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- Russian detains suspects after deadly Moscow concert hall attack
- Kate, Princess of Wales, reveals she has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy
- 'Generational shift started in Cong in several states, can't write off party'
- Nine former Himachal MLAs, including six from Congress, join BJP

BJP seeks Kejriwal's resignation, AAP plans office in jail

Will seek court permission to set up office in jail: Punjab CM

NEW DELHI, March 23: Aam Aadmi Party leader and Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday said that if his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal is sent to jail, they will approach the court for permission to set up his office in prison so that he can run his government from there.

He also asserted that no one can take Kejriwal's place in the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

"It is not written anywhere that a government cannot run from jail," Mann told PTI videos in an interview when asked about the arrest of the Delhi chief minister and AAP chief by the Enforcement Directorate in an excise policy case and how he will run his government if he is remained in jail custody.



The BJP has demanded the resignation of Kejriwal after he was sent to ED custody till March 28.

"The law says he can work from jail till found guilty. We will seek permission from the Supreme

Court, High Court for setting up an office in the jail and the (Delhi) government will function," Mann said. No one can take Kejriwal's place in AAP because he created the party out of the anti-corruption

movement, Mann, who often accompanied Kejriwal to public meetings across the country, replied when asked if the campaigning for Lok Sabha polls will be affected by the AAP chief's arrest.

He said he would go wherever the party assigns him duty.

"No one can take the place of Arvind Kejriwal in the party because the party was brought out of the movement (India Against Corruption). He is a senior founder member of the party. The day he registered the party and got the symbol of broom, I was not with him. I joined later on," Mann said.

The Punjab chief minister said there is no ranking in AAP, adding, "Everyone is a loyal soldier of Kejriwal". (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

AAP advocates for caste census in Assam

DIBRUGARH, March 23: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday advocated for a caste-based census in Assam to safeguard the political and economic rights of the people of the state, while reaffirming its opposition to the CAA.

The party also promised to set up world-class educational and healthcare facilities, besides working for the uplift of different sections such as tea garden workers, in its 'Guarantee Card' for the northeastern state. The election manifesto was released here by AAP national spokesperson and party MLA from Delhi, Dilip Pandey, in the presence of the state unit chief Bhabesh Choudhury, its Northeast coordinator Rajesh Sharma and Lok Sabha candidates from the state.

Alleging that the BJP-led central government has failed to keep its promises made to the people, the AAP questioned why the saffron party has not fielded its incumbent MPs from Dibrugarh and Sonitpur constituencies in the state.

The BJP has named Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal for Dibrugarh, replacing another Union minister Rameswar Teli, while former state minister Ranjit Dutta was made the candidate for Sonitpur in place of incumbent MP Pallab Lochan Das.

The AAP is contesting these two seats in the state, naming Manoj Dhanowar for Dibrugarh and Rishiraj Kauntilya for Sonitpur.

The party urged the people of Assam to repose their faith in its candidates and assured voters of delivering all the promises made.

Among the assurances by the party in its 'Guarantee Card' was a caste census in the state.

"In order to get a correct understanding of the population and economic condition of the people of Assam, AAP supports a caste census in the state. It will help in taking steps to safeguard their political and economic rights," the party stated in the 'Guarantee Card'.

Stating that the BJP had come to power in 2014 by promising to act against illegal immigrants, the AAP maintained that the same party brought the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA, which "welcomes" infiltrators. "As a result, Assam's culture and language will be destroyed and the jobs of the local youths will be snatched away. AAP will oppose the CAA at all forums," the 'Guarantee Card' stated.

It also lent its support to the demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for Koch-Rajbongshi, Moran, Mottok, Chutia, tea tribe and Tai-Ahom communities, without depriving the existing ST communities in any manner.

The party assured of building world-class government-run educational institutions and healthcare facilities. Regarding issues faced by the tea industry workers, the AAP assured of raising the minimum daily wage of the labourers to (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Rhino carcass

KAZIRANGA: The carcass of a male rhino, suspected to be killed in infighting, was found in Assam's famed Kaziranga National Park on Saturday, an official said. The carcass of the rhino with severe facial injury marks and deep wounds was found on the western side of the Tumikati anti-poaching camp in the Burapahar range of the park. The nasal bone and part of the horn were found to be intact and no bullet injury was detected during the post-mortem examination, the official said. The facial injury and wounds were confirmed in the post-mortem examination as incisor wounds inflicted by another male rhino during the fighting, she said. The deceased rhino was estimated to have passed its prime at 25 years, and had most likely lost the battle to a younger and stronger male.

Heroin recovered

BOKAJAN: Acting on secret information regarding drug smuggling the police on Friday morning set up a check post and intercepted a car, NL 07 CB 0290, at Janakpukhuri under Khakhati police station and recovered heroin. A car coming from Dimapur was intercepted a thorough checking was carried out during which 26 plastic soap cases filled with brown powder suspected to be heroin weighing 294.64 grams were recovered and seized. The driver cum carrier of the contraband identified as Ghookavi Chisi, son of Ghonito Chisi, resident of Nuland, Dimapur was apprehended in this connection.

Youth found dead

GUWAHATI: A young man's body was discovered under unexplained conditions in Hatigaon, Guwahati on Saturday. The deceased, found in House no 40 on Shankar Path, has been identified as Pradip Das from Ghilamora in Lakhimpur. Das was employed at a restaurant and was living in a rented house in Hatigaon with a friend. Guwahati police have reached the scene and initiated an investigation to determine the cause of his death.

Cong govts synonymous with misrule: Sonowal

GUWAHATI, March 23: Alleging that the Congress governments at the Centre since independence were synonymous with "misrule, corrupt practices, nepotism and family politics", Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal said the INDIA bloc has "failed to integrate" the opposition parties ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

In an interview with PTI, Sonowal, the minister for ports, shipping, waterways and ayush, asserted that the BJP-led NDA's aim of winning over 400 Lok Sabha seats is "practically feasible with positive work done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi".

During his 10-year tenure, PM Modi has implemented a range of developmental programmes for every section of society, such as farmers, students, tea garden workers, women, old-aged people and

divyangs, with quality and also within a specific time frame, he said. "Because of that, people got empowered, motivated and charged up. Such a situation did not exist before though the Congress had been in power for 60 years. Because of its misrule, corrupt practices, nepotism and family politics, people were deprived of their due rights," Sonowal said.

The successive Congress governments at the Centre since the country's independence only made the slogan 'Garibi Hatao' (eliminate poverty) but did not take up any scheme as a follow-up action or implement it, he claimed.

"That is why people have identified them as betrayers. Citizens of the country have identified PM Modi as their well-wisher, who firmly believes that India can be strengthened (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso confident of victory in Diphu Constituency



HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 23: BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso on Saturday exuded confidence in the party's prospects, declaring victory in the 6 - Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency as inevitable.

He said this during his address at Diphu government school following a grand welcome at Parokhuwa gate

by enthusiastic party workers and supporters.

"With 8.9 lakh voters spanning three hill districts of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and NC Hills, BJP's triumph is assured," Tisso proclaimed, energising the crowd.

Expressing unwavering support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, Tisso articulated his vi-

sion for the region, emphasising the necessity of securing a significant victory margin from the Diphu seat. Furthermore, Tisso pledged to advocate for an Autonomous State in Parliament, echoing the aspirations of the people of the hill districts of Assam.

"The implementation of Article 244(A) for granting an Autonomous State by the central government is our people's primary demand. If elected, I will tirelessly champion this cause during my tenure as MP," Tisso affirmed.

Highlighting ongoing efforts, including the introduction of the 125th constitutional amendment bill by Union home minister Rajnath Singh, aimed at amending Article 244(2) and Article 275(1) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, Tisso underscored his dedication to legislative (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

Liquor traders urged to uphold election code of conduct

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 23: With parliamentary elections looming, Jorhat district commissioner Pulak Mahanta, also serving as the district election officer (DEO) and returning officer (RO) for the 14 Jorhat Lok Sabha seat, emphasised the importance of adhering to the rules and regulations set forth by the Excise department to prevent any violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) currently in force due to the parliamentary polls.

He said this during a crucial meeting at the Jorhat DC office complex to ensure compliance with election regulations, particularly regarding the sale of licentiate Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL). Addressing a gathering comprising IMFL traders, Excise department (CONTD ON PAGE-2)



People buy Holika items from a roadside shop ahead of the Holi festival, at Fancy Bazaar in Guwahati on Saturday. HT photo

Flying Squads seize over ₹ 37.41 lakh ahead of LS polls in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 23: In a proactive move to ensure fair and transparent elections, flying squads and static surveillance teams have seized over ₹37.41 lakh in cash across four Assembly constituencies in Jorhat district over the past four days, said an official.

A district administration official informed that these teams were specially constituted following the announcement of Lok Sabha election dates to curb instances of voter intimidation, influence peddling, and bribery through the distribution of cash, liquor, and other items.

The highest amount seized, totaling ₹ 27,78,310, was reported in the Titabar civil subdivision on March 21, highlighting the widespread nature of the issue.

In response to these seizures, the administration has formed a high-level team to investigate the matter thoroughly and take neces-

sary legal action where required. Additionally, the ongoing drive has also resulted in the confiscation of 60 litres of illicit liquor, further underscoring the authorities' commitment to maintaining election integrity.

Meanwhile, preparations for the upcoming elections are in full swing, with the recent commencement of the first phase of training for 70 micro poll observers for the Jorhat election district. Conducted at the conference hall of the DC's office, the training sessions were led by the district development commissioner and two assistant commissioners.

During the training, micro observers were briefed on various aspects crucial to ensuring a smooth electoral process, including the assessment of essential facilities such as toilets, drinking water provisions, and accommodations for persons with disabilities, and (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

'Assam Rifles committed to deliver wherever asked for'

GUWAHATI, March 23: Assam Rifles Director General Lieutenant General Pradeep Chandran Nair on Saturday affirmed the commitment of the country's oldest paramilitary towards working in the interest of the country while emphasising its special bond with the people of the Northeast.

Delivering a video message on the eve of the 189th Raising Day of Assam Rifles, Nair also paid tributes to the personnel who have laid their lives in the line of duty.

"As we complete our 189th year of Raising and enter our 190th year, I wish to recall the courage and valour as also the sacrifices made by our great force. Through the decades of the past two centuries, our contribution towards nation-building has been exemplary," he said. He emphasised the Assam Rifles' connection with the people of the Northeast, and also highlighted (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

'To combat this dual threat of TB, there is an urgent need to strengthen tobacco control laws'

Tobacco smokers at higher risk of developing tuberculosis, say experts

WORLD TB DAY

NEW DELHI, March 23: Tobacco smokers are at a higher risk of developing tuberculosis and experiencing more severe forms of the disease, experts said on Saturday.

Additionally, exposure to second-hand smoke can worsen tuberculosis (TB) outcomes and hinder treatment effectiveness, the experts said as they emphasised the urgent need for strengthening tobacco control laws to combat this dual threat.

World Tuberculosis Day is observed on March 24. The date marks the day in 1882 when Dr Robert Koch announced that he had discovered the bacterium that causes TB, paving the way for diagnosing and



curing this disease.

According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global TB Report 2023, India accounted for the highest number of tuberculosis cases in the world in 2022, representing a staggering 27 per cent of the global burden. India recorded

2.8 million (28.2 lakh) TB cases in 2022. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitious vision to eliminate TB by 2025 demonstrates the government's commitment to addressing this issue comprehensively, the experts said.

One significant factor exacerbat-

ing the TB burden in India is the connection between tuberculosis and tobacco use, they said.

According to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey in India, a staggering number of individuals are tobacco users.

"To combat this dual threat of TB, there is an urgent need to strengthen tobacco control laws. By implementing stringent tobacco control measures, India can mitigate the impact of tobacco use on TB incidence and mortality rates," Bhavna Mukhopadhyay, Chief Executive, Voluntary Health Association of India said.

"Moreover, there is a pressing need to enhance tobacco cessation services to support individuals in quitting tobacco use and reducing their risk (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

Cong like well-established company with fluctuating market cap: Jairam Ramesh

NEW DELHI, March 23: Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh likened his party to a "well-established company" whose market capitalisation keeps fluctuating and asserted that it will stage a comeback.

In an interaction with PTI Editors at the news agency's headquarters here, Ramesh also dismissed suggestions that it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma that was responsible for the BJP's electoral performance and stressed on the importance of organisational strength.

The idea of a charismatic leader was a "dangerous concept" to believe in as one doing so, automatically believes in a "demagogue", the Congress general secretary in charge of communications asserted.

Talking about the need for bringing in new faces, Ramesh, however, noted that this was difficult in the Congress because people have been in the party for long.



"It's easier for the BJP. Because, you know, the BJP is a startup in many states. You look upon the BJP as a startup. The Congress is not a startup. The Congress is a well-established company whose market cap (market capitalization) keeps fluctuating. But the BJP is a startup," he said.

"So, a startup can absorb a lot of people. The guy who does not get a ticket in the Congress joins the BJP.

So in many of the states, I would say, the Congress' disadvantage is that it has been entrenched for decades," he said during an interaction with editors and journalists of the news agency on Friday.

One of the disadvantages of being entrenched is that one is not able to give opportunities to new people to come in, Ramesh noted.

Asked whether there was a need for a change of central leadership of the Congress and why generational change was not taking place there, Ramesh said the Congress is the only party which has an elected president.

Elaborating on the point further, he said, "We tend to ascribe far too much importance to individuals... If you read the bible of Indian political science by Rajni Kothari, one of the points Rajni Kothari makes in that book is that there was a Congress system and that system first got broken in 1969 (CONTD ON PAGE-2)

Govt extends ban on onion exports till further orders

NEW DELHI, March 23: The government has extended the export ban on onion till further orders to increase domestic availability and keep its prices under check.

Earlier, it was prohibited till March 31 this year.

"Export prohibition on export of onions valid till 31st March 2024, is extended until further orders," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a notification dated March 22. DGFT is an arm of the ministry which deals with exports and imports-related issues. On Dec 8, 2023, the government banned export of onions.

In the 2023 rabi season, onion production was estimated to be at



22.7 million tonnes. The export of onions to friendly countries is allowed on a case-to-case basis after approval from the inter-ministerial group. The government has permitted exports of 64,400 tonnes of

onion to the UAE and Bangladesh through the National Cooperative Exports Ltd (NCEL).

Earlier, the Centre, in October 2023, had decided to step up the sale of buffer onion stock at a subsidised rate of ₹ 25 per kg in retail markets in order to provide relief to consumers. To control prices, the government has earlier taken several steps. It had imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 800 per tonne on onion exports on October 28 till December 31, 2023.

In August, India had imposed a 40 per cent export duty on onions up to December 31, 2023.

Onion is a politically sensitive commodity. (PTI)

Experts recommend investing in annuity products

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 23: Market experts are forecasting a decline in interest rates in India over the coming months, providing customers with an opportune moment to secure their investments in annuity products at the current interest rate of approximately 7%. Investing in annuity products offers several benefits to customers, particularly in providing a guaranteed regular lifelong income. These pension or annuity products, exclusively offered by life insurance companies, ensure a steady income unaffected by fluctuations in interest rates. This stability enables retirees to maintain financial independence with a reliable income source. With the expectation of falling interest rates, purchasing an annuity product now allows customers to lock in their investment at the current interest rate, safeguarding against potential income decreases in the future.

Illustrating the significance of this strategy, consider the case of Mr. Prajapati, who initially invested Rs. 1 crore in deposits at an 8% interest rate, yielding a monthly income of ₹ 67,000. However, with a subsequent drop in interest rates to 6%, his monthly income dwindled to ₹ 50,000, adversely affecting his standard of living. Had Mr. Prajapati opted for an annuity product at a 7% interest rate, he would have received approximately ₹ 58,000 per month for the remainder of his life. This fixed income would have remained unaffected by fluctuations in interest rates, ensuring financial stability regardless of market conditions.

Among annuity products, the ICICI Pru Guaranteed Pension Plan Flexi stands out for its ability to help customers build a retirement fund through systematic investments. This plan guarantees a stable income post-retirement, particularly advantageous in India's market where interest rates are expected to decline. Furthermore, a variant of this plan offers a unique feature, providing a 100% refund of all premiums paid, making it the first of its kind in the life insurance industry.

JCB India marks milestone with rollout of 500,000th construction equipment

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 23: In a momentous occasion at its India Headquarters in Ballabgarh, JCB India, the nation's premier manufacturer of Earthmoving and Construction Equipment, celebrated the production of its 500,000th Construction Equipment unit. This achievement underscores JCB's longstanding commitment to India, a journey that began in 1979 and has since seen the company's machines become indispensable in the country's infrastructure development endeavours. The event, graced by the presence of JCB's Group Chairman, Lord Bamford, highlighted the pivotal role India plays in JCB's global operations. Lord Bamford emphasized India's emergence as a powerhouse economy and commended the nation's concerted efforts towards infrastructure development over the past decade. He expressed pride in JCB's contribution to this growth trajectory through its cutting-edge machines.

The 500,000th machine, a Telehandler renowned for its versatility in material handling, epitomizes JCB's commitment to innovation and safety. Offering a revolutionary approach to material handling at heights, the Telehandler promises enhanced productivity and safety compared to conventional methods. Deepak Shetty, CEO and Managing Director, JCB India, hailed the significance of the Telehandler as the milestone machine. He underscored its role in making workites safer and more productive, citing its superior design and engineering. Shetty also highlighted



JCB's continued investment in India and reiterated the company's dedication to delivering global quality standards to its customers.

JCB India's contribution extends beyond manufacturing, with a notable emphasis on gender diversity in the traditionally male-dominated Construction Equipment sector. Notably, the Jaipur factory boasts a commendable 34% representation of women on the shop floor, while the Vadodra facility, inaugurated in 2022, sets a remarkable precedent with nearly 52% female workforce participation. Moreover, the company's design center in Pune, housing over 700 engineers, serves as a hub for domestic and global projects. With a portfolio comprising over 60 products across nine categories, JCB India continues to set benchmarks in the Construction Equipment industry. As the nation progresses, opportunities abound for JCB's innovative machines, ensuring their continued relevance in India's infrastructure and material handling sectors.

realme Unveils NARZO 70 Pro 5G

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 23: In a bid to redefine industry standards for low-light photography, realme, renowned as India's most reliable smartphone service provider, has introduced its latest addition to the NARZO By realme lineup - the NARZO 70 Pro 5G. This announcement marks a significant milestone in the smartphone market, as realme continues its commitment to innovation and excellence.

The NARZO By realme series, known for its stylish design and comprehensive user experience, has garnered a rapidly growing user base of over 16 million in India. These smartphones are crafted with advanced technology and premium features to cater to the evolving needs of users, empowering them to express their individuality while staying ahead of the curve.

Collaborating strategically with Amazon, realme aims to enhance

the shopping experience for consumers by exclusively offering the NARZO By realme lineup on Amazon.in. Embracing a dual-platform strategy, realme launched its first online store on Amazon in March 2023, further reinforcing its commitment to delivering advanced technology to its users.

The realme NARZO 70 Pro 5G emerges as a powerhouse smartphone, boasting remarkable features designed to elevate the smartphone experience. Noteworthy among its features is India's first 50MP Sony IMX890 Camera with Optical Image Stabilization (OIS) in its segment, promising to capture stunning, blur-free photos even in low-light conditions. Enhancing its visual appeal, the smartphone features a Horizon Glass Design and a 120Hz Ultra-Smooth AMOLED Display, offering vibrant colors and deep blacks. Powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 7050 5G Chipset, it ensures swift performance and supports 5G

connectivity for faster internet speeds.

Introducing Air Gesture controls for the first time in its segment, the realme NARZO 70 Pro enables users to perform various actions without touching the screen. To tackle heat dissipation during intense usage, it incorporates a 3D VC Cooling System. Moreover, the smartphone houses a large 5000mAh battery and supports efficient 67W SUPERVOOC charging technology for quick power-ups. Operating on realme UI 5.0 based on Android 14, it offers a smooth, intuitive user interface with extensive customization options and features for enhanced usability.

Available in two stunning colors - Glass Green and Glass Gold - and two storage variants: 8GB+128GB priced at ₹ 19,999 and 8GB+256GB priced at INR 21,999, the realme NARZO 70 Pro 5G aims to redefine the mid-range smartphone segment.

CREDAI urges Rajasthan govt to connect Bhiwadi with Delhi-Mumbai Expressway

NEW DELHI, March 23: Realtors body CREDAI has requested the Rajasthan government to connect Bhiwadi with the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway to boost economic activities and real estate demand in the city.

CREDAI's local chapter 'CREDAI NCR Bhiwadi Neemrana' has written a letter to the Chief Secretary, Government of Rajasthan, in this regard. Anil Gupta, President of CREDAI NCR Bhiwadi Neemrana, has requested the state government to consider linking Bhiwadi to the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway.

The association has presented some potential

solutions to connect Bhiwadi with the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, including the construction of a dedicated access road directly linking Bhiwadi to the expressway. "The connectivity to the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway is the need of the hour for Bhiwadi's continued growth and development. We urge the Rajasthan government to consider these proposals and take necessary actions to ensure the prosperity of our region," Gupta appealed in the letter.

Enhancing this connectivity would not only stimulate economic growth but also facilitate smoother movement of goods and people,

thereby boosting regional development, Gupta said. In the letter, the association has demanded the removal of the toll plaza in Bhiwadi for smooth traffic flow.

The association has requested the government to expedite the work of road connecting Neemrana and Bhiwadi directly without crossing the border of Haryana.

CREDAI NCR Bhiwadi Neemrana is one of the chapters of CREDAI NCR representing developers of Bhiwadi, Dharuhera and Neemrana.

CREDAI National has more than 13,000 developers as members. (PTI)

Norges Fund Investment Bank of Norway supports ICICI Securities delisting

NEW DELHI, March 23: Amid Quantum Mutual Fund voting against the proposed delisting of ICICI Securities, the largest public shareholder Norges Fund Investment Bank has voted in favour of the proposal of the stock broking arm of ICICI Bank.

The foreign fund, which holds nearly 3.25 per cent stake in ICICI Securities, voted in favour on Thursday, the first day of e-voting, as per the information posted on the website of Norges Fund Investment Bank.

The e-voting will remain open till March 26. The move of the Norway-based Norges Bank provided a shot in the arm of ICICI Securities' plan to delist itself as it needs two-thirds of the public shareholders' support to pass the resolution.

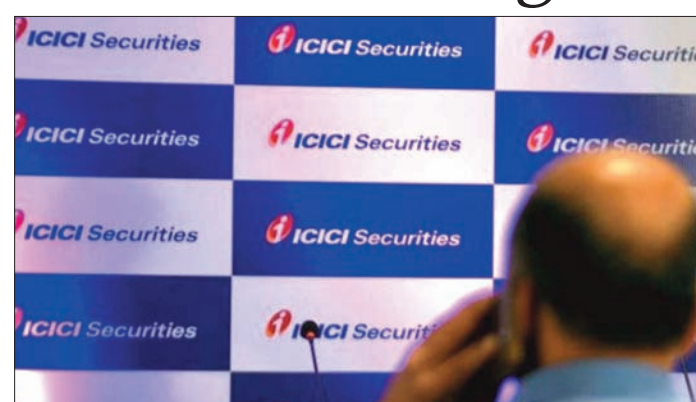
However, Quantum Mutual Fund, which holds a 0.09 per cent stake in ICICI Securities, voted against the resolution on Thursday.

Quantum Mutual Fund opposed the delisting as it did not find the swap share ratio lucrative to the shareholders of ICICI Securities.

As per the scheme of arrangement, shareholders of ICICI Securities will get 67 shares of ICICI Bank for every 100 shares they hold. Public shareholders collectively hold nearly 25 per cent stake in the company.

Now, the fate of the resolution hinges on how the remaining public shareholders vote.

Life Insurance Corporation is the second biggest public shareholder, with a 2.5 per cent stake in ICICI Securities. Indian insurance companies, including LIC, hold a



3.5 per cent stake, while mutual funds hold a 2 per cent stake.

The total shareholding of foreign portfolio investors is 10 per cent. Resident Indians hold nearly 6 per cent. ICICI Bank is the promoter of the company, with nearly

75 per cent shareholding.

ICICI Securities announced the plan to delist in June 2023.

If the resolution goes through, ICICI Securities will eventually become a wholly-owned subsidiary of ICICI Bank. (PTI)

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BJP seeks Kejriwal's

"Kejriwal did one thing in the party, he made everyone national convener. AAP made everyone a leader. 'I have 92 MLAs in Punjab. Out of these 80 are first-timers aged 28-30 years who are MLAs, ministers. So, there is no ranking of generals and soldiers in the AAP. We all are generals and soldiers- loyal soldiers of Arvind Kejriwal... we are standing rock-solid with him," Mann said.

The Punjab chief minister lashed out at the BJP alleging it was engaging in "political vendetta" and wanted to send everyone in the opposition to jail to win elections. "This happened in Bangladesh. The entire opposition of the country is in jail. In Russia, Putin became President till 2030 with 88 per cent votes. Is this a democracy?" he said. Mann pointed out that India is said to be the biggest democracy in the world and added, "Is this democracy to send those who built hospitals, schools, and speak in Rajya Sabha behind bars?"

The top leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party including former deputy chief minister and education minister Manish Sisodia, former health minister Satyendar Jain and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh are in jail for many months after being arrested in money laundering cases.

Kejriwal is currently in Enforcement Directorate custody till March 28. He was arrested by the ED on Thursday night in connection with a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy of his government. Sisodia and Singh are also in jail in the same matter. "At present, there is a need to save the Constitution of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and 140 crore people of the country understand this," Mann said.

Meanwhile, Delhi cabinet minister Atishi claimed that the Aam Aadmi Party office in the city has been "sealed" from all sides, adding the party will report the matter to the Election Commission. A Delhi Police officer refuted the allegation by AAP. Police personnel were deployed at DDU Marg to stop the gathering of people since CrPC section 144 is imposed there, the officer said. (PTI)

AAP advocates for

₹ 450 from ₹ 250 at present and working for land rights to every tea garden worker. The party will also support the fixing of the Minimum Support Price for green leaves produced by small tea growers, besides declaring tea as the national drink. Among other assurances are opposing privatisation of oil fields and PSUs, working for increasing wages of Anganwadi, mid-day meal and other such workers, and scientific handling of annual flood problem of the state. (PTI)

Cong govts synonymous

and taken on the path of development to make it self-reliant and by 2047, India becomes a developed nation in the world," Sonowal said. Continuing his tirade against the grand old party, the union minister claimed that the Congress made the country "poor and miserable", and because of its "policy paralysis, the party could not do anything for the cause of the people". "The Congress could not even protect national security and sovereignty. After Modi abrogated Article 370, the whole nation felt well-guarded and well-protected. Now, India is fully secured under the dynamic leadership of PM Modi," he said. Sonowal asserted that the upcoming Lok Sabha elections will be fought mainly on two specific parameters -- speed and scale of the economic growth process and the developmental journey.

Asked about the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), the Rajya Sabha MP said, "They are all disintegrated. The Congress has failed to integrate the opposition parties. One can see their condition in every state." Referring to the Mumbai rally on the last day of the Congress' 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', where several opposition leaders assembled, he said that such kind of "photographic demonstration" cannot bring changes, because people have "identified their character".

"They simply made louder commitments during 60 years of their misrule and bad governance. On the other hand, whatever PM Modi has promised to the nation has been fulfilled. He made the commitments to be honoured, not to be forgotten. The Congress made so many promises during their rule, but they never honoured those," Sonowal said. The people of India have "rejected" the Congress and its partners, while accepting the BJP and its allies with "heart, faith and trust", he claimed. Asked whether the BJP-led NDA's target of winning at least 400 seats in the Lok Sabha polls is practically feasible or not, Sonowal said, "Yes, it's practically possible. Last time, the tally was 303 for BJP only and that was never expected earlier. It was because of PM Modi's performance, his visionary leadership and good governance."

With the "remarkable and unprecedented success" story created in the last 10 years of the BJP-led NDA rule, every citizen has "full confidence" in Modi's leadership and the whole nation wants him to become the PM for the third term so that "India can become the third biggest economy in the world by 2028", he claimed.

"At the global stage, India was able to create a dignified position, even among the top developed nations. Nowadays, they attach importance to the statements of PM Modi and India's stand on global crisis or situation. He is the most credible and popular leader in the world," Sonowal said.

He claimed that people have categorically expressed their "highest level of satisfaction" because of Modi and his good governance as the NDA government has done "exceptionally well in different parameters such as social security, justice, economic upliftment and life with dignity".

"The growth of development and a positive environment have been created by Modi. The corrective policies and programmes, and his firm decision to restore peace in Assam and the northeast have led to progress in the region. "People are expecting prosperity to grow further in the near future. A huge interest is generating in the minds of voters and they are waiting for the day to cast their votes," said Sonowal, who is contesting from Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency in Assam. The BJP has nine MPs, out of 14 from the state in the outgoing Lok Sabha, while its allies Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) have no representation. The opposition Congress holds three seats and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) one, while another is an Independent MP. (PTI)

BJP candidate Amarsing

action for regional development and empowerment. As election fervor intensifies, Tisso's rallying cry resonates with the aspirations of the people, promising a future marked by progress and prosperity for the region.

Earlier, Tisso, accompanied by prominent leaders including Roland Killing, President of BJP-East Karbi Anglong District Committee, Tuliram Ronghang, chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), and incumbent MP Horensing Bey, was escorted in a decorated car.

A jubilant procession of party workers and supporters, chanting slogans of 'BJP zindabad', 'Narendra Modi zindabad', 'Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma zindabad', 'CEM Tuliram Ronghang zindabad', and 'Amarsing Tisso zindabad', accompanied Tisso to the BJP-EKADC office in Diphu.

Along the route, stops at various points including Dokmoka, Bakulia, Longnit, and Manja were marked with traditional Karbi turbans, flowers, and bouquets, symbolising the warmth of the reception.

Liquor traders urged to uphold

officials, police personnel, and district administration officials, Mahanta underscored the need for strict adherence to Excise department guidelines in operating liquor shops. Among the directives issued, Mahanta emphasised the prohibition of liquor sales to individuals below the age of 21 and the enforcement of limits on the quantity of liquor sold per transaction. Additionally, he urged liquor vendors to prominently display signboards at their outlets highlighting the adverse effects of alcohol consumption and to maintain continuous surveillance through CCTV cameras.

Furthermore, Mahanta urged IMFL traders to ensure timely renewal of their licenses before the March 31 deadline to avoid facing penalties.

He also directed Excise department officials to bolster surveillance efforts along inter-State boundary areas to prevent the smuggling of liquor to neighboring states.

The meeting, which saw participation from officials of the Titabar Sub-Divisional administration and the Transport department, served as a platform to reinforce the administration's commitment to upholding electoral integrity and fostering responsible liquor sales practices in Jorhat district.

As the electoral process unfolds, such proactive measures aim to safeguard the sanctity of elections and promote compliance with regulatory frameworks, ensuring a fair and transparent electoral environment for all stakeholders involved.

Flying Squads seize over

electricity connections at polling stations. They were also instructed to uphold the secrecy of votes cast and ensure that voting proceeded in a free and fair manner. Furthermore, the training encompassed practical sessions on the operation of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), equipping the micro observers with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfill their duties effectively on election day. As the electoral machinery gears up for the impending polls, these proactive measures aim to safeguard the democratic rights of citizens and uphold the sanctity of the electoral process in Jorhat district.

'Assam Rifles committed

the role of the force beyond the region. "Our deep connection with the people of the Northeast has been unparalleled, though we have delivered whenever asked for beyond the region as we are doing in Kashmir and the United Nations now," he said. Paying homage to those laying their lives in the line of duty, Nair exhorted the serving personnel to continue doing their job with utmost sincerity.

"I wish to assure our countrymen that Assam Rifles shall leave no stone unturned to act in the interest of our country no matter what challenges lie ahead of us. We are and shall eternally remain the friends of the Northeast," he added. Assam Rifles was originally formed as 'Cachar Levy', established by the British in 1835 as a police force to protect settlements against tribal raids. (PTI)

Tobacco smokers at higher

of TB and other related health complications," she added. Tuberculosis, primarily caused by mycobacterium tuberculosis, poses a complex challenge in India, where roughly a quarter of the population is infected and at risk of developing the disease. Recent research has shed light on a correlation between tobacco consumption and TB, illustrating how smoking significantly increases the risk of contracting, developing, and dying of TB.

"Studies indicate that individuals who smoke tobacco are 2.5 times more likely to develop pulmonary tuberculosis compared to non-smokers. TB patients who smoke face double the risk of death during treatment as smoking not only heightens susceptibility to TB but also undermines treatment effectiveness," said Dr Sonu Goel, Professor, Department of Community Medicine and School of Public Health PGIMER.

"It also increases the likelihood of relapse and adds to the burden faced by patients and healthcare systems alike," Goel said. Additionally, the widespread prevalence of tobacco use, with an estimated 10 per cent of India's populace being tobacco users, further complicates efforts to combat TB in India, Goel said.

"By quitting smoking, individuals can protect themselves and their communities from the devastating impact of TB," Goel added. Despite commendable initiatives by the central government, such as the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) and the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP), stronger enforcement and evidence-based interventions are imperative to effectively curb tobacco consumption, experts stressed. Moreover, there is a growing consensus on the importance of collaboration between health sectors to efficiently address the tobacco-TB connection, utilising existing TB infrastructure to deliver cessation interventions effectively, they said. (PTI)

Wild elephant dead at Sonaikuchi Reserve Forest

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, March 23: A pregnant wild elephant died at the Sonaikuchi Reserve Forest in Jagiroad in Morigaon district on Saturday.

According to sources, the elephant had slipped and accidentally come into contact with solar-powered fencing while coming out from the forest in search of food. The fence was installed by the state forest department to prevent human-elephant conflict.

Locals alleged that a shortage of food and negligence on the part of the forest department have led to the death of the female elephant. Officials of the forest department allegedly visited the spot and recovered the carcass.

Public Relations Society of India elects new committee

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 23: The Public Relations Society of India (PRSI), Guwahati chapter elected a new nine-member executive committee for 2024-2025.

The new executive committee comprises of Ruma Chakraborty as chairperson, Surojit Sinha Roy as vice chairman, Dr Bimal Krishna Sarma as secretary, Junita Saikia as joint secretary, and Anjan K Borah as treasurer (working). Jayanta Kumar Barua, Bhuchitra Bhushan, Hamad Berashker and Emmanu-El Hmar have been elected as members of the executive committee.

During the first meeting of the new committee on Saturday, plans were made to organise more activities in the field of communication to enhance the skills of both professionals and students. As per the new annual calendar of 2024, the committee aimed at conducting PR Day talk session on April 21 under the theme, 'Sanatan values and emerging India - role of PR' by eminent speakers. Also, on April 30, the apex body of PR will organise voters' awareness programme to highlight the importance of voting among first time women voters at Handique Girls' College.

Moreover, the organisation look forward to collaborate with the youths by establishing Nalanda, a community of young PR practitioners from various colleges and universities across the state. There are several programmes planned, like PRSI NE Conclave, Seven Sister Magazine and Column and opening up of new chapters across the Northeast that will gradually unfold in days to come.

Sonowal spends time with intellectuals, cultural activists in Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency Sonowal urge youths to become ambassadors of community by developing personality



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, March 23: Union minister of ports, shipping and waterways and Ayush, Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday urged the youths to take a keen interest in education, sports and other cultural activities in order to develop their personalities and become ambassadors of their communities.

He took a unique path to engage with the people as he went on a spiritual sojourn amidst the political fervour on Saturday. He spent time with the intellectuals and cultural activists after his visit to Tai Educational and Cultural Centre in Dibrugarh.

He also joined in the celebrations of the foundation day of the Sonowal Kachari Samaj at Lepetkata on the outskirts of the Dibrugarh town on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion Sonowal said, "Youths should cultivate their personalities through education and sharpen it further with active participation in sports and other cultural activities. They should hone their personalities so that they become ambassadors of their respective communities."

"The youths should navigate life's challenges by embracing yoga and leveraging modern technology to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for advancement. It is with these that we will have an army of ambassadors from every community, who will take the onus to bring change and foster a spiritual bonding towards the cause of community building. This is essential to the cause of nation building, to the goal of Viksit Bharat that our leader PM Narendra Modi has set for us to achieve," Sonowal stated.

"The Sonowal Kachari Society is dedicated to bolstering the self-esteem, resilience, and capacities of its people, offering aid in times of indigenous community crises. The Sonowal Kachari community has played a pivotal role in the broader Assamese nation building process. The rich cultural heritage and spiritual practices of a multi-cultural society profoundly influence the community's identity, leaving a lasting imprint on Assam's social fabric. Sonowal Kacharis are renowned for their cultural sustainability, marked by humility and decency. It's imperative for this community to uphold this legacy, a responsibility that various organisations have been actively pursuing. Notably, The Sonowal Kachari Samaj stands out for its significant efforts in this regard," he further said.

The Union minister said, "As a proud member of the Sonowal Kachari community, I've always heard commendable praises about our society. Renowned for our generosity, Sonowal community represents admirable human qualities, particularly as ardent nature enthusiasts. Our deep connection to nature, with Mother Earth holding a cherished place in our hearts underscores our society's essence. Within the broader Assamese nation-building cause, the Sonowal Kachari community holds a significant role, currently at the forefront alongside the blessings of Khiring Khoring Bathau Devata and in close association with the rich Sattriya culture. Empowered by our internal strengths, we're unstoppable. Today, there's a growing interest in studying the songs of the Sonowal community, with concerted efforts underway to share this cultural wealth with the wider world."

The BJP candidate from Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency also visited two Holi Milan festivals near Tirupati Mandir in Seujpur as well as Khalihamari in Dibrugarh.

NSS team shines in national integration camp



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 23: The National Service Scheme (NSS) team representing the state has been adjudged the best cultural team at the National Level Integration Camp organised by Regional Directorate of NSS, Lucknow under the Union ministry of youth affairs and sports.

The NSS team from the state was adjudged best cultural team from among over 200 NSS contingents representing different states of the country, including West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

The Assam NSS team staged a commendable performance led by NSS programme officer of Ranga-

para College, Aswini Kumar Deka. The NSS volunteers who formed part of the team included Mohitosh Sen and Bidisha Krishnatraya from the Pandu College, Subham Sarma and Pragna Sarma from the Tezpur College, Manoj Kumar Nath and Yachita Oza from the Chatia College, Subhajit Dey, Manabjyoti Das, Rashmi Kurmi and Nikita Das from the Rangapara College and Anku Sinha, Ankur Deuri, Chittaranjan Phookan, Richa Barua, Jitumoni Deuri and Chayanika Saikia from the Madhavdev University.

The team proved their expertise in academics, folk culture, tradition, cuisines, economy, language, etc and was able various awards in different categories at the national integration camp.

BJP candidate Suresh Bora appeals for vote



HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, March 23: BJP's Lok Sabha candidate Suresh Bora on Saturday urged the voters to vote for the party so that Prime Minister Narendra Modi can lead the country for the third consecutive term.

The BJP candidate started his first campaign at Mori-Burhagaon area (ST dominated ward) in the town.

Earlier Morigaon constituency's MLA Ramakanta Deuri introduced him among the public where he was warmly welcomed by the residents of Burhagaon.

Addressing the public, Bora

said, "I will always be available for the people of my constituency if I am voted to power. I shall try to work for the all round development of my constituency."

Moreover, Bora also campaigned at Konwargaon, Dighalbori, Barangabari, Bhurbandha and Mikirbhetta. The campaigns were attended by former chief executive member of the Tiwa Autonomous Council, Paban Manta and president of Morigaon BJP Prabin Medhi.

The BJP workers honoured the MLA, president, vice-president and mandal president of Morigaon town by felicitating them.

'World Water Day' observed in Hojai

HT Correspondent
HOJAI, March 23: The Rastrabhasha Middle School has celebrated the 'World Water Day, 2024' in its campus in Hojai by holding a programme, which focused on the theme 'Water for prosperity and peace'.

A total of 50 students, nine teachers and guests participated in the programme that was held in the school campus on Friday.

The programme was organised jointly by the representative of the school, TERRE, Paryavaran Sanraksh Gatividhi and Small Steps. The celebrations began with lightening of the lamp by forest official, Santosh Sah of Nagaon South forest division and Prodip Kumar Sahoo. The purpose of celebration of the 'World Water Day' was stated by the science teacher of the school, Arup Ratan Debnath on the occasion.

Some of the students of the school recited poetry and spoke on the theme of water. This was followed by the speech of Sri Sah that focused on maintain the ecological



balance in nature through conservation of forest as well as water resources.

Prodip Kumar Sahoo delivered a lecture on the comprehensive aspects related to the importance, availability of water sources, causes of scarcity of water with special reference to drinking water, its impact on living beings and the need to conserve water. He spoke on the scarcity of water in different parts of the country and how several organisations are working to solve it. Emphasising on the theme of 'World Water Day', Sahoo ap-

pealed to everyone to follow different strategies to save water through its judicious use. He also cited the initiatives taken by him to save water by reusing it in day-to-day life. In this connection, he appealed everyone to conserve water through rain-water harvesting. By using rain water for daily activities, people can conserve ground water which is the only main source of drinking water. He concluded his speech by with the song "...Ye Prithivi, Ye Dharti, Ye Vasundhara Humaree Hai...Ise Hum Pujenge, Piyar Karenge, Kardege Ye Haribhari..."

Wild elephants kill man in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, March 23: A herd of wild elephants killed a man in the Sonokpora area in Dibrugarh district on the evening in Saturday.

According to sources, the herd of elephants attacked the victim while he was returning home with his herd of cows from a nearby grazing land.

Soon locals informed the officials of the forest department and the police about the incident. A senior official of the Dibrugarh divisional forest office in Sonokpora area of the Dehing-Medela Forest Reserve said, "The victim was on his way back home along with his herd of cows when he was attacked by wild elephants. His cows were grazing in a field nearby."

The victim hails from Tetelguri near Demow in Sivasagar district. His name is however, not known.

Training programme of polling personnel held

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 23: A training programme of polling personnel was organized by the office of the Sonitpur district election officer at the auditorium of the Tezpur Academy School in Tezpur on Saturday.

The programme was organized for around 35 officials of the state public works department, who will be deputed in various places for duty during the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the state. District commissioner and returning officer of 11-Sonitpur House of People Constituency, Deba Kumar Mishra visited the venue of the training programme and interacted with the trainees.

Addressing the gathering, the district commissioner highlighted on an inclusive election where all eligible sections of the society take part in the democratic process. He informed that 11-Sonitpur HPC has planned out three model polling stations, one in Dhekiajuli and two in

Tezpur to be manned by officials of the public works department. He assured the trainees that the Sonitpur district administration will provide all necessary assistance such as porters, special transportation and health facilities among others in these three polling stations. During the programme, the trainers were provided the polling personnel with hands-on training on the use of EVMs and explained in detail their roles and responsibilities. An interactive session was also held during which doubts and possible difficulties that may be faced by the trainees were addressed.

Meanwhile, a review meeting on poll preparedness was also held on Friday at the DC office. The meeting was presided over by the state's chief electoral officer, Anurag Goel. Sonitpur district commissioner and returning officer of 11-Sonitpur PC Deba Kumar Mishra and cell in-charges were also present on the occasion.

Banmukh Jakhini Primary School celebrates 104th anniversary

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, March 23: The two-day 140th anniversary celebrations of the Banmukh Jakhini Primary School concluded on Saturday.

An open meeting was held, which was presided over by Sonit Kumar Gogoi. School inspector of Sivasagar, Promod Gogoi lauded the people of the locality in supporting the school for their children. He said that our children in government run schools are fortunate to have well trained and talented teachers now and majority of the schools have shown better results. Samsul Barik, a writer said that the schools need a collective leadership to inspire the children.

Prasanta Kumar Chutia, vice president of the Jila Sahitya Sabha said that the National Education Policy is the result of consistent research



to prepare our children for the future challenges.

"Dilili", the souvenir was released by noted poet Punjan Baruah. A collection of poems written by Urmila Gogoi Tamuly was released by Khadyot Gogoi, superintendent engineer of the Guwahati water supply department.

The meeting felicitated social worker Dinanath Gogoi, headmistress of the Subasani High School, Binu Gohain, secretary of the

Sivasagar Subdivision Primary School Teachers Association, Arun Kalita, senior journalist Bhoirab Munda, Rajani Panging, Sunit Kumar Gogoi, principal of the Banmukh HS School Punyawati Taye, retired teacher Biren Gogoi, Manoj Kr Gogoi, Arun Sarma and Nirupoma Chetia. Bibhuti Kumar Chetia, executive president of the celebration committee spoke on the objectives of the meeting and recollected the sacrifices of the founder teachers of the school.

Sushen Gogoi and his wife Mina Gogoi also donated ₹ 50,000 to the Jukta Gogoi Memorial Fund in memory of their daughter. The couple handed the amount to the school authorities.

A cultural procession was also taken out besides organising a Rangmela and a Bhortal Nritya on the first day of the celebrations on Friday.

Experts said that policy makers should formulate eco-friendly policies

Regional Meteorological Centre celebrates 'World Meteorological Day'



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 23: The Regional Meteorological Centre, Guwahati in collaboration with the Indian Meteorological Society, Guwahati Chapter celebrated the World Meteorological Day on Saturday highlighting the theme 'At

the Frontline of Climate Action.' The special lecture organised for the occasion was delivered by Lalit Saikia, assistant professor, of the department of earth science of the University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya. During his speech Saikia urged policy

makers to formulate eco-friendly policies. Taking part in the programme, K N Mohan, scientist-G stressed on the need to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Sanjay O'Neill Shaw, scientist-F in his speech suggested

the audience to contribute on an individual level to save our environment. Sunit Das, scientist-F explained about the consequences of global warming on us in the programme. The programme was hosted by meteorologist Suruj Gogoi.

The 'World Meteorological Day' is celebrated throughout the world every year to create awareness on the undeniable threat to our entire civilization in the form of climate change. It poses a serious threat to our entire civilization as the effects of climate change are already visible and will be catastrophic unless we act now.

On the occasion Regional Meteorological Centre, Guwahati also received the 'Best RMC' award from Indian Meteorological Department. Also, Kanak Chandra Das of the centre also received the 'Best Employee' award.

DANCING ALL THE WAY



Dancers performing during a workshop on Bihu dance organized by the Bharalu Cultural Committee in Guwahati on Saturday. UB photos

The first Indian woman mahout

By: Kanchan Basu

When she first opened her eyes to the world, she saw an elephant. For most people, that would seem apocryphal, but when Parbati Barua says it, it rings true. It's a tale that her father, the last prince of Gauripur, told her often. "When I was born, on the family estate, there were 45 elephants living there too," she says. "There was more or less always one in sight."

No matter what stage of Barua's audacious life one looks at, one finds an elephant present. "I am now in Manas National Park in Assam, helping with an elephant calf who is not well," says the wildlife conservationist, speaking over the telephone.

By 15, Parbati Barua had grown to be the first woman mahout or elephant trainer on record in India. She would be the subject of a book and a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) documentary, "Queen of the Elephants" (1995), written by Mark Shand (incidentally the brother of Camilla Parker Bowles).

Parbati Barua, 70, is now the first Indian woman mahout to be awarded a Padma Shri. Her fam-

ily didn't just own elephants, and that's probably where it all began.

For generations, the Baruas of Gauripur ran an elephant-trapping business. They captured and tamed wild elephants and sold them to other royal families, wealthy Indian landowners, and the British.

Her father, Prakritish Chandra Barua, known as 'Lalji', had a reputation for understanding these animals more deeply than most mahouts, and being able to develop strong bonds with them.

Parbati Barua remembers spending large parts of her childhood deep in forests in Assam, Bengal, and Bihar, where her father would set up camp for six months at a time, with his four wives and a large retinue of staff, including a private tutor for his nine children.

Then, in 1970, the Privy Purse was abolished, the family lost its royal status and its income, and Prakritish Chandra Barua turned his focus on the elephant business as a livelihood. He began to train Parbati as his apprentice. Like him, she had shown a rare ability to connect with the lumbering giants.

"I learnt everything from my father; he was my guru," she



says. One of the things she learned was the ancient, dangerous skill of mela shikar (hunting in the open, without a stockade). Here, the only tool available to the mahout is a lasso.

Less than five feet tall, thin, and wiry, Parbati Barua would sit astride her elephant, stalking a wild herd for days as she chose her target – typically any young calf with a propensity to stray – and waiting for her moment.

As soon as the calf had wandered out of sight of its mother, she would signal her elephant, with the pressure of her toes behind its ears, to silently rush up to it. She would then aim her

lasso around its neck and lead it away. Speed was vital; she had to do all this and be gone before the wild elephants noticed and charged.

In this way, she captured 14 calves. "During the capture, time would stop. I had no sense of anything else," she says. "Afterwards, I would feel sad about taking a child away from its mother."

In 1977, the capture and sale of elephants was banned in India, and Barua's focus shifted to "rescuing elephants from people, and people from elephants," as she puts it. Long before wildlife conservation was de-

India was brought into conflict with humans. On average, 500 people and 100 wild elephants are killed each year in face-offs on farms and villages. "Despite the odds, things are getting better," Barua says.

"There has been a slight improvement in the quality of forests, more awareness of the need to protect migration routes. There is also empathy in people about the elephant's plight, and more awareness about how things can be done to help both humans and elephants in a non-violent way."

Through the worst of the conflict, in the '80s and '90s, when new laws were still taking effect and enforcement methods were being framed, she was often called upon to help ease herds away from human settlements in Assam, West Bengal, and Bihar. "The situation then was dire," she says. "Man is very aggressive, very badly behaved. We see only our losses, but not the losses we inflict. We destroy without a thought. Animals never break the law of nature. A tiger kills a deer only because he has to eat. We kill for no reason."

Riding on her longtime companion Lakshmimala, she and

other mahout-herd duos would guide the animals back into forests, or past disruptions and back onto migratory routes. Sometimes she would spend weeks following a herd of up to 50 to familiarize themselves with her and her fellow mahouts and their elephants, so they would trust her to guide them to safety.

At 70, Parbati Barua has slowed down a bit. She doesn't intervene directly anymore, but trains mahouts and other conservationists in the ways of the elephant, often in association with the wildlife departments of West Bengal and Assam.

She shies away from human company, she says, preferring the company of Lakshmimala, whom she captured 50 years ago. They have lived apart lately, ever since Parbati Barua settled in Guwahati in 2010. Lakshmimala now lives on the outskirts of Manas National Park, about 130 km away.

"I visit her almost every week," Parbati Barua says. "We have given each other all our time, summer, monsoon, and winter. I love her more than any other being. There is no language for this attachment. It is all love."

Satra and Namghar—formation and function

By: Arup Saikia

The many Satras (Monasteries) played a pivotal role to preserve and popularize Sankari ideals and Bhaona after the demise of Sankardeva. The Satras are an expanded form of Namghar. Namghar is Assamese prayer house and socially also very important as center of rural administration. Sankardeva at first created Namghar in Bordowa or Batadrava at the very young age of nineteen only (1468). But at that time Namghar was not fully grown, it was just in embryonic stage. He staged his first pantomime drama "Chinha Yatra" in a temporary structure of Namghar.

Later Namghar is more developed after returning from first pilgrimage spending abroad nearly more than a decade (12 years).

At the beginning, the Satra and Namghar have no difference. Both were simply prayer houses and the meeting place of the devotees. The literal meaning of Satra is assembly. Satra is a residential spiritual school in layman language. Hostel facility is available with the service of the students (Devotees). It's in the methodology of ancient guru ashram (Abode of teacher). Bordowa wasn't as such Satra in today's perspective.

However Bordowa Namghar is flanked by two Satras –Narowa and Salaguri on its north and south respectively. Saint Madhavdeva oversaw the construction of the first full-fledged Satra in Barpeta (Late sixteenth century). There were a community prayer-hall with an auditorium for practice and performance of dance and drama. The name of the auditorium building was "Rangiyal-ghar". The name has much similarities with Ranghar of Ahom dynasty.

Nomenclature: The term "Satra" wasn't used during the lifetime of Sankardeva. Sankardeva named this institution as "Than" or "Dham". But the name, "Than", was more prevalent and popular. During the lifetime of Sankardeva many "Thans" were established in the entire Brahmaputra valley. The "Than" of Barpeta, established by his main disciple Madhavdeva is the biggest one amongst all.

Actually: Than- was another name of Namghar in that time. So God's residing house was also called Hari Griha, Guru Griha, Kirtana Griha, Prasangar Griha etc.

Structure: The main structure of Satra is nothing but Namghar, but with dwelling facilities. The Namghar is situated at the center of the premises. The "Hati" (Huts) of devotees located in all directions. The four rows of huts form the four Hatis.

On the other hand Namghar is constructed in east-west direction with complete front opening. The eastern part of the building is said to be a womb chamber. The other western part of the area is used for assembly of devotees and other meeting purposes by common villagers. The sanctum sanctorum is the Singhasan or Guru Asana. Guru Asana is made in pyramidal pattern generally with seven layers corresponding Saptakuntha (Seven heavens – Swetabilas, Shantambilas, Pushpabilas, Pankaj Bilas, Kanak Dant, Sanatan and Golok respectively).

On the top of the layer Kirtana or Namghosa is kept in a scissors like wooden structure called "Thaga". The small place on the top of Guru Asana is Aamohi ghar. The non-Sankari Satras of other sanghati can keep their own holy book in Aamohi ghar. It is not compulsory to keep Kirtan or Nam Ghosha only. The holy book is covered with white cloth from top to bottom. The tortoise, lion and elephant sculpted on pillars represent devotion, domination and sin respectively.

A tortoise can keep its limbs inside its shell; like that a devotee can also suppress greed. So sin can never enter the heart of a devotee. Sometimes when sin appears, the lion in the name of the Lord suppresses the elephant of sin. Kirtana ghar or Namghar, the two words are synonymous. The total formation of Namghar expresses unique expanded Vaishnavite style. One Namghar comprises at least

three structures. The western entryway is a small square size open room (Batchora). The Batchora is connected with the main hip roofed rectangular house by veranda like open structure (Bulani Chora). On the same line in the last part eastern side- Monikut (House of gems) is constructed. Unlike rectangular main building, the size of Monikut is generally square. People sit in main Kirtan ghar facing each other row wise in aisled pattern. The vacant middle portion facing Guru Asana used for cultural shows and other congregational religious functions.

According to Indian spiritual ideals, merely ritual offerings cannot satisfy the Deity as quickly as dance and song. Dance performed through voice and instrumental music ensures the fruits of sacrifices and worship. Therefore Sankardeva associated dance, song and acting with worship. Therefore one auditorium is also constructed in Satras for the practice of performing arts- Bhaona. The Bhaonas possess song, dance and acting altogether. The effect of Bhaona is far-reaching for awakening of spiritual and national consciousness.

Architecture: The architecture of Namghar or Satra is purely indigenous. Since the prehistoric times; Assam has been the land of major tribal or hilly people. It's utmost concern of Sankardeva to convert the tribes to the Vaishnavite fold. The tribes living in Assam like Kuki, Missing, Naga or Kachari have tradition of building

Dekachang or Morang ghar (Tribal Houses). Dekachang are mainly constructed by unmarried tribal boys. These Dekachangs started to play a vital role in rural administration, education, culture etc. The famous anthropologist J. P. Mills asserted that the-Dekasang-of the Kacharis living in the plains could be converted into Namghar. Assamese Namghar inherited the role of guardianship of

the above-mentioned tribal houses or institutions in society. Sankardeva imitated the tribal architectural or social culture to attract them to neo-vaishnavism. This allows the indigenous tribal elements to enter into the Sankari dance and song also including with some popular instruments.

The overall architecture of Namghar is very meaningful and easily not comprehensible. The main entry door is named as Singhaduwar. The motif of a lion is decorated on the upper lintel. Symbolically the powerful lion denotes omnipotent God. Generally in Assam any big door or chair are addressed by people as Singha Duwar or Singhasan respectively. Spiritually Narasingha also revered as incarnate being of Lord. The nine divisions inside the Namghar symbolize nine devotions (Na bhakti).

The congregational part is divided into seven areas with fourteen posts. This fourteen represent fourteen Parishadas (Holymen). The main roof is connected by veranda like structure on three sides except the side of Guru Asana. The twelve posts on each sides symbolize twelve Vaishnavas (Devotee of Lord Vishnu). According to Vaishnavite scholars Namghar is depicted as the foot symbol of Lord Vishnu. The top roof starts from the hip area of Lord. The continuous slope looks like the back of an elephant. Whatever the roof structure may be, it's confirmed that Sankardeva tried to develop an indigenous Assamese architecture through Namghar.

Post-Sankari Satra: (A). **Brahma Sanghati:** The literal meaning of Sanghati is association. Satra has been radically changed in absence of Sankardeva. Madhavdeva was unofficial successor of Sankardeva. But Sankardeva's main brahmin disciples Damodardev and Haridev declined to follow Madhavdeva. So naturally they

formed a sub-sect of Satra – namely Brahma Sanghati. The main monotheistic and non idolatry ideology of Sankardeva was deviated at the instance of his brahmin disciples duo.

The vedic rituals of worshiping, classification on the basis of caste regained momentum in Brahma Sanghati. Sankardeva emphasized to abolish caste system in total. As regards to the abolition of caste system, Sankardeva was also not totally successful. Knowing this well Sankardeva entrusted specially brahmin Damodardev to initiate fellow brahmin people to Bhakti cult. Anyway the motto of Sankardeva's religious philosophy was started to disband under Brahma Sanghati.

(B). **Purush Sanghati:** This sanghati was born after the death of Madhavdeva. "Hari Naam" is their main preaching. The word -Purush-obviously refers to Saint Sankardeva. His two grandsons -Purushottam and Chaturbhuj Thakur - established Satra of this Sanghati. As mentioned earlier Sankardeva also to some extent compromised his religious principles during his lifetime. So in Purush Sanghati some brahminical rites are permissible.

(C). **Nika Sanghati:** The trio Badala Padma Ata, Kesava and Mathura Das were the spiritual icons behind the formation of this Sanghati. Good companion and holy thinking are main precept of the sub-sect of this Satra. Being given utmost regard to Madhavdeva, his strict adherence to non-idolatry is followed.

(D). **Kala Sanghati:** This satra was formed at a place named Kaljar. Therefore it's called Kala. Worldly salvation through the worshiping of "Guru" is their main philosophy. Only sect of this Satra was most successful in abolition of caste system. So many people of backward classes and huge number of tribal people joined this sect. The large number of "Paiks" of Ahom monarchy came under this Satra to gain freedom breaking servile bondage. Being strictly monotheistic Satra, the disciples are no way allowed to bow their head before anyone else except the one Almighty. The famous Moamoria rebellion that broke the backbone of Ahom dynasty were done by the disciples of Kala Satra.

Satra & Namghar at present situation: Satra and Namghar, both have predominant influence on social life of Assam. As all the Satras haven't the same ideology, some Namghars are also likely to have nursed different sub-sect rites of Hinduism. But the differences within Namghar isn't conspicuous or open like that of the Satras. Originally some Namghars are patronized by the Satras of the same ideology in some parts of Assam. But nowadays it's very less and the Namghars are independent of concerned villages. The quantity of Namghar is very big than that of the Satras.

Even some villages have two Namghars also. So present life of the Assamese society is Namghar centric. After first quarter of twentieth century, many Vaishnavite or Sankari organizations have emerged. They are strictly monotheistic of Sankari ideals. Most of the Namghar society is ideologically affiliated to these Sankari organizations or under the religious cultural flag of Saint Sankardeva. So the maximum Namghars are united unlike the Satras divided into four sub-sects in the name of Sanghati. Some followers of brahminical Satras (Damodariya) prefer to perform religious rites in "Than", "Dol" or temples besides Namghars.

The two most important institutions of Assam – Satra and Namghar – must have ideological homogeneity for overall development of the Assamese society. (The author is a noted cultural enthusiast, writer and Bhaona artist from Assam. arupsaikia07@gmail.com)

'Oppenheimer' links with Supreme Science

By: Amar Krishna Paul

"Oppenheimer" is the 12th successful film by Christopher Nolan. The film chronicles the events that precede and succeed the world's first nuclear test led by American theoretical physicist Julius Robert Oppenheimer for the US Army. Its code name is "Trinity." It has recently won seven Oscars. The biopic film on Oppenheimer has established a strong connection with the Supreme Science of God, i.e., the Gita.

About the film: This is an epic biographical thriller movie written, directed, and produced by Christopher Nolan. The movie stars Cillian Murphy in the titular role of J. Robert Oppenheimer, popularly known as the "Father of the Atomic Bomb." The movie is based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography titled "American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer" (2005). The film broke all box office records and earned over \$82.4 million. It went on to make over \$912 million worldwide in its entire theatrical run. The film is nonetheless the highest-grossing biopic of all time.

"Oppenheimer" revolves around J. Robert Oppenheimer, played by Cillian Murphy. He was the scientist behind the Manhattan Project, which aimed to create an atomic bomb during World War II. Hence, the film showcases the efforts behind the creation of the atomic bomb during World War II, and how J. Robert Oppenheimer was responsible for making the Manhattan Project a success.

The first announcement of "Oppenheimer" was made in July 2022, and the film's official trailer later dropped on December 18, 2022. The film hit theatres on July 21, 2023.

About the Gita: The Science of God is not different from the original Gita. Lord Krishna first spoke to the Sun about the Gita long back and, afterward, presented the same to Arjuna just before the world's greatest battle at Kurukshetra (now in Haryana, India), which was fought between the armies of Pandavas and Kauravas. But one should not merely read the Gita like newspapers. It should be read by heart and soul. One



should clearly try to pronounce all the verses of the Gita.

Later on, the reader can easily utter the tough verses by the causeless mercy of Lord Krishna, who is also known as the Most Merciful Lord towards his devotees. In fact, if you study the Gita seriously then Lord Krishna will be happy.

Biopic's link with the Gita: In an informal chat, Cillian Murphy, the lead actor of the film, said that he had read the Bhagavad Gita while preparing for "Oppenheimer". Murphy's revelation is gaining traction on the internet since Oppenheimer is believed to have famously said that he was reminded of the Gita in the immediate aftermath of successfully testing the world's first atomic bomb and invoked a quote: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

In an interview with film critic Sucharita Tyagi, Murphy was asked about Oppenheimer being influenced by sacred text, to which the actor said even he was highly inspired by it.

"I did read the Bhagavad Gita in preparation, and I thought it was an absolutely beautiful text, very inspiring. I think it was a consolation to him, he kind of needed it and it provided him a lot of consolation, all his life," the actor said in the video posted by Ms. Tyagi on her YouTube channel.

Historically, the first atomic explosion in the world took place in a desert in Alamogordo in the State of New Mexico, USA at 5:45 am on July 16, 1945. It changed the world. Oppenheimer was the Director of the Manhattan Project.

Linguistically, Dr. Oppenheimer was proficient in Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek. Apart from being a great scientist, he was a great lover of Sanskrit. He had studied a vast number of Sanskrit books in his original form, including the Bhagavad Gita (which is part of the Bhisma Parva of the great epic Mahabharata).

ten about that one phone call that was made by Oppenheimer during the time of the Non-Alignment Movement amid the battle between USA and USSR.

According to Sahgal, Oppenheimer delivered a secret message through Bengali poet and academic Amiya Chakravarti. It's also suggested that the scientist begged India to maintain its foreign policy as he didn't want any more catastrophe after Hiroshima-Nagasaki.

Moreover, another biography, titled "Homi J Bhabha: A Life" and penned by Bakhtiyar K Dadabhoj, sheds light on an unexpected aspect of Oppenheimer's life - an invitation to immigrate to India and make it his home.

As per this 723-page book, there existed a cordial and intellectual camaraderie between Oppenheimer and Homi Jehangir Bhabha, a prominent Indian physicist at that time. The two icons likely crossed paths after World War II had concluded, forging a deep friendship. Their shared interests in culture and learning boosted their bond.

Final thoughts: The biopic film carries a few important messages. But the hidden message is that the world does not want any more atomic destruction like the bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The nuclear powerhouses may be used in the reconstruction of the trouble-torn geopolitical peripheries of the world these days. These powerhouses may be better engaged in electricity generation. It will cut the large-scale use of coal and natural gas in thermal power plants. This will virtually help us to check the global warming situation to some extent.

That is, nuclear power is a clean and environmentally friendly base load source of electricity generation. It is available 24/7. It has huge potential and can provide global long-term energy security in a sustainable manner. Expansion of nuclear power capacity will help in the world's energy transition to meet the goal of net-zero emissions through a combination of emission reduction and removal. This is the most urgent need of the hour. (The author is a Guwahati-based writer and analyst on Current Affairs. He can be reached at amarkrishnaghy@gmail.com)

Majuli attains GI tag for mask making and manuscript painting

By: Dipak Kurmi

Majuli, nestled in the embrace of the Brahmaputra River in Assam, stands as a unique riverine delta, known for its vibrant cultural tapestry and deep-rooted traditions. Home to over 240 villages, Majuli is not just an island; it is a living testament to the rich heritage of Assam. In recent times, its traditional art forms of Mukha Xilpo and Manuscript Paintings have earned the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag, showcasing the island's unique cultural identity.

The cultural heritage of Majuli: Mukha Xilpo, also known as Mukha Shilpa, is a traditional art form that involves the intricate design of masks used during Bhaonas and Raas Utsavs. These masks, with their elaborate creation process on woven bamboo frames, portray characters, emotions, and themes of Vaishnavism, reflecting the socio-religious fabric of Majuli. Introduced by Saint Sankardeva during the medieval period, Mukha Xilpo is a captivating expression of the island's cultural vibrancy.

Manuscript Paintings, another jewel in Majuli's cultural crown, depict stories from Hindu mythological epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Bhagavata Purana. The paintings focus on events related to Lord Krishna, showcasing three popular styles of manuscript writing—Gargayan script, Kaitthal, and Bamunia. Despite facing challenges such as soil erosion and loss of historical manuscripts, Majuli remains a treasure trove for history buffs and art lovers alike.

Cultural Satras and their unique offerings: Majuli is dotted with satras, monasteries that serve as cultural sanctuaries and embody distinct art forms. Kamlabari Satra, despite its historical displacement, boasts the Ankia Naata drama performed in the original

Brazawalli language, offering a glimpse into Majuli's rich past. The Saali Nitya, another dance form originating from Kamlabari Satra, adds to the island's cultural richness.

The Bengenaati Satra, known for Natua and Ojapali dances, showcases a beautiful umbrella made entirely of gold and hosts the unique Fakua festival. Shamaguri Satra, famous for its wooden, bamboo, and cane masks, is integral to various forms of drama across Majuli. Auniati Satra, with around 400 devotees following the Udaseen Pratha of Madhabdev, is a hub for religious ceremonies, including the annual Pal Naam.

Dakhinpat Satra, renowned for its Ras Leela, a cosmic dance depicting Lord Krishna, is a highlight of Majuli's cultural calendar. The fusion of Devdasi and Satriya dance elements called Natua and the dying art form of Ojapali further contribute to the artistic richness of Dakhinpat Satra.

Majuli music festival and ecotourism:

Every November, Majuli comes alive with the three-day Majuli Music Festival, featuring live performances by independent artists, art and culture exchanges, exhibitions, and traditional food and wine. The festival promotes rural ecotourism, providing a sustainable platform for village entrepreneurs.

Majuli, with its Geographical Indication-tagged art forms, cultural satras, and vibrant festivals, stands as a beacon of Assam's cultural heritage. Beyond being an island, Majuli is a living canvas where traditions, arts, and spirituality converge, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the unique cultural experience it offers. As we celebrate the recognition of Mukha Xilpo and Manuscript Paintings, Majuli remains an invaluable cultural gem, inviting all to witness the beauty of its traditions and the resilience of its people. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)*



Boosting the popularity of social media posts

By: Sheikh Aqib Farooq

Computer scientists have created a new algorithm to recommend tags for social media posts, aiming to boost the popularity of the post in question. This algorithm takes into account more types of information than previous algorithms with a similar goal. The result is a measurably improved view count for posts that use the tags recommended by this new algorithm. Such research could be useful commercially and for other researchers who study online behaviour.

Xueting Wang, a postdoctoral researcher at the Yamasaki Laboratory, is a keen user of social media sites. She was puzzled by how different posts by different people achieve notoriety or fade into obscurity. Driven by this curiosity, Wang, along with her colleague Yiwei Zhang and their supervisor, Associate Professor Toshiniko Yamasaki, investigated the relationship between social media content, the tags attached to content, and the people who post it.

"It is well-known in our field that tags for social media posts are important," explained Wang. "It's also known that the nature of these tags,

and the relative popularity of the user in question, can impact the popularity of a post—for example, the number of views. What I wanted to do was come up with a system to recommend suitable tags for your posts that would demonstrably improve their popularity."

This is far easier said than done. Computers excel at precisely defined mathematical tasks; however, some of the social concepts explored by the researchers, such as a user's popularity, are too vague for a computer to process directly. Wang and her team had to carefully define every aspect of the problem in mathematical terms for an algorithm to be possible.

"We had 60,000 publicly available images with tags, number of views, and associated user data from the photography website Flickr to experiment with," continued Wang. "That gave us enough source data to create a system to score different user and image details and assign numerical values to things. This meant we could perform different functions on the data."

Using this data, Wang and her team ranked the effective success of a specific tag in contributing to the image's view count. Essentially,

successful tags were recommended by this process, resulting in a 20-percent boost to the popularity of a post.

What sets their approach apart from others is that it takes into account who created the post. The system cleverly imitates the tagging behaviour of people with high social popularity scores to recommend effective tags.

"The algorithm is called the 'user-aware folk popularity rank,' and it is the first of its kind to be, as the name suggests, aware of the user in how it recommends tags," said Wang.

"We see from our results that carefully selected tags, which express emotional impressions rather than just literal representations of the image content, will be more effective. But all the tags the system produces are from an existing pool and it would be good to grow our system so it can generate new ideas." *(The author stands as a multifaceted professional with a wealth of experience in skill development, civil service training, and the art of commentary. His contributions have not only empowered individuals but have also enriched the intellectual discourse in the spheres he has engaged with)*

KYF tapestry: A chronicle

By: Sushmita Lahkar

A small girl, barely five years of age, held her father's hand with one hand and a candyfloss with the other as they strolled around. Winter sunshine beamed through the greens in the vibrant Taralango grounds in January, with the constant hum of traditional folk music filling the air. She pointed across to a vendor standing inexpressively across the road with a lot of colourful wares for sale, from flutes to masks.

Finally, the father gave in to his little girl's whims and crossed the road, walking up to the seller. The little girl was wearing a colourful pair of Pekok-Pini paired with a black full-sleeved sweater, her tiny traditional Karbi outfit looking as adorable as her father's proud wear of the Choy-aan (Karbi jacket) over his western garments. As I dotting looked at this father-daughter duo from a distance, two young boys walked past me on high stilts.

If you have ever watched Ethiopian tribes doing a high stilt walk or jokers performing stunts in a circus, you will understand what I am talking about. Wearing Karbi traditional attire with a Poho (turban), the two teenage boys were equally excited to be walking by, standing atop those long poles amidst the wonder-struck onlookers. They quickly manoeuvred past the whizzing cars and groups of visitors slowly trickling into the festival grounds in the morning.



Visiting the Karbi Youth Fest in mid-January 2024 (12th – 19th) was an enchanting experience, to say the least. As the festival celebrated its golden jubilee year this time, the grandeur was spectacular.

Apart from the vibrant display of Karbi customs, the event had many highlights, from regional and international bands and musicians reverberating across the foggy hills to foreign diplomats and students traveling from around the world to witness the grandiosity of the event.

Word of the rich heritage of the Karbis spread to distant corners of the world this year. Not just that, the festival had even bagged the prestigious 'Cultures of Resistance 2023' award for its untiring contribution and effort toward positive change and preserving the rich Karbi heritage. The state government also lauded this oldest heritage ethnic festival by announcing an annual grant of 3 crores to support the event in subsequent years.

The event had its roots in

1972-73 in the minds of revolutionary leaders who wanted to preserve the rich heritage of the Karbis by mobilizing local youths through a peaceful cultural festival.

Over the years, it eventually grew stronger with the inclusion of many visionary men and women who crusaded toward a common goal. The first KYF was held in 1974 at the Diphu Karbi Club and was attended by a few members and participants. The birth of the parent body, Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), in 1977 led to the organized planning of the KYF.

As it grew over the years, a significant turn came in 1994 when a sprawling 1,086 bighas of land were donated by the people of Taralango to house the Karbi People's Hall, a permanent festival zone. From an unorganized community event in Diphu to a majestic global event today, the Karbi Youth Fest has proudly journeyed a long way with unmatched determination of ethnic pride.

The festival slogan read "Might in our Pride," and why not? The pride shone across the festival grounds when every Karbi, young and old, in their traditional finery, thronged the festival grounds to witness and revisit the display of their cultural tapestry.

The town was painted in red, black, and white as the mood was set for the 50th-year celebrations. There's so much to learn and take back from the people here, who follow their hearts alone. The need for respecting one's cultural heritage and upholding the indigenous treasures of one's legacy is elemental in today's fast-changing world.

As I set out to return, my eyes fell on a group of young girls and boys carrying a Jamborang (local handloom bag) each and taking selfies as the sun was about to set across the silver Nothenngpi (traditional Karbi earring) heritage museum. A hot air balloon that gave visitors a brief thrill-ride set flight in the air.

I couldn't help but reflect that there's so much beauty in harmonious coexistence. No one can stop the future from coming, but we can surely carry a bit of our roots and ethnicity in our hearts wherever we go, and preserve the richness of our culture in the wide world eclipsed by modernity. And if we try, we all can cohabit peacefully in the cultural kaleidoscope of India, celebrating our own without imposing, and mutually respecting the diverse milieu of our country.

No thoroughfare for 3-wheelers



By: Kamal Baruah

In early 90s, there was no multiplex imagination or today's streaming services like Netflix, Prime Video or Hotstar but PVR Priyaat Vasant Vihar was the only movie theater that offered a distinctive culture of Hollywood blockbusters and urban leisure to the middle-class residents of Delhi. The nearby JPs Vasant Continental was another hotspot attraction for elite Delhiites.

The luxurious lifestyles and personal ostentation of the rich and the famous were hated against such envy. Meanwhile, the pathetic mess food forced them to experience some adventure to live their own way as they were missing their "ghar ka khana" those days. Nevertheless, a movie and street food in the weekend somehow made their days.

On Sundays, they would plan their wild outing to fetch the height of madness, while cars and bikes were jostled for space on the busy street of South Delhi. They yawned lazily in the luxuri-

ous comfort of "hey-rickshaw", when a couple of paddle rickshaws pulled them towards the JPs Vasant Continental.

However, the securities at the gate got confused to welcome with such unexpected visitors and frightened by their sudden move that made things worse, while they even parked their hired three wheelers - rickshaw inside the valet parking.

The Café Resto was overwhelmed by music to the ears, while beers and wines tasted well with the western music. A pair of formal dinner tables were set and reserved for them in advance.

Meanwhile the banquet hall echoed to the sound of clinking Champagne glasses. The drinks had put guests in an amiable mood; also the fashionable interior could be the surprising ingredient for the perfect flavours. But they had another idea and requested the night manager to play some other music from their choice.

Soon their audio cassette inserted and pressed the 'play' button on tape

recorder, it was the Khayal, a Hindustani classical form of singing for the popular renditions of Pt. Bhimsen Joshi. The mood of the entire hall was gradually dying down into a pin-drop silence except the golden voice from the song 'Mile Sur Mera Tumhara' that completely enthralled the gang of eight rickshaw traveler. They were humming a cheerful tune of ragas; while the other affluent diners felt dejected as forced to listen to classical numbers one after another. The heat was unbearable for many. Some of them could be seen leaving the dinner early.

A hotel just can't discriminate based on a protected class so their chosen music was on and they enjoyed raising their drinks with the soulful music in the air. It continued till their dinner over and they finally left the place quietly heading towards the parking rickshaw.

The incident rocked the hoteliers that night. The Vasant Continental awoke to find the flaws in the glass by prohibiting rickshaw into their campus, while notifying on the very next day "No thoroughfare for three wheelers" following the incident.

The paddle rickshaws are prohibited from driving in their premises in actuality as it faced the incident last supper. The boys couldn't stop laughing then. As intrepid adventurer, JNU boys from north-east simply loved exploring the wilderness in the national capital. As that pathetic "bahana" (excuse) for student at hostel, if they have had a stressful day at classroom, they love to chill out and listen to some soulful music - after all, the tape recorder plays at the Vasant Continental was definitely worth a listen.

Analysis

By: Mowsam Hazarika

'Holi' is for me
It's an opportunity
to go nearer

'Abir' is for me
It's an excuse
of being colourful

Love is for me
A tune
of being close

Separation is for me
A heavy stone
of carrying on the chest



Estranged

By: Aniruddh Oghori

If life were the same
I would not want to pretend
To make myself whole again.
Reincarnation—in the name of the game
Life possibly couldn't be same.
Whilst my dear! All is estranged.
In all that was good and all that was bad
In all the fights we chose and all the wars we waged
Trying to find a little love
Drowned somewhere in our apocalypse.

There must have been a middle ground above
Where minds shattered and our hearts collapsed.
If I were ever out of hope,
What despair could you possibly be?
I look at you like a star from a telescope.
Is this love, feign agony, that feels like eternity?

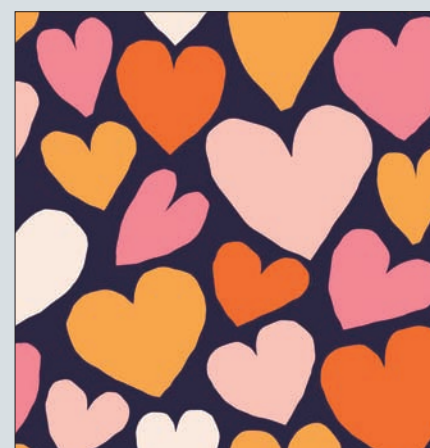


Insect of Hatred

By: Khemu Parashar

Push hatred into a deep abyss,
of course scatter its branches,
its temple should not be built even by mistake,
hate destroys humanity,
becomes queen herself,
there would be an empire but there, would be no peace,
the world of evil people resides there,
people yearn for love,
never be a part of this world

Hate is a worm that destroys humanity in an instant,
strains relationships,
turns everyone into dust,
destruction is embedded in every, particle of it,
it has nothing to do with love,
destroy hatred



Voyage of Love

By: Dr Priyanka Bhattacharya & Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The eve is crimson, the breeze blows lazy
The sea seems serene, the surge falls easy
I stand onto the sand, and call out to you
Oh my mighty sailor! With all your mighty hue
Come release me, my ankles are in chains
Bruised since ages with the poisonous banes
No Siren no Mermaid, a melody so sweet
A deep, ardent voice my ears do meet
Not a bird, not a person, not a ship to be found
As the waves are coming, so is the sound
Enchanted I am, drift towards the liberty
Fall back to shackles, hands stretch to thee
Then the surge comes, followed by the lay
kisses my feet and the shackles swept away
Moving to the Deep and I embrace you warm
Water shields me, our beings blend one form
The waves were that day the highest seen
And No trace found to the coast and between

From not loving to loving
We started today a long journey
When the vast sheets of water lie in foam
before you and me
A sailor can steer the ship carrying
both of us safely to new land
But rarely in any profound emotional moment
he can stretch his eager hand
Eager to hold you near, and eager
to hold you ecstatically so close
When the foamy sea drowns him and
the mysterious depth he never even knows
We promise to move from not loving to loving
from not knowing to knowing
Fragrance of your locks welcomes the Spring
You too know it for the best song to sing

11 people have been detained after gunmen stormed a concert hall and opened fire on the crowd

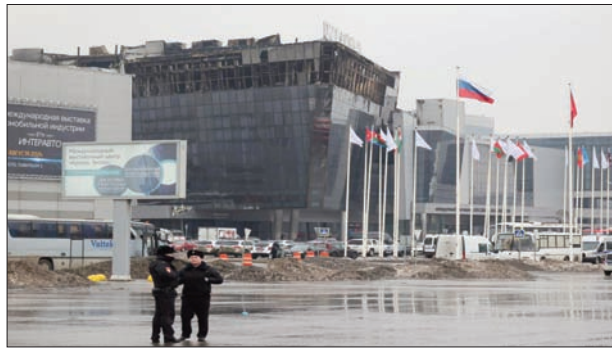
Russian detains suspects after deadly Moscow concert hall attack that killed 93 people

MOSCOW, March 23: Eleven people have been detained after gunmen stormed a concert hall in Moscow and opened fire on the crowd, the head of Russia's Federal Security Service told President Vladimir Putin on Saturday, according to Russian state news agency Tass.

At least 93 people were killed in the attack, including three children, Russian authorities said on Saturday.

Images shared by Russian state media on Saturday showed a fleet of emergency vehicles still gathered outside the ruins of Crocus City Hall, a shopping mall and music venue with a capacity of more than 6,000 people in Krasnogorsk, on Moscow's western edge.

Friday's attack came just days after President Vladimir Putin cemented his grip on power in a highly orchestrated electoral landslide. The attack was the deadliest in Russia in years and came as the country's fight in Ukraine dragged into a third year.



Videos posted online showed gunmen in the venue shooting civilians at point-blank range. The roof of the theatre, where crowds had gathered Friday for a performance by the Russian rock band Plochy, collapsed in the early hours of Saturday morning as firefighters spent hours fighting a fire which erupted during the attack.

Four of those detained were directly involved in the attack, Tass said.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on affiliated social media

channels, although neither the Kremlin nor Russian security services have officially assigned blame for the attack.

In a statement posted by its Aamaq news agency, the Islamic State's affiliate in Afghanistan said it had attacked a large gathering of "Christians" in Krasnogorsk. It was not immediately possible to verify the authenticity of the claim.

However, a US intelligence official told The Associated Press that US intelligence agencies had confirmed that IS was responsible for the attack.

The official said US intelligence agencies had gathered information in recent weeks that the IS branch was planning an attack in Moscow, and that US officials had privately shared the intelligence earlier this month with Russian officials.

The official was briefed on the matter but was not authorised to publicly discuss the intelligence information and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Messages of outrage, shock and support for those affected have since streamed in from around the world.

On Friday, the UN Security Council condemned "the heinous and cowardly terrorist attack" and underlined the need for the perpetrators to be held accountable. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also condemned the terrorist attack "in the strongest possible terms", his spokesman said.

Meanwhile, in Moscow itself, hundreds of people stood in line Saturday morning to

donate blood and plasma, Russia's health ministry said.

Putin, who extended his grip on Russia for another six years in this week's presidential vote after a sweeping crackdown on dissent, had publicly denounced the Western warnings of a potential terrorist attack as an attempt to intimidate Russians. "All that resembles open blackmail and an attempt to frighten and destabilize our society," he said earlier this week.

In October 2015, a bomb planted by the Islamic State downed a Russian passenger plane over Sinai, killing all 224 people on board, most of them Russian vacation-goers returning from Egypt. The group, which operates mainly in Syria and Iraq but also in Afghanistan and Africa, also has claimed several attacks in Russia's volatile Caucasus and other regions in the past years. It recruited fighters from Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. (AP)

Kate, Princess of Wales, reveals she has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy



LONDON, March 23: Kate, the Princess of Wales, has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy, she revealed on Friday in a stunning announcement that followed weeks of speculation about her health and whereabouts.

The princess disclosed her condition in a video message recorded Wednesday in Windsor and broadcast Friday. It came after relentless speculation on social media ever since January, when she was hospitalized for unspecified abdominal surgery.

Kate asked for "time, space and privacy" while she is treated for an unspecified type of cancer that was discovered after what she described as "major" surgery.

Wearing a casual striped sweater and jeans, Kate sat on a wooden bench in front of a lawn dotted with daffodils. The flowers, which bloom in early spring, are often used as a symbol of hope for people fighting cancer.

Kate, the Princess of Wales, said she is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. Here's what you need to know.

Kate has been out of view from the media, leading to weeks of speculation and gossip before the announcement.

The news is another shock for the royal family since the news last month that King Charles III was being treated for an unspecified type of cancer.

Catch up on how the news unfolded — as it happened — with AP's live coverage.

The timeline: A look at recent events that have fueled rumors relating to the royal family. "I am well," she said. "I am getting stronger every day by focusing on the things that will help me heal."

Kate, 42, hadn't been seen publicly since Christmas until video surfaced this week of her with her husband, Prince William, heir to the throne. It showed them walking from a shop that sells produce grown on the royal family's Windsor estate.

The news is another jolt for the royal family since the announcement last month that King Charles III was being treated for an unspecified type of cancer that was discovered while

undergoing a procedure for a benign enlarged prostate.

Kate, the reliable face of a modern monarchy, now faces a personal battle in the public eye.

Charles said he is "so proud of Catherine for her courage in speaking as she did," according to a statement released by Buckingham Palace. The king, who received prostate treatment in the same hospital and at the same time Kate had her surgery, remained in the "closest contact with his beloved daughter-in-law" in the past weeks.

The king and Queen Camilla "will continue to offer their love and support to the whole family through this difficult time," the palace said.

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, who have been estranged from William and Kate since their move to California in 2020, wished the princess well.

"We wish health and healing for Kate and the family, and hope they are able to do so privately and in peace," they said in a statement.

Before Friday, Kensington Palace had given little detail about Kate's condition beyond saying it wasn't cancer-related, the surgery was successful and recuperation would keep the princess away from public duties until April. Kate said it had been thought that her condition was non-cancerous until post-surgery tests revealed the diagnosis.

"This of course came as a huge shock, and William and I have been doing everything we can to process and manage this privately for the sake of our young family," she said.

By choosing to speak directly to the country and the world about her condition, rather than issuing a statement through the palace, Kate offered a level of intimacy and transparency atypical of a member of the royal family and may help tamp down runaway conjecture. The king's disclosure of his condition was also notably open by royal standards.

Kate said it had taken her time to recover from the surgery before starting "preventative" treatment, which she said was in the early stages. (AP)

Chinese coast guard blasts Philippine boat with water cannon in disputed sea for 2nd time this month

MANILA, March 23: Two Chinese coast guard ships fired at a Philippine supply boat with water cannon on Saturday in the latest confrontation near a disputed South China Sea shoal, causing heavy damage to the wooden vessel, Philippine officials said.

It was not immediately clear if the Philippine navy crew was injured, or whether their damaged boat, the Unaizah May 4, managed to maneuver past the Chinese coast guard blockade to deliver supplies to Philippine forces manning a territorial outpost in the nearby Second Thomas Shoal. It's the second time this month the Unaizah May 4 has been damaged during an attempt to resupply the outpost.

The shoal has been occupied by a small contingent of Philippine navy personnel on a marooned warship since the late 1990s, but has recently been surrounded by Chinese coast guard and suspected militia vessels in an increasingly tense territorial standoff.

Aside from China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei also have overlapping claims in the resource-rich and busy waterway, a key global trade route.

The United States lays no claims to the strategic waters but has deployed Navy ships and fighter jets in what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations, which have been criticised by China.

A Philippine coast guard ship that was escorting the Unaizah May 4 was also blocked and surrounded by a Chinese coast guard ship and two suspected militia vessels, Philippine coast guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarrila said.

The escort ship, BRP Cabra, was "iso-

lated from the resupply boat due to the irresponsible and provocative behaviour of the Chinese maritime forces", Tarrila said, adding that the Chinese forces were disregarding international regulations aimed at preventing collisions at sea.

Video released by the Philippine military shows two Chinese coast guard ships hitting a smaller wooden-hulled boat with high-pressure water cannon sprays at close range, causing the boat to shift in the high seas.

The Philippine military said without elaborating that its chartered boat "sustained significant damage".

There was no immediate statement from Chinese officials in Manila or in Beijing.

Chinese coast guard previously blasted the Unaizah May 4 with high-pressure water cannon blasts in a confrontation near the Second Thomas Shoal on March 5, shattering its windshield and slightly injuring a Filipino admiral and four of his men with glass shards and splinters of debris.

Beijing said then that its coast guard ships had taken steps after the Philippine vessels ignored warnings and encroached into what it calls its territorial waters.

The Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila summoned China's deputy ambassador after the March 5 confrontation to convey a protest against the Chinese coast guard's actions, which it said were unacceptable.

Washington renewed a warning that it is obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea. China has asked the US to stop meddling in what it calls a purely Asian dispute. (AP)

Prez Zardari urges political parties to unite to tackle challenges faced by Pak

ISLAMABAD, March 23: Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari on Saturday urged all political parties to set aside their differences to tackle the multiple problems faced by the cash-strapped country amidst increasing political polarisation and a spike in terror attacks.

Zardari was addressing the 84th Pakistan Day celebrations and army parade held at the Parade Ground area here.

The day marks the adoption of the historic Lahore Resolution on this day in 1940 which provided a framework for the realisation of the goal of a separate homeland for Muslims of South Asia.

Saudi Defence Minister Khalid Bin Salman was the guest of honour on the occasion.

Zardari inspected the parade of tri-services and admired the preparedness of the forces. He also used the occasion to urge for building internal consensus while shunning political differences.

"I request all political parties that they should set aside all their political issues and work for the development and prosperity of the country," Zardari, who was elected as President earlier this month, said.

Zardari was referring to the protest by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) against the alleged rigging in the election and imprisonment of its leader Imran Khan.

Zardari said that Pakistan was facing multiple challenges but the newly-elected government would address the challenges faced by the country. "I am happy that a democratic government has been set up after elections. Now it is our responsibility to tackle all challenges. I believe that as we did in the past, we will tackle all problems and we will take the country out of the current troubles," he said.

He said Pakistani forces were strong enough to face the threat and defend the country, adding that the success of Pakistan against terrorism has been acknowledged by the world.

The president said the country had already set up the Special Investment Facilitation Centre (SIFC), including top civil and military leadership, to make key decisions regarding developing important sectors like mining, agriculture, and information technology.

Zardari said that Pakistan being a peaceful nuclear state was eager to have good ties with all neighbours but warned that it would not tolerate any kind of aggression.

"We will not tolerate any kind of effort by terrorists or any group to destabilise our country," he said, apparently referring to the spike in terror attacks in the country and tensions with neighbouring Afghanistan. (PTI)

Lebanon's displaced celebrate Ramadan amid fears that border conflict might become the 'new normal'

MARWANIEH, March 23: Shortly before sunset on a recent evening, Mervat Reslan and a group of other women made french fries in vats of boiling oil to serve with that night's iftar — the meal that breaks the daily fasts Muslims observe during the holy month of Ramadan.

They belong to roughly 60 families who have been sheltering at an abandoned hotel in the southern Lebanese town of Marwanieh to escape the shelling and airstrikes that have made it too dangerous to stay in their homes in the country's border region with Israel. Although they've become a family of sorts to one another, many long to return home.

"Especially during Ramadan, you start thinking that your house is better — that you and your family all used to gather together, your children and their children, your in-laws and neighbours. And now you're sitting by yourself in a room," said Reslan.

Those living at the Hotel Montana, which went out of business in 2005, are among an estimated 90,000 people from southern Lebanon who have been displaced by the near-daily clashes between the militant group Hezbollah and Israeli forces.

Another 60,000 Lebanese civilians have



decided to stay in the border zone and risk the danger, according to a United Nations agency.

The border clashes began with a few Hezbollah rockets fired across the frontier on October 8, the day after Hamas' deadly incursion into southern Israel and Israel's ensuing bombardment of the Gaza Strip. They quickly escalated to near-daily exchanges of rockets, shelling and airstrikes across the border and sometimes beyond.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 300 people in Lebanon. Most were militants from Hezbollah or allied groups, but more than 40 were civilians. Hezbollah strikes, meanwhile, have killed at least eight Israeli civilians and 11 soldiers, and displaced tens of thousands on that side of the border.

The cross-border attacks seem unlikely to end before a cease-fire is reached in Gaza — and possibly not even then.

The prolonged state of limited conflict has left Lebanon, and particularly the displaced families, in

limbo. School, work and farming in Lebanon's border region have been put on hold. For a while, many hoped that a cease-fire would coincide with the start of Ramadan, but half of the holy month has passed without clear prospects for a solution.

Most of the displaced Lebanese have moved in with relatives or found shelter in vacant houses or rooms offered up by residents farther north. Those with the means have relocated to their second homes or rented apartments.

Shelters like the Hotel Montana are a last resort. "A person can deal with 10, 15, 20 days, a month (of displacement), but we're now entering the sixth month and it looks like it will go on longer," said Ali Mattar, who heads the union of municipalities for the Sahel al-Zahrani region, which includes Marwanieh.

The cash-strapped municipalities have been given much of the responsibility for dealing with the displacement, a task made more difficult by the

four years of economic crisis the country has faced.

The Lebanese government has promised to compensate residents of the south whose homes have been damaged or destroyed. But the funding hasn't been secured, said Maj. Gen. Mohammad Kheir, who heads the country's Higher Relief Committee. A comprehensive survey hasn't been conducted to assess how many houses are damaged, though it is "in the thousands", he said.

Hezbollah has been providing monthly payments to many of the displaced families, an official with knowledge of the situation said. The official, who was not allowed to brief journalists and spoke on condition of anonymity, did not give a precise amount, saying it depends on a family's size and needs.

Local and international nongovernmental organizations and religious charities have taken up much of the slack, but their resources are also strained. At the Hotel Montana, for instance, the Red Cross provides diesel to run a generator, but it can only be run for two hours in the morning and five in the evening because the supply is limited, said Salam Badreddine, who oversees disaster management for the union of municipalities. (AP)

Senate passes USD 1.2 trillion funding package in early morning vote, ending threat of partial shutdown

WASHINGTON, March 23: The Senate passed a USD 1.2 trillion package of spending bills in the early morning hours on Saturday, a long overdue action nearly six months into the budget year that will push any threats of a government shutdown to the fall. The bill now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

The vote was 74-24. It came after funding had expired for the agencies at midnight, but the White House sent out a notice shortly after the deadline announcing the Office of Management and Budget had ceased shutdown preparations because there was a high degree of confidence that Congress would pass the legislation and the president would sign it on Saturday.

"Because obligations of federal funds are incurred and tracked on a daily basis, agencies will not shut down and may continue their normal operations," the White House statement said.

Prospects for a short-term government shutdown had appeared to grow Friday evening after Republicans and Democrats battled over proposed amendments to the bill. Any successful amendments to the bill would have sent the legislation back to the House, which had already left town for a two-week recess.

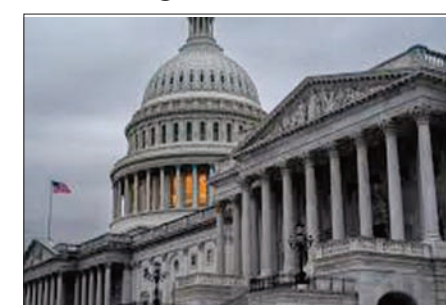
But shortly before midnight Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced a breakthrough.

"It's been a very long and difficult day, but we have just reached an agreement to complete the job of funding the government," Schumer said.

"It is good for the country that we have reached this bipartisan deal. It wasn't easy, but tonight our persistence has been worth it."

While Congress has already approved money for Veterans Affairs, Interior, Agriculture and other agencies, the bill approved this week is much larger, providing funding for the Defence, Homeland Security and State departments and other aspects of general government.

The House passed the bill Friday morning



by a vote of 286-134, narrowly gaining the two-thirds majority needed for approval. More than 70 per cent of the money would go to defence.

The vote tally in the House reflected anger among Republicans over the content of the package and the speed with which it was brought to a vote. House Speaker Mike Johnson brought the measure to the floor even though a majority of Republicans ended up voting against it. He said afterward that the bill "represents the best achievable outcome in a divided government".

In sign of the conservative frustration, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., initiated an effort to oust Johnson as the House began the vote but held off on further action until the House returns in two weeks. It's the same tool that was used last year to remove the last Republican speaker, Kevin McCarthy of California. The vote breakdown showed 101 Republicans voting for the bill and 112 voting against it. Meanwhile, 185 Democrats voted for the bill and 22 against.

Rep. Kay Granger, the Republican chair of the House Appropriations Committee that helped draft the package, stepped down from that role after the vote. She said she would stay on the committee to provide advice and lead as a teacher for colleagues when needed.

Johnson broke up this fiscal year's spending bills into two parts as House Republicans revolted against what has become an annual practice of asking them to vote for one massive, complex bill called an omnibus with little time to review it or face a shutdown.

Johnson viewed that as a breakthrough, saying the two-part process was "an important step in breaking the omnibus muscle memory."

Still, the latest package was clearly unpopular with most Republicans, who viewed it as containing too few of their policy priorities and as spending too much.

"The bottom line is that this is a complete and utter surrender," said Rep. Eric Burlison, R-Mo.

It took lawmakers six months into the current fiscal year to get near the finish line on government funding, the process slowed by conservatives who pushed for more policy mandates and steeper spending cuts than a Democratic-led Senate or White House would consent. The impasse required several short-term, stopgap spending bills to keep agencies funded.

The first package of full-year spending bills, which funded the departments of Veterans Affairs, Agriculture and the Interior, among others, cleared Congress two weeks ago with just hours to spare before funding expired for those agencies.

When combining the two packages, discretionary spending for the budget year will come to about USD 1.66 trillion. That does not include programs such as Social Security and Medicare, or financing the country's rising debt.

To win over support from Republicans, Johnson touted some of the spending increases secured for about 8,000 more detention beds for migrants awaiting their immigration proceedings or removal from the country. That's about a 24 per cent increase from current levels. Also, GOP leadership highlighted more money to hire about 2,000 Border Patrol agents.

Democrats, meanwhile, are boasting of a USD 1 billion increase for Head Start programmes and new child care centres for military families. They also played up a USD 120 million increase in funding for cancer research and a USD 100 million increase for Alzheimer's research. (AP)

BJP ends alliance with SKM

To contest Lok Sabha, assembly polls in Sikkim alone

GANGTOK, March 23: The BJP on Saturday called off its alliance with the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) and announced that the party would go alone in the simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the Himalayan state.

The SKM, on the other hand, did not rule out the possibility of a post-poll alliance with the BJP on the lines of a similar arrangement made after the 2019 polls.

The announcement to fight the upcoming polls alone was made by state BJP president D R Thapa, who returned to Sikkim after attending a meeting with the party's central leadership in Delhi on seat-sharing with SKM.

Addressing party workers at Rangpo upon his return to the state, Thapa said, "The alliance with SKM has ended."

"A new era of independent action against corruption and a focused commitment to Sikkim's development has begun... the dissolution of the alliance provides a great opportunity to serve the interests of the people of the state," he said.

Thapa said that he told the central leadership that the state unit was fully geared to contest all the



32 assembly seats and the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state on its own.

Reacting to the development, SKM leader Jacob Khaling Rai, who is also the political secretary to the CM, said, "We did not have a pre-poll alliance with the BJP in the previous election, but we had worked out a post-poll alliance in

the interest of the nation and the state. This time too, that is not being ruled out."

He also congratulated the BJP for going ahead with its decision to contest the elections alone.

Sources said that the talks between the SKM and the BJP on seat-sharing broke down after Chief Minister Prem Singh

Tamang refused to go for a pre-poll alliance with the saffron party.

Tamang had visited the national capital recently to discuss seat-sharing with BJP leaders, which, however, did not materialise, they said.

Both the BJP and the SKM are likely to announce their candidate lists within the next few days.

Sources said that while both parties were earlier expected to contest the elections in an alliance, the SKM developed cold feet over the issue, fearing that opposition Sikkim Democratic Front and Citizen Action Party may fuel Sikkimese sub-nationalism over the Centre's alleged dilution of Article 371F of the Constitution that guarantees special status to the state and protects its old laws that existed prior to the state's merger with the Indian union in 1975.

The two parties had contested the 2019 polls separately, with the SKM winning 17 seats and forming the government. The BJP, on the other hand, drew a blank, polling less than two per cent votes.

The two parties stitched a post-poll alliance after the BJP's tally of MLAs suddenly swelled to 10 following defections from the SDF.

Two SDF MLAs also joined the SKM, taking its tally to 19.

The BJP subsequently contested two assembly by-polls, winning both to increase its tally to 12.

Expanding its footprint in Sikkim, the BJP's candidate DT Lepcha also won the lone Rajya Sabha seat in the state. (PTI)

Mizoram MP accuses BJP leaders of trying to turn India into Hindu kingdom

AIZAWL, March 23: A day after asserting the need to challenge and oppose the NDA government, K. Vanlalvena, Mizoram's lone Rajya Sabha member, on Saturday leveled a serious allegation against BJP leaders, claiming they are striving to transform India into a Hindu kingdom.

Vanlalvena, who was named by the opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) as their nominee for the upcoming elections to the state's lone Lok Sabha seat, told reporters that the NDA is an alliance formed by various parties, not all of which share the ideologies of the BJP.

"Some BJP leaders with vested interests are trying to turn the country into a Hindu kingdom. The NDA is likely to retain power at the Centre in the upcoming polls. If the NDA government takes steps, which are against the interest of the religious minorities, including Mizo Christians, I shall oppose it vociferously both within and outside Parliament," the 54-year-old MNF leader said.

However, Vanlalvena commended the NDA government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for its contributions to economic development in the country.

He affirmed his willingness to collaborate with other NDA members in Parliament if elected to the Lok Sabha, stressing the importance of NDA's continuity for the progress and development of the nation.

Vanlalvena outlined the protection of Mizo culture and religion and the consolidation of various Mizo tribes under a single administrative unit as his primary campaign agenda for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls scheduled for April 19.

He asserted that his efforts during his tenure as a Rajya Sabha member have already begun yielding positive results for Mizoram's development. At an event following his nomination as the MNF candidate on Friday, Vanlalvena had reiterated the necessity to challenge and oppose the NDA regime.

He had also cautioned against the potential implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) if the NDA government returned to power.

Despite being a member of the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) and part of the NDA government at the Centre, MNF does not collaborate with the saffron party in the state. (PTI)

BJP to not contest from Shillong & Tura seats

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 23: The BJP has decided to opt out of fielding candidates for the Tura and Shillong Lok Sabha seats in Meghalaya, throwing support behind NPP candidates in these constituencies.

BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra confirmed the decision, citing instructions from BJP national president JP Nadda.

This move, aimed at honoring NDA alliance partners, is seen as a strategic shift in the campaign dynamics, potentially easing competition for NPP contenders Agatha K Sangma and M Ampareen Lyngdoh.

A total of 11 hopefuls vied for the BJP ticket, with 5 contenders eyeing the Shillong seat and 6 aiming for Tura.

In the Shillong parliamentary seat race, Meghalaya cabinet minister AL Hek was joined by advocate Dr Fenela Lyngdoh Nonglait, former BJP state president Ernest Mawrie, state BJYM president Mewaker Lyngdoh, and Sumitra Laloo as ticket aspirants.

Meanwhile, the Tura Lok Sabha seat saw a competitive field with contenders including sitting Tura GHADC MDC Bernard N Marak, former MLAs Winner-D Sangma and KC Boro, former MDC Boston Marak, Riya Sangma, and Thomas Marak.

Large participation in 60th 'Naga national service'

DIMAPUR, March 23: A large number of people participated in the 60th year celebration of "Naga national service" of Thuingaleng Muivah, the Ato Kilonser (Prime Minister) of NSCN-IM, at Camp Hebron off Dimapur in Nagaland on Saturday.

Naga Hoho, Global Naga Forum (GNF), Naga Mothers' Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), Tirap, Changlang, Longding People's Forum, Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR), Naga Students' Federation (NSF), Eastern Naga Peoples' Organisation (ENPO), United Naga Council (UNC), Naga Women Union (NWU), Eastern Naga Students' Federation (ENSF), Naga Council Dimapur, Naga Women Hoho Dimapur, Dimapur Naga Students' Union, All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM) and many others were in the programme.

Representatives of various Naga organizations spoke on the occasion. NSCN-IM chairman Q Tuccu, delivering a speech, said, "By any standard 60 years is no mean achievement for any person who has given his everything for the Naga political issue, to take up the challenges that Nagas are not lost people".

He also said, "You spared no effort to work on this line and the world knows too well how you have gone



through 'blood, sweat and tears' to save the Naga nation from being thrown into oblivion".

Q Tuccu also said that Th Muivah has played a significant role to let the world take cognizance of Nagas as a people and as a nation beginning from his mission in China during the 1960s and 1970s and his successful international campaign in early 1990s when Nagalim was made the bona fide member of UNPO in 1993.

Since then Muivah has left no stone unturned cultivating the political legit-

imacy of the Naga nation, according to Tuccu.

"Along with our late chairman Isak Chishi Swu, you achieved another milestone when you signed the historic Framework Agreement with the Government of India on August 3, 2015. Naga people will remain indebted to you for years to come for defending the sovereignty identity of the Naga nation," he added.

The NSCN-IM chairman further said that the "groundbreaking foray" of Muivah into the Naga political

movement makes all the difference towards making the NSCN as the torch bearer of Naga political movement.

"It was because of your brand of revolutionary leadership that the Government of India took notice of the Naga issue from the correct perspective. Let us praise the Lord for giving you a full life of 90 years and 60 years of divinely ordained visionary leadership," Q Tuccu further added.

Singing and other activities were displayed as tributes to the NSCN-IM leader. (NNN)

Anganwadi worker suspended in Tripura

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 23: Following a distressing incident at the Bairagimura Anganwadi Center in Sepahijala district of Tripura, where two children suffered severe burn injuries in a hot water accident, the Tripura government swiftly responded.

On Friday (March 22), an order was issued from the office of the Tripura child development project officer, suspending Jayalaxmi Sarkar (Debbarma), the Anganwadi worker in-charge of the Anganwadi centre.

The order outlines that on March 20, two five-year-old girls, Puniti Debbarma and Hamari Debbarma, sustained critical burns due to accidental contact with hot water at the Anganwadi centre, allegedly caused by Anganwadi worker Jayalaxmi Sarkar (Debbarma).

The injured children are currently receiving treatment at the burn unit of Agartala government medical college & GB Pant hospital in Tripura.

Jayalaxmi Sarkar (Debbarma) was suspended from her duties, as per the order issued on March 22, owing to her purported involvement in the incident.

Furthermore, Anita Burman, the sector supervisor of Telkajla sector, along with Debayan Chowdhury and Bishu Kumar Debbarma, supervisors, have been tasked with visiting the Anganwadi centre.

Their assignment includes engaging with local parents and members of the Anganwadi centre Management Committee.

A comprehensive investigation is underway, and a report detailing the findings is expected to be submitted to the relevant authorities within two days.

The Tripura department of social welfare and social education promptly extended assistance to the affected families, offering ₹ 30,000 in support.

Tripura minister Tinky Roy and department officials visited the injured children at the hospital, ensuring coordinated efforts with medical personnel for their care and treatment.

Tripura minister Roy has expressed intentions to provide further financial assistance to the affected children.

The department has initiated an inquiry into the incident, promptly suspending the services of the implicated Anganwadi worker.

Death threat to Meghalaya police officer

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 23: The proscribed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) has issued a death threat against the Meghalaya police officer responsible for the death of Cherishterfield Thangkiew, the former general secretary of the banned outfit. HNLC made this threat while questioning the Meghalaya police, asking that if the state police is claiming that Cherishterfield Thangkiew, the outfit's former general secretary, is still alive.

This scepticism arises from the Meghalaya police department's statement claiming that arrested HNLC members were in communication with military commander Sanbor Pala.

The outfit cited a report from the judicial inquiry led by Justice (retired) T Vaiphei, which allegedly quoted Meghalaya police asserting that Cherishterfield Thangkiew and Sanbor Pala were one and the same.

In a statement, HNLC's general secretary-cum-publicity secretary, Sainkupar Nongtraw, expressed surprise at the police department's contradictions regarding the audio recording purportedly featuring a conversation between arrested HNLC suspects and Sanbor Pala. Nongtraw questioned whether the police now suggest that Thangkiew might still be alive and criticized the Meghalaya police for targeting individuals suspected of being Sanbor Pala without concrete evidence. Regarding Thangkiew's death, Nongtraw alleged a politically motivated conspiracy involving certain ministers within the Meghalaya government, as per the 2022 judicial report.

The HNLC leader vowed consequences for the police officer responsible for Thangkiew's demise, emphasizing the outfit's determination to unveil the truth.

Tripura CM Manik Saha hits out at opposition INDIA bloc

AGARTALA, March 23: Launching a scathing attack on opposition bloc INDIA, Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Saturday asserted that 'A' has already departed and only 'I' will remain by the time Lok Sabha polls begin.

Although Saha did not explicitly identify 'A', it seems to allude to Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal, who was sent to Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody for a week by a court over his alleged involvement in a liquor policy case. "Within INDIA, 'A' has departed, and as elections progress, other elements will fade away, leaving only 'I' in place", he told an election rally of BJP Yuva Morcha here.

The Tripura CM also expressed dismay at the condition of bloc allies Congress and CPI(M) in the state.

"It is very sad to see CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Chaudury, who is also the opposition leader in Tripura, visiting Congress state headquarters in Agartala! This came days after Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president Asish Kumar, who is contesting as INDIA Bloc candidate from Tripura West Tripura Parliamentary constituency, visiting CPI(M) headquarters at Melarmath. I could not believe this!", he said. Saha, who switched from the Congress to the BJP in 2016, two years before the saffron party's victory in the northeastern state, alleged that Tripura witnessed violence during the Communist regime, with peace only being restored after the BJP came to power in 2018. (PTI)

JJM KRC of USTM holds training at Namsai and Lohit

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 23: As empanelled Key Resource Centre (KRC) under Ministry of Jal Shakti, Jal Jeevan Mission, department of drinking water & sanitation, govt of India, the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) organised a two-day-long Residential Training Program at Arunachal Pradesh covering Namsai and Lohit district.

The programme started on March 20 at Hotel Anni's Fine Dine Namsai and it will cover eight numbers of training at different places in Arunachal Pradesh.

On the first day, a total of 149 participants from different villages of Namsai attended the training and all were VWSC (Village Water Sanitation Committee) members.

The programme was inaugurated by Er Prakriti Kr Chakraborty, rtd secretary public

health engineering Department govt of Assam and Technical Advisor of KRC, Jal Jeevan Mission, USTM. In the inaugural session, Dr Nibedita Paul PD KRC JJM USTM welcomed all the participants of the training and explained the role of VWSC at this juncture.

Er P P Sharma, senior technical expert USTM explained that KRCs are now partners of PHED and mainly to help the department by providing required training under JalJeevan Mission to build capacity of all stakeholders for its successful implementation. Rituparno Borkotoki, Monitoring & Evaluation Expert of KRC addressed the participants and mentioned the key objective of JJM.

Kaling Pao district PHED official also addressed the participants and requested them to be part of this training program as the main partner of JJM. The main resource person of the programme was Anindita Choudhury, Ex

Unicef Sanitation Consultant, Joly Changmai Kalita, WASH Expert, Chaitali Mondal EC/BCC Expert, Pradip Deb Nath MIS Expert trained participants on various components under JJM.

However, the major focus of the training was to highlight the issues of water source sustainability and source protection. The role of VWSC was explained mainly to make the community aware of the above-mentioned area for the sustainability of Jal Jeevan Mission.

Issues and challenges in the operation and maintenance of PWS specifically technical issues and proposed mitigation measures were also addressed under the training because of community interest. Training coordinator K G Banik managed and coordinated the sessions and reported from Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh.

Need for robust district judicial system: Justice Surya Kant

'Need for well well-equipped district judicial system by way of imparting training and sensitisation programmes for judicial officers'

AGARTALA, March 23: Supreme Court Judge Justice Surya Kant on Saturday emphasised the need for a robust district judicial system.

He said this at the annual judicial conclave of Tripura Judicial Academy at Nrasingarh in West Tripura district.

"There is a narrative that the district judiciary is supposed to dispose of only civil and criminal cases but being the true representative of a country's judicial system, it can take up litigations pertaining to constitutional rights. Even civil courts can also do the same thing", he said at the event organised to mark the 12th foundation day of the High Court of Tripura.

Emphasising the need for a robust district judicial system to dispose of such cases, Justice Surya Kant said very few people can

travel to the constitutional bench therefore there is a need for well-equipped district judicial system by way of imparting training and sensitisation programmes for judicial officers.

"The person who believes in judiciary and enters into district court must get justice at the earliest", he said, adding the judicial academy also has a role to play to make judicial officers well equipped to dispose of commercial disputes effectively.

He claimed that India is the fastest growing economy in the world and may become the third largest world economy with more foreign investment coming to the country.

"We need to have expertise in solving commercial disputes because commercial litigants wish to get speedy disposal of their cases. The Judicial academy must under-

take specialist training and sensitisation programmes for judicial officers", he said.

Chief Justice of the High Court of Tripura, Justice Apares Kumar Singh highlighted the thin pendency in the high court due to co-operation from lawyers who are meticulously and effectively taking up cases during the trial.

"The number of pending cases which was 1,600 till January 2023, has come down to 1,170. We are working to dispose of all the five-year-old cases pending in the district courts", he said.

Justice Singh said a special CBI court has started functioning here (Agartala) to hear the chit-fund-related cases in the northeastern state.

Earlier, Justice Kant virtually inaugurated a newly built additional district and sessions court at Kamalpur of Dhalai district. (PTI)



Generational shift started in Cong in several states, can't write off party: Jairam Ramesh

Such a change has already been initiated in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, Ramesh said, adding that other state units of the party will follow suit

NEW DELHI, March 23: Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has said the much-needed generational shift in the party has already been heralded in several states, making it difficult to write off the grand old party even though many have already penned its obituaries.

Such a change has already been initiated in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, he said, adding that other state units of the party will follow suit.

"There has been a generational shift in Madhya Pradesh. For the Congress, what has happened in Madhya Pradesh is a huge transformation," Ramesh said, adding the party has shifted from a generation of 70-year-old leaders to those who are 50 years old.

"Both the Pradesh Congress Committee chief and the Congress Legislature Party leader are of a completely different generation. For the Congress to make that step is huge," he said during an interaction at the PTI office here.



This shift was replicated in Rajasthan and a newer leadership is coming to the fore there. In Chhattisgarh the party still has many experienced faces, Ramesh said.

He said that in Telangana too, "you see new people coming in. One of the reasons we won in Telangana is actually a lot of new people were projected. Our chief minister was a new person in the Congress. He joined the Congress two to three years ago."

"But, that (generational shift) is happening slowly. It's happening in a couple of states. It should happen faster for sure," he added.

Asked whether such a change is required at the central level, he said one should not ascribe too much importance to individuals as the Congress is the only party to have an elected president. The party systems have to be strengthened instead, Ramesh said.

On whether this Lok Sabha election is a fight for survival, he said many have written obituaries of the Congress but it is difficult to write off the party. "Many times, writing obituaries has been a favourite pastime for commentators. But the Congress will come back. I'm sure," he said.

"I think the Congress is giving its all, in spite of what has been happening in the last month. But, you can't write off the Congress. I think it is too deeply ingrained (into the country)," the Congress leader said.

Ramesh said he has seen that in several parts of the country where the Congress has no MP or MLA, the party flag still flies there. The party has received a very good response in Gujarat, Maharashtra and some other states under the two Bharat Jodo yatra, he said.

Ramesh, however, did not speculate on the numbers that the party would get in these Parliamentary elections but exuded confidence along with other parties, they would get a majority in the Lok Sabha.

He also expressed confidence that the Lok Sabha results could spring a surprise this time just like in 2004 when the Congress was written off, but emerged as the single-largest party. "Similar questions were raised in 2004. So, I would not put it past the realm of possibility that you will be in for a big surprise," he said.

Ramesh felt that after Hemant Soren and Arvind Kejriwal's arrest by federal agencies, the BJP would target some more leaders in the days to come. (PTI)

AAP office in Delhi 'sealed', matter to be raised with EC: Atishi

NEW DELHI, March 23: The Aam Aadmi Party office in Delhi has been "sealed" from all sides, its senior leader Atishi claimed on Saturday and said the party will report the matter to the Election Commission.

In a post on X, she questioned the "sealing" of the party office, saying it goes against the concept of having a "level playing field" in elections as promised by the Constitution.

"How can access to a national party's office be stopped during the Lok Sabha election? This (is) against the 'level playing field' promised in the Indian Constitution. We are seeking time with the Election Commission (EC) to complain against this," the Delhi minister said in her post.

Another senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj alleged that all access to the party office has been stopped by the Union government.

"We will approach EC. The Central government has closed all access to AAP head office at ITO, that too in Model Code of Conduct," he said in a post on X.

In a press conference, Bharadwaj said that the Election Commission should act as a neutral institution and ensure strict action against police officers.

The AAP office at DDU Marg near ITO in central Delhi was also blocked on Friday during a protest by party leaders and volunteers at the BJP headquarters, just a few metres ahead of it, against the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Bharadwaj said two ministers, including himself and Atishi, were stopped from



going to the party office. How can a national party's office be sealed during elections, he asked.

He also claimed that the vehicle in which Atishi was going home was stopped by the police.

Atishi also posted a video on X in which she can be seen arguing with a Delhi Police officer while some AAP leaders laid down on the road as a mark of protest over being stopped by the police.

Bharadwaj accused the police of barricading the AAP office and preventing party leaders from going there and said they would complain to the EC over the matter. The AAP office was barricaded from all sides on Friday and no one was allowed to go inside, he claimed.

AAP national convener Kejriwal was remanded to Enforcement Directorate custody till March 28, following his arrest on Thursday by the agency in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy of the Delhi government. (PTI)

Nine former Himachal MLAs, including six from Congress, join BJP

NEW DELHI, March 23: Nine former Himachal Pradesh MLAs, including six disqualified Congress legislators and three Independents who resigned, joined the BJP on Saturday amid the continuing political crisis in the state.

The former lawmakers slammed the Congress government in the state headed by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, saying development work has stalled since it came to power.

They joined the BJP in the presence of Union Minister Anurag Thakur, former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur, its national general secretary Arun Singh and state unit president Rajeev Bindal.

Welcoming the former lawmakers into the party, Anurag Thakur said their presence will further strengthen the BJP as he accused the Congress government in the state of failing to fulfil its promises, leading to all-round anger among people. Anurag Thakur said six of the former lawmakers, despite being Congress MLAs, supported the BJP in the recent Rajya Sabha election as they chose to reflect the "public anger" against the Sukhu government.

The former Congress MLAs who joined the BJP are Sudhir Sharma, Ravi Thakur, Rajinder Rana, Inder Dutt Lakhpanal, Chetanya Sharma and Devinder Kumar Bhutto -- all disqualified on February 29 for defying a party whip to be present in the House and vote in favour of the state government during a cut motion and budget.

Ashish Sharma, Hoshiyar Singh and KL Thakur, who were elected as Independents and resigned on Friday, also joined the BJP, with Singh saying they decided to be part of the country's development journey under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Development works in the state have stopped since the Congress came to power, he said.

BJP leaders cited a host of development measures taken by the Modi government for the state, including highway and rail projects, and said the former MLAs decided to strengthen the prime minister's leadership. These former lawmakers will be given due respect in the BJP, they said. They are expected to contest the bypolls from their respective seats as candidates of the saffron party.

Jai Ram Thakur described the six former Congress MLAs' joining the BJP as a big political development for such a small state, noting that several of these leaders had held senior positions within the party. The former Congress leaders slammed the party, saying its national leadership is no longer visible and offers no vision for the country, leading to its "disintegration".

Sharma, a four-term MLA, alleged that there is no atmosphere for development in the state while the Congress is disintegrating because its leadership lacks vision for the country and has nothing to offer except criticism of Modi.

Rana echoed his view and blamed the Congress leadership for causing a "political disaster" and said they are hopeful of putting the hill state on the path to development, a pointer to the BJP's efforts to bring down the government through by-poll wins and further defections from the grand old party. (PTI)

Farmers' income didn't double by 2024, those in power don't care about them: Sharad Pawar

PUNE, March 23: People in power do not care about the farmers in the country, said NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Saturday, claiming that the Centre has failed to keep its promise of doubling their income by 2024.

The veteran politician was addressing a farmers' rally at Indapur in Maharashtra's Pune district in the presence of Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders like Sanjay Raut, Balasaheb Thorat and Supriya Sule.

MVA comprises the Congress, NCP (SP) and Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) and is a part of the opposition INDIA bloc.

"The situation now is different in the country. The upcoming (Lok Sabha) elections are very important. The prime minister had once assured that farmers' income would be doubled by 2024, but that has not happened," said Pawar.

Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra, which elects 48 MPs, will be held in five phases between April 19 and May 20.

The 83-year-old NCP leader said the country's farmers have



demanding relief over onions. "But those in power do not care about the farmers," he said at the rally in Indapur, which is a part of the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency.

Pawar's daughter and three-term MP Supriya Sule will be contesting from Baramati.

The former Union agriculture minister said Sena (UBT) leader Raut was put behind bars after he

spoke against the government, referring to the Rajya Sabha MP's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an alleged money laundering case in 2022.

"Despite his hard work, Arvind Kejriwal has been sent to jail. In the last Delhi elections, the BJP won only 2 per cent of the seats and the rest was in favour of Kejriwal (AAP)," he said.

The ED on Thursday arrested

Kejriwal in an excise policy-linked money laundering case. On Friday, he was remanded in ED's custody for six days.

At the rally, Raut also targeted the BJP-led Centre and state government.

"We don't want your 'Acche Din'. Give us the days we had before 2014. There's no impact on us after Ajit Pawar joined their alliance. Our party has grown stronger after Eknath Shinde left us. Maharashtra didn't witness the difference after those who left us," he said.

The Sharad Pawar-founded NCP split last year after Ajit Pawar and several MLAs loyal to him broke away to join the Maharashtra government. In 2022, Shinde had triggered a similar upheaval in the original Shiv Sena to become the chief minister with BJP's help.

"Do not threaten us. We are not going to be afraid of anything. We will see a change in the government in the country in the next four months. Once our government is formed, no one will be left in your party," he added. (PTI)

India summons German deputy chief of mission to protest country's comments on Kejriwal's arrest

NEW DELHI, March 23: India on Saturday summoned the German deputy chief of mission here and lodged a strong protest against the country's foreign ministry's remarks on the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. The German envoy Georg Enzweiler was summoned by officials in the external affairs ministry and told that the German Foreign Ministry's remarks on Kejriwal's arrest were an interference in India's judicial process and any "biased assumptions" were "most unwarranted", an MEA official said. A German Foreign Ministry spokesperson had "taken note" of Kejriwal's arrest.

"We assume and expect that the standards relating to the independence of Judiciary and basic democratic principles will also be applied

in this case," the German official had said.

"The German deputy chief of mission in New Delhi was summoned today and conveyed India's strong protest on their Foreign Office spokesperson's comments on our internal affairs," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"We see such remarks as interfering in our judicial process and undermining the independence of our judiciary," he said.

"India is a vibrant and robust democracy with the rule of law. As in all legal cases in the country, and elsewhere in the democratic world, law will take its own course in the instant matter. Biased assumptions made on this account are most unwarranted," Jaiswal said. (PTI)

CBI conducts searches at premises of Mahua Moitra: Officials

NEW DELHI, March 23: The CBI on Saturday conducted searches on the premises of former TMC MP Mahua Moitra in multiple locations, including Kolkata, in connection with the alleged cash-for-query case, officials said.

Teams of the central probe agency reached Moitra's residence in Kolkata and other cities early on Saturday, informed about the search proceedings and started the operation, they said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) registered an FIR against the former Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP on Thursday on the directives of the Lokpal, which has instructed the agency to file a report within six months, they said. Moitra was expelled from the Lok Sabha in December for "unethical conduct".

The former MP has challenged her expulsion in the Supreme Court and will again be in the hustings during the upcoming general elections as a TMC candidate from the Krishnanagar seat in West Bengal.

The Lokpal, the anti-corruption ombudsman, issued the directions to the CBI after receiving the findings of its preliminary inquiry into allegations made against Moitra by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey.

Dubey, a Lok Sabha member, alleged that Moitra had asked questions in the House in exchange for cash and gifts from Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani to mount an attack on industrialist Gautam Adani and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, among others. (PTI)

New curriculum, books for grades 3-6 from 2024-25, no change in syllabus for other classes: CBSE

In a revision of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) after 18 years, the Ministry of Education had last year notified the changes

NEW DELHI, March 23: The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) will release a new syllabus and textbooks for Classes 3 to 6 while there will be no change in the curriculum and textbooks for other grades for the academic year 2024-25 commencing from April 1, according to CBSE officials.

The NCERT has informed the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) that new syllabi and textbooks for classes 3 and 6 are currently under development and will soon be released, the CBSE said in a communication sent to affiliated schools.

"Consequently, schools are advised to follow these new syllabi and textbooks for classes 3 and 6 in place of textbooks published by NCERT till the year 2023," said Joseph Emmanuel, Director (Academics), CBSE.

"Additionally, a bridge course for class 6, and concise guidelines for class 3 are being developed by the NCERT for facilitating a seamless transition for students to



new pedagogical practices and areas of study aligned with new curriculum framework, 2023. These resources will be disseminated to all the schools online once

they are received from NCERT.

"The Board will also organize capacity-building programs for school heads and Teachers to orient them with the new teaching learning perspectives as envisioned in NEP-2020," he added in the letter.

In a revision of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) after 18 years, the Ministry of Education had last year notified the changes. The NCF had undergone four revisions in the past - in 1975, 1988, 2000, and 2005.

The council is in process of preparing new school textbooks in line with the new national curriculum framework for school education (NCF-SE) 2023 as a part of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

"There will be no change in the Curriculum and textbooks for other classes for the academic year 2024-25 commencing from April 1, 2024," he said.

The NCF for the foundational stage (FS) was launched by the Ministry of Education

in 2022 and according to the curriculum framework, the NCERT developed and collected the learning-teaching material (LTM).

Toys, puzzles, puppetry, posters, flash cards, worksheets and attractive storybooks are part of the "Jaadi Pitara" launched by the Ministry of Education for learning at the foundational stage.

In 2022, the NCERT had rationalised the syllabi of classes 6 to 12 to "reduce the content load" on students in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the changes, reflected in new textbooks published last year, the council had removed chapters on Mughal courts, 2002 Gujarat riots, cold war, references of Mughal emperors, and Emergency and periodic table.

While the council maintained there was no selective omission of topics, the rationalisation exercise had created a political controversy with leaders from opposition parties alleging the ruling dispensation was "erasing history". (PTI)

Warship INS Kolkata carrying 35 pirates, apprehended off Somalia coast, reaches Mumbai



MUMBAI, March 23: Warship INS Kolkata, carrying 35 pirates who were apprehended in an operation off the coast of Somalia, reached Mumbai on Saturday morning, the Navy said.

These pirates were then handed over to the Mumbai police, it said.

The exercise was undertaken as part of the ongoing Operation Sankalp, wherein Indian Navy ships are deployed in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden for the safety of seafarers and mercantile trade passing through the region.

"INS Kolkata, with the 35 apprehended pirates, returned to Mumbai on March 23 and handed over the pirates to the local police for further legal action in accordance with Indian laws, specifically the Maritime Anti Piracy Act

2022," the Navy said.

In an operation lasting over 40 hours that commenced in the early hours of March 15, INS Kolkata intercepted Pirate Ship ex-MV Ruen in the Arabian Sea based on inputs received by Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region from UKMTO (United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations).

The ship was being used as a Mother Ship for undertaking piracy attacks and hijacking of merchantmen, it said.

INS Kolkata started shadowing the Pirate Ship in the early hours of March 15.

The vessel, upon sighting INS Kolkata, reversed course and started heading towards the Somali Coast. Several armed pirates were

observed on upper deck of the ship, the Navy said.

INS Kolkata directed the pirate ship to stop for investigation in accordance with International Law, especially the United Nations Conventions on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).

However, the pirate ship refused to comply and instead opened fire. "INS Kolkata thereafter acted in self-defence and used kinetic measures required to disable the ship and compel the pirates to surrender," it said.

INS Subhadra joined INS Kolkata in the operation. Further, Indian Navy undertook long range deployment and paradrop of Marine Commandos over the sea in vicinity of the pirate ship using C17s in coordination with Indian Air Force.

Aerial surveillance for the operation was undertaken by Indian Navy P8I aircraft, Sea Guardian UAV, and the ship's integral helicopters and spotter drones.

"In the face of decisive action by the Indian Navy, all pirates on-board surrendered. The 35 pirates and 17 crew members were duly taken into custody and shifted to Indian Naval ships," it said.

The Indian Navy searched and sanitised the ship with respect to arms, ammunition and contraband, rendering it safe. In addition, assessment of seaworthiness and essential repairs were undertaken by the naval technical team, for making the ship fit for further voyage. (PTI)

Tulip garden in Srinagar, Asia's largest, thrown open for public

SRINAGAR, March 23: Ensnored between the Dal Lake and the Zabarwan Hills, Asia's largest tulip garden was thrown open to the public on Saturday, officials said. The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden, earlier known as Siraj Bagh, was opened for the public as tulips of different colours have started to bloom. Floriculture department officials said.

"The tulip garden has been thrown open to the public," the department's Commissioner Secretary Sheikh Fayaz Ahmad told PTI.

The department plants the tulip bulbs in a phased manner so that the flowers remain in the garden for a month or more.

"When the garden blooms fully, there will be a rainbow of tulips," department officials said.

The department added that five new varieties of tulips have been added to the existing 68 this year. It has also increased the area of the tulip garden by adding another two lakh bulbs. A record 17 lakh tulip bulbs have been planted in the garden spread over 55 hectares, the officials said. Other spring flowers such as hyacinths, daffodils, muscari and cyclamens will also be on display to add to the variety of flowers and colours in the garden, they said.

The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden was set up by Ghulam Nabi Azad, the then-chief minister of the erstwhile state, in 2007 to advance the tourist season in Jammu and Kashmir that was earlier limited to summers and winters. The garden started on a small scale with 50,000 tulip bulbs imported from The Netherlands. It instantly gained popularity and has been steadily growing each year -- both in terms of the number of visitors and the tulips. (PTI)

Was trolled for changing seating position, says CJ while highlighting stress management

BENGALURU, March 23: Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud on Saturday recalled a recent incident of him facing 'trolling' and 'vicious abuse' for adjusting his seating position, during a hearing due to a discomfort and highlighted the need for judicial officers to manage stress and ensure work-life balance.

He was speaking after inaugurating the 21st Biennial State Level Conference of Judicial Officers titled, "Equity and Excellence for Futuristic Judiciary", organised by the Karnataka State Judicial Officers' Association.

Speaking on work-life balance and stress management, which was one of the topics of the two-day conference, he said the capacity to manage stress is significant in the life of a judge, especially for district judges.

As judicial officers they regularly engage with vulnerable litigants. Many of the people who come to the courts are stressed about the injustice caused to them, he said.

"Sometimes in their dealings with us as judges, they cross the line. As Chief Justice of India, I see so many lawyers and litigants crossing the line when they speak to us in the court. The answer when these litigants cross the line is not to use the power of contempt (of court), but to understand why they have crossed the line," Justice Chandrachud said.

He said there must be some deep rooted injustice which the lawyers and their clients were confronting, which is why they sometimes utter things which they otherwise would not say.

"In these context, the responsibility you carry is immense, necessitating a calm and compassionate approach. Maintaining a work-life balance is integral to fulfilling

these duties effectively," he advised the judicial officers.

A judge who was overwhelmed with work and unable to prioritise personal time with family and self care may struggle to perform optimally, Justice Chandrachud said.

"The ability to manage stress and achieve work life balance is not separate from but rather intertwined with delivering justice completely. We often tell physicians and surgeons, 'heal thyself'. Before you heal others, you must learn how to heal yourself. The same is true about judges as well," he underlined.

The CJ shared his personal experience which occurred recently. He said he was also trolled recently based on the live-streaming of an important hearing.

"Just four or five days ago when I was hearing a case, I had a little pain in back, so all that I did was I placed my elbows in my armchair in the court and I just shifted my position in the chair," Justice Chandrachud said.

He said there were several comments on the social media which alleged that the Chief Justice of India is "so arrogant" that he got up in the midst an important argument in court.

"What they didn't tell you was that all he did was only to shift his position in the chair. 24 years of judging can be a little strenuous which I have put in. I didn't leave the court. I only shifted my position but I was subject to vicious abuse, trolling, the knives were out but I do believe that our shoulders are broad enough and the ultimate confidence which we have is of common citizens in the work which we do," he noted.

The judges in the Taluk level courts do not have protection which the judges in the Supreme Court and High Courts enjoy. (PTI)

Gangster Prasad Pujari brought back to India from China; placed under arrest by Mumbai cops

Pujari is allegedly involved in eight serious cases in Mumbai, including firing, extortion and murder

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, March 23: Gangster Prasad Pujari, accused of being involved in several serious crimes including murder, extortion and kidnapping, was brought back to India after his deportation from China in the early hours of Saturday, and was then placed under arrest by Mumbai police, an official said.

Pujari alias Subhash Vitthal Pujari alias Siddharth Shetty alias Siddhu alias Sidh alias Johny is a former member of gangs led by mobsters Kumar Pillai and Chhota Rajan.

He was staying in China having an Interpol Red Notice against him, and was arrested there last year. After that, Mumbai police's Crime Branch continuously tried to bring him back to the country, the official said.

The CBI got issued a Red Notice against him from the Interpol on February 14, 2012 and also provided coordination assistance to Mumbai Police and Ministry of External Affairs in return to India from China, CBI Spokesperson said in a statement on Saturday.

A Red Notice alerts all Interpol



member countries about an absconding accused who should be detained when spotted in their jurisdiction.

Pujari is allegedly involved in eight serious cases in Mumbai, including firing, extortion and murder. A resident of Tagore Nagar in Vikhroli, he had fled from the country some years ago. He had allegedly targeted builders and businessmen in eastern Mumbai, the crime branch official said.

Pujari's name came up in the case of firing on Shiv Sena worker Chandrakant Jadhav, who lived in

the Vikhroli area, in December 2019. He was apprehended by authorities in Hong Kong in February 2023.

"Following a tip-off by the Interpol, Pujari was arrested in March last year in Hong Kong on the charges of possessing a fake passport. He was held when he was preparing to board a flight from Hong Kong to Shenzhen (city in China). Pujari, who is married to a Chinese national, was residing in Shenzhen with his wife and a child at the time of his arrest," the official added.

In 2020, the crime branch had arrested Pujari's mother, Indira Vitthal Pujari, for her alleged involvement in the case of extortion of a builder from Vikhroli. She was arrested under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) for allegedly extorting ₹ 10 lakh from a developer, the official said.

Pujari used to extort money from businessmen and known people using international numbers as well and gave death threats to some of the leading film directors, producers and Bollywood actors. His gang is very active in Mumbai, Thane and Navi Mumbai localities, he added.

After being deported from China, he was brought to India shortly around 1 am on Saturday. He was then placed under arrest by the Mumbai police in one of the cases registered against him at the Vikhroli police station under sections including 307 (attempt to murder), 120-B (conspiracy) as well as the MCOCA. The Anti Extortion Cell (AEC) of the crime branch took him into custody, the official said. (PTI)

Will take affirmative action to ensure safer Indian Ocean Region: Navy chief on anti-piracy ops

NEW DELHI, March 23: Indian Navy will take "affirmative action" to ensure a safer and more secure Indian Ocean Region, its chief Admiral R Hari Kumar said on Saturday while citing the anti-piracy operations undertaken by the naval force in the last 100 days.

In response to a query during a press conference at the newly-built Nausena Bhawan here, he said "no Indian-flagged vessel" has been targeted by the Houthis at sea.

Earlier in the day, INS Kolkata, carrying 35 pirates who were apprehended in a recent operation off the coast of Somalia, reached Mumbai, the Navy said. These pirates were handed over to the Mumbai police for further legal action under Indian laws, specifically the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022.

The Navy chief cited the dramatic mid-sea operation undertaken by the Navy along with the IAF that ended a three-month hijacking of a bulk carrier with the deployment of its warship INS Kolkata, long-endurance Sea Guardian drones, P-8I surveillance aircraft and airdropping of elite MARCOS commandos from a C-17 plane. The Navy seized the former Maltese-flagged vessel, rescued 17 hostages and captured 35 armed pirates in the nearly 40-hour operation around 2,600 km from the Indian coast that experts say was the first such successful takeover of a cargo ship from the Somali pirates in the last around seven years.

In the last 10 years, this was the largest opera-

tion in which the Indian Navy caught 35 pirates, the Navy chief said.

Admiral Kumar also said the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022, has been a "great enabler" for security forces, especially the Indian Navy, which is involved in anti-piracy operations. He had recently said the Navy has got a shot in the arm because of this legislation and underlined the deployment to counter-piracy attempts.

Asked if this has elevated the image of the Indian Navy as the first responder, Admiral Kumar said, "Bharat is on the trajectory to becoming a great power."

With "great power, comes great responsibility", he said, while asserting that the "Indian Navy is determined to protect, preserve, promote and pursue our national interests in maritime domain".

Asked how long these operations will continue, Admiral Kumar replied, till the Indian Ocean is safe and secure. "Indian Navy will take affirmative action to ensure safer, more secure Indian Ocean Region."

So, whether it is Indian nationals or vessels, "we will ensure their protection", the Navy chief said.

"We are the largest resident naval power in the Indian Ocean. Indian Navy's responsibility is to ensure the Indian Ocean Region remains safe, secure, and stable and we will ensure that it is free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order is maintained," he added. (PTI)

Army cancels seminar on UCC after backlash from political parties in J&K

SRINAGAR, March 23: The Army in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday cancelled a seminar, which was aimed to raise awareness about the Uniform Civil Code and other topics after a backlash from the political parties here.

The Army late Friday sent invitations to the media houses for a seminar on the subject "Navigating legal frontiers: Understanding Indian Penal Code 2023 and the quest for Uniform Civil Code". The seminar was scheduled for March 26 at the Kashmir University Auditorium.

However, there was a backlash from the regional political parties with former chief minister and National Conference

(NC) vice president Omar Abdullah questioning the Army's involvement in a "divisive" issue like the Uniform Civil Code in a "sensitive" place like Kashmir.

"Is it appropriate for the Indian Army to get involved in the divisive issue of the uniform civil code & that too in a sensitive area like Kashmir? There is a reason the Indian Army has remained apolitical & religious. This ill-advised UCC seminar is a threat to both these basic tenets," Abdullah said in a post on X.

He said going ahead with the seminar risks opening up the Army to charges of getting involved in the "murky world" of politics coupled with "interfer-

ing" in religious matters.

His party colleague and NC's chief spokesperson Tanvir Sadiq asked the Election Commission of India (ECI) to "assess the appropriateness" of the Army discussing an issue that figures prominently in the BJP's manifesto while the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is in effect. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) also criticised the Army for conducting the seminar.

"What we are seeing is the continuation of the trend of 'Naya Kashmir' and Akhbar Kab Tak campaigns in which the Army as an institution was seen as playing a partisan role and directly interfering in the political affairs of J-K," PDP spokesperson Najmus Saqib said. (PTI)

New approach: Multiple swarms of drones to tackle natural disasters like forest fires

BENGALURU, March 23: A new approach by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) seeks to use multiple swarms of drones to tackle natural disasters like forest fires.

Forest fires are becoming increasingly catastrophic across the world, accelerated by climate change, it was noted.

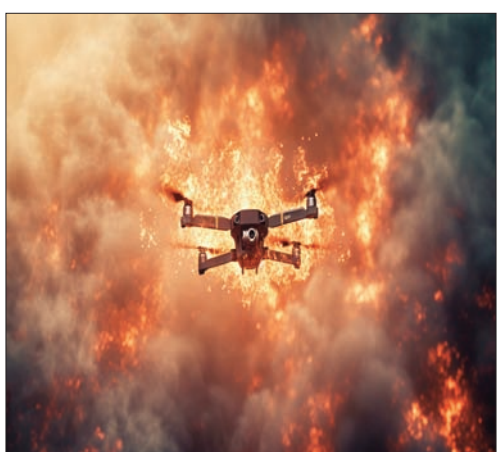
"A swarm of drones could be the solution," says Suresh Sundaram, Professor in the Department of Aerospace Engineering, IISc. Although they have not yet been used in India, the use of drones is not entirely new, according to a press release issued by the Bengaluru-based IISc.

But in a new study, Sundaram's team proposes taking the technology a step further: Coordinated multi-swarm drones swooping in to quell forest fires.

The solution was to design a special kind of algorithm that would allow the swarm to communicate with each other as well as make independent decisions. In a hypothetical scenario, when an alarm is raised about a potential fire, the swarms can be sent in, each drone armed with cameras, thermal and infrared sensors, and temperature detectors, to spot the fires.

Once the fire is discovered, the drone closest to it becomes the centre of the swarm and attracts others towards it. Interestingly, each drone will also have autonomy to calculate the fire's size and potential spread, and decide how many drones are needed to quench the fire.

"These decisions are made by the drones," says Sundaram. "They figure out which cluster of fire is going



to spread faster, and allocate the required number of drones to put out that fire while the others look for other fire clusters."

The swarm-based search algorithm developed by the team is key to controlling the drones' behaviour, the release said. Searching for fire cannot be random as the area to explore would be too large. To address this, the researchers took inspiration from the foraging behaviour of a marine predator, a flagellum called Oxyrrhis marina.

"When foraging, it firsts take longer steps to explore the area.

Once it feels like it is closer to the food source, it

will reduce the step length and then start exploring the area in more detail," explains Josy John, PhD student at the Department of Aerospace Engineering, and lead author of the study published in 'IEEE Transactions on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics: Systems.' The team decided to incorporate this behaviour into their algorithm.

"The temperature sensors in the drones look for a minimum (threshold) value. When that is reached, the drones reduce their search step, because the fire is near," John adds.

The advantage of using drones, Sundaram points out, is that the decision-making is decentralised, based on data, and aimed at maximum efficiency. No more than the required number of drones will be assigned to a fire cluster, allowing others to fan out in search of other clusters.

The researchers have tested specific components of the approach, such as the AI-enabled fire detection using thermal cameras, and accurate payload drop mechanism for fire extinguisher deployment.

Full-scale search and mitigation by the swarm is yet to undergo field-testing.

Going forward, they plan to combine such drone swarms with unmanned ground vehicles that can carry resources and serve as refuelling stations, the release said.

Such drone swarms can also be helpful during other natural disasters like floods and earthquakes, to locate survivors, deliver water, food and medicines; and boost communication, it was noted. (PTI)

Punjab hooch tragedy: Death toll climbs to 20; EC seeks report from chief secretary, DGP

CHANDIGARH, March 23:

The death toll due to the suspected consumption of spurious liquor in Punjab's Sangrur district has climbed to 20, with six more people succumbing during treatment, officials on Saturday said.

The Election Commission of India on Saturday sought an immediate report from the Punjab chief secretary and the director general of police in the Sangrur hooch tragedy.

In a letter, the Punjab chief electoral officer asked the two senior officials to submit preliminary and detailed reports regarding the incident on Saturday to apprise the Commission, according to an official statement.

The officials earlier said that a four-member special investigation team (SIT), led by an additional director general of police rank officer, has been set up in connection with the incident. Eleven people are undergoing treatment at Patiala's Rajindra Hospital and six at the Civil Hospital in Sangrur.

Sangrur Civil Surgeon Kirpal Singh on Saturday said 20 people have died so far in the incident.

The officials said the casualties have been reported from Gujran, Tibbi Ravidaspura and Dhandoli Khurd villages in Dirba and Sunam blocks.

Police have made eight arrests in the case so far, they said. The AAP government has been under fire from the opposition Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) over the hooch tragedy.

A case has already been registered under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Excise Act. The police on Saturday said a high-level committee has been set up to supervise the uncovering of the backward and forward linkages in a professional and scientific manner to unearth the nexus behind the whole matter.

A four-member SIT headed by ADGP (law and order) Gurinder Singh Dhillon will supervise the investigations.

Deputy Inspector General (Patiala Range) Harcharan Bhullar, Senior Superintendent of Police, Sangrur, Sartaj Chahal, and Additional Commissioner (Excise) Naresh Dubey will be part of the SIT.

"The SIT will go to the bottom of the conspiracy. No person found involved will be spared," police said.

The district administration has already formed a five-member committee, led by the Dirba sub-divisional magistrate, to investigate the matter.

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

Police had said with the arrests made until Thursday it had busted a gang which had just started selling spurious liquor in the area in view of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. (PTI)

Wild elephant dead at Sonaikuchi Reserve Forest

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, March 23: A pregnant wild elephant died at the Sonaikuchi Reserve Forest in Jagiroad in Morigaon district on Saturday.

According to sources, the elephant had slipped and accidentally come into contact with solar-powered fencing while coming out from the forest in search of food. The fence was installed by the state forest department to prevent human-elephant conflict.

Locals alleged that a shortage of food and negligence on the part of the forest department have led to the death of the female elephant. Officials of the forest department allegedly visited the spot and recovered the carcass.

Public Relations Society of India elects new committee

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 23: The Public Relations Society of India (PRSI), Guwahati chapter elected a new nine-member executive committee for 2024-2025.

The new executive committee comprises of Ruma Chakraborty as chairperson, Surojit Sinha Roy as vice chairman, Dr Bimal Krishna Sarma as secretary, Junita Saikia as joint secretary, and Anjan K Borah as treasurer (working). Jayanta Kumar Barua, Bhuchitra Bhushan, Hamad Berlashker and Emmanu- al Hmar have been elected as members of the executive committee.

During the first meeting of the new committee on Saturday, plans were made to organise more activities in the field of communication to enhance the skills of both professionals and students. As per the new annual calendar of 2024, the committee aimed at conducting PR Day talk session on April 21 under the theme, 'Sanatan values and emerging India - role of PR' by eminent speakers. Also, on April 30, the apex body of PR will organise voters' awareness programme to highlight the importance of voting among first time women voters at Handique Girls' College.

Moreover, the organisation look forward to collaborate with the youths by establishing Nalanda, a community of young PR practitioners from various colleges and universities across the state. There are several programmes planned, like PRSI NE Conclave, Seven Sister Magazine and Column and opening up of new chapters across the Northeast that will gradually unfold in days to come.

Sonowal spends time with intellectuals, cultural activists in Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency Sonowal urge youths to become ambassadors of community by developing personality



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, March 23: Union minister of ports, shipping and waterways and Ayush, Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday urged the youths to take a keen interest in education, sports and other cultural activities in order to develop their personalities and become ambassadors of their communities.

He took a unique path to engage with the people as he went on a spiritual sojourn amidst the political fervour on Saturday. He spent time with the intellectuals and cultural activists after his visit to Tai Educational and Cultural Centre in Dibrugarh.

He also joined in the celebrations of the foundation day of the Sonowal Kachari Samaj at Lepetkata on the outskirts of the Dibrugarh town on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion Sonowal said, "Youths should cultivate their personalities through education and sharpen it further with active participation in sports and other cultural activities. They should hone their personalities so that they become ambassadors of their respective communities."

"The youths should navigate life's challenges by embracing yoga and leveraging modern technology to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for advancement. It is with these that we will have an army of ambassadors from every community, who will take the onus to bring change and foster a spiritual bonding towards the cause of community building. This is essential to the cause of nation building, to the goal of Viksit Bharat that our leader PM Narendra Modi has set for us to achieve," Sonowal stated.

"The Sonowal Kachari Society is dedicated to bolstering the self-esteem, resilience, and capacities of its people, offering aid in times of indigenous community crises. The Sonowal Kachari community has played a pivotal role in the broader Assamese nation building process. The rich cultural heritage and spiritual practices of a multi-cultural society profoundly influence the community's identity, leaving a lasting imprint on Assam's social fabric. Sonowal Kacharis are renowned for their cultural sustainability, marked by humility and decency. It's imperative for this community to uphold this legacy, a responsibility that various organisations have been actively pursuing. Notably, The Sonowal Kachari Samaj stands out for its significant efforts in this regard," he further said.

The Union minister said, "As a proud member of the Sonowal Kachari community, I've always heard commendable praises about our society. Renowned for our generosity, Sonowal community represents admirable human qualities, particularly as ardent nature enthusiasts. Our deep connection to nature, with Mother Earth holding a cherished place in our hearts underscores our society's essence. Within the broader Assamese nation-building cause, the Sonowal Kachari community holds a significant role, currently at the forefront alongside the blessings of Khiring Khiring Bathau Devata and in close association with the rich Sattriya culture. Empowered by our internal strengths, we're unstoppable. Today, there's a growing interest in studying the songs of the Sonowal community, with concerted efforts underway to share this cultural wealth with the wider world."

The BJP candidate from Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency also visited two Holi Milan festivals near Tirupati Mandir in Seujpur as well as Khalihamari in Dibrugarh.

NSS team shines in national integration camp



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 23: The National Service Scheme (NSS) team representing the state has been adjudged the best cultural team at the National Level Integration Camp organised by Regional Directorate of NSS, Lucknow under the Union ministry of youth affairs and sports.

The NSS team from the state was adjudged best cultural team from among over 200 NSS contingents representing different states of the country, including West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

The Assam NSS team staged a commendable performance led by NSS programme officer of Ranga-

para College, Aswini Kumar Deka. The NSS volunteers who formed part of the team included Mohitosh Sen and Bidisha Krishnatraya from the Pandu College, Subham Sarma and Pragna Sarma from the Tezpur College, Manoj Kumar Nath and Yachita Oza from the Chatia College, Subhaji Dey, Manabjyoti Das, Rashmi Kurmi and Nikita Das from the Rangapara College and Anku Sinha, Ankur Deuri, Chittaranjan Phookan, Richa Barua, Jitumoni Deuri and Chayanika Saikia from the Madhavdev University.

The team proved their expertise in academics, folk culture, tradition, cuisines, economy, language, etc and was able various awards in different categories at the national integration camp.

BJP candidate Suresh Bora appeals for vote



HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, March 23: BJP's Lok Sabha candidate Suresh Bora on Saturday urged the voters to vote for the party so that Prime Minister Narendra Modi can lead the country for the third consecutive term.

The BJP candidate started his first campaign at Mori-Burhagaon area (ST dominated ward) in the town.

Earlier Morigaon constituency's MLA Ramakanta Deuri introduced him among the public where he was warmly welcomed by the residents of Burhagaon.

Addressing the public, Bora

said, "I will always be available for the people of my constituency if I am voted to power. I shall try to work for the all round development of my constituency."

Moreover, Bora also campaigned at Konwargaoon, Dighalbori, Barangabari, Bhurbandha and Mikirbhetta. The campaigns were attended by former chief executive member of the Tiwa Autonomous Council, Paban Manta and president of Morigaon BJP Prabin Medhi.

The BJP workers honoured the MLA, president, vice-president and mandal president of Morigaon town by felicitating them.

'World Water Day' observed in Hojai

HT Correspondent
HOJAI, March 23: The Rastrabhasha Middle School has celebrated the 'World Water Day, 2024' in its campus in Hojai by holding a programme, which focused on the theme 'Water for prosperity and peace'.

A total of 50 students, nine teachers and guests participated in the programme that was held in the school campus on Friday.

The programme was organised jointly by the representative of the school, TERRE, Paryavaran Sanraksh Gatividhi and Small Steps. The celebrations began with lightening of the lamp by forest official, Santosh Sah of Nagaon South forest division and Prodip Kumar Sahoo. The purpose of celebration of the 'World Water Day' was stated by the science teacher of the school, Arup Ratan Debnath on the occasion.

Some of the students of the school recited poetry and spoke on the theme of water. This was followed by the speech of Sri Sah that focused on maintain the ecological



balance in nature through conservation of forest as well as water resources.

Prodip Kumar Sahoo delivered a lecture on the comprehensive aspects related to the importance, availability of water sources, causes of scarcity of water with special reference to drinking water, its impact on living beings and the need to conserve water. He spoke on the scarcity of water in different parts of the country and how several organisations are working to solve it. Emphasising on the theme of 'World Water Day', Sahoo ap-

pealed to everyone to follow different strategies to save water through its judicious use. He also cited the initiatives taken by him to save water by reusing it in day-to-day life. In this connection, he appealed everyone to conserve water through rain-water harvesting. By using rain water for daily activities, people can conserve ground water which is the only main source of drinking water. He concluded his speech by with the song "...Ye Prithivi, Ye Dharti, Ye Vasundhara Humaree Hai...Ise Hum Pujenge, Piyar Karenge, Kar-denge Ye Haribhari..."

Wild elephants kill man in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, March 23: A herd of wild elephants killed a man in the Sonokpora area in Dibrugarh district on the evening in Saturday.

According to sources, the herd of elephants attacked the victim while he was returning home with his herd of cows from a nearby grazing land.

Soon locals informed the officials of the forest department and the police about the incident. A senior official of the Dibrugarh divisional forest office in Sonokpora area of the Dehing-Medela Forest Reserve said, "The victim was on his way back home along with his herd of cows when he was attacked by wild elephants. His cows were grazing in a field nearby."

The victim hails from Teteligurri near Demow in Sivasagar district. His name is however, not known.

Training programme of polling personnel held

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 23: A training programme of polling personnel was organized by the office of the Sonitpur district election officer at the auditorium of the Tezpur Academy School in Tezpur on Saturday.

The programme was organized for around 35 officials of the state public works department, who will be deputed in various places for duty during the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the state. District commissioner and returning officer of 11-Sonitpur House of People Constituency, Deba Kumar Mishra visited the venue of the training programme and interacted with the trainees.

Addressing the gathering, the district commissioner highlighted on an inclusive election where all eligible sections of the society take part in the democratic process. He informed that 11-Sonitpur HPC has planned out three model polling stations, one in Dhekiajuli and two in

Tezpur to be manned by officials of the public works department. He assured the trainees that the Sonitpur district administration will provide all necessary assistance such as porters, special transportation and health facilities among others in these three polling stations. During the programme, the trainers were provided the polling personnel with hands-on training on the use of EVMs and explained in detail their roles and responsibilities. An interactive session was also held during which doubts and possible difficulties that may be faced by the trainees were addressed.

Meanwhile, a review meeting on poll preparedness was also held on Friday at the DC office. The meeting was presided over by the state's chief electoral officer, Anurag Goel. Sonitpur district commissioner and returning officer of 11-Sonitpur PC Deba Kumar Mishra and cell in-charges were also present on the occasion.

Banmukh Jakhini Primary School celebrates 104th anniversary

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, March 23: The two-day 140th anniversary celebrations of the Banmukh Jakhini Primary School concluded on Saturday.

An open meeting was held, which was presided over by Sonit Kumar Gogoi. School inspector of Sivasagar, Promod Gogoi lauded the people of the locality in supporting the school for their children. He said that our children in government run schools are fortunate to have well trained and talented teachers now and majority of the schools have shown better results. Samsul Barik, a writer said that the schools need a collective leadership to inspire the children.

Prasanta Kumar Chutia, vice president of the Jila Sahitya Sabha said that the National Education Policy is the result of consistent research



to prepare our children for the future challenges.

"Dilili", the souvenir was released by noted poet Punjan Baruah. A collection of poems written by Urmila Gogoi Tamuly was released by Khadyot Gogoi, superintendent engineer of the Guwahati water supply department.

The meeting felicitated social worker Dinanath Gogoi, headmistress of the Subasani High School, Binu Gohain, secretary of the

Sivasagar Subdivision Primary School Teachers Association, Arun Kalita, senior journalist Bhoirab Munda, Rajani Panging, Sunit Kumar Gogoi, principal of the Banmukh HS School Punyawati Taye, retired teacher Biren Gogoi, Manoj Kr Gogoi, Arun Sarma and Nirupoma Chetia. Bibhuti Kumar Chetia, executive president of the celebration committee spoke on the objectives of the meeting and recollected the sacrifices of the founder teachers of the school.

Sushen Gogoi and his wife Mina Gogoi also donated ₹ 50,000 to the Jukta Gogoi Memorial Fund in memory of their daughter. The couple handed the amount to the school authorities.

A cultural procession was also taken out besides organising a Rangmela and a Bhortal Nritya on the first day of the celebrations on Friday.

Experts said that policy makers should formulate eco-friendly policies

Regional Meteorological Centre celebrates 'World Meteorological Day'



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 23: The Regional Meteorological Centre, Guwahati in collaboration with the Indian Meteorological Society, Guwahati Chapter celebrated the World Meteorological Day on Saturday highlighting the theme 'At

the Frontline of Climate Action.' The special lecture organised for the occasion was delivered by Lalit Saikia, assistant professor, of the department of earth science of the University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya. During his speech Saikia urged policy

makers to formulate eco-friendly policies. Taking part in the programme, K N Mohan, scientist-G stressed on the need to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Sanjay O'Neill Shaw, scientist-F in his speech suggested

the audience to contribute on an individual level to save our environment. Sunit Das, scientist-F explained about the consequences of global warming on us in the programme. The programme was hosted by meteorologist Suruj Gogoi.

The 'World Meteorological Day' is celebrated throughout the world every year to create awareness on the undeniable threat to our entire civilization in the form of climate change. It poses a serious threat to our entire civilization as the effects of climate change are already visible and will be catastrophic unless we act now.

On the occasion Regional Meteorological Centre, Guwahati also received the 'Best RMC' award from Indian Meteorological Department. Also, Kanak Chandra Das of the centre also received the 'Best Employee' award.

DANCING ALL THE WAY



Dancers performing during a workshop on Bihu dance organized by the Bharalu Cultural Committee in Guwahati on Saturday. UB photos

Netherlands trounce Scotland 4-0 in friendly; Colombia beat Spain

MADRID, March 23: The Netherlands recovered from a shaky first half to give Scotland a masterclass in clinical football and win their friendly by 4-0 in Amsterdam on Friday.

The Dutch took the lead after 40 minutes when Tijani Reijnders scored from 25 meters out. Georginio Wijnaldum doubled its advantage in the 72nd minute when he headed in a cross from Cody Gakpo.

Substitute Wout Weghorst made it 3-0 with a header in the 84th, and Donyell Malen fought his way through the defense to score a fourth two minutes later.

It was a bitter lesson in the need to take chances for Scotland, which matched its host for long spells and hit the woodwork twice.

Mark Flekken touched Ryan Christie's diving header on to the crossbar early in the game and, at 1-0, Lawrence Shankland, starting just his second game for the national side, should have scored with just the goalkeeper to beat.

Scotland faces host Germany in the European Championship opening match in Munich on June 14. The Netherlands is in Group D with France, Austria and the winner of the Poland-Wales playoff.



European champions in 1964, 2008 and 2012, Spain is one of the favourites for the Euros but it was handed a lesson by Colombia in their friendly at London Stadium.

A fervent pro-Colombian

crowd saw Daniel Muñoz score the only goal after 61 minutes. James Rodriguez fed Luiz Diaz on the right and his cross was volleyed home in spectacular fashion by the Crystal Palace defender.

The win extended Colombia's unbeaten run to 20 matches, a streak that includes victories over Germany, Brazil and Mexico. It was Spain's first loss in almost a year. Luis de la Fuente's side is in Group B with

Italy, Albania and Croatia.

Hungary extended its unbeaten run to 13 games with a 1-0 win over fellow Euro 2024 qualifier Turkey. Liverpool midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai scored the only goal from the penalty spot three minutes into the second half.

The Czech Republic beat Norway 2-1 in Oslo. Oscar Bobb put Norway ahead after 20 minutes but David Zima equalized for the visitors and Antonín Barák grabbed the winner five minutes from time.

The Czechs will be at their eighth successive Euros in Group F alongside Portugal, Turkey and the winner of the Georgia-Greece playoff.

Romania, which will meet Belgium, Slovakia and Ukraine or Iceland in Group E, came from behind to draw with Northern Ireland 1-1 in Bucharest.

Jamie Reid scored seven minutes into his international debut for Northern Ireland but Romania equalized 15 minutes later when Conor Hazard allowed Dennis Man's shot to squirm through his hands.

Albania, which faces Spain, Croatia and Italy in Group B, lost to Chile 3-0 in Parma, Italy. (AP)

Chhetri set for 150th international cap on Tuesday; to be feted by AIFF



NEW DELHI, March 23: Nearly two decades after he made his senior debut against Pakistan, Indian talisman Sunil Chhetri is set for another milestone as he will appear in his 150th international match in the World Cup qualifier against Afghanistan in Guwahati on Tuesday.

India played out a goalless draw against Afghanistan in their away leg contest as they climbed to second in Group A in the second round of the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

By achieving the feat, Chhetri will become the 40th player in the world to play 150 or more international matches in the list led by Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (205).

Chhetri first donned the senior national jersey on June 12, 2005, in a friendly match against Pakistan in Quetta.

He was India's scorer in the 1-1 draw. Since then, he has made 149 appearances for the national team, netting a record 93 goals.

A prolific goal-getter, the 39-year-old holds the unique record of scoring at least one goal in his first, 25th, 50th, 75th, 100th and 125th match for the Blue Tigers. "It's been an awe-inspiring and

staggering cruise that all of us have been fortunate to witness since 2005." All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Kalyan Chaubey said in a press release.

"Chhetri playing his 150th international match is an extraordinary accomplishment that will go a long way in keeping the Indian football flag flying high.

"He has been a great influencer who has motivated millions to play this beautiful game. I congratulate Chhetri for reaching this great height in international football," he added.

The AIFF also announced that they will felicitate the Indian star on the sidelines of their return leg clash against Afghanistan in Guwahati.

"In many football fans' eyes, Chhetri is almost the synonym of the Indian men's national team. He is a fabulous footballer, a cool captain, and a star striker.

"The All India Football Federation is proud to felicitate him on his 150th international match. We sincerely hope Chhetri will continue to serve Indian football in the same breath in the future." AIFF acting secretary general M Satyanarayan said. (PTI)

Srikanth makes first semis in 16 months at Swiss Open

BASEL, March 23: Star shuttler Kidambi Srikanth emerged as the lone Indian survivor at the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament when he progressed to the semifinals with a straight game win over Chinese Taipei's Chia Hao Lee here.

Playing his eighth tournament this season, Srikanth dished out a calm and composed performance on way to a 21-10 21-14 win over world no. 34 Lee in 35 minutes on Friday night.

Guilty of throwing away matches from advantageous positions for too many times, Srikanth, who is now being coached by Parupalli Kashyap, finally seemed to have a bit of form as he dished out a near flawless performance to out-class Lee.

With the win, Srikanth made his first final four appearance in 16 months. He last played a semi-final at Hylo Open in November 2022.

Srikanth, a 2021 world championships silver medalist, will next face Chinese Taipei's world no. 22 Lin Chun-Yi later on Saturday.

While the 31-year-old from Guntur stayed on track for a first title in many years, it turned out to be a heartbreaking affair for Kiran George as his gallant fight ended with a 23-21 17-21 15-21 loss to Denmark's Rasmus Gemke in another quarterfinal.

Another upcoming Indian Priyanshu Rajawat also found Chou Tien Chen too hot to handle, going down 15-21 19-21 in a 43 minute clash at the St Jakobshalle stadium.

Srikanth, who has often drowned in a pool of errors by

over-hitting or spraying wide while going for his flamboyant smashes, cut his mistakes and looked to outwit his opponent at the net.

His dazzling net play helped him to jump to a 8-1 lead before entering the break with an 11-5 lead. He kept things under tight grip to quickly grab a massive 10 game points and converted on the second chance.

After the change of ends, the things started on a tight note as Lee briefly held a 7-5 and 8-7 lead but it was short-lived as Srikanth again marched ahead to take a 11-8 cushion at the interval. Lee managed to cut down the deficit to 12-14 before Srikanth pulled away to shut the doors on his rival.

As someone, who claimed four Super Series titles in 2017 season, Srikanth has failed to consistently weave a string of performance in a week though he managed to win the 2018 Commonwealth Games silver and the 2021 World Championships silver.

His exploits as a second singles player fashioned India's epic Thomas Cup win two years ago but he has suffered meltdowns since, the latest being the Asia Team Championships where he blew a healthy lead against Japan's Kento Momota.

On Saturday night, Srikanth will hope to get across Lin to line himself up for a title but even if he doesn't, the week will give him a lot of confidence and it will augur well for India when the men's team defends its Thomas Cup crown next month. (PTI)



Hope to make fans happy and celebrate the title: MCFC's Jakub Vojtus

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 23: Indian Super League (ISL) side Mumbai City FC recently announced the signing of Slovak striker Jakub Vojtus to their squad.

This acquisition comes as a replacement for Spanish center-forward Iker Guarrotxena, who unfortunately suffered a knee injury shortly after joining the Islanders during the January transfer window, ruling him out for the remainder of the season.

Vojtus brings a wealth of experience to Mumbai City FC, having honed his skills across various European leagues. With a background in Inter Milan's youth setup, he embarked on a career journey that took him through leagues in Portugal, Romania, Poland, and Hungary. Prior to joining Mumbai City FC, Vojtus featured for Romanian side ACSM Politehnica Iasi in the top division.

The Slovak striker has signed a deal with Mumbai City FC that extends until the end of the season. In expressing his enthusiasm for joining the club, Vojtus has expressed his eagerness to contribute to the team's success.

"I am excited to join Mumbai City FC and I hope we can win together the title and achieve the objective of the club has," he said in an exclusive interview with Mumbai City FC.

He further said: "Honestly, I didn't expect that I would receive an offer like that from India. Today finally I can join my teammates because it was a national break and everybody I think wasn't here, they had a few days' holidays. I came on Monday and did the last medical test to sign the contract. I'm really excited to meet them and can't wait for the



training."

Mumbai City FC tops the ISL table with 41 points from 19 games, boasting 12 wins, five draws, and a mere two losses - the fewest in the league. With only three games left, the Islanders are aiming to secure the Shield for the second consecutive season. Head coach Petr Kratky, who joined mid-season, has effectively galvanised the team, achieving commendable results in their pursuit of the League Shield. New signing Jakub Vojtus is eager to make a significant contribution to the team's success through goals and assists.

"My target for myself like a striker I hope that I can help with the goals and with the assists to the team and with my best performance on the pitch. This is my target because football is not an individual sport. I like to help my teammates and to reach the top."

The Slovakian provided a glimpse into his playing style ahead of his debut for the team. Mumbai City FC, known for their dynamic attacking prowess,

has been one of the most vibrant offensive sides this season under Kratky's leadership, consistently adopting an aggressive approach in their matches.

He affirmed, "My playing style depends. For most of my career I played in Europe, also I played in different countries so you have to adapt yourself very fast. In one country you play more on the ground, in some countries you play a little bit differently, like English style, so it depends. I'm already used to playing all of the styles of football."

"Even today in football you don't have just play ball on the ground like a striker, you have to fight for the ball, you have to come and play. So you have to have all of these qualities. So I try to adapt to the team and the style I'm playing. So this the most important, but I like to play to create the chance for my team and then to go to the box and score. I just want to enjoy football and win the games," he added.

Shubhankar fires 4-under to move up to fourth place

SINGAPORE, March 23: India's Shubhankar Sharma is finding form ahead of his home event at the Hero Indian Open next week, as he moved up to fourth place at the Porsche Singapore Classic here on Saturday.

He shot a fine 4-under 68 after rounds of 68-69-68. Sharma, who last won in 2018, moved to 11-under despite a closing bogey and was two shots behind leader David Micheluzzi who finished with back-to-back birdies to take a one-stroke lead after the third round.

Sharma had three birdies in his first six holes and then went through eight pars, before he found back-to-back birdies on the 15th and the 16th but then closed on the 18th with a bogey.

Earlier Micheluzzi had one bogey in his round of six under par 66 to move into the lead on 13 under par. He is one clear of overnight co-leader Andy Sullivan and fellow Englishman Sam Bairstow who shared second place on 12 under at Laguna National Golf Resort Club.

The swirling winds of the first two days dropped on day three, but 27-year-old Micheluzzi breezed to the top of the leaderboard on what was still a red-hot day in Singapore. Micheluzzi had rounds of 67-70-66.

Second round co-leader Sullivan experienced a rollercoaster of emotions on day three.

After starting with four birdies in his first eight holes, the double bogeyed both the ninth and tenth, as well as bogeying the 11th. The four-time DP World Tour winner steadied the ship, however, with four birdies in his next seven to post a three under 69 and remain in contention.

The 2019 Open Champion Shane Lowry gave himself a shot at contending for the title with a six under 66 on moving day to earn a share of 13th on eight under par.

Frenchman Matthieu Pavon came within an inch of winning the €192,000 Porsche Panamera Turbo E-Hybrid, which is on offer to the first player to ace the Par-3 17th hole this week. (PTI)

Not about Scoreboard: Rishabh Pant's journey back to life

NEW DELHI, March 23: Rishabh Pant stepped onto the competitive amphitheatre of 22 yards after 453 days and his comeback lasted 19 minutes. He faced 13 balls and scored 18 runs.

But Indian cricket's most anticipated comeback was not just about cold dry numbers, meant only for the stat-munchers.

When Pant walked in at 4.06 pm on a hot Saturday afternoon at the fall of David Warner's wicket, it was a triumph of hope over despair. A journey back to life when not many saw light at the end of the tunnel.

At 4.25 pm, when he trudged back to the dug-out, there was some disappointment but perhaps way more relief that Indian cricket's 'Crazy Diamond' has shown signs of shining again. If not on a Saturday afternoon, then surely on some

other evening.

Exactly 448 days back on that fateful midnight in December, 2022, Pant had miraculously cheated death. But doing again what you have loved doing all your life was never going to be the same.

As he looked at the overhead sun to get his eyes set, one saw Ricky Ponting's wife Riana all smiles and giving the DC captain a standing ovation.

Every time Ponting speaks about Pant, the warmth in his voice, the choice of words, touches anyone who would care to listen.

The home team supporters also gave him a warm reception as his partner Shai Hope welcomed him to the crease.

So how were those 19 minutes? He was certainly rusty but even his ardent fan would know that he would take some time to

get into the groove.

That first run, a tap towards mid-wicket for a single off left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar was the first baby step towards liberating himself from all the demons that must have time and again knocked on his head during those hard days of rehabilitation.

"Mahi bhai humesha bolte hain ki core subject pe focus karo (MS Dhoni always tells us to focus on core subject, that is game)" he told 'Jio Cinema' during a conversation where he was asked about the anticipation, emotional build-up to his imminent comeback.

Pant, trusts any advice from Dhoni implicitly and just like his mentor, his eyes belied any emotional storm that must have been brewing up in his mind.

There was urgency for sure when he first tried to step out



and loft Rahul Chahar but was too close to the pitch of the delivery. Then he couldn't connect properly a reverse sweep.

The first boundary and his 400th in all forms of T20 cricket came when Harshal Patel lost sight of a mistimed pull and what should have been an easy catch turned into a boundary.

The second boundary was a signature Pant, a muscular cover drive, one that always sends his fans into a frenzy.

There were a couple of twos and anyone doubts about his fitness level would be dispelled as he strode comfortably on both occasions.

But as it was inevitable with someone playing a competitive game after 15 months. The rustiness is still there. It was clear when he played a non-existent ramp-shot off Harshal

Patel, who had smartly taken the pace off his delivery.

What followed was some self admonition. He hit his pads with his bat. Yet he has taken the first big step towards the much-anticipated comeback.

The more challenging part was certainly 6wicket-keeping and captaincy. The chirpy Pant was nearly non-existent but that is understandable for a comeback man who would have hundred things going in his mind.

With Ishant Sharma hobbling out after twisting his ankle, his worries did compound but the bowling changes were sharp and to the point.

Behind stumps, he looked pretty sharp and indicator was how he kept up to Kuldeep Yadav but the best part of the day was his flash reflexes while whipping off the bails to nearly stump Jitesh Sharma.

But Jitesh wasn't second time lucky as he tried an indiscreet reverse sweep and this time Pant used the split second to fullest. The child-like smile was back.

Somewhere relaxing in his south Mumbai hotel room, Rohit Sharma must be grinning from ear to ear. The muscle memory is indeed intact.

Pant's comeback is a big boost for DC but even an eternal hopeful knows that the team's Indian roster is pretty poor and one man cannot simply turn the tide. While managing his own comeback, he has to make do with a team that is pretty mediocre by the IPL standards.

Delhi's Rishabh Pant took the field on Saturday. India's Rishabh Pant will certainly enthrall the fans in days to come. (PTI)

Not the ideal comeback for Pant as Punjab Kings prevail over DC by 4 wickets

CHANDIGARH, March 23: It was not the comeback Rishabh Pant had wished for as English all-rounder Sam Curran's counter-attacking half-century powered Punjab Kings to a four-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in their Indian Premier League (IPL) opener here on Saturday.

Curran blazed away to a 47-ball 63 and got excellent support from compatriot Liam Livingstone (38 not out off 21 balls), as Punjab completed a chase of 175 with four balls to spare.

This was after the returning Pant failed to set the stage on fire as Punjab Kings rallied to stop Delhi Capitals at 174 for nine.

Batting at number nine, Abhishek Porel top-scored for DC with an unbeaten 32 off only 10 balls, helping the side to a total that did not pose any problem for Punjab on a pitch with no demons.

Punjab Kings began their chase in earnest and raced to 34 in three overs when Shikhar Dhawan (22 off 16 balls) charged down the wicket only to miss and see his middle stump getting disturbed by Ishant Sharma.

Impact Sub Prabhsimran walked in at number three and Ishant squared him up with one that hit the perfect length and left the batter in two minds. Prabhsimran's riposte was a boundary through mid-off as the batter showed aggressive intent.

Having struck two fours in three balls, Jonny Bairstow was run out in an unfortunate fashion as Ishant managed to get his fingertips to a Prabhsimran drive before the ball went on to hit the stumps at the non-striker's



end. Bairstow dived, but had backed up too far and couldn't win the race against the ball.

Prabhsimran (27 off 17 balls) struck Khaleel Ahmed for two successive fours to relieve the pressure but, after having steadied the ship, the batter fell to in-form wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav who snared him with a googly.

Kuldeep also accounted for Jitesh Sharma to leave Punjab in a spot of bother at 100 for four in the 12th over.

Earlier, Punjab were put under pressure straightaway by the flamboyant Australian

opening duo of David Warner (29 off 21 balls) and Mitchell Marsh (20 off 12 balls), who were dealing in fours and sixes.

Marsh worked a poor Sam Curran delivery off his pads for the day's first boundary. Another mediocre offering from Curran was expertly flicked by Marsh for a four and the Capitals were on their way.

Not to be left behind when it comes to playing strokes, Warner pulled left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh (2/28) for a six in front of square and then played the bowler between cover-point and cover to find a four.

The flurry of boundaries forced Punjab

Kings skipper Shikhar Dhawan to effect a bowling change but Kagiso Rabada's introduction did little to stem the flow of runs as Marsh pulled a short ball over deep backward square for a big six.

Arshdeep came back and was whacked over long-off for another gigantic six by Marsh.

However, the left-arm seamer had the last laugh as he had Marsh caught by an agile Rahul Chahar at cover point, after the batter played a booming drive in the air.

Unperturbed by the departure of his opening partner, Warner continued to play in his usual aggressive fashion, hitting Rabada for a four through mid-off and then sat down to use the scoop shot for an incredible maximum over shot fine.

Harpreet Brar checked the flow of runs by bowling a fine first over but Chahar started with a 14-run over with Shai Hope hitting the bowler for a six and a four.

Harshal Patel (2/47) got the big wicket of Warner in his first over as comeback-man Pant (18 off 13 balls) arrived at the crease to loud applause from the stands.

The weekend crowd acknowledged his tale of perseverance after surviving a horrific car accident in December 2022 with cheers of joy.

Pant got himself a couple of boundaries before walking back to the dugout after a rather soft dismissal off Harshal.

Meanwhile, Rabada accounted for Hope and Chahar got rid of Tristan Stubbs as Delhi slipped to 128/6 in the 16th over. (PTI)

Focus on fit again K L Rahul as LSG face RR



JAIPUR, March 23: The focus will be on KL Rahul's form and fitness when he returns from a quadriceps injury to lead the Lucknow Super Giants in their IPL opener against Rajasthan Royals here on Sunday.

Rahul missed the last four Tests against England due to pain in his right quadriceps. He was out for four months last year after undergoing a thigh surgery.

LSG captain will look to hit top gear not only as a batter but also as a leader, especially after guiding the team to successive playoffs in the first two seasons.

Rahul is likely to play purely as a batter, at least in the initial phase of IPL, but the additional burden of keeping strengthen his chances of making the T20 World Cup squad.

His opposite number on Sunday, Sanju Samson, is also a candidate for the wicket-keepers' role in the India squad for the ICC event and he too will be keen to find his rhythm right from the start.

RR had come tantalisingly close to clinching a second title before Gujarat Titans broke their heart in the final in 2022. They looked good in the initial stages even last season but slipped to fifth place in the end.

Both the teams will have some tough calls to make as they figure out their best XI.

RR have a solid batting lineup, boosting of the likes of in-form Yashasvi Jaiswal, Jos Buttler, besides skipper Sansom. They also have a finisher in Dhruv Jurel, who made an impressive India debut in the recent five-match Test series against England.

But Samson may look to strength the middle-order by bringing in West Indies' Rovman Powell to go with country-mate Shimron Hetmyer.

LSG, on the other hand, would depend on Quinton de Kock, Marcus Stoinis and Nicholas Pooran to do bulk of the scoring apart from skipper Rahul.

It is going to be an interesting battle as they will have to con-

tend with spin wizards -- Ravichandran Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal, who can run through any batting line-up on a given day.

Lucknow too have a shrewd customer in leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi, who would be itching to put up a good show to put himself in line for a place in the T20 World Cup squad. Also the 41-year-old veteran leg-break bowler Amit Mishra is always in the thick of things.

But their pace battery wears a dim look, especially after foreign recruits Mark Wood and David Willey were ruled out and the Indian talents like tearaway quick Mayank Yadav and Mohsin Khan plagued by fitness issues.

Also the inexperience of pacer Yash Thakur and lack of game time for Shivam Mavi means LSG might hand the responsibility to experienced Naveen ul Haq and West Indies sensation Shamar Joseph.

It will also be interesting to see how Justin Langer goes about his business in his first IPL assignment as coach of LSG.

Squads:
Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shubham Dube, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Rivan Parag, Rovman Powell, Kunal Singh Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Donovan Ferreira, Avesh Khan, Trent Boult, Nandre Burger, Yuzvendra Chahal, Prasad Krishna, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Kuldeep Sen, Abid Mushtaq, Tanush Kotian.

Lucknow Super Giants: KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis, Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Avesh-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yuvraj Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamar Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Shivam Mavi, Arshin Kulkarni, M. Siddharth, Ashton Turner, David Willey, Mohd. Arshad Khan.

Match starts 3.30 PM IST. (PTI)

Bhopal-born former PCB chairman and diplomat Shaharyar Khan dies

LAHORE, March 23: Shaharyar Khan, a career diplomat and former Pakistan Cricket Board chairman who played a big role in restoring cricket ties with India in the early 2000s, died on Saturday. He was 89.

The Bhopal-born Pakistan diplomat, who was a cousin of former India captain Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, breathed his last here after battling prolonged illness.

He served as Pakistan foreign secretary between 1990-94 and also as a High Commissioner in New Delhi and the United Kingdom.

Shaharyar headed the PCB from 2003 to 2006, a period when India toured Pakistan twice, and from 2014 to 2017.

He also worked as Pakistan team manager during the 1999 tour of India and the 2003 Cricket World Cup. He belonged to the royal family of Bhopal.

A learned personality who also wrote several books on his experiences in foreign relations and cricket, Shaharyar, in an interview last year, expressed regrets that in his last tenure as PCB chief he couldn't revive regular bilateral Test cricket ties with India which have been suspended since 2007 due to the tense relations between the two neighbours.

Perhaps the biggest controversy in his tenure as PCB chairman was Pakistan forfeiting the Oval Test to England in 2006 for which he blamed the then captain, Inzamam-ul-Haq. (PTI)

Pandya begins high-profile Mumbai Indians captaincy stint against former team Gujarat Titans

AHMEDABAD, March 23: Hardik Pandya will aim to build on the rich legacy of his predecessor Rohit Sharma when he begins his Mumbai Indians captaincy stint with a match against Gujarat Titans, a team that the star all-rounder himself marshalled over last two seasons, in the IPL here on Sunday.

Such are the professional ways of IPL that Pandya, having led Titans to the title and runners-up finish in the previous two seasons, has gone to back to the Mumbai Indians where he made a name for himself.

The tournament also marks Pandya's comeback from a 'freak' ankle injury he picked up in the middle of the ODI World Cup in October.

The form of the injury-prone all-rounder with both bat and ball will be closely tracked in the tournament that precedes the T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean.

With Pandya moving on to the other side, Titans will be led by Shubman Gill, who assumes the responsibility with very little captaincy experience. Mumbai have been grappling with fitness issues to their key players including star batter Suryakumar Yadav, who is yet to get fitness clearance from NCA.

Left-arm pacers Jason Behrendorff and Dilshan Madushanka are already ruled out of the IPL while new recruit Gerald Coetzee, nursing a groin injury, might not be available for the first few games.

Having led Mumbai to as many as five IPL titles, India skipper Rohit will be turning up as a player this season and would be expected to hit top form ahead of the ICC event in June.

Another player whose performance will be scrutinised is Ishan Kishan, who will have a point to prove after losing his BCCI central contract for defying the Board's diktat on domestic cricket.

The southpaw, who missed the entire Test series against England, preferred to train on his own for the IPL and did not turn for his state side Jharkhand in the Ranji Trophy. The fight for the wicket-keeper batter's slot in the World Cup squad will be intense and Kishan needs to



be at the top of his game over the next two months.

Besides Pandya, Mohammad Nabi and Romario Shepherd are the other quality all-round options Mumbai possess.

Domestic players like Akash Madhwal and Nehal Wadhwa will be looking to build on their performances of the previous season.

On the Titans' front, Gill has been tasked to ensure that the team maintains the remarkable consistency it showed in its first two seasons. Gill could be one of the future leaders for India but for that to happen, he must prove himself on the IPL stage.

He was the leading run-getter last season and the franchise would be hoping that captaincy doesn't impact his batting in anyway.

Titans are bound to miss the services of Mohammed Shami, who recently underwent a surgery to repair Achilles tendon and will be back only in the second half of the year.

The return of trump card Rashid Khan from a back surgery is a massive boost for Titans. The Afghanistan spinner made his comeback in the series against Ireland last week.

Among the new joiners, left-arm pacer Spencer Johnson and Azmatullah Omarzai, will be looking to make a mark in the world's biggest T20 league.

Squads:
Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan, Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivailik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Vishnu Vinod, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood, Suryakumar Yadav.

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), Azmatullah Omarzai, Spencer Johnson, Kartik Tyagi, Josh Little, Abhinav Manohar, David Miller, Sushant Mishra, Darshan Nalkande, Noor Ahmad, Rashid Khan, Wriddhiman Saha, Sai Kishore, Sai Sudharsan, M Shikhar Khan, Vijay Shankar, BR Sharath, Mohit Sharma, Manav Suthar, Rahul Tewatia, Matthew Wade, Kane Williamson, Jayant Yadav, Umesh Yadav. Match starts 7.30 PM IST. (PTI)

Mustafizur executed the plans beautifully: I learnt finishing games from Mahi bhai: Shivam Dube



CHENNAI, March 23: Chennai Super Kings' bowling consultant Eric Simons has heaped praise on Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman for executing the plans perfectly to set up their comfortable six-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL opener here.

Mustafizur (4/29) rattled the RCB top-order, dismissing Virat Kohli (21), skipper Faf du Plessis (35) and Rajat Patidar (0) -- besides also getting rid of Cameron Green (18), to return with his best ever IPL figures as CSK restricted RCB to 173 for six.

"We always wanted to look at the conditions and the balance of the side. He does suit the conditions, but it's the simplicity of the plan that we put in place, and he executed that beautifully today (Friday)," said Simons during the post-match press conference.

While RCB was reeling at 78 for five, Anuj Rawat (48) and Dinesh Karthik (38 not out) pair added 95 crucial runs to propel the side to an encouraging total.

Asked why spinner Rachin Ravindra was not introduced to arrest the flow of runs, Simons felt it was a

bit late to hand over the ball to him.

"They were 78-5, and the spinners had done a good job. Two overs went for a few, and the momentum shifted, and it was probably late at that stage to throw the ball to him in that situation. From what we have seen in the nets, he can certainly bowl; but at the right time," the South African said.

Simons stressed on the importance of controlling the powerplay and death overs but credited the RCB batters for dictating terms in the fag end of their innings.

"From the seam perspective, to control the Powerplay and to control the death is a very important aspect of the game. We have a lot of discussions not just about skills but educating ourselves and the bowlers about how to use variations, field placements and tactics," he said.

"DK (Dinesh Karthik) is a daunting guy to bowl to in those moments. Some credit must go to the (RCB) batters as to how they manipulated us. We will then look at it, did we allow to happen too much?"

"My question is who's controlling the tactics? Are the (opponent) batters dictating it to us, or vice versa? and you walk away from today thinking that we allowed the batters dictating too much."

"We will review some of those match footage and have discussions about it, along with (Dwayne) Bravo, who has a lot of knowledge."

Chasing 174, CSK batters looked aggressive and Simons said they wanted the batters to play with freedom.

"The important thing in competitions like this is for the batters to be themselves, and that's the way they like to play, with freedom and be intimidating to the opposition. The batting line-up that we have gives us confidence as to what we can do. (PTI)



CHENNAI, March 23: India all-rounder Shivam Dube says he relishes finishing the crunch games -- an art he learnt by following his legendary CSK colleague MS Dhoni.

Dhoni is one of the best finishers the world cricket has seen.

Dube played a crucial 34-run cameo and also shared an unbeaten 66-run partnership for the fifth wicket with Ravindra Jadeja (25 not out) to lead defending champions Chennai Super Kings (CSK) to a six-wicket win over against Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) on Friday.

"It was amazing. Finishing the game for Chennai is always something that amazes me. That's what I have learnt from Mahi bhai, and I try to do it every game," Dube told IPLT20.com

"It feels very good when you finish the game like this, especially during the first game of the season. So, it always feels special."

Chasing a target of 174, CSK were off to a confident start with debutant Rachin

Ravindra (37) being the main aggressor. He was also the top scorer for the side.

The talented New Zealander praised his skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad for handling the tough chase well.

"It was nice to have a partnership with Rutu. Obviously, he's done this for a long period for Chennai," he told Dube in the IPL video.

"The calming presence that he had and also building the partnership with Jinx (Ajinkya Rahane) was pretty cool in front of the full house. The wicket was beautiful, so it made life a lot easier."

Ravindra was also amazed by the capacity Chepauk crowd cheering at the top of its voice for CSK.

"It was crazy; the crowd was incredible, one of the loudest I have ever experienced. It was unbelievable. Hopefully, we have more wins here to get the crowd going," he concluded.

CSK play their next game against last season's runner-up, Gujarat Titans, here on Tuesday. (PTI)