

**6** WORLD

**8** NATION

- US President Joe Biden approves \$60mn aid
- Russia launches barrage of 99 drones and missiles
- Fresh I-T notices to Cong: Party to hold nationwide protests
- Mahagathbandhan announces LS seat-sharing for Bihar

**HT BRIEFS**

**AAP leaders**

**BOKAJAN:** Aam Admi Party (AAP) leaders of Bokajan LA, Karbi Anglong Deepjyoti Borah Gohain (Lachit) and Ranjit Tasa joined the BJP in presence of BJP MP candidate Amarsing Tisso; chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang in the residence of CEM. AAP sources said that since AAP is not placing its candidate in 6-Diphu (ST) Parliament Constituency all the votes of AAP in Bokajan LA will be transferred to the BJP.

**Land donation**

**HOWRAGHAT:** A pious Muslim Jinnat Sikdar donated one bigha of his ancestral land for building a Hindu Brahma Dharma temple at Mulandubi village under Kajigaon police station in Kakrajhar district. Jinnat Sikdar donated his family's land of one bigha area near Kurshakati Bazaar for building Hindu Brahma Dharma Brahmajyoti Mandir. Talking to the media Jinnat Sikdar said that his father Prayat Nazrat Sikdar has decided to donate the land for building the temple and his family has no objection to it whatsoever. He hoped that the gesture will nurture Hindu-Muslim brotherhood and inter community harmony.

**Grand old party receives I-T notices of over ₹ 1,800 crore**

**BJP accused of indulging in 'tax terrorism', violating I-T regulations**

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** The Congress on Friday said it has received fresh notices from the income-tax department, asking it to pay ₹ 1,823.08 crore, and alleged that the BJP is in "serious violation" of income-tax laws for which authorities should raise a demand of more than ₹ 4,600 crore from the saffron party.

The Congress also accused the ruling BJP of indulging in "tax terrorism" to financially cripple the opposition party ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here along with Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, party treasurer Ajay Maken alleged that the BJP is in serious violation of income-tax laws and said the I-T department should raise a demand of ₹ 4,617.58 crore from the saffron party for such violations.

Maken said political parties have to fill up a proforma of Form 24A, in which two basic and important



pieces of information have to be furnished -- the names and addresses of their donors.

"We have analysed all the submissions of the BJP to the Election Commission (EC). The party has faltered every year," Maken claimed.

Ramesh alleged that through the "electoral bonds scam", the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has collected ₹ 8,200 crore and used the route of "pre-paid, post-paid,

**Amit Shah to campaign in Assam on April 6: Himanta**

**GUWAHATI, March 29:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said that Union home minister Amit Shah will campaign for the first phase of Lok Sabha polls in the state on April 6.

The BJP leader will campaign in Lakhimpur parliamentary constituency and in Hojai which falls under Kaziranga seat, Sarma told reporters at the BJP state headquarters here.



"We have discussed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaigning in the state with New Delhi and it is being worked out. We will know the details by tomorrow or day after," he said.

Sarma will begin his campaign in the state from April one by participating in a cycle rally in Majuli.

"The candidates have already launched their campaign in their respective constituencies with each of them addressing 10 to 12 meetings daily," Sarma said.

The most important aspect of the campaign this time will be the 'socio-economic survey by the booth committees to ascertain whether any beneficiary has been left out of government schemes that they are entitled to,' he said.

The booth committees will submit the list to the government after the elections and 'we will ensure that those left out are also covered by the schemes', Sarma said.

Asked about the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state, the chief minister said certain issues need to be resolved and it will be done after the Lok Sabha polls.

On BJP's prospects in the state, he said that the party will win comfortably in 11 seats and there will be triangular contests with the Congress and AIUDF in two seats-Karimganj and Nagaon.

"The BJP's position in these two seats was also bright and we will make all efforts to win", he said.

Asked about state Congress president Bhupen Borah's claim of becoming the chief minister in the state in 2026, Sarma said, 'He can become if he joins the BJP, but he cannot be a chief minister if he is in the Congress'.

Sarma has claimed on several occasions that Bora will join the BJP by 2025. Out of the 14 Lok Sabha (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**Election preparations reviewed**

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, March 29:** In an effort to assess preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, a meeting was conducted at the Diphu Circuit House on Friday, spearheaded by key members of the Election Cell and attended by the expenditure observer of the three hill districts, Shankar Lal Verma.

The gathering saw the presence of prominent figures including the district election officer, the superintendent of police, various election cell nodal officers, and officers engaged in election-related duties.

Addressing the attendees, Verma, drawing upon his wealth of experience and expertise, led the interaction, fostering a comprehensive discussion on various pertinent issues.

The meeting provided a valuable platform for each officer to share insights, experiences, and challenges encountered during their respective election duties, thereby nurturing a collaborative effort aimed at enhancing the efficiency and integrity of the electoral process in the three hill districts.

In his capacity as the expenditure observer, Verma emphasised the paramount importance of maintaining transparency and adhering to electoral guidelines, especially concerning the management of election expenses. He also lauded the dedication and diligence exhibited by (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**VVPAT machine reported missing in Assam's Udalgiri**

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 29:** A VVPAT machine was reported missing in Assam's Udalgiri district on Friday, an official statement said.

The Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machine could not be found during assembly-wise segregation after the first randomisation, it said.

A joint electoral officer was deputed to conduct a preliminary inquiry into the matter, the statement issued by the Chief Electoral Officer said.

After first-level checking of EVMs and VVPATs, the machines that were found to be working were kept in a strong room in the presence of representatives of political parties, the statement said.

"The strong room has 24x7

CCTV coverage and armed security, and there is no question of any missing unit, due to the stringent storage and security protocol with the participation of the political parties at every stage," it said, after the preliminary inquiry.

The missing VVPAT might have been inadvertently shifted to the Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) factory along with units that were found non-functional during first-level checking, the statement said.

The matter has been taken up with the ECIL authorities, it added.

Strict action will be taken if any dereliction of duty is found on the part of district officers concerned, the statement said.

The polls for the 14 Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam

will be held in three phases just after Rongali Bihu beginning on April 19, according to the poll schedule announced on Saturday.

Five constituencies each will go to polls on April 19 and 26, while voting for four seats will take place on May 7.

In the first phase, Kaziranga, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur will be held on April 19. Voters of Darrang-Udalguri, Diphu (ST), Karimganj, Silchar (SC) and Nagaon will exercise their franchise in the second phase.

In the third and final phase on May 7, polling will be held in Kokrajhar (ST), Dhubri, Barpeta and Guwahati constituencies, according to the schedule announced by the ECL. (With inputs from PTI)

**Vice President calls for neutralising 'anti-national' narrative regarding judiciary**

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday called for neutralising the "anti-national" narrative regarding India's judicial system and democratic fabric, saying it cannot be compromised by any individual or group.

He also said that there is a need to look for "these people" who are "certainly not friendly to this nation".

His remarks come close on the heels of more than 600 lawyers, including senior advocate Harish Salve and Bar Council chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra, writing to Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, alleging that a "vested interest group" is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts, especially in cases of corruption involving politicians.

"These tactics are damaging to our courts and threaten our democratic fabric," the lawyers drawn from across the country said in the letter dated March 26.

CJI Chandrachud's leadership is crucial in these "tough times" and the apex court should stand strong, they said, adding it is not the time to maintain a dignified silence.

The letter targeted a section of lawyers without naming them and alleged that they defend politicians by day and then try to influence judges through the media at night.

Speaking at an event at the Indian Institute of Public Administration here, Dhankhar said India is a democratic nation with a robust judicial system which cannot be compromised by any individual or group.

"We have to be extremely careful, sensitive and proactive in neutralising anti-national narrative with respect to our robust judicial system, our democratic fabric and what we have attained," Dhankhar said.

"It is that institution of Judiciary that has met at midnight, that has met on a holiday (and) imparted relief. Can we target our institutions because they conduct themselves in a particular manner," he added.

He said the Judiciary can have a point of view on a particular issue which will not be palatable to the government and it has happened on several occasions.

"It is their (Judiciary's) job," he said.

"But if a group of people without being registered or recognised party (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**TMC seeks action on BJP's misuse of central agencies**

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Trinamool Congress leaders on Monday approached the Election Commission of India alleging misuse of central agencies by the ruling BJP, and sought its intervention.

The TMC leaders will meet the chief election commissioner and election commissioners on Monday to raise their concerns.

Addressing the media outside the ECI's headquarters here, West Bengal minister Shashi Panja said they were disturbed the way former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren was arrested ahead of the elections being announced, while Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal was arrested after the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into force.

"We are disturbed the way Hemant Soren was arrested just before the MCC was announced... Now the MCC has been announced, the ECI is in control, but the Delhi chief minister is behind the bars. This is the attitude on display. We are requesting the ECI to use powers at their disposal," Panja said.

"Central agencies like ED, CBI and NIA are gunning at the opposition leaders. They are being used as a weapon against the opposition. We had (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**ED wants AAP's LS poll strategy details from Kejriwal's phone: Atishi**



**NEW DELHI, March 29:** The Enforcement Directorate is working as BJP's political weapon and it wants to get details of AAP's Lok Sabha election strategy by accessing Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's phone, senior AAP leader Atishi alleged on Friday.

Kejriwal, who is the national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), was arrested by the central probe agency on March 21 in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case and is in its custody till April 1.

Addressing a press conference here, Atishi claimed the insistence of the ED to look into Kejriwal's mobile phone, which is a few months old and did not exist when the policy was formed and implemented, proves that the agency is working as a "political weapon" of the BJP.

Hitting back at Atishi, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva accused her of "bluffing" and asked the AAP to explain to the people why Kejriwal and former deputy

chief minister Manish Sisodia "changed phones frequently".

No immediate reaction was available from the ED.

Atishi, who is a Cabinet minister in the Delhi government, said, "Actually it is the BJP and not the ED that wants to know what is there on Kejriwal's phone".

The excise policy was implemented in 2021-22 and the chief minister's current phone is just a few months old, Atishi claimed.

The ED has said that Kejriwal's phone from that period is not available, and now, it wants the password of his new phone, Atishi said.

"They want it because they will find in it details of AAP's Lok Sabha poll strategy, campaign plans, talks with INDIA bloc leaders and information regarding media and social media strategy," she said.

The ED counsel said in the court that custody of Kejriwal was required for a few more days because he has not disclosed the password of his phone, Atishi said. She charged (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**AFSPA extended in four districts of Assam**

**GUWAHATI, March 29:** The Assam government has extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 in four districts for six months from April 1.

The state government's political department issued a notification, stating that the 'Disturbed Area' tag under the AFSPA has been extended in areas covering Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo and Sivasagar districts.

The Assam Police had submitted a report, asserting that there was an improvement in the law and order situation in the state, barring one militant organisation being active in the four districts.

The state government's home and political department submitted a proposal to this effect to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, which, after due consideration, decided to maintain the 'status quo'

regarding 'disturbed area' for an additional six-month period, an official said.

Subsequently, the state government, acting on the directive of the Centre, extended the Act till September 30, 2024, he said.

The Act empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without any prior warrant. It also gives a certain level of immunity to the se-

curity forces in case of misplaced operations.

The Act was last extended on October 1, 2023, for six months ending on March 31.

During the last extension, the AFSPA was withdrawn from Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

Earlier, the Act was withdrawn from April 1, 2022 from the entire state of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**'This is the first election after delimitation of constituencies in the state'**

**Nalbari district admin conducts drive to increase women voter turnout**

**NALBARI, March 29:** Assam's Nalbari district administration helmed by women officials is conducting a drive to increase voter turnout of female electors in the general elections.

Targeted awareness campaigns are being conducted in areas where women voter turnout was less in the previous Lok Sabha elections, Nalbari district commissioner Varnali Deka told PTI on Friday.

She said that nearly 50 per cent of all urban polling stations in the district would be managed by women staffers in this election.

"The overall voter turnout in the district was over 80 per cent in the last Lok Sabha polls, but there was a gap of two per cent between male and female turnouts, which we looking to bridge this year," she said.

The male voter turnout in Nalbari was 84 per cent in 2019, while the female voter turnout was 82 per cent. The overall male and female voter turnout in the state were 81.75 per cent and 81.35 per cent



respectively.

"We are conducting targeted activities based on data from polling stations where the women voter turnout was less. We are looking into the possible reasons in those specific areas and address those," Deka said.

About 50 per cent of the polling stations in urban areas in the district will be managed by women, from polling officials to security personnel, in another step to increase women's participation, the DC said.

A special awareness meeting for women as part of the Systematic

Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme was also held in the DC's office on Thursday.

Besides Deka, superintendent of police Supriya Das and other women officials participated in the meeting. Deka pointed out that a number of top officials in the district were women.

Besides Deka and Das heading the civil and police administrations, among other important positions held by women are that of additional DC, election officer, assistant commissioners and circle officers.

The DC said that along with encouraging more women participation, the administration is also working on creating awareness among first-time voters and vulnerable sections such as transgender and sex workers.

"This is the first election after delimitation of constituencies in the state. We are also ensuring that there is no confusion among voters regarding their polling stations and other details," Deka added. (PTI)

**ENPO sticks to decision not to take part in LS poll process**

**KOHIMA, March 29:** The ENPO has stuck to its decision not to take part in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections until its demand for a separate state carved out of Nagaland is fulfilled by the Centre, its leaders said on Friday.

The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) held a closed-door meeting with 20 MLAs of the region and the lone Rajya Sabha member of Nagaland, who also hails from there, at Tuensang on Thursday.

"We have decided to stand firm to abstain from the ensuing Lok Sabha elections and also not to allow any campaign within our jurisdiction till the demand for Frontier Nagaland Territory is fulfilled by the Centre," ENPO vice president W Bendang Chang told PTI over the phone.

Eastern Nagaland Legislators Union (ENLU) official C L John confirmed that all the 20 legislators of the area and the Rajya Sabha MP attended Thursday's meeting that continued till 7 pm.

"During the meeting, we appealed to the ENPO and tribal bodies to revoke their decision but it did not materialise. They con-

cluded that the final decision would be taken only after consultation with people," John told PTI.

Asked if the ENLU had received any assurance on the demand for Frontier Nagaland Territory from the Centre during their recent visit to Delhi, he said there was "no assurance" but "we have asked the state government to submit its view".

John said ENLU will meet with chief minister Neiphiu Rio on the matter at the earliest.

ENPO president R Taspikiu Sangtam said the "public emergency", which was declared on March 5, would continue and the decision on the next course of action to press their demand would be taken after consultation with the public.

During the "public emergency", the ENPO, the apex body of seven Naga tribes of the region, and its frontal organisations have not been allowing any political campaign.

The ENPO has been demanding a separate state since 2010, claiming that the six districts in the eastern part of Nagaland have been neglected in all aspects for years. (PTI)



# PM cautions against misuse of AI, other powerful tech in unskilled, untrained hands

*PM advocates clear 'dos and don'ts', use of watermarks on AI-generated content to curtail misinformation*

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday cautioned that a powerful technology like AI in unskilled, untrained hands holds significant risk of misuse, as he advocated the need for clear 'dos and don'ts' and use of watermarks on AI-generated content to curb misinformation and deepfake-related harms in the society.

In a candid, free-wheeling chat with Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates, Modi spoke at length on how India has democratised technology for the benefit of its citizens, embracing the power of digital for improving lives, and exuded confidence that the country will take remarkable strides in the fourth industrial revolution, that has digital in its core.

During the discussion that touched on a slew of topics, from AI to Digital Public Infrastructure, the PM said in the case of deepfakes, it is crucial to acknowledge and identify that a particular deepfake content is AI-generated, along with appropriate disclosures about its source.

Citing dangers of AI harms and deepfakes in a society, he said, misuse of his voice, for instance, can initially deceive and misguide peo-



ple leading to widespread uproar.

"It is crucial to acknowledge that deepfake content is AI-generated and mention its source. These measures are important in early days. We need to establish dos and don'ts...we will need to think about it seriously," Modi said.

The PM talked of "significant risk of misuse" when a powerful technology like AI is placed in unskilled and untrained hands.

"I suggest that we should start with clear watermarks on AI-generated content to prevent misinformation," he said, adding the idea is not to devalue AI creations but to recognise them for what they are.

Acknowledging the importance

of AI, the PM outlined how India extensively leveraged the new-age innovations during the G20 Summit. AI also helped to translate his speeches in different languages, he mentioned.

In the course of his conversation, the PM asked Gates to take a selfie via Namu app, as he demonstrated an AI-powered feature and face-recognition technology on the popular app. Gates lauded India's technological strides.

In a witty take on AI, the PM said, in India, mothers are referred to 'Aai' (a word that sounds similar to AI), and added that children here have become so advanced that they start using the hi-tech term very

early in life.

Modi said if people use AI merely as "magic tool" or rely on it out of sheer laziness, say in drafting letters, it would lead to "great injustice". He stressed that AI tools must be leveraged to enhance human efficiency and within a field of expertise.

"One should compete with AI and ChatGPT...should strive to surpass its capabilities," he advised.

PM said he was very clear that he would not let digital divide hamper the progress of the country. India, he said, has built digital public infrastructure, and extended digital facilities and services for public good.

Modi said data security remains a paramount concern, and emphasised that while India has a strong legal framework in place, public awareness is equally crucial.

"We need to train the common man for quality data. Second, data-owner must be informed about the intentions behind data requests. If the requester aims to monetise the data through agreements, consent should be given. The priority should be given for research, and it is essential to keep the cost of research data affordable," Modi said. (PTI)

## PhonePe enables UPI payments in UAE

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 29:** PhonePe users visiting the UAE now have the convenience of making payments using Unified Payments Interface (UPI) at Mashreq's NEOPAY terminals, present in various retail stores, dining outlets, and tourist attractions.

By scanning the QR code, users can seamlessly conduct transactions, with the account debited in INR, reflecting the currency exchange rate.

Moreover, non-resident Indians (NRIs) with UAE mobile numbers can download the PhonePe app and link their NRE and NRO accounts for hassle-free payments, enhancing transaction ease for the Indian diaspora in the UAE.

This collaboration, facilitated by Mashreq's partnership with NPCI International Payments Limited

(NIPL), signifies a significant step in integrating UPI as a payment instrument at NEOPAY terminals, providing Indian travelers with familiar and convenient payment options. Ritesh Pai, CEO International Payments, PhonePe, expressed enthusiasm about the partnership, emphasizing PhonePe's commitment to customer convenience and embracing evolving traveler needs.

Vibhor Mundhada, CEO of NEOPAY at Mashreq, echoed the sentiment, highlighting the launch as a testament to Mashreq's dedication to innovation and customer-centric solutions. Anubhav Sharma, deputy chief of Partnership Business Development and Marketing at NIPL, emphasized the collaboration's role in streamlining cross-border payment solutions for Indian travelers to the UAE.

## HMIF 'Art for Hope - Season 3' empowers 40 artists nationwide

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 29:** Hyundai Motor India Foundation (HMIF) has embarked on its third edition of 'Art for Hope,' a flagship initiative aimed at uplifting and showcasing the diverse talent of Indian artists.

With a focus on promoting traditional art, craft, and culture, the event celebrates the rich heritage of India's artistic landscape.

The four-day exhibition and workshop, held at Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi, from March 28-31, 2024, serves as a

platform for emerging artists, youth, women, communities, and local talents, supported by HMIF grants. The initiative, aligned with Hyundai's global vision of 'Progress for Humanity,' aims to democratize access to art while providing national exposure to artists across various domains.

At the inaugural ceremony, attended by esteemed personalities such as Mr. Un Soo Kim, MD & CEO of Hyundai Motor India Ltd., the emphasis was placed on inclusivity, with the inclusion of specially-abled artists. Mr. Kim highlighted

HMIF's commitment to enriching lives through art, recognizing its transformative power and unique perspective.

The event not only showcases diverse artworks but also emphasizes inclusivity through braille, tactile artworks, and sign language interpretations for differently-abled visitors.

Additionally, workshops and panel discussions on cultural sustainability and art as a catalyst for social change further enrich the experience, demonstrating HMIF's commitment to nurturing India's artistic community.

## Religare, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital achieve landmark in Arunachal's healthcare landscape

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 29:** Religare Enterprises Ltd (REL) and Sir Ganga Ram Hospital (SRGH) have achieved a significant milestone in bolstering healthcare services in Arunachal Pradesh.

A successful kidney transplant, facilitated by REL and conducted at SRGH in New Delhi, signals a transformative step towards enhancing healthcare accessibility and quality for the state's residents.

The successful surgery, performed by an expert medical team, marks the inauguration of a Centre of Excellence for Renal Sciences at TRIHMS, advancing the state's healthcare infrastructure. This initiative underscores REL's broader social commitment through the Religare Care Foundation (RCF) to augment medical facilities and skill development in Arunachal Pradesh.

In 2023, an MoU was inked between the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, SRGH, and REL to fortify the state's healthcare services, with SRGH serving as the technical partner. Dr. Rashmi Saluja, Executive Chairperson of REL, emphasized the pivotal role of public-private partnerships in addressing healthcare challenges and enhancing patient outcomes.

## Adani Green Energy begins operation of 775 MW solar projects in Gujarat

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Adani Green Energy on Friday announced the beginning of the operation of its 775 megawatt solar power projects in Khavda, Gujarat. The capacities have been operationalised after securing relevant clearances, Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) said in an exchange filing.

Adani Green Energy through its various wholly-owned stepdown subsidiaries has operationalised an aggregate 775 MW solar power projects at Khavda, Gujarat, it said.

"Based on the relevant clearances, it was decided at 00:12 am on March 29, 2024 to operationalize the plant and commence power generation from March 29, 2024," the company said.

Part of the Adani Group, AGEL has the largest operating renewable portfolio in India, spread across 12 states. (PTI)



## Asian shares mostly higher after another set of Wall St records

**BANGKOK, March 29:** Asian shares ended mostly higher in quiet, Good Friday holiday trading, while European and U.S. markets were closed.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 rose 0.5% to 40,369.44 and the Kospi in Seoul was little changed, at 2,748.55. The Shanghai Composite index gained 1% to 3,041.17.

Taiwan's Taie advanced 0.7%.

In Bangkok, the SET added 0.5%. The U.S. dollar slipped to 151.35 Japanese yen from 151.38 yen. The euro edged lower, to \$1.0774 from \$1.0790.

On Thursday, the S&P 500 added 0.1%, to its all-time high set a day before and closed at 5,254.35. It gained 10.2% in the first quarter.

The Dow Jones Industrial Aver-

age ticked up 0.1% to 39,807.37 and likewise set a record. The Nasdaq composite dipped 0.1% to 16,379.46.

Chemours fell 9.1% despite reporting better results for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It gave a forecast for earnings before taxes and other items in the current quarter that was below analysts' expectations. (AP)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Grand old party receives I-T

take its guarantees to the people of the country. "We will not be scared of these notices. We will be more aggressive and fight these polls," the former Union minister said.

Maken alleged that the Congress and other like-minded opposition parties are being selectively targeted by the I-T department, which he described as the BJP's "frontal organisation".

He said the Supreme Court will soon hear the Congress's plea on the I-T department's demands from it. "An illegal attempt to freeze the bank accounts of the principal opposition party in February has gone on for more than a month on the eve of the general election," Maken said.

Before the dust could settle on that unprecedented "vindictive" action, in a patently "illegal and undemocratic" move, the "frontal organisation of the BJP" has launched its next "premeditated" and "diabolical" campaign against the Congress, he added.

The income-tax returns filed by the Congress for eight years have been reopened on "baseless and manufactured" grounds to levy illegal I-T demand orders totalling thousands of crores of rupees, Maken said.

The timing of the I-T department's action -- in February and March, days before and even days after the Lok Sabha polls were announced on March 16 -- speaks for itself about the mala-fide nature of these actions, the Congress leader said.

Maken alleged that the "BJP-ruled I-T department" has so far forcibly taken out Rs 135 crore from the Congress's bank accounts due to an alleged Rs 14 lakh non-compliance demand against the party.

"This amount was recovered by freezing more than Rs 270 crore of the Congress's bank balance across several accounts," he said. During this period of several weeks, the bank accounts of the Congress were effectively "frozen" in an illegal attempt to paralyse the party's functioning during the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Maken alleged.

"This action was designed to choke the Congress financially and prevent, stop, delay and disable any election-related expenditure by the party on advertisements, travel, salaries, agencies etc.

"It is indeed appalling that the financial years assessed go back to 1993-94, when the late Sitaram Kesri was the party's treasurer. Out of the eight years, the I-T demand orders for four years have been issued by the BJP's frontal organisation even without assessment orders. This is unprecedented in the history of taxation in India," he said.

"These orders are based on manufactured and planted diaries and so-called raids by the BJP's frontal organisation on third parties. Several of these raided third parties enjoy stay orders from courts based on vitiated search procedures by the I-T department," Maken claimed, adding that the same interim relief is not being granted to the Congress.

In the history of India, why is the Congress, a tax-exempt political party like others, being "forced" to pay income tax during the 2024 Lok Sabha election, he asked.

"Why have the BJP or its alliance partners not been dealt with similarly? Why has the I-T department not taken cognisance of the Yediyurappa diaries, Jain diaries, Sahara diaries, Birla diaries, Bangaru Lakshman convictions and penalised the BJP?" he asked.

"Why is the EC -- the guarantor of free-and-fair elections -- a mute spectator? Is this not an obvious, brazen, blatant and shameful attempt by the BJP to illegally financially cripple the opposition? Where is the level-playing field in Indian elections? Can 2024 be called a free-and-fair election anymore?" Maken asked. (PTI)

## Amit Shah to campaign in Assam

seats in the state, the BJP is contesting in 11 seats while its alliance partners Asom Gana Parishad in two and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in one. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUFD and an independent one each from the state. (PTI)

## Election preparations reviewed

the Election Cell members and officers, underscoring their critical role in upholding democratic principles of fairness and accountability.

Expressing gratitude for the active engagement of all participants, the district election officer reaffirmed the administration's commitment to ensuring a smooth and lawful electoral process in the three hill districts.

With the general election drawing nearer, such collaborative initiatives serve as pillars of strength in fortifying the electoral framework and upholding the cherished democratic ethos of the nation.

## Vice President calls for neutralising

act as a political party. What do we do? They are not accountable. They get traction. We must rise above it," he said. In an apparent swipe at the United States and Germany for their remarks on the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, he said India is a democratic nation with a robust judicial system.

He said a country in Europe, "a developed democracy, they need to think within. They need to attend to their own affairs. India is a democratic nation with robust judicial systems".

Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21 in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case and is in its custody till April 1.

Referring to the debate around the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the rules for which were framed recently, Dhanikhar said the law is not discriminatory.

"How this can be discriminatory, no one is stopped from applying for citizenship of this country. Anyone from any country can apply for the citizenship of this country. It is available as before, with no change. It will be considered on merit. Has anyone been deprived of citizenship under the Act?" he said.

He said "these narratives" are orchestrated in a design to taint and tarnish our image, our institution. "We need to speak out our minds; our silence will resonate in our ears. There was an occasion, at the point of time in history when I could make my point, I kept quiet," he said. (PTI)

## TMC seeks action on BJP's

sought time to raise our concerns, and we have been given an appointment for Monday," Panja said.

She also alleged that TMC workers and leaders in West Bengal were being summoned by the agencies, which is disrupting the election campaign, and sought the poll panel's intervention.

Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party leader in Rajya Sabha Derek O'Brien, MPs Dola Sen, Saket Gokhale, and Sagarika Ghose were also a part of the delegation.

The TMC will also attend the March 31 rally by the opposition parties against the arrest of Delhi chief minister at the Ramlila Ground. O'Brien and Ghose will represent the party at the protest rally. (PTI)

## AFSPA extended in four districts

Assam, barring nine districts and a sub-division of Cachar district.

The state was declared a 'disturbed area' under the AFSPA in November 1990 and it was periodically extended for six months since then. (PTI)

## ED wants AAP's LS poll strategy

that the BJP wanted to know AAP's strategy for contesting the parliamentary elections in Delhi, Punjab, Gujarat, and Assam where the party has fielded its candidates on a total of 22 seats, she said.

The Excise Policy 2021-22 was formulated and implemented between November 2021 and August 2022. "So I want to ask the ED why they want to examine a phone that is only a few months old when they know that it is not the phone used during the policy period?" she questioned.

She claimed that the AAP national convener was arrested for hindering and sabotaging the party's Lok Sabha election contest.

The Delhi BJP chief said both Kejriwal and Sisodia "admitted to having changed several phones".

"Kejriwal and former deputy CM Manish Sisodia changed their phones frequently, AAP leaders must reveal the reason behind this," Sachdeva said. Sisodia is lodged in Delhi's Tihar jail after being arrested in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. (PTI)

### NAME CHANGED



I, SHAHNEWAZ CHOWDHURY, AGED ABOUT 39 YEARS, SON OF LATE ABDUL LATIF CHOUDHURY, RESIDENT OF BLOCK-1, FLAT NO.7C, SHINE HEAVEN APARTMENT, BAGHORBARI SATGAON, GUWAHATI-27, DISTRICT KAMRUP(M) ASSAM.

I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM "MD SHAHNEWAZ CHOWDHURY" SON OF LATE ABDUL LATIF CHOUDHURY AND AFTARA BEGUM CHOWDHURY (MOTHER) TO "SHAHNEWAZ CHOWDHURY" HENCEFORTH I SHALL BE KNOWN AS SHAHNEWAZ CHOWDHURY IN ALL PURPOSE.

SO, I HEREBY DECLARE THAT SHAHNEWAZ CHOWDHURY AND MD SHAHNEWAZ CHOWDHURY IS THE ONE AND SAME PERSON HAVING SINGLE IDENTITY.

## VC firm Accel selects 8 startups focused on AI, industry for Atoms 3.0'

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Venture capital major Accel has selected eight startups with specialised solutions in AI and Industry 5.0 for 'Atoms 3.0', its six-month accelerator programme that hand-holds and nurtures ventures to give them more firepower to unlock growth and collaboration opportunities.

Atoms 3.0 offers up to USD 500,000 in funding, access to more than USD 5 million in perks, personalised mentorship, and a vibrant founder community network, the global venture fund that counts Flipkart, Cure.fit, Ninjacart, Swiggy and BookMyShow among its portfolio companies said.

Atoms 3.0 mentors exceptional pre-seed startups dedicated to advances in cutting-edge domains such as Artificial Intelligence and Industry 5.0 (new-age model that refers to humans working alongside smart machines).

"The shift to a thematic programme design for Atoms 3.0 has enabled us to provide deeper, sector-focused mentorship for the startups. Atoms has always restricted itself to smaller cohort sizes to stay hyper-focused on the needs of a smaller group of exceptional founders," said Prayank Swaroop, a partner at Accel. The eight startups in the third cohort represent the "next wave of disruptors in AI and Industry 5.0", he said.

Of Accel's line up of eight startups, four are pushing new frontiers in AI. The list includes Tune AI, which offers a GenAI stack for enterprises; Skoob, a generative AI platform for enhancing reading experiences; Meritic, a financial storytelling co-pilot; and Arivihan, India's first fully automated AI-based learning platform.



In the Industry 5.0 space, Spintly provides an IoT (Internet of Things) platform for smarter building management, while Asets brings in a multidisciplinary CAD (computer aided design), simulation, and engineering design platform.

The other two startups are currently in "stealth mode".

"The six-month Atoms 3.0 journey is giving founders insight into critical areas like hiring, getting your first 10 customers, or tuning your pitch for investors," said Barath Shankar Subramanian, another partner at Accel.

During the past two editions of Atoms, Accel had taken a sector-agnostic approach. Now with Atoms 3.0, the VC firm has shifted its strategic focus to becoming a mentor that supports startups in the fast-evolving technology landscapes of AI and Industry 5.0.

Swaroop and Subramanian, Accel partners leading the AI and Industry 5.0 domains respectively, are of the firm belief that while these two areas present incredible opportunities, the pace of innovation in these categories requires founders to have the right mindset for navigating the market, and sector-focused mentorship.

Accel's Atoms programme has been instrumental in the success of

numerous category-defining startups across India, such as Flipkart and Swiggy. With over USD 200 million raised by the 24 startups from the first two cohorts, Atoms 3.0 continues this legacy of fostering innovation and entrepreneurial success, according to a statement by Accel. Beyond capital, the programme offers founders access to networking and learning sessions.

Pallavi Chakravorty, co-founder and CEO of Meritic, a beneficiary of Atoms 3.0, noted that beyond the capital and learning sessions, being part of Atoms has given the venture a strong founder community and highly collaborative network of over 200 portfolio company founders.

"We've been through many renowned accelerators. But what makes Atoms stand out above the others is its extremely engaging programme design, which was enormously useful for us as early-stage founders - with sessions by subject matter experts and operators who have built successful companies. I'd recommend the programme to anyone looking for mentorship in any area. Atoms accelerates growth exponentially, positioning pre-seed founders for long-term success," added Naman Maheshwari, co-founder, Tune AI. (PTI)



## Leaders express confidence in victory & highlights coalition's commitment to welfare and development initiatives

# NDA partners felicitate Joyanta Basumatary



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, March 29:** The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) extended a warm welcome and felicitation to NDA alliance (UPPL, BJP & AGP) candidate, Joyanta Basumatary at a program held in Kokrajhar on Friday amidst the presence of huge party leaders and workers.

A delegation team of AGP party led by its president and state cabinet minister, Atul Bora, rushed to Kokrajhar and held a meeting with NDA partners UPPL party leaders and workers at Chandrapara amidst the presence of AGP working president and cabinet minister, Keshab Mahanta, senior AGP leader, Bhupen Roy, UPPL presi-

dent and CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, and NDA alliance candidate, Joyanta Basumatary.

Notably, Joyanta Basumatary is contesting on an NDA alliance ticket from No 1 Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency. The meeting of the NDA alliance partners has prepared necessary strategies to ensure the victory of the NDA alliance candidates across the state.

AGP president, Atul Bora, said that the NDA alliance (UPPL, BJP, AGP) is fully prepared to contest in all 14 constituencies, including Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections. He expressed hope that the NDA nominee for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Joyanta Basumatary, would win the elections with ma-

mentary elections, and PM Narendra Modi is set to become Prime Minister for a third consecutive term. He expressed confidence that the NDA alliance nominee for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Joyanta Basumatary, would win the elections by a margin of over 3 lakhs votes. Boro emphasised that people from various communities are expressing their willingness to vote in favour of the BJP-led NDA alliance.

"Our powerful BJP Assam Pradesh + United People's Party Liberal + Asom Gana Parishad coalition has already become everyone's favourite, and we are all set to ensure a big victory for the coalition in the coming Lok Sabha elections. With immense blessings and support, Joyanta Basumatary, NDA candidate for the No 1 Kokrajhar (ST) Lok Sabha constituency, is heading for a tremendous win in Lok Sabha elections 2024," Boro added.

Meanwhile, nearly 200 youths from different areas of Kokrajhar district joined the UPPL party on Thursday evening in the presence of UPPL president and CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro, and senior party leaders. The newly joined youth members were warmly welcomed and felicitated with party mementos.

CEM Boro mentioned that youths representing different communities have come forward to join the UPPL party as the UPPL party is dedicatedly working towards the welfare and upliftment of citizens, which motivated them to join the party.

## Former armed cadres express resentment over govt inaction on MoS 2021

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, March 29:** Several former armed cadres of Karbi Anglong have expressed their resentment over the attitude adopted by the state government and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) in fulfilling the accords of MoS 2021.

Several former armed cadres, under the banner of Karbi Ex-Revolutionary United Forum (KERUF), in a press conference held at Taralango, expressed their resentment over the 'lackadaisical attitude' by the KAAC and state government.

One of the former armed cadres, Roto Timung, told media persons that on September 4, 2021, six armed organisations, namely Karbi Longri & NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLFF), People's Democratic Council of Karbi Longri (PDCK), United People's Liberation Army (UPLA), and three factions of Karbi People's Liberation Tigers (KPLT), signed a MoS with the state and central government. However, as the KAAC and state government have not imple-

mented the accords in the peace agreement, the former armed cadres are being deprived and facing difficulties.

Two and a half years have passed since the signing of the MoS, but the KAAC and state government are silent on opportunities and schemes that are supposed to be provided as mentioned in the accord, Timung said, mentioning that as per the accord, all pending cases will be withdrawn, but the KAAC is silent on it.

Timung questioned the KAAC authority on the delayed rehabilitation package that is supposed to be given to armed cadres. He further questioned the KAAC authority on why employment opportunities had not been extended to former armed cadres. Additionally, he inquired about the rationale behind denying electoral tickets to leaders associated with armed groups during the KAAC election.

The former insurgents demanded that all clauses in the accords in the MoS 2021 should be immediately implemented.

## Demow BPHC hosts ASHA Workers Convention 2023-24

**HT Correspondent**  
**DEMOW, March 29:** The health workers of Demow Block Primary Health Centre (BPHC), in association with ASHA workers, organised the ASHA Workers 2023-24 Convention in the auditorium of Demow College on Friday. As per the schedule, the program started with flag hoisting, conducted by Ranjit Borah, BPM of Demow Block Primary Health Centre. The cultural procession was inaugurated by Swarna Saikia, ASHA supervisor of Demow Block Primary Health Centre. Niva Gogoi Mech, president of Sivasagar District ASHA Workers Association, offered smriti tarpan. An open session was organised in the auditorium of Demow College on Friday, inaugurated by Dr Rupam Borkotoky, deputy superin-

tendent of Demow Model Hospital. Dr Chandralekha Saikia, additional chief medical & health officer, was present at the program as the chief guest. Dr Udaiyatiya Rajkonwar, chief medical and health officer, was present at the program as the specific orator. Solo and group dances were performed during the program. Minakshi Chetia, an inhabitant of Rupahibam near Demow who works as an ASHA under Bhimpuwa Health and Wellness Centre (HWC) in the Nabil area near Demow, received the 'Assam Gaurav Award 2023' for social service recently and was felicitated in the program. The ASHA workers and ASHA supervisors were felicitated with phulam gamosa, certificates, and mementos in the program.

## Christian communities observe Good Friday with solemn services

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, March 29:** In sync with nations worldwide, the Christian community in Diphu town commemorated Good Friday, marking the suffering and death of Lord Jesus Christ, through solemn services held in their respective churches. In particular, the Catholic community in Diphu observed Good Friday by participating in the Stations of the Cross, reflecting on Jesus Christ's suffering, crucifixion, and death. The Stations of the Cross, comprising 14 stations, feature crosses or depictions of Christ's suffering at each stop. Participants, including priests, nuns, and laypeople, paused at each station for contemplation and prayer before progressing to the next.

The procession for the Stations of the Cross commenced from Rongtharve, traversing through Valley View Road, and culminated at the Cathedral of the Risen Lord. Hundreds of faithful, along with priests and nuns, joined the procession.

At the outset, Fr Thomas Maripparath, parish priest of Diphu parish, carried the cross at the first station, later aided by other laypersons. The Good Friday service concluded with the veneration of the cross, during which priests, nuns, and the faithful bowed and knelt to kiss the cross in remembrance of Christ's passion. Holy Communion was also distributed among the faithful by the priests, marking the solemnity of the occasion.

**Our Dongkamukam correspondent adds:** In harmony with the global observance, the Christian community of West Karbi Anglong observed Good Friday in a spirit of peace and reflection.

At Sojong Christ the King Church near Dongkamukam, the Catholic community participated in the Way of the Cross, a solemn procession to meditate on the sufferings, crucifixion, and death of Jesus Christ. Leading the procession at Sojong Parish was Fr CB John, while in Satgaon Parish, Fr CA John took the lead. The Way of the Cross journeyed from East Bhellapara to conclude at the church in Satgaon, symbolising Christ's final steps before his crucifixion.

Beyond the Catholic community, various denominations such as the Church of North India, Baptist Believers, Believers Church, and Presbyterian Church of Jengkhia also observed Good Friday by conducting services at their respective churches.

## 8 Assam Battalion NCC secures best NCC unit title

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, March 29:** The 8 Assam Battalion National Cadet Corps (NCC) achieved a remarkable milestone as it clinched the title of the 'Best NCC Unit' in the north-east region.

On the occasion of this prestigious achievement, a grand felicitation ceremony was organised on Friday at the battalion's headquarters, showcasing the dedication, discipline, and excellence exemplified by the unit under the dynamic leadership of its commanding officer, Colonel Amar Singh.



The ceremony witnessed a gathering of notable figures, including principals of various colleges and Assistant NCC Officers (ANOs), who joined in celebrating the remarkable achievements of the battalion. The atmosphere was abuzz with pride and enthusiasm as attendees hailed the exemplary efforts of the cadets and their mentors in upholding the values of the NCC.

Colonel Amar Singh, the driving force behind the battalion's success, expressed his gratitude to the cadets and the entire team for their unwavering commitment and hard work. He emphasised the importance of discipline, teamwork, and service to the nation, which form the cornerstone of the NCC's ethos.

Addressing the gathering, Narendra Kumar Shah appraised the 8 Assam Bn NCC for its outstanding performance and lauded the leadership of Colonel Amar Singh for instilling a sense of purpose and dedication among the cadets. He underscored the pivotal role played by the NCC in shaping the future leaders of the nation and fostering a spirit of patriotism and social responsibility.

During the program, cadets showcased their proficiency in various disciplines through captivating displays and demonstrations including precision drills, cultural activities, and others.

The program concluded with the presentation of awards and certificates to outstanding cadets recognising their exemplary contributions and achievements, as stated in a press note here.

## Static surveillance seizes ₹ 2.75 lakh

**HT Correspondent**  
**JAGIROAD, March 29:** A static surveillance team deployed in Laharighat assembly constituency under Nagaon LS seized ₹ 75,000 in cash from a man in Bakrigaon in the district of Morigaon on Wednesday. On the other hand, on March 25, the static surveillance teams deployed in Morigaon assembly constituency seized ₹ 2 lakh in cash from a man at Bachnaghat in the district. As per the Election Commission's directives, if a candidate, any agent of the candidate, or party worker is seized with a vehicle worth more than ₹ 50,000 in cash or carrying drugs, liquor, weapons, or gifts worth more than ₹ 10,000, such items will be confiscated. The public is also required to carry appropriate documents to carry amounts exceeding ₹ 50,000 in cash. This is stated in a DIPRO press release.

## Second phase of election training concludes

**HT Correspondent**  
**BISWANATH CHARIALLI, March 29:** The second phase of election training organised for the polling officials for the Biswanath election district concluded on Friday. A total of 299 presiding officers and 269 first polling officers, including 24 women polling officers, were imparted training for the second phase by 25 master trainers at Biswanath College premises. The training session was attended by officials from the personnel and training cell of the Biswanath district administration, as stated in a press release.

## Neglect plagues multi-crore water supply project



**HT Correspondent**  
**MARGHERITA, March 29:** Amidst the state government's proclamation of development, the multi-crore project by the Irrigation Department in Ledo Maulang, under the 83rd Margherita constituency in Tinsukia district, resembles more of a deserted structure than a symbol of progress. Despite significant investments, including iron pipes, boats, staff quarters, water motors, and various electrical equipment, the site languishes in neglect with-

out adequate security measures. Local residents lament the lack of attention from state government officials, including the Irrigation Department minister and higher-ranking personnel. Despite the presence of four department employees, their sporadic visits and hefty monthly salaries over the years have failed to address the project's deterioration.

The neglect has had tangible consequences, with agricultural fields suffering due to water scarcity. Despite pleas from locals,

officials have been remiss in their duties, failing to address the urgent need for water access in the area.

In areas like 1 no Maulang, Ledo Bengali Gaon, Ledo Gaon, and 1 no Maulang Bengali Gaon, which boast ample agricultural land, the irony is stark. While the multi-crore irrigation project was meant to alleviate water scarcity, it has only provided water once, during its inauguration. Today, local farmers are left to fend for themselves, resorting to self-funded methods to irrigate their fields.

## General observer assesses election preparations

**HT Correspondent**  
**SIVASAGAR, March 29:** General Observer M Satyasara Devi, overseeing the elections for the 18th Jorhat Lok Sabha seat, visited Sivasagar on Friday. She also visited the Demow LAC segments of the constituency and reviewed the poll preparations with DC Sivasagar Aditya Vikram Yadav, SP

Sivasagar Subhrajyoti Bora, district election officer Sugara Siddhartha Goswami, and other officers at the Circuit House. She additionally visited sensitive areas along the Assam-Nagaland border and discussed poll-related issues with officers in Nazira Sivasagar, besides inspecting several polling stations in the district.

## Tiwa Cultural Festival commences at Tiwa Fa Indraching Deuri Kshetra

Three-day extravaganza to highlight the community's cultural legacy with performances, exhibitions, and discussions

**HT Correspondent**  
**MORIGAON, March 29:** The three-day long Tiwa cultural program commenced on Friday at Tiwa Fa Indraching Deuri Khetra in Morigaon district, with the objective of showcasing and promoting the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the Tiwa community spanning seven generations. The 'Tiwa Kanchichuri Kham' or Tiwa Cultural Festival, the cultural program, was organised centrally here. The Tiwa Cultural Festival was organised by the Tiwa Autonomous Council and jointly organised by the Tiwa Chhatra Sanstha, Tiwa Yuva Chhatra Parishad, Tiwa Raj Darbar, Sadao Tiwa Mahila Sanstha, Tiwa Cultural Society, and Tiwa Suraksha Parishad.

The main gate of Tiwa Fa Indraching Deuri Kshetra was inaugurated by veteran artist and prominent social worker Ashok Deka in the morning. The event was inaugurated by the founder chief executive member of Tiwa Autonomous Council, Narayan Kumar Radukakati. The 2024 Tiwa Cultural Festival was inaugurated by the president of the organising committee and



Morigaon MLA Ramakanta Deuri and the general secretary of the organising committee, Pranabiyoti Masrang. The exhibition and trade fair were inaugurated by Pankaj Chakraborty, director, Tribal Beliefs and

Culture Department, Government of Assam, and the Kuru Lampharaja Cultural Forum was inaugurated by Jurching Bardoloi, president, Tiwa Raj Darbar. The Tiwa dance was performed by Kuru Chadangaraja Memorial

## Morigaon secures victory

**HT Correspondent**  
**MORIGAON, March 29:** In the second match of the Central Assam Zone Group 'A' in the Assam Cricket Academy's Under-14 Pulin Das Inter-District Cricket Tournament, held at Morigaon Khirud Barua Stadium, Morigaon emerged victorious over Titabar.

Titabar Sports Association batted first, posting a total of 92 runs for the loss of eight wickets in 30 overs, with notable contributions from Abhigyan Dutta and Darshan Priyam. Morigaon's bowlers, Anurag Mahanty, Raja Deka, and Rupam Tinsinai, each claimed two wickets to restrict Titabar's innings.

In response, Morigaon chased down the target with ease, reaching the required runs for the loss of just one wicket in 12.2 overs. Anurag Mahanty remained unbeaten with a score of 36, supported by Rajni Killing's 31 runs.

The match was officiated by Assam Cricket Association panel umpires Kailash Dutta and Debarshi Duwara.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*It is difficult to free fools from the chains they revere.*  
-Voltaire

## India's priciest election

As India gears up for its 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the spotlight is not only on the political fervour but also on the unprecedented financial implications accompanying this democratic spectacle. With estimations soaring to a staggering \$12 billion, it's poised to become the costliest electoral event globally. Amidst this financial behemoth lies a tangled web of funding intricacies and economic ramifications that demand attention and scrutiny. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's admission of insufficient funds for the electoral battle underscores the gravity of the situation. Despite presiding over massive government expenditures, the candid acknowledgment sheds light on the stark reality of India's exorbitant electoral costs. Indeed, the lavish nature of Indian elections prompts reflection on the sources and implications of such monumental spending. The evolution of election financing in India unveils a narrative fraught with twists and turns. Once open to corporate contributions, the landscape shifted dramatically with Indira Gandhi's ban, later reversed by her son. The idea of state-funded elections, albeit appealing for transparency, encounters scepticism, particularly from major political players wary of unveiling government coffers to partisan interests.

Amidst this backdrop, electoral bonds emerge as a contentious issue, shrouded in secrecy and speculation. While ostensibly aimed at legitimizing contributions, their opacity only deepens the mystery surrounding political funding. The involvement of prominent donors, often linked to regional interests, underscores the intricate nexus between money and politics. A closer look at the financial dynamics reveals telling insights. The BJP's formidable war chest, coupled with significant contributions from regional players like the Trinamool Congress, underscores the magnitude of financial stakes involved. The arithmetic of electoral spending paints a vivid picture, with parties vying for resources to secure electoral success. Yet, beyond the individual figures lies a broader narrative of economic impact. The influx of billions into the electoral arena has ripple effects, from price fluctuations to the circulation of black money. The surge in disposable income and cash transactions presents challenges for economic policymakers, wary of inflationary pressures and illicit financial practices.

In light of these challenges, calls for regulatory reform and fiscal prudence resonate louder than ever. The need for greater transparency in political financing and accountability in expenditure allocation cannot be overstated. As India navigates the complexities of its democratic process, ensuring integrity and fairness in electoral practices remains paramount. As the world's largest democracy, India's electoral extravagance carries global implications. The Economist's acknowledgment of its surpassing even the US presidential election in cost underscores its significance on the world stage. Yet, amidst the grandeur and spectacle, it's imperative to remember the underlying socioeconomic realities and the imperative for responsible governance. India's journey towards democratic renewal must be accompanied by a commitment to financial probity and ethical conduct. The forthcoming Lok Sabha elections represent not only a test of political prowess but also a pivotal moment for redefining the contours of electoral finance.

## Arvind Kejriwal's arrest poses a big threat to parliamentary democracy in India

By: P. Sudhir

The arrest and detention of Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of Delhi, by the Enforcement Directorate is a turning point in the steady erosion of democracy in India. This brazen assault on the democratic system is a first in many respects. It is the first time a sitting chief minister whose party commands more than four-fifth majority in the assembly has been arrested, for the first time the head of a national political party has been put behind bars. And this is the very first time that such an arrest has been affected after the announcement of the Lok Sabha election and the model code of conduct has come into force.

The ruling party is out to finish off the opposition using an array of instruments of the State. The central agencies are being used to target key opposition leaders. Prior to Kejriwal's arrest, the chief minister of Jharkhand Hemant Soren was detained by the ED just after he resigned from the chief ministership. Earlier the deputy chief minister of Delhi, Manish Sisodia was arrested and spent nearly a year in jail. There are scores of further opposition leaders and ministers in all non-BJP state governments who are either in jail or facing investigations by the central agencies. The central agencies have also been illegally used to threaten opposition leaders and legislators to engineer their defection to the BJP.

The notorious role of the ED has been exposed after the details of the electoral bond scheme were made public. In the liquor policy case in which Kejriwal has been implicated, the ED had arrested the managing director of a pharmaceutical company, Aurbindo Pharma, Sarath Chandra Reddy, whose company donated ₹ 5 crore through electoral bond to the BJP, five days after his arrest in November 2022. Subsequently, he got bail and turned approver and four months later, ₹ 25 crore was paid to the BJP through bonds. This shows how the cases against Kejriwal and AAP leaders have been manufactured. Apart from coercive action by the ED and the CBI, opposition parties are facing attacks by the Income Tax department on

their finances. The main opposition party, the Congress, has faced penal action and been taxed to the tune of ₹ 135 crores for the financial year 2018-19. Its bank accounts were frozen before the IT department recovered this amount. Similar action is being taken against other parties too. For instance, the CPI(M) had its tax exemption withdrawn for the year 2016-17 and ordered to pay a tax of ₹ 15.59 crore for the mere technical lapse of not listing one of the hundreds of bank accounts that the Party has all over the country. The CPI(M) went to the Delhi High Court against this unwarranted action and the matter is sub-judice at the moment.

After having choked off legal funding to the opposition parties through the electoral bond scheme and monopolising corporate donations through electoral trusts, the Modi government is now bent upon strangulating the opposition financially through punitive taxation measures.

The Kejriwal arrest comes after the systematic onslaught on the powers of the elected government in Delhi. Just like the opposition parties, state governments run by the opposition are under attack through assaults on the federal principle.

It is in this context that the Kejriwal arrest must be seen as part of the existential threat to parliamentary democracy in India. There are no pretensions left, the veil is off. A tyrannical regime has established an electoral autocracy. The Election Commission is under the thumb of the executive and the higher judiciary is refusing to confront a rampaging government.

There is no other way but for the secular and democratic forces to go to the people and mobilise them against the threat to their democracy and citizens' rights. The mass protests must not be centered in Delhi alone, where a mass rally by the INDIA bloc is being organised on March 31, but must spread throughout the country. Kerala had shown the way where mass demonstrations and rallies have been held all across the state. It is essential that popular protests and mass campaigns take place. It is such public mobilisation that will certainly affect the BJP adversely in the elections. (IPA Service)

## A working paper on "Study on violation of rights of private sector employees in State of Nagaland"

In light of the escalating instances of infringements upon the rights of employees within Nagaland's burgeoning private sector, our attention has been drawn to 234 cases wherein the rights of employees engaged in various occupations such as Hotel staff, Shop staff, Workshop staff, School teachers, Media employees, College teachers, Construction labourers, Daily wage earners and NGO workers/employees have been compromised. In the sphere of employment, the relationship between an employer and an employee is governed by a complex interplay of statutory provisions, corporate policies, and ethical precepts. Central to this discourse is the contentious issue surrounding the deduction of an employee's remuneration for instances of tardiness that is late coming (Late arrival at workplace) as we found this as one of the common "allegations" against employees in Nagaland. Hence, our discovery made us launch a focal inquiry pertaining to the legal prerogative of an employer to effectuate deductions from an employee's salary owing to late arrival, and if so, the requisite conditions and limitations governing such actions.

It is firmly established in jurisprudence that an employer possesses the legal prerogative to promulgate and enforce rules pertaining to punctuality and attendance within the workplace. Nonetheless, the exercise of this authority must adhere scrupulously to established legal norms and principles of fairness. Consequently, an employer is empowered to deduct an employee's salary for tardiness, provided that such deductions are commensurate with the duration of the lateness and are executed in strict conformity with applicable statutory provisions and judicial precedents.

For instance, in the event that an employee is late by one hour in reporting to work, the employer is within their rights to deduct from the employee's salary an amount commensurate with the duration of said tardiness. Any deduction surpassing the actual period of absence would run afoul of the principles of proportionality and equity. It is imperative to underscore that deductions must be limited to the precise duration of the employee's absenteeism.

A frequently encountered misinterpretation observed in certain organizations involves the deduction of half-day salary in instances where an employee arrives one or more hours late. It is imperative to note that such a policy lacks legal foundation and constitutes a clear infringement upon the principles of justice codified within the law. Employees subjected to these arbitrary deductions possess the right to pursue legal recourse to challenge these unjust practices.

It is incumbent upon companies/business entities to acknowledge that their policies must conform to legal statutes and constitutional principles, rather than being solely guided by subjective moral considerations/moral compass. Instances wherein organizations arbitrarily deduct a full day's salary for minor tardiness, ranging from 5 to 30 minutes to one or more hours, demonstrate a disregard for legal standards. In such circumstances, employees are advised to pursue legal recourse to rectify the financial losses suffered as a result of unlawful deductions.

Employees who have been unfairly subjected to deductions have legal avenues available for seeking redress. They possess the

right to lodge complaints with the Labour Department, an administrative body tasked with overseeing matters pertaining to employment and ensuring adherence to labour legislation. Furthermore, employees retain the option to initiate legal proceedings in civil courts (by initiating recovery suits) to pursue remedies for damages incurred as a consequence of unlawful practices perpetrated by their employers.

Moreover, mental harassment in the form of late wages, no wages, or even equal pay for equal work or illegal deductions in salary can be easily claimed. Redressal in such cases can be granted by the Labour Court if the victim approaches the Labour Court/Industrial Tribunal under the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947 or the Payment of Wages Act, 1936. Importantly, all those workers/employees not governed by the Industrial Disputes Act, 1936 can very well move to the Civil Court jurisdiction.

Also, in addition, various sections of Indian Penal code can

also be used to address mental harassment perpetrated by employers against employees. For instance, Section 503 and Section 504 deal with criminal intimidation and intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace, respectively. We came across a case where employers (Partnership Firm) have regularly used abusive language against a certain employee which even led the concerned person to develop suicidal tendency (Suicidal tendency is actually very rare in Naga society).

An inherent challenge in penalizing late attendance lies in the failure to differentiate between remuneration (salary) and punitive measures (penalty/fine). Remuneration, constituting payment for services rendered by an employee, contrasts with fines, which serve as sanctions for infractions or breaches of regulations. Policies that equate tardiness with salary deductions blur the distinction between remuneration and penalties, thus detracting from the fundamental principle of compensating workers/employees for their labour.

In a hypothetical scenario, let us consider a situation wherein a company establishes a late attendance policy wherein tardiness exceeding the fourth instance results in the forfeiture/deduction of an entire day's compensation. Such a stringent measure fails to adhere to principles of proportionality and fairness. Depriving an employee of their full day's compensation for tardiness (when in-fact employees go on performing all of their tasks throughout the day at work) is excessively severe and lacks justifiable rationale hence deserved to be examined in the eyes of Law.

Moreover, it must be noted that employees who arrive late, within a range of 5 to 15, or at most 20/30 minutes to one hour, are nonetheless capable of fulfilling their contractual obligations and contributing to the organizational objectives with due diligence. Despite occasional instances of punctuality lapses, these employees consistently discharge their assigned duties. This raises the pertinent inquiry: What recompense do these diligent employees receive for their exertions on days when they are

department as well as the Management. However, while employees demonstrate dedication, it remains imperative for employers to acknowledge and value their contributions appropriately. This entails the implementation of fair and equitable policies that prioritize the principles of justice and respect for labour rights. By fostering a work environment that recognizes and rewards employee efforts, employers can cultivate loyalty, motivation, and productivity among their workforce, thereby fostering a harmonious and thriving workplace culture.

In districts such as Dimapur, Kohima, and Chumukedima, the proliferation of private enterprises is evident. Our comprehensive research spanning the past two years has unveiled a concerning reality regarding the observance of rights among private employees, encompassing establishments such as hotels, shops, restaurants, spas, schools, beauty parlors, and colleges. Concurrently, our findings have revealed a strong resolve among the contemporary educated workforce to enhance their understanding of their legal and constitutional rights and entitlements. They are ready to undertake necessary measures aimed at preserving and safeguarding the inherent freedoms and dignity assured by the Constitution of India.

Tardiness represents one among several workplace issues that merit careful examination. Throughout our research, we have identified numerous instances where employers have exploited such matters to the detriment of their employees. While egregious acts of misconduct such as divulging proprietary business information, engaging in sexual impropriety, watching/exhibiting/sharing pornographic material at workplace, consumption of Alcohol/Drugs/Narcotic substance at workplace, misappropriating funds, or committing criminal breaches of trust may warrant severe disciplinary actions in accordance with the law, the treatment of tardiness cases is distinct.

In situations where an employee facing disciplinary action

or termination due to tardiness continues to fulfill their work duties for the entirety of the workday before departing, it becomes evident that the severity of the consequences imposed is disproportionate to the infraction committed.

The issue of deducting an employee's salary for tardiness necessitates a careful examination of legal principles, ethical considerations, and practical implications. While employers have the authority to enforce rules regarding punctuality, they must do so in a manner that is proportionate, fair, and consistent with legal requirements.

Employees, on their part, have the right to challenge arbitrary deductions through legal avenues to safeguard their rights and interests in the workplace. Ultimately, fostering a work environment characterized by fairness, respect, and mutual understanding is essential for promoting productivity and employee well-being.

Moreover, the issue of deducting an employee's salary for tardiness cannot be viewed in isolation; rather, it must be contextualized within the broader framework of employee rights and protections against exploitation within the private sector. Exploitation of private sector employees represents a grave concern, encompassing various forms of misconduct by employers aimed at deriving undue benefits at the expense of their workers' rights and well-being. Legal frameworks worldwide seek to address and prevent such exploitation through a range of provisions and regulations tailored to safeguard employee rights, thereby ensuring fair treatment and just compensation for all workers within the private sector.

One common aspect of legal protections for employees is the establishment of minimum wage rates, which serve to guarantee a baseline level of compensation for labour and prevent exploitation through substandard pay. Employers who pay below the mandated minimum wage or circumvent statutory entitlements exploit their employees' vulnerability for unjust gain. Moreover, laws often limit the number of hours an employee can work per week without receiving overtime pay, aiming to prevent exploitation when employers compel their workers to toil excessively without proper compensation, contravening labor regulations and disregarding employees' well-being.

Wage theft, another form of exploitation, occurs when employers illegally withhold or fail to pay salary/wages owed to their employees, taking various forms such as non-payment for work performed unauthorized deductions, or misclassification of workers to evade providing rightful benefits or protections. Additionally, ensuring safe working conditions is a fundamental responsibility of employers governed by occupational health and safety regulations, with exploitation arising when employers flout these regulations, subjecting employees to hazardous environments jeopardizing their physical or mental health.

Discrimination and harassment, prohibited by law, represent forms of exploitation when employers engage in discriminatory practices such as pay disparities, wrongful termination, or fostering a hostile work environment through systemic harassment based on protected characteristics. Moreover, contractual violations constitute exploitation when employers

breach the terms and conditions outlined in employment contracts (or add conditions without taking expressed/written consent from employee or by way of systematic coercion-for e.g. threat of termination), including renegeing on promised benefits, unilaterally altering terms without employee consent, or retaliating against whistleblowers exposing illegal/unlawful activities or safety concerns at workplace.

In our research we found that, in Nagaland, as in other regions of India, private sector employees encounter similar challenges related to exploitation, including non-payment or delayed payment of wages, violation of minimum wage standards, overtime violations, lack of social security benefits, unsafe working conditions, discrimination, harassment, contractual breaches, and insufficient legal awareness among employees. To address these issues effectively, robust legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms are essential.

In Nagaland, employees can seek recourse by reporting grievances to the Nagaland Labour Department, which oversees labour law enforcement and dispute resolution. Furthermore, the active involvement of labour unions, civil society organizations, and public spirited individuals is crucial in advocating for employee rights and providing support to those facing exploitation within the private sector. By upholding and strengthening these legal protections, societies can strive towards fostering fair and equitable workplaces where employees are treated with dignity and respect.

It is high time residents of Nagaland, especially employees in the private sector, should make themselves aware of legal provisions which can safeguard their life and rights. Knowledge of Law is an empowerment so that none can fool an individual and take them for a ride. In a rapidly evolving world where legal intricacies can often determine the course of one's life, understanding one's rights and obligations under the law is paramount. By familiarizing themselves with legal provisions, residents of Nagaland can equip themselves with the tools necessary to navigate various situations and protect their interests.

Whether it pertains to civil matters, matrimonial rights, employment rights, consumer protection or criminal justice, having a basic understanding of the law empowers individuals to assert their rights and seek redressal when necessary. Moreover, an informed citizenry serves as a bulwark against exploitation and injustice, fostering a society founded on principles of fairness and equality before the law. Therefore, it is incumbent upon residents of Nagaland to invest in legal literacy and education, thereby enhancing their ability to assert their rights and contribute to the overall welfare and development of the state. (Dr. Rilipong Thonger is the Bureau Chief, Longkhim-Chare region, Project Constitutional Justice, Legal Advisor USSC, International Human Rights Member, Adekking I. Sangtam is the Vice President, United Sangtam Students Conference (USSC), Naset Chollen is a Senior Policy Researcher & Analyst, Project Constitutional Justice, Tuensang HQ, Liase Sangtam is the Bureau Chief, Kiphire District, Project Constitutional Justice, Adv. (Dr) Veersingh Rathod is a Senior Legal Advisor, New Delhi and Adv. Nishant Jaiswal is a Legal Advisor, Rajasthan High Court, Jaipur)

## Deepening clouds of water crisis

By: Ajay Pratap Tiwari

Water scarcity has emerged as a pressing global issue, posing significant challenges to human health, agriculture, industry, and the environment. The exponential growth of population, coupled with unsustainable consumption patterns and climate change, has exacerbated the situation, leading to a steady decline in freshwater resources worldwide. One of the primary causes of water scarcity is the mismanagement of water resources. In many regions, inefficient irrigation techniques and inadequate infrastructure result in substantial water losses during transportation and distribution. Furthermore, pollution from industrial discharge, agricultural runoff, and untreated sewage contaminates water bodies, rendering them unfit for consumption. These factors not only diminish the availability of clean water but also degrade existing supplies, exacerbating the crisis. Climate change further intensifies water scarcity by altering precipitation patterns and exacerbating drought conditions in many regions. Prolonged droughts lead to diminished surface water sources, reduced groundwater recharge, and depletion of aquifers. Additionally, rising temperatures accelerate evaporation rates, exacerbating water stress in already arid regions. The increasing frequency and sever-

ity of extreme weather events, such as floods and storms, also disrupt water supply systems; causing further strain on already limited resources. The consequences of water scarcity are far-reaching and multifaceted. In regions facing acute water shortages, communities struggle to access safe drinking water, leading to health issues and sanitation challenges. Agricultural productivity declines as farmers lack the water necessary for irrigation, jeopardizing food security and livelihoods. Industries reliant on water for manufacturing processes face operational disruptions, hindering economic growth and development.

Moreover, ecosystems suffer as reduced water availability threatens biodiversity and disrupts ecological balance. Addressing the crisis of water scarcity requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach. Firstly, there is a need for improved water governance and management practices. Governments must prioritize investments in water infrastructure, including reservoirs, pipelines, and treatment plants, to ensure reliable access to clean water for all citizens. Additionally, promoting water conservation measures, such as rainwater harvesting, efficient irrigation techniques, and public awareness campaigns, can help reduce wastage and optimize water usage. Furthermore, sustainable agricultural practices, such as crop diversification and precision irrigation, can enhance water efficiency in

farming while minimizing environmental impact. Encouraging industries to adopt water-saving technologies and implement responsible wastewater management practices is also crucial in mitigating water scarcity.

International cooperation and collaboration are essential in addressing transboundary water issues and promoting equitable distribution of shared water resources. Diplomatic efforts and treaties can facilitate dialogue and negotiation among countries sharing river basins, fostering cooperation rather than conflict. Individuals also play a vital role in mitigating water scarcity through simple yet impactful actions such as reducing water consumption, fixing leaks, and avoiding water wastage. Education and awareness campaigns can empower communities to adopt sustainable water practices and foster a culture of conservation. In conclusion, water scarcity poses a significant threat to global development, human well-being, and environmental sustainability. Addressing this complex issue requires concerted efforts at the local, national, and international levels, involving governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals alike. By implementing proactive measures to manage water resources wisely, promote conservation, and foster cooperation, we can work towards a future where access to clean and safe water is a fundamental human right for all.



# The incalculable value of wildlife

By: Ranjan K Baruah

We are aware of wild lives and it does not mean only animals but plants and many other living species. Wildlife refers to undomesticated animal species, but has come to include all organisms that grow or live wild in an area without being introduced by humans. Wildlife can be found in all ecosystems like forests, deserts, plains, grasslands, woodlands, etc.

We should know that 1 in 5 people around the world rely on wild species for income and food, while 2.4 billion people depend on wood fuel for cooking. It seems surprising, but cacti, seaweeds, giraffes, parrots, and

oak trees are groups of species endangered. Currently there are one million species under threat. Wild species are under threat around the world in spite of people everywhere relying on wildlife and biodiversity-based resources to meet their needs - from food, to fuel, medicines, housing, and clothing.

World Wildlife Day (WWD) which observed on 3rd March is an opportunity to celebrate the many beautiful and varied forms of wild fauna and flora and to raise awareness of the multitude of benefits that their conservation provides to people. At the same time, the Day reminds us of the urgent need to step up the fight against wildlife crime and human-induced reduction of



species, which have wide-ranging economic, environmental and social impacts.

WWD 2024 focuses on digital innovation and emphasizes how digital conservation technologies and services can drive wildlife conservation, sustainable and

legal wildlife trade, and human-wildlife coexistence. This year's theme, "Connecting People and Planet: Exploring Digital Innovation in Wildlife Conservation", recognizes the impact of digital interventions on ecosystems and communities in an increasingly

connected world.

While technological advancements have significantly improved various aspects of wildlife conservation, including research, communication, tracking, and DNA analysis, challenges such as uneven access, environmental pollution, and unsustainable technology use impede achieving universal digital inclusion by 2030. WWD 2024 serves as a platform for cross-generational exchange and youth empowerment.

It's high time that we focus on wildlife conservation. This also brings more career opportunities for young people who are committed to work for nature. There are different job avenues or opportunities for self employment

related to wildlife conversation. One may choose to study science stream after senior secondary and choose different courses and subjects to get engaged in the field of wild life.

One of the options is studying Veterinary Science and becoming a doctor and contributing to the field of wildlife safety. Veterinary science is a branch of medical science that deals with the diagnosis and treating of injured animals. Students will focus on the study of animal immunology and infectious diseases that occur to the animals. Job options include Animal Doctor, Animal Anatomist, Animal Pathologist, Animal Physiologist, Animal Surgeon, etc.

Apart from studying Veteri-

nary Science, aspirants may also choose life sciences like zoology, botany, etc. Students who are interested in animals may choose zoology and people who have interest in plants may choose botany but both are important when it comes to wildlife and their safety or protection by different means. There are specific bachelor and masters degree courses related to Wildlife Sciences. There are many other courses related to wildlife conservation or management. *(The author is the Advisor of Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department of Bodoland Territorial Region, Kokrajhar and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjn@gmail.com)*

## Cotton University Faculty Recruitment 2024 – 167 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 02/04/2024.

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

### 1. Professor

No of posts: 21 posts

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

### 2. Associate Professor

No of posts: 46 posts

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

### 3. Assistant Professor

No of posts: 100 posts

Scale of Pay: ₹ 57,700 to ₹ 1,82,400

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

### Application Fee:

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

### How to Apply for Cotton University Recruitment?

#### The candidate must

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

(ii) Send hard copy of the filled in application form along with the photocopies of the relevant documents to "The Registrar, Cotton University, Panbazar, Guwahati-781001, India".

The candidates must produce the original certificates/documents/testimonials at the time of interview.

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

### Important Dates of Cotton University Recruitment 2024

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

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

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

Last Date: 05/04/2024.

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

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

No of posts: 16 posts

### Category-wise vacancy:

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

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

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

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

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

### Other Criteria of Dairy Development Recruitment

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

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

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

### Residency:

(i) The candidate must be a permanent resident of Assam.

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

### Application Fee:

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

### Important Dates of Dairy Development Vacancy 2024

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

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

## Assam Secretariat Recruitment 2024 – 7 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 09/04/2024.

Assam Legislative Assembly Secretariat has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 7 Additional Secretary, Protocol Officer, Language Reporter, Assistant Librarian, and Stenographer Posts in Assam Legislative Assembly Secretariat. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

### 1. Additional Secretary

No of posts: 1 (UR)

### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# Minimum 7 years of experience as Joint Secretary or equivalent in any Govt. Department of Assam.

# Must have sound knowledge in Constitutional Law and Parliamentary Practice & Procedure.

# Person possessing Degree of Bachelor of Law from any recognized University shall be given preference.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 50 years and more than 55 (fifty-five) years of age at the time of application.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 30000 -110000 + GP- 17500 P.M. in Pay Band - 4 and other admissible allowances.

### 2. Protocol Officer

No of posts: 1 (UR)

### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# The Candidate must possess Master Degree in any discipline with minimum 60% marks from any recognized University.

# The candidate must have 4 years of working experience in any Govt./Semi Govt. Office/Organization.

# The candidate having degree in Tourism & Hospitality Management will be given preference.

# The candidate must have good command over English, Assamese & Hindi language.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 35 years and more than 40 (forty) years of age at the time of application.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 30000-110000/- + GP- 14500 P.M. in Pay Band - 4 and other admissible allowances.

### 3. Language Reporter (Grade-II)

No of posts: 2 (UR)

### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# The candidate should possess Bachelor Degree in Arts/Science/Commerce from any recognized University.

# No candidate shall be eligible to sit for Speed Test at 100 w.p.m. in Assamese unless the candidate have Certificate of Stenography in Assamese with 80 w.p.m. from any Institute recognized by the Govt. of Assam.

# The candidate must have adequate knowledge of Computer application with DTP in Assamese.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 21 years and more than 38 (thirty eight) years of age at the time of application.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 22000-97000 + GP- 9400 P.M. in Pay Band - 3 and other admissible allowances.

### 4. Assistant Librarian

No of posts: 1 (UR)

### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# The candidate must possess Bachelor Degree in Library Science from any recognized University.

# The candidate must have 5 (five) years of experience dealing with Library Management in reputed Institution/ Organization/Govt. Office and have practical knowledge in digital Library.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 21 years and more than 38 (thirty eight) years of age at the time of application.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 14000-70000+GP-8700 P.M. in Pay Band - 2 and other admissible allowances

### 5. Stenographer Grade-III (English)

No of posts: 2 (UR-1, STP-1)

### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# The candidate should possess Bachelor Degree in Arts/Science/Commerce from any recognized University.

# No candidate shall be eligible to sit for Speed Test at 80 w.p.m. in English unless the candidate have Certificate in Stenography from ITI in Assam or any other Institute recognized by Govt. of Assam/ Govt. of India.

# The candidate must have adequate knowledge of Computer Application and good command over English Language.

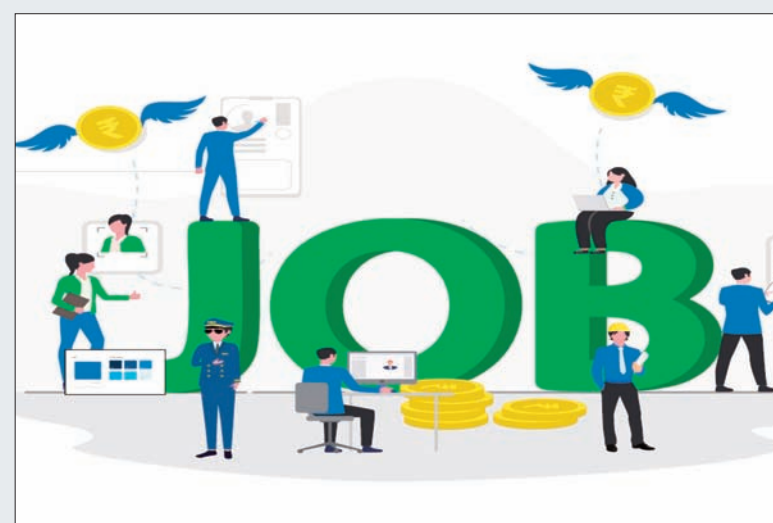
**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 21 years and more than 38 (thirty eight) years of age at the time of application where the upper age limit is relaxable by 5 years for ST (P) candidates i.e. upto 43 years.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 14000-70000+GP-8700 P.M. in Pay Band - 2 and other admissible allowances

### Important Dates of Assam Secretariat Recruitment 2024

# Starting date of submission of application: 13th March 2024

# Last date of submission of application: 9th April, 2024



## APSC Recruitment 2024 – 17 Computer Operator Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 13/04/2024.

Assam Public Service Commission has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 17 Computer Operator Posts in the office of Assam Public Service Commission. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

**Name of post:** Computer Operator

No of posts: 17 posts

### Category-wise vacancy:

# UR: 8  
# OBC/ MOBC: 5  
# SC: 1  
# STP: 2  
# STH: 1

**Name of organisation:** Assam Public Service Commission

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 14,000 - to 60,500 - GP: ₹ 6,200

**Age Limit:** The candidates should not be less than 18 years of age and not more than 40 years of age as on 01/01/2024.

**Educational Qualification:** A candidate must have Higher Secondary or Class XII passed from any Government recognized Board/Council.

### Other Criteria of APSC Recruitment

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

### Residency:

(i) The candidate must be a permanent resident of Assam.

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

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

# SC: 5 years  
# ST: 5 years  
# OBC/ MOBC: 3 years  
# PwBD: 10 years  
# For more details pl read the official notification/s.

**Employment Exchange Registration:** Candidates must be registered themselves in any of the employment exchanges of Assam.

**Small Family Norms:** The candidates have to submit a declaration regarding "The Small Family Norms" in Form-A at the time of applying for the post.

### Computer Proficiency:

a) Candidates must have good working knowledge of office productivity software tools (independent of any operating system i.e. MS Windows, Linux, Mac etc.) such as —

- Word Processor,
- Spreadsheet,
- Presentation Graphics,
- Content of Database,
- Internet and
- E-Mail.

b) Candidates must possess a minimum 6 (six) months completed diploma/ certificate in computer proficiency, from a Govt. of Assam recognized institution (no breaks in qualification admissible) and must have computing knowledge in Assamese and English Language.

**Application Fee:** Category-wise application fee is as under.

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

### Important Dates of APSC Recruitment 2024

# Starting date of submission of online application: 14th March 2024

# Last date of submission of online application: 13th April 2024



'The State is deeply grateful for the federal funds and support,' Wes Moore said at an evening news conference

# US President Joe Biden approves \$60mn aid; Governor Wes Moore warns of 'very long road ahead' for recovery

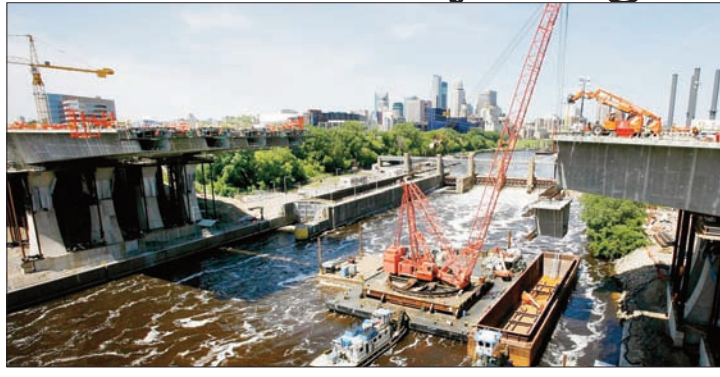
**BALTIMORE, March 29:** BALTIMORE - Maryland Gov. Wes Moore warned on Thursday of a "very long road ahead" to recover from the loss of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge as the Biden administration approved \$60 million in immediate federal aid after the deadly collapse.

Meanwhile the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was moving the largest crane on the Eastern Seaboard to help remove the wreckage of the bridge, Moore said, so work to clear the channel and reopen the key shipping route can begin. The machine, which can lift up to 1,000 tons, was expected to arrive on Thursday evening, and U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen said a second crane with a 400-ton capacity could arrive Saturday.

The state is "deeply grateful" for the federal funds and support, Moore said at an evening news conference. Moore promised Thursday that "the best minds in the world" were working on plans to clear the debris, move the cargo ship that rammed into the bridge from the channel, recover the bodies of the four remaining workers presumed dead and investigate what went wrong.

"Government is working hand in hand with industry to investigate the area, including the wreck, and remove the ship," said Moore, a Democrat, who said the quick aid is needed to "lay the foundation for a rapid recovery." President Joe Biden has pledged the federal government would pay the full cost of rebuilding the bridge.

"This work is not going to take hours. This work is not going to take days. This work is not going to take weeks," Moore said. "We have a very



long road ahead of us."

Van Hollen said 32 members of the Army Corps of Engineers are surveying the scene of the collapse and 38 Navy contractors are working on the salvage operation.

The devastation left behind after the powerless cargo ship struck a support pillar early on Tuesday is extensive. Divers recovered the bodies of two men from a pickup truck in the Patapsco River near the bridge's middle span on Wednesday, but officials said they have to start clearing the wreckage before anyone could reach the bodies of four other missing workers.

State police have said that based on sonar scans, the vehicles appear to be encased in a "superstructure" of concrete and other debris.

National Transportation Safety Board officials boarded the ship, the Dali, to recover information from its electronics and paperwork and to interview the captain and crew members. Investigators shared a preliminary timeline of events before the crash, which federal and state officials have said appeared to be an accident.

land Transportation Authority were honored for their actions in halting bridge traffic and preventing further loss of life. The three said in a statement that they were "proud to carry out our duties as officers of this state to save the lives that we could."

The Dali, which is managed by Synergy Marine Group, was headed from Baltimore to Sri Lanka. It is owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd. and was chartered by Danish shipping giant Maersk.

Synergy extended sympathies to the victims' families in a statement early on Thursday.

"We deeply regret this incident and the problems it has caused for the people of Baltimore and the region's economy that relies on this vitally important port," Synergy said, noting that it would continue to cooperate with investigators.

Scott Cowan, president of the International Longshoremen's Association Local 333, said the union is scrambling to help its roughly 2,400 members whose jobs are at risk of drying up until shipping can resume in the Port of Baltimore.

"If there's no ships, there's no work," he said. "We're doing everything we can."

The huge vessel, nearly as long as the Eiffel Tower is tall, was carrying nearly 4,700 shipping containers, 56 of them with hazardous materials inside. Thirteen of those were destroyed, officials said. However, industrial hygienists who evaluated the contents identified them as perfumes and soaps, according to the Key Bridge Joint Information Center.

"There was no immediate threat to the environment," the center said.

Booms were placed to prevent any spreading, and state environmental officials were sampling the water.

At the moment there are also cargo containers hanging dangerously off the side of the ship, Gilsreath said, adding, "We're trying to keep our first responders ... as safe as possible."

Divers sent to work beneath the bridge debris and container ship will encounter challenging conditions, including limited visibility and moving currents, according to officials and expert observers.

"Debris can be dangerous, especially when you can't see what's right in front of you," said Donald Gibbons, an instructor with the Eastern Atlantic States Carpenters Technical Centers.

The sudden loss of a highway that carries 30,000 vehicles a day and the port disruption will affect not only thousands of dockworkers and commuters but also U.S. consumers, who are likely to feel the impact of shipping delays.

The governors of New York and New Jersey offered to take on cargo shipments that have been disrupted, to try to minimize supply chain problems.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who met Thursday with supply chain officials, has said the Biden administration was focused on reopening the port and rebuilding the bridge, but he did not put a timeline on those efforts.

From 1960 to 2015, there were 35 major bridge collapses worldwide due to ship or barge collisions, according to the World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure. (AP)

# Russia launches barrage of 99 drones and missiles on Ukraine's energy system: Officials

**KYIV, March 29:** Moscow launched a large-scale attack on Ukraine's energy infrastructure on Friday, with a mass barrage of 99 drones and missiles hitting regions across the country, Ukraine's armed forces said.

Air raid warnings across the country continued through the night as the strike targeted 10 separate regions, Ukraine's Interior Minister, Ihor Klymenko, said in a statement on Telegram. The Ukrainian air force reported that 60 Shahed drones and 39 missiles of varying types were seen across the country, of which 58 drones and 26 missiles were ultimately shot down by air defenses.

Ukraine's state-owned grid operator, Ukrenergo, said that the attack deliberately targeted energy infrastructure, including thermal and hydroelectric power plants across central and western regions. DTEK, Ukraine's largest private electricity operator, also said Friday that three of its thermal power plants had been damaged in the attack. Elsewhere, five people were wounded during the attack in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region, said local governor Serhii Lysak. The injured included a 5-year-old girl. The bombardment in the west of Ukraine caused the Polish Armed Forces to scramble its own aircraft, the country's operational command said on social media.

Putin says he won't start a war with NATO. But Western bases hosting Ukraine F-16s would be targets. Last week Warsaw demanded an explanation from Moscow, after one of its missiles strayed briefly into Polish airspace during a major missile attack on Ukraine, prompting the NATO member to activate F-16 fighter jets. Romania's defense ministry also said on Friday that an investigation has been launched after fragments that appear to be from a drone were identified on its territory on Thursday evening in an agricultural area of Braila county, close to the border with Ukraine. It did not provide additional details, although since the start of the full-scale invasion of neighboring Ukraine, NATO member Romania has confirmed drone fragments on its territory on several occasions. (AP)



## Pak Finance Min says meeting with IMF scheduled for April 14-15

**KARACHI, March 29:** Pakistan's Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Friday said the government will hold a meeting with the IMF on April 14 and 15 in Washington to discuss the features of the new bailout programme which the cash-strapped country is seeking, according to a media report.

The minister for finance and revenue in the Shehbaz Sharif government, while addressing journalists during his visit to the Pakistan Stock Exchange here, reiterated that the government plans to enter a major programme with the International Monetary Fund which will ensure microeconomic stability, Geo News reported.

Aurangzeb said the features of the new programme would be discussed during the meeting, while detailed talks would be held in Pakistan, the report said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz on March 21 signalled that the new IMF programme was likely to be continued for three years.

Shehbaz, while addressing a session of the Special Investment Facilitation Council's apex committee attended by civil-military leadership, said the new tranche of loan was likely to be received from the IMF in a few days.

"However, we would need another programme," he added.

He also said the country's current account was "better" and the exchange rate was also "stable", the report said.

Aurangzeb said the inflation rate has also decreased and credited the accomplishments to the stand-by arrangement (SBA) agreement during PM Shehbaz's last tenure.

"The caretaker government did better work to restore the economy. The economy will stabilise soon owing to better economic policies," the minister was quoted as saying. (PTI)

# Sri Lanka put on high alert; security beefed up around churches having Good Friday service: Police

**COLOMBO, March 29:** Sri Lanka was put on high alert on Friday and security beefed up in major cities across the country, with special surveillance around the Churches having Good Friday services, according to a senior police official.

Police spokesman Nihal Thaldudwa said that over that 6,000 police personnel, over

3,000 military soldiers and over 400 elite special task force members have been deployed across the country on the occasion of Good Friday.

"We have identified 2,268 churches having Good Friday services to provide special security," Thaldudwa said.

Police have also set up a special hotline to report any suspicious movements near

the churches. The police said they were taking all precautions in view of the fifth anniversary of the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings which killed 270 people, including 11 Indians.

Meanwhile, the Magistrates Court in central Colombo's Maligawatta has issued a summons to former president Maithripala Sirisena to appear before the court on April 4 to record a statement.

This was following the police's CID reporting to court a statement recorded from Sirisena last week over his public comments that he was aware of who carried out the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. Sirisena as the president

then held the defense ministry and he was accused of inaction to prevent the attack despite the availability of prior intelligence.

Sirisena was ordered to pay 100 million rupees as compensation to the kith of the 2019 bomb attack victims.

A local jihadi group with links to ISIS was originally blamed for the attacks. (PTI)

# Haiti now needs up to 5,000 police to help tackle 'catastrophic' gang violence, UN expert says

**UNITED NATIONS, March 29:** Haiti now needs between 4,000 and 5,000 international police to help tackle "catastrophic" gang violence which is targeting key individuals and hospitals, schools, banks and other critical institutions, the U.N. rights expert for the conflict-racked Caribbean nation said on Thursday.

Last July, William O'Neill said Haiti needed between 1,000 and 2,000 international police trained to deal with gangs. Today, he said the situation is so much worse that double that number and more are needed to help the Haitian National Police regain control of security and curb human rights abuses.

O'Neill spoke at a news conference launching a U.N. Human Rights Office report he helped produce which called for immediate action to tackle the "cataclysmic" situation in Haiti where corruption, impunity and poor governance compounded by increasing gang violence have eroded the rule of law and brought state institutions "close to collapse."

The report, covering the five-month period ending in February, said gangs continue to recruit and abuse boys and girls, with some children being killed for trying to escape.

Gangs also continue to use sexual violence "to brutalize, punish and

control people," the report said, citing women raped during gang attacks in neighborhoods, "in many cases after seeing their husbands killed in front of them." In 2023, the number of people killed and injured as a result of gang violence increased significantly - with 4,451 killed and 1,668 injured, the report said. And up to March 22 this year, the numbers skyrocketed to 1,554 killed and 826 injured.

As a result of the escalating gang violence, so-called "self-defense brigades" have taken justice into their own hands, the report said, and "at least 528 cases of violence were reported in 2023 and a further 59 in 2024."

The human rights report reiterated the need for urgent deployment of a multinational security mission to help Haiti's police stop the violence and restore the rule of law. And it urged tighter national and international controls to stem the trafficking of weapons and ammunition to gangs and others - much of it from the United States.

O'Neill, who was appointed by the Geneva-based U.N. human rights chief, said the "alarming" targeting of key institutions and individuals began in the last four or five weeks - with 18 attacks on hospitals documented, attacks on schools including one set on fire three days ago, and one of Haiti's elite academic institutions set ablaze on Wednesday night. Gangs have also stormed Haiti's two biggest prisons.

In addition, he said, gangs have made two attempts to take control of the National Palace, and they are targeting human rights defenders, journalists and people they see as threats to their continuing control of territory. Another new element documented by the U.N. human rights team in Haiti, O'Neill said, is the use of children not only as messengers, lookouts, sex slaves and cooks, but young teenagers are now involved in frontline activities and attacks in numbers not seen before.

The closure of the airport and roads has also left about 1.4 million Haitians on the verge of famine. And

the number of people fleeing their homes has increased from 50,000 last July according to the U.N. International Organization for Migration to at least 362,000, "and I would say given the last three to four weeks, we're probably close to 400,000 if not over that," the U.N. envoy said.

O'Neill said re-establishing security is key, and getting the international security force on the ground in Haiti is critical and urgent.

Getting the transitional presidential council officially installed and active is also "crucial" and "absolutely vital," O'Neill said, expressing hope this could happen possibly next week. For one thing, Kenya's President William Ruto has said he won't deploy police to lead the multinational security operation until he has a Haitian counterpart, the U.N. expert said. O'Neill said the trust fund to finance the international police operation also desperately needs funds.

Haiti asked for an international force to combat gangs in October 2022, and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed for a force last July, he said.

"We're still waiting and every day lost means more people die, and more women and girls get raped, and more people flee their homes," O'Neill said. "So the sooner the better." (AP)

## A Filipino villager is nailed to a cross for the 35th time on Good Friday to pray for world peace

**MANILA, March 29:** A Filipino villager has been nailed to a wooden cross for the 35th time to re-enact Jesus Christ's suffering in a brutal Good Friday tradition he said he would devote to pray for peace in Ukraine, Gaza and the disputed South China Sea.

On Friday, over a hundred people watched on as 10 devotees were nailed to wooden crosses, among them Ruben Enaje, a 63-year-old carpenter and sign painter.

The real-life crucifixions have become an annual religious spectacle that draws tourists in three rural communities in Pampanga province, north of Manila.

The gory ritual resumed last year after a three-year pause due to the coronavirus pandemic. It has turned Enaje into a village celebrity for his role as the "Christ" in the Lenten reenactment of the Way of the Cross.

Ahead of the crucifixions, Enaje told The Associated Press by telephone on Thursday night that he has considered ending his annual religious penitence due to his age, but said he could not turn down requests from villagers for him to pray for sick relatives and all other kinds of malady.

The need for prayers has also deepened in an alarming period of wars and conflicts worldwide, he said. "If these wars worsen and spread, more people, especially the young and old, would be affected. These are innocent people who have totally nothing to do with these wars," Enaje said.

Despite the distance, the wars in

Ukraine and Gaza have helped send prices of oil, gas and food soaring elsewhere, including in the Philippines, making it harder for poor people to stretch their meagre income, he said.

Closer to home, the escalating territorial dispute between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea has sparked worries because it's obviously a lopsided conflict, Enaje said.

"China has many big ships. Can you imagine what they could do?" he asked.

"This is why I always pray for peace in the world," he said and added he would also seek relief for people in southern Philippine

provinces, which have been hit recently by flooding and earthquakes. In the 1980s, Enaje survived nearly unscathed when he accidentally fell from a three-story building, prompting him to undergo the crucifixion as thanksgiving for what he considered a miracle.

He extended the ritual after loved ones recovered from serious illnesses, one after another, and he landed more carpentry and sign-painting job contracts.

"Because my body is getting weaker, I can't tell ... if there will be a next one or if this is really the final time," Enaje said.

Among the crowd this year was Maciej Kruszewski, a tourist from Poland and a first-time audience member of the crucifixions.

"Here, we would like to just grasp what does it mean, Easter in completely different part of the world," said Kruszewski. (AP)



## Bus plunges off a bridge in SA, killing 45 people, 8-yr-old survives

**CAPE TOWN, March 29:** A bus carrying worshippers on a long-distance trip from Botswana to an Easter weekend church gathering in South Africa plunged off a bridge on a mountain pass on Thursday and burst into flames as it hit the rocky ground below, killing at least 45 people, authorities said.

The only survivor was an 8-year-old child who was receiving medical attention for serious injuries.

The Limpopo provincial government said the bus veered off the Mmamatlakala bridge in northern South Africa and plunged 50 meters (164 feet) into a ravine before bursting into flames.

Search operations were ongoing, the provincial government said, but many bodies were burned beyond recognition and trapped inside the vehicle, while others had been thrown from the bus.

The crash happened near the

town of Mokopane, which is about 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the South African capital, Pretoria.

Hours after the crash, smoke seeped from the mangled, burned wreck underneath the concrete bridge. Authorities said it appeared that the driver lost control and the bus ploughed into the barriers along the side of the bridge and then over the edge. The driver was one of the dead.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the victims appeared to be all from Botswana and had been on their way to the town of Moria in Limpopo for a popular Easter weekend pilgrimage that attracts hundreds of thousands of worshippers from South Africa and neighboring countries who follow the Zion Christian Church.

Ramaphosa had phoned Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi to offer his condolences and

said the South African government would do all it can to help, according to a statement from Ramaphosa's office.

Provincial authorities said the bus had a Botswana license plate.

South African Minister of Transport Sindiiso Chikunga was in Limpopo province for a road safety campaign and changed plans to visit the crash scene after hearing the "devastating news," the national Department of Transport said. She said there was an investigation underway into the cause of the crash and offered her condolences to the families of the victims.

The South African government often warns motorists to be cautious during the Easter holidays, which is a particularly busy and dangerous time for road travel.

More than 200 people died in road crashes during the Easter weekend last year. (AP)



# Amit Shah likely to campaign in Tripura for 2 days

**Shah to address meeting, rally, road show in Udaipur in Gumati district**

AGARTALA, March 29: Union home minister Amit Shah is likely to visit Tripura for two days from April 7 and will address a rally and hold a road show the next day as part of the BJP's campaign for its candidates in the two Lok Sabha seats in the northeastern state, a party leader said on Friday.

During his proposed visit, Shah is also expected to chair an organisational meeting of party leaders, he said.

"Amit Shah ji, who is scheduled to address a rally in Mizoram on April 7, is likely to arrive in Tripura on the same day. He will hold an organisational meeting, address a rally in Gumati district's Udaipur and a road show in Agartala," BJP state general secretary Amit Rakshit told PTI.

He said Tripura chief minister Manik Saha held a meeting with senior party leaders on Thursday night for Shah's visit to the state.

Elections to the Tripura West Lok Sabha constituency and by-poll to the Ramnagar assembly seat will be held on April 19, while the Tripura East parliamentary constituency will go to polls on April 26.



Rakshit said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, defence minister Rajnath Singh, Union tribal affairs minister Arjun Munda and party MP Hema Malini are likely to visit the northeastern state soon to join the party's campaign.

"We have already sent a wishlist for star campaigners to the party's central leader-

ship. We have started campaigns for the elections with chief minister Manik Saha leading us," he said.

The BJP has fielded Rajya Sabha MP Biplab Kumar Deb from the Tripura West Lok Sabha seat, while Kriti Devi Debbarman is contesting the Tripura East parliamentary constituency. (PTI)

# Aspirants with Imphal as exam centre can change it, Delhi HC told

NEW DELHI, March 29: The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has told the Delhi High Court that it will permit candidates from the hill districts of Manipur, who have opted for Imphal as their examination centre to change it and that the state government will facilitate their travel.

The commission said such aspirants can choose any of the centres in Aizawl in Mizoram, Kohima in Nagaland, Shillong in Meghalaya, Dispur and Jorhat in Assam, Kolkata in West Bengal and Delhi by making a request for change of examination centre between April 8 and 19 through an e-mail.

The statement came on a petition by Zomi Students Federation seeking setting up of examination centres in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi in the hill districts of Manipur for Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination, 2024 and Indian Forest Service (Preliminary) Examination, 2024.

The UPSC said that since the Manipur government has expressed its inability to open examination centres in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, it was not feasible to open and operate examination venues there for the UPSC examination.

"He (UPSC's counsel) assures that the Commission will permit the candidates from the hill districts of Manipur who have opted for Imphal as their ex-



amination centre to change their examination centre during the period 8th April, 2024 to 19th April, 2024 by making a request for change of examination centre at e-mail ID: uscsp-ups@nic.in," recorded a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora in an order passed on Thursday.

The court, in its order, also noted that the Manipur government has decided to extend financial assistance in the form of reimbursement of fare for conveyance, limited to the maximum of 2nd class sleeper railway fare rates or notified bus fare rate of the State, as well as for fooding and accommodation at the rate of Rs 1,000 per day for three days at the maximum.

In case of any need, the candidates from these districts can contact the Commission's toll-free helpline number

1800118711, added the court.

Closing the proceedings on the petition, the court "accepted" the statements and assurances given by the Commission as well as by the State of Manipur and said they would be held bound by the same.

Manipur plunged into violence in May 2023 over a high court order directing the state government to consider including the non-tribal Meitei community in the list of Scheduled Tribes.

This order led to rampant ethnic clashes. More than 160 people have been killed and several hundred injured since the ethnic violence first broke out in the state on May 3 when a "Tribal Solidarity March" was organised in the hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for scheduled tribe status. (PTI)

## Mizoram observes Good Friday with religious fervour

AIZWAL, March 29: Good Friday was observed and celebrated in all parts of Mizoram with religious fervour to mark and commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Good Friday observance began on Thursday evening with different local churches holding special services and administering holy communion (sacrament) to adhere to the commandment of Jesus, who instructed his disciples to do it just a night before his crucifixion.

Holy Communion or Lord's Supper symbolises the blood and flesh of Jesus Christ, which he sacrificed for humans.

It signifies the New Covenant, with Jesus Christ being the sacrificial lamb for humanity.

On Friday, all local churches of different Christian denominations, including Presbyterian and Baptist churches, held special church services and delivered sermons related to the crucifixion of Christ.

Most local churches organised con-

gregational singing or services, locally known as "Zaikhawm or Lengkhawm", to observe the day.

Zaikhawm is an integral part of the important days like Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Sunday for the Christian Mizos.

Respective Roman Catholic churches also organised mass and took out Good Friday processions in the streets, singing hymns and preaching the gospel about the sacrifice made by Jesus so that humans are redeemed from their sins and have eternal lives.

All government offices, educational institutions, commercial banks and private institutions were closed on Friday as the government declared a public holiday to mark the day.

Streets in Aizawl were deserted looks, with only a few vehicles plying on the roads.

Good Friday observance will be followed by the Easter Sunday celebrations on March 31 to commemorate the resurrection of Christ. (PTI)

## PM believes development impossible without financial empowerment: Tripura CM

AGARTALA, March 29: PM Narendra Modi strongly believes that the all-round development of Tripura will not be possible if people are not economically and socially empowered, chief minister Manik Saha said on Friday.

Addressing an election rally at Mandwai, which has a significant tribal population, in the West Tripura district, Saha said his government doesn't discriminate between tribal and non-tribal people of the state.

"PM Narendra Modi strongly believes that the all-round development of Tripura will not be possible if tribal and non-tribal people are not economically and socially empowered. His Act East Policy has brought a sea change in Tripura, especially in terms of connectivity," he said.

The Bru people who had been leading a "miserable life" for 23 years in relief camps have now been settled through a historic



agreement and it was only possible because of PM Modi, he said.

The Centre has sanctioned a ₹ 100-crore special package for tribal welfare, the CM said, adding that the BJP-led government has already sent a proposal to empower the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) by increasing its seats

from 30 to 50.

Maintaining that the government has given due attention to the welfare of the tribals, Saha said 12 tribal-majority blocks of the state have been identified as aspirational, and 10 per cent additional budgetary outlay is being made for them.

Saha said his government

doesn't discriminate between tribals and non-tribals regarding people's welfare.

"Altogether 1.32 lakh households got electricity connection, while 4.50 lakh houses have been allocated for the state under PM Awas, and out of this, construction of 3.90 lakh have already been completed. As many as 5.12 lakh families have enrolled under the Ayushman Bharat scheme," he said.

Saha said his government was also committed to the empowerment of women.

"Over 5 lakh women are engaged in self-help groups (SHGs). If women are empowered, automatically the economic prosperity of the state would be ensured," he said.

Saha appealed to the people to increase the vote share of the BJP-Tipra Motha-IPFT in the Lok Sabha election by at least 10 per cent. (PTI)

## Nagaland observes Good Friday

KOHIMA, March 29: Nagaland, a Christian majority state, observed Good Friday with churches holding special prayer services while faithful Catholic believers took out processions.

Special prayers seeking forgiveness for sins, and services were organised in churches to thank Jesus for sacrificing his life for mankind.

In the state capital of Kohima, the congregation of different Catholic churches took out processions from various locations to their respective churches while singing hymns and reading the rosary.

On the occasion, chief minister Neiphiu Rio said, "On Good Friday, we remember the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his unconditional love for us. Light conquered darkness and goodness conquered sin. May the day bring new meaning and positive change in our lives? I wish all Christians a blessed Good Friday."

Marking the occasion, the faithful believers are holding fasts, ranging from three days to 40 days, which will end with the celebration of Easter Sunday.

Meanwhile, believers are also gearing up to celebrate Easter Sunrise or Resurrection Sunday organised by Kohima Baptist Pastors' Fellowship (KBPF) at The Heritage, Old DC Bungalow here. (PTI)

## Mizoram CEO devises strategy to ensure high voters' turnout

AIZWAL, March 29: Mizoram chief electoral officer, Madhup Vyas has held a meeting with poll officials to discuss strategy to ensure high voter turnout in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in the state, an official statement said. The CEO expressed his concern over "lower voter turnout in Lok Sabha polls as compared to state assembly elections" in the past, it said.

Mizoram registered one of the highest voter turnouts in India in the assembly polls, held in November last year, while the polling percentage in the last Lok Sabha elections in 2019 was "even lower than the national average of 67 per cent", the statement said.

The state recorded a 63.13 per cent voter turnout in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, which was much lower than the over 80 per cent turnout registered in the state assembly elections last year. Elections to the lone Lok Sabha seat in Mizoram, which is reserved for scheduled tribe, will be held on April 19. Various issues related to voter education were discussed during Thursday's meeting, the statement said. It stressed on the need to focus on youth participation, especially first-time voters, and to undertake awareness campaigns at the micro-level.

The departments of school, higher and technical education, sports and youth services will be roped in for the task, it added. (PTI)

## Nominations of 14 candidates in Sikkim's lone Lok Sabha seat approved

GANGTOK, March 29: The nomination papers of all 14 candidates in the lone Lok Sabha seat in Sikkim were found valid during scrutiny on Friday, officials said.

Among these 14 candidates are incumbent MP Indra Hang Subba of SKM, opposition SDF's PD Rai, Congress's Gopal Chhetri, CAP's Bharat Basnett, and DC

Nepal of BJP, they said.

The last date for the withdrawal of candidature is March 30, following which the list of contesting candidates in Form 7 (A) will be published, they added.

The polling for the constituency will be held along with the assembly elections in the state on April 19. (PTI)

## 14 candidates in fray for Arunachal LS seats



ITANAGAR, March 29: 14 candidates are in the fray for the two Lok Sabha seats in Arunachal Pradesh, which will go to polls on April 19, an official said on Friday.

Eight candidates will contest in the Arunachal West Lok Sabha constituency from where Union earth sciences minister Kiren Rijju and Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee president Nabam Tuki are trying their luck.

The total number of candidates, contesting in the Arunachal East parliamentary constituency, is six after the nomination of Techi Rana, an independent candidate, was found invalid during scrutiny on Thursday, the official said.

Eight independent candidates are fighting the Lok Sabha polls from the two constituencies.

Besides Lok Sabha polls, assembly elections in the northeastern state will be held on April 19.

Altogether 169 candidates are in the fray for the 60 assembly seats, the official said.

The number of valid nominations for the assembly elections includes 59 of the BJP, 23 of the Congress, 16 of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and 23 of the National People's Party (NPP).

There are 29 independent candidates in the assembly elections, he added. (PTI)



Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma campaigning ahead of Lok Sabha Polls in North Garo Hills on Friday. UB Photos

## Army conducts musical extravaganza for Naga youths

**Winner bags cash prize worth ₹3 lakh, while 1<sup>st</sup> runner-up, 2<sup>nd</sup> runner-up win cash prize worth ₹2 lakh and ₹1 lakh respectively**

**HT Correspondent**

DIMAPUR, March 29: The Spear Corps of Indian Army has conducted a mega Hindi music competition titled 'Fusion of the Bands' for the youths of Nagaland at the Rangapahar military station in Dimapur.

Nagaland Governor La Ganesan graced the finale of the event as the chief guest. The finale took place at the Bhagat Stadium of the Rangapahar military station on Thursday evening.

Conducted in three phases, bands and artists from all the 16 districts of the state participated in the competition.

The first phase was an online audition phase, where 29 bands showcased their musical prowess. After a rigorous selection process, 12 bands were shortlisted to compete in the final phase at the semi-finals held at the military station on March 26.

The selected bands and artists presented a captivating and vibrant musical extravaganza on Thursday night, showcasing their exceptional talent in the field of Hindi music.



The event was conducted under Operation Sadbhavana, providing a unique platform for artists, representing the vast and diverse geographical extent of the state.

The presence of renowned guest artists like Prashant Tamang, winner of the Indian Idol Season-3, Inna Yaden, Eva Rongmei, NK Naga, Akumsem, emtur and Aloboli Kinimi at the final event provided a musical spectacle of unparalleled grandeur.

Underscoring the significance of

recognizing and rewarding exceptional musical prowess, the winner of the competition Noisy Neighbours from Dimapur was awarded Rs 3 lakh while the first runner-up Kunwang Wangh, also from Dimapur, received Rs 2 lakh and second runner-up Lies and Lullabies of Kohima pocketed Rs 1 lakh. Acknowledging the remarkable musical abilities of the finalists, each band was awarded Rs 25,000.

'Fusion of the Bands' was a testa-

ment to the musical vibrancy and talent that thrive in Nagaland. With a stellar line-up of artists, generous prize offerings, and a meticulous selection process, the talent hunt not only celebrated music, but also nurtured and promoted the rich cultural heritage of the region. The unforgettable musical experience for both participants and audiences alike, cemented Nagaland's position as a hub of musical excellence.

Through Operation Sadbhavana, Indian Army executes diverse initiatives on the basis of 'Felt Need' of the population.

The projects are selected after carefully considering the local aspirations, in conjunction with local administration to ensure that there is no duplicity of the projects being shortlisted. Projects like national integration tours (NIT), women empowerment, employment generation, education, opportunities to youths for showcasing their talent and other development activities towards nation building are planned and executed under Operation Sadbhavana.



## Mahagathbandhan announces LS seat-sharing for Bihar; RJD to contest 26, Cong 9

**PATNA, March 29:** The RJD-led Mahagathbandhan in Bihar on Friday announced its formula for seat-sharing, with Lalu Prasad's party laying claim on nearly two-thirds of the state's 40 parliamentary constituencies, virtually steamrolling allies - the Congress and three Left parties.

The RJD will be contesting 26 seats, nine more than it had fought in 2019 when it drew a blank. The Congress has got nine seats, as many as it had contested in the last elections, followed by CPI(ML) Liberation (three) and CPI and CPI(M) (one each).

The belated announcement, coming a day after filing of nomination papers for the first phase of Lok Sabha polls was over, was made at a press conference here addressed by RJD national spokesman and Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Kumar Jha, state Congress president Akhilesh Prasad Singh and state-level leaders of CPI(ML) Liberation, CPI and CPI(M).

Tejashwi Yadav, the Mahagathbandhan's leader in the state legislature, was scheduled to address the press conference but remained conspicuous by his absence.

Jha said names of candidates would be announced soon and claimed: "We have arrived at a unanimous decision, demonstrating a cohesiveness that you may

not find in the NDA. We will defeat them at the hustings".

Notably, the RJD had fielded its candidates for the four seats of Gaya, Aurangabad, Jamui and Nawada, which go to polls in the first phase, much to the annoyance of its allies, particularly the Congress which wanted to give ticket to former MP Nikhil Kumar.

Moreover, CPI and CPI(M) have already announced their candidates for Begusarai and Khagaria seats.

According to the seat-sharing formula, the RJD has also wrested from the Congress Purnia, a seat the latter has been contesting in the past few Lok Sabha polls.

Recently, Lalu Prasad, the RJD president, gave party ticket for the seat to JD(U) turncoat Bima Bharti, stopping short of making a formal announcement.

The Congress had last week inducted Pappu Yadav, a three-term former MP from Purnea, whose wife is also a Rajya Sabha MP of the party. Yadav had been hopeful of getting the ticket from the seat claiming that an assurance to the effect was given to him by Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi.

There were murmurs that Prasad, whose "blessings" Yadav had sought before he went to Delhi and merged his Jan Adhikar Party with the Congress, was suggesting

that the former Purnea MP try his luck from Madhepura, which he had won on an RJD ticket in 2014, or Supaul which his wife had represented more than once.

However, that option, too, seems closed as both seats have been claimed for itself by the RJD and it remains to be seen what is going to be the next move of Yadav who has been dropping hints that he will not flinch from fighting as an Independent from Purnea if the need arose.

Among the seats given to the Congress are Kishanganj, Bihar's lone Muslim-majority constituency that the party has been winning for some time, and adjoining Katihar where senior leader Tariq Anwar lost by a thin margin in 2019, having won in 2014 on an NCP ticket.

Other seats given to Congress include Patna Sahib, where the BJP has been seemingly invincible, Bhagalpur, where party MLA Ajeet Sharma wanted to field Bollywood actress daughter Neha Sharma, who has refused, and reserved constituency Sasaram, a bastion of late Deputy Prime Minister Jagjivan Ram, whose daughter and former Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar, has won the seat a few times but reportedly excused herself this time on account of old age. (PTI)

## Fresh I-T notices to Cong: Party to hold nationwide protests over weekend against 'tax terrorism'

**'IT department has forcibly taken away ₹135 crores from our bank account'**

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** The Congress will hold nationwide protests over the weekend against fresh income tax demand of over ₹1,800 crore, which it has described as an "egregious attack" on democracy and imposition of "tax terrorism" amid the crucial Lok Sabha elections.

The opposition party said it has received fresh notices from the income-tax department, asking it to pay ₹1,823.08 crore.

Congress general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal has asked all Pradesh Congress Committees (PCCs) to hold massive public demonstrations at the state and district headquarters in their respective states on Saturday and the following day, involving senior leaders and party functionaries.

In his letter to all PCC presidents, Congress legislature party leaders, AICC general secretaries, in-charges and heads of frontal organisations, Venugopal said, "As you are well aware, the systematic process to thwart Indian democracy by the BJP proceeds at an alarming rate."

"An illegal attempt to freeze the bank accounts of the principal national opposition party the In-



dian National Congress last month in February has gone on for over a month on the eve of the national general election. Yesterday, we received fresh notices from the IT department to pay ₹1823.08 crores. Already the IT department has forcibly taken away ₹135 crores from our bank account," the Congress leader said. "Now in a patently illegal and undemocratic action, the Income Tax Department has launched its

next premeditated, diabolical campaign against the Congress," he said.

Eight years of Income Tax returns of the Congress have been reopened on baseless, manufactured grounds to levy patently illegal Income Tax Demand orders totalling thousands of crores of rupees, he said, adding that this is nothing but a blatant attack on the very principals of democracy.

"In light of this egregious at-

tack on democracy and the imposition of tax terrorism on our party amidst the crucial Lok Sabha Elections, All Pradesh Congress Committees (PCCs) are requested to hold massive public demonstrations at the State and District headquarters in their respective states tomorrow and the following day, involving senior leaders and party functionaries," Venugopal said in his letter.

"Massive protest demonstrations shall be held in all constituencies, led by our party candidates. Protest demonstrations, including 'Mashal Julooos', shall be conducted in all districts by the District Congress Committees," he said.

Tagging Venugopal's letter, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "As is known the world over, the BJP is out to financially eliminate the Congress and has filed multiple frivolous cases against us right on the eve of elections."

"Against this action, all PCCs will be protesting across the country tomorrow, in every district. This is not about our party alone, it is a systematic bludgeoning of the people's voice. And the people will revolt," Ramesh said. (PTI)

## 44 per cent of sitting MPs face criminal charges, 5 per cent are billionaires: ADR



**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Out of the 514 sitting Lok Sabha MPs analysed, 225 (44 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves, according to the self-sworn affidavits analysed by poll rights body Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR).

Out of those analysed, 5 per cent are billionaires, with assets exceeding ₹100 crore.

The report by the ADR, which scrutinised affidavits of the sitting MPs, revealed that among the sitting MPs with criminal charges, 29 per cent face serious criminal cases, including allegations of murder, attempt to murder, promoting communal disharmony, kidnapping, and crimes against women.

Out of the sitting MPs with serious criminal cases against them, nine face murder cases. The analysis revealed that five of these MPs belong to the BJP.

Furthermore, 28 sitting MPs have declared cases related to attempt to murder, with a majority—21 MPs—belonging to the BJP. Similarly, 16 sitting MPs face charges related to crimes against women, including three allegations of rape.

The report also sheds light on the financial aspects of these law-

makers. Among major parties, the BJP and the Congress have the highest number of billionaire MPs, though the analysis shows significant representation from other parties as well.

Regarding the distribution of criminal cases among states, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Himachal Pradesh stand out with more than 50 per cent of their MPs facing criminal charges.

Additionally, the analysis unveils disparities in wealth among MPs, with some having assets worth hundreds of crores, while others have minimal assets.

Notably, the top three MPs with the highest declared assets are Nakul Nath (Congress), DK Suresh (Congress), and Kanumuru Raghurama Krishna Raju (Independent), with assets amounting to hundreds of crores. The report also highlights the educational background, age, and gender distribution among the sitting MPs.

A significant majority—73 per cent—of the MPs have graduate or higher educational qualifications, while only 15 per cent of the sitting MPs are women. (PTI)

## BJP misusing agencies to subvert democracy, belittle Constitution: Kharage

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accused the BJP-led Centre on Friday of misusing institutions like the income-tax department, ED and CBI to subvert democracy and belittle the Constitution, and asked why is the I-T department being used as a weapon to harass the principal opposition party.

He asserted that such actions would not deter the Congress from contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and vowed that his party will free the country's institutions from the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) "dictatorship".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also hit out at the BJP, accusing it of indulging in "tax terrorism".

"When the government changes, action will definitely be taken against those who have 'disrupted democracy'. And such exemplary action will be taken that no one will dare to do all this again. This is my guarantee," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X.

He also tagged a previous video of his and used the hashtag "#BJPTaxTerrorism" with his post. Kharge said a penalty of ₹4,600 crore has been "overlooked" for the BJP's ₹42-crore unaccounted deposits, while a penalty of ₹135 crore is being demanded for the Congress's ₹14-lakh cash deposits by MLAs and MPs.

"Who is pressurising the Income Tax department to act in this unjustified manner only against the opposition? Why is the IT department being

allowed to be used as a weapon to harass the principal opposition party -- Congress! They are misusing institutions like IT, ED, CBI to subvert democracy and belittle the Constitution," he alleged in a post on X.

Citing examples, Kharge said the I-T department has now given a notice to the Congress for a total amount of ₹1,823 crore and already withdrawn ₹135 crore from the party's accounts, which were funds collected by the party through crowdsourcing.

"But IT did not give any notice to BJP. Despite the fact that public information of the Election Commission clearly shows that 1,297 people have deposited ₹42 crore to BJP in 2017-18 without mentioning their names and addresses," Kharge claimed.

The Congress chief said his party was fined ₹135 crore for ₹14 lakh deposits and its account was frozen. "But in the last 7 years, this penalty to BJP amounts to a whopping ₹4,600 crore," he claimed.

"Our direct question is why is BJP getting this penalty exemption?" Kharge asked.

He also asked, "Do these IT notices dating many years ago being served right before Lok Sabha elections prove BJP's conspiracy to capture the level playing field?"

Citing details, he said a penalty of ₹54 crore has been imposed by the I-T authorities for the year 1993-94, ₹182 crore for 2016-17, ₹179

crore for 2017-18, ₹918 crore for 2018-19 and ₹480 crore for 2019-20.

"Congresspersons are never afraid! We will fight the elections with our full might. We will free the country's institutions from BJP dictatorship," Kharge said.

Accusing the government of indulging in "tax terrorism", Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said for alleged violations committed in the last six years, the opposition party was served a notice for ₹1,823 crore.

"For those very same violations, in the very same time period, the BJP should have been slapped with notices for ₹4,600 crore."

"All that Ajay Maken did was to use the R programming language to drill down the data submitted by the BJP itself, which is available publicly on the ECI's website. We have attached the code to this tweet."

"It follows that either the Khatbandi on the INC accounts is unjustified and a blatant misuse of government agencies, or that the IT department is willfully neglecting the BJP's fraudulent practices," Ramesh said in a post on X.

The Congress on Friday said it has received fresh notices from the income-tax department, asking it to pay ₹1,823.08 crore, and alleged that the BJP is in "serious violation" of income-tax laws for which authorities should raise a demand for more than ₹4,600 crore from the saffron party. (PTI)

## INDIA parties stage protest in Mumbai, call Kejriwal's arrest 'illegal', 'unjustified'

**MUMBAI, March 29:** Opposition INDIA bloc parties staged a protest in Mumbai on Friday against the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in an excise policy-linked money laundering case and called the ED action "illegal" and "unjustified". Demonstrators held a "satyagrah" (a form of non-violent resistance) at south Mumbai's Azad Maidan and called for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s resounding defeat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. The anti-BJP grouping consisting of more than two dozen parties reiterated commitment to their united struggle against the Modi government's "tyranny". Political workers cutting across party lines braved scorching heat to register their protest against Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate last week. The Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is a constituent of INDIA, which was formed last year to take on the BJP and the Lok Sabha polls.

In attendance at the protest site were Varsha Gaikwad, Mumbai Congress president, Bhai Jagtap Congress MLC, Preeti Sharma-Menon, AAP Mumbai chief, Rakhee Jadhav, Mumbai head of NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar), Vidya Chavan of NCP(SP), Shailendra Kamble of CPI-M, Samya Korde of Peasants and Workers Party of India and a few other leaders of INDIA. Sharma-Menon said previous arrest of former Delhi ministers and AAP politicians Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain has disrupted the work they were doing in education and healthcare fields, respectively. "It is not Manish Sisodia who is in jail, it is education (portfolio held by him as deputy CM) in India that is in jail. It is not Satyendar Jain who is in jail, it is healthcare that is in jail. And it is not Arvind Kejriwal who is in jail, it is India's hope that has been imprisoned," she maintained. (PTI)

## Kejriwal arrested as Union govt wants to weaken opposition, democracy: MP Cong chief

**BHOPAL, March 29:** Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal was pending against him. The MP Congress chief also said those joining the BJP in Chhindwara, the only seat the opposition party had won in 2019, were persons with business interests and "contractor types".

Some 25-30 of these persons came to him and said they are joining due to severe business related problems, Patwari claimed, adding many of them will return when the BJP loses power.

Asked if Congress leader Rahul Gandhi contesting from north India will help the party in a major way, Patwari said the former had done so earlier but added "he can't leave those (Wayanad voters) who made him victorious". Whatever the party does is well thought out and there is no bar from anyone contesting from anywhere in the country, he added. Asked if he wanted Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to contest from Raebareilly Lok Sabha seat, which is represented by Sonia Gandhi currently, Patwari said, "It is not a question of what I wish. What the party wants is more important and moreover what Priyanka Gandhi wants. The party will take appropriate decisions in the interest of the organization." Patwari said he was confident the Congress would win 15 seats in MP based on the party's performance in the 2023 Assembly polls.

"There were 12-15 seats where we won or were very close to winning. We are in a position to perform better," he asserted. Asked about MP chief minister Mohan Yadav pointing out that the BJP has given tickets to six women for Lok Sabha polls while the figure for the Congress was just one, Patwari asserted 80 per cent of his party's candidates were below the age of 50 and the representation of SC/ST and OBCs was also very good. (PTI)

## Storage capacity in main reservoirs drop to 36 pc, south states show significant shortfall: Data

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** The live storage capacity in India's 150 primary reservoirs has dropped to 36 per cent of their total capacity while the southern states like Karnataka face a significant shortfall in water storage compared to the previous year and the ten-year average, according to official data.

Cities like Bengaluru have been grappling with water shortage, which can be attributed to rain deficiency in Karnataka during last year's monsoon, a decline in reservoir level, and the loss of lakes due to rapid urbanisation.

The Central Water Commission, in its weekly bulletin, said the total live storage capacity of 150 reservoirs is 178,784 BCM (billion cubic metres) which is about 69.35 per cent of the live storage capacity of 257,812 BCM, which is estimated to have been created in the country.

As per reservoir storage bulletin released on Thursday, live storage available in these reservoirs is 64,606 BCM, which is 36 per cent of total live storage capacity of these reservoirs.

"However, last year the live storage available in these reservoirs for the corresponding period was 76,991 BCM and the average of last 10 years live storage was 66,644 BCM," it said.

Thus, the live storage available in 150 reservoirs as per the bulletin is 84 per cent of the live storage of the corresponding period of last year and 97 per cent of storage of the average of the last ten years.

Ahead of the summer season, a week-on-week decline has been noted in the reservoir



capacity. According to last week's bulletin, the live storage capacity was 38 per cent or 67,591 BCM.

In the week of March 7-14, the live storage capacity was recorded at 40 per cent or 70,746 BCM and the week prior to that it was 41 per cent or 73,297 BCM.

In the northern region, comprising states like Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan, the total live storage available in the

monitored reservoirs stands at 32 per cent of their total capacity.

This figure, at 6,290 BCM, is notably lower than the storage levels observed during the corresponding period last year and falls short of the ten-year average.

The southern region, including states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, faces a significant shortfall in water storage compared to both the previous year and the ten-year average.

With storage levels at a mere 22 per cent of

total capacity in southern states, the situation underscores the pressing need for water conservation measures and sustainable management practices.

Contrastingly, the Eastern region, encompassing states like Assam, Jharkhand, and Odisha, exhibits a more positive scenario.

The total live storage available in the reservoirs is recorded at 47.49 per cent of their capacity, marking an improvement from the previous year and surpassing the ten-year average. The states like Gujarat and Maharashtra, falling under the Western region, are grappling with a decline in water storage compared to the previous year.

Despite this, the current storage levels, at 42 per cent of total capacity, exceed the ten-year average, offering a glimmer of hope amidst the challenges posed by fluctuating water availability.

Similarly, the Central region, comprising states such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, witnessed a decrease in water storage compared to the previous year.

However, the current storage levels, at 44 per cent of total capacity, surpass the ten-year average, indicating a relatively stable situation despite the year-on-year decline.

Several states, including Assam, Jharkhand, and Odisha, among others, have showcased improved water storage levels compared to the previous year.

However, states like Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Maharashtra, along with others, continue to grapple with diminished water storage. (PTI)



# Jaishankar, Ukrainian foreign minister Kuleba hold bilateral talks

During the telephone conversation, the Ukrainian President had thanked India for its support for his country's sovereignty and said that it would be important for Kyiv to see New Delhi attend the inaugural Peace Summit in Switzerland

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** India and Ukraine on Friday held "open and wide-ranging" talks here as part of a bilateral engagement between its foreign ministers, with discussions focussing on the "on-going conflict and its wider ramifications".

Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba's two-day visit to India comes amid efforts to seek a peaceful resolution to the more than two-year-old Russia-Ukraine conflict. He arrived here on Thursday.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Kuleba at the Hyderabad House.

After the meeting, Jaishankar in a post on X said, "An open and wide-ranging conversation with Ukraine FM @DmytroKuleba this afternoon."

"Our discussions focused on the ongoing conflict and its wider ramifications. Exchanged views on various initiatives in that context. Spoke as well on global and regional issues of interest to both of us. Reiterated our commitment to strengthen the overall relationship, including bilateral cooperation," he said.

Jaishankar also shared some photographs of him shaking hands with his Ukrainian counterpart and the bilateral meeting.

On Thursday, Kuleba had posted on X, "I began my visit to New Delhi upon @DrJaishankar's in-



invitation. The Ukrainian-Indian co-operation is important and we will be reinvigorating ties. Building on the dialogue between @ZelenskyyUa and @NarendraModi, we will pay specific attention to the Peace Formula."

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Jaishankar welcomed Kuleba to India, and said he was glad to see that "some of our bilateral mechanisms have also met" which has created "a certain momentum in our bilateral relationship".

"Welcome to India, to New Delhi. We have been looking forward to this visit, and I'm very glad that despite our - both of us have fairly heavy travel schedules,

we have been able to match it and organise this meeting," he said.

Jaishankar added that in recent months, "we've had actually interactions at various levels. I'm glad to see that some of our bilateral mechanisms have also met. I think this has created a certain momentum in our bilateral relationship".

"And today, after this discussion in the afternoon, we look forward also to the meeting of the Inter-Governmental Commission," he said.

"Your visit gives us an opportunity, obviously, to understand the situation in your own region, and I look forward to hearing your perspectives on that. I think our teams have prepared a very substantial

agenda of our discussions, and I would invite you to make your opening remarks," Jaishankar said.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the government of India recognised the Republic of Ukraine as a sovereign independent country in December 1991. India and Ukraine enjoy warm and friendly relations, according to a 2013 statement on India-Ukraine relations available on the MEA website.

During his weekly press briefing on Thursday, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in response to a query on Kuleba's visit, said there will be a "bilateral engagement with the external affairs minister in which they will go over a gamut of issues that lie in the domain of bilateral relations".

They will also "review the Inter-governmental Commission that was held earlier," he had said. The two leaders will also discuss regional and global issues of common concern, Jaiswal had said, adding that there are several other engagements also lined up for the Ukrainian foreign minister.

"Our position is very clear on peace initiatives and how we look at the Ukraine-Russia conflict. We continue to encourage peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy and remain open to engaging all ways and means that would help achieve

this objective," the MEA spokesperson had said on a query on India's position on the peace conference in Switzerland.

The peace formula proposed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in 2022 follows 10 principles aimed at ensuring a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 20 had held separate conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Zelenskyy and asserted that dialogue and diplomacy were the way forward for the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Modi had spoken to Putin over telephone to congratulate him for winning a fifth term in office in the recent elections, and followed it up with a phone call to Zelenskyy to convey India's "consistent support" for all efforts for peace and bringing an early end to the ongoing conflict.

During the telephone conversation, the Ukrainian President had thanked India for its support for his country's sovereignty and said that it would be important for Kyiv to see New Delhi attend the inaugural Peace Summit in Switzerland.

Zelenskyy had hailed India's continued humanitarian assistance for the people of Ukraine as the two leaders had discussed ways to further strengthen their bilateral partnership in various spheres. (PTI)

# Cong bats for women reservation in govt jobs, says powerful women will change destiny of India



**NEW DELHI, March 29:** The Congress will reserve 50 per cent of government jobs for women if it is voted to power, former party chief Rahul Gandhi said on Friday, asserting that powerful women will change the destiny of India.

Gandhi asked why even today only one in three women is employed and why is there only one woman in 10 government jobs.

"Isn't the population of women in India 50%? Is the presence of women in higher secondary and higher education not 50%? If so, then why is their share in the system so less?" the former Congress chief said. "Congress wants - 'Aadhi Abadi Poora Haq', we understand that women's potential will be fully utilized only when women have equal contribution in the government running the country," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

Therefore, the Congress has decided that half the recruitment in all new government jobs should be reserved for women, he said.

"We are also in favour of immediate implementation of women's

reservation in Parliament and in assemblies," Gandhi said.

Women with secure income, future, stability and self-respect will truly become the strength of the society, he asserted.

"Having women on 50% government posts will give strength to every woman in the country and powerful women will change the destiny of India," Gandhi asserted.

Under its five guarantees of Nari Nyay, the Congress has promised Rs 1 lakh per annum direct cash transfer to be made to one woman from each of India's poorest families. The party has said 50 per cent of all new recruitment to the central government positions will be reserved for women, if it comes to power.

It has also promised that the central government's contribution to the monthly pay of ASHA, anganwadi, and Mid-Day Meal workers will be doubled.

The party has further promised to appoint an Adhikaar Maitri in every panchayat to serve as a paralegal to educate women and assist them in the enforcement of their legal rights," he said.

The Congress has also promised to set up 'Savitribai Phule Hostels', under which the central government will double the number of working women's hostels in the country, with at least one hostel in each district. (PTI)

# Sunita Kejriwal preparing to hold CM's post like Rabri Devi did in Bihar: Hardeep Puri

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Friday compared chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita to former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, and said she is perhaps preparing to hold the post of her husband.

"The madam you are naming is perhaps preparing to hold the post like Rabri Devi did in Bihar," the senior BJP leader told reporters here at the inauguration of the Delhi BJP's election office. The Union minister for Housing and Urban Affairs was responding to a question about Sunita Kejriwal who has been briefing media on behalf of her husband, since his arrest by the ED last week. Earlier in the day, Sunita Kejriwal launched a WhatsApp campaign, urging people to support her husband, who is in ED custody in an excise policy-linked money-laundering case. In a digital media briefing, she said her husband has challenged the "most corrupt and dictatorial forces" in the country and asked people to support him through their blessings and prayers.

The Delhi chief minister was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21 in the money-laundering case linked to

the now-scrapped excise policy for Delhi. A court on Thursday extended his ED custody till April 1.

When Puri was asked how serious challenge the AAP-Congress alliance in Delhi was for the BJP, he said, "Which alliance? What are you talking about? They (Congress) have not released the names of candidate." He slammed AAP and its leaders saying they joined politics pledging to fight corruption and now they have allied with the "most corrupt" Congress.

In a seat sharing agreement, AAP is contesting four Lok Sabha seats in Delhi while Congress has to declare candidates on the remaining three of total seven constituencies in the capital. Kejriwal has said he was arrested without any reason but he skipped nine summonses by the ED after which the agency reached his doorsteps, Puri said, adding "his (Kejriwal's) time very limited."

Puri said he will join the BJP campaigning in Delhi, holding press conferences for each of the seven party candidates in coming days and tell the people about the Narendra Modi government's works and achievements in last 10 years. (PTI)

# At 30, Mukhtar Ansari showed no fear of law: Delhi Police official who arrested him in 1993

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, who died after suffering cardiac arrest on Thursday, revealed everything "fearlessly" and "confidently" about his crime when he was arrested by a team of Delhi Police Crime Branch in connection with a highly sensational case in 1993.

The case pertained to ransom for kidnapping a businessman from Lutyness Delhi.

"He was around 30-years-old then, full of confidence and showing no fear of law. That was a highly sensational case in those days," recalled Ashok Chand, a retired Delhi Police officer, who led the team and ensured the safe rescue of the businessman from Panchkula at the Punjab-Haryana border, 250 kilometers away from Delhi.

Ansari and his two associates had demanded a ransom of Rs 1 crore from the family members of the west Delhi-based businessman Ved Prakash Goel. The calls were made from a local police booth of Panchkula, where they had hid Goel in a rented accommodation.

Ansari, who was elected an MLA five times, died of cardiac arrest in a hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Banda on Thursday. He was serving his jail term in a case of gangster act of Uttar Pradesh.

Chand, who interrogated Ansari at length in Delhi, said he and his team never thought that one day, he would become one of the "biggest bahubali dons" in north India.

Ansari was facing 61 cases, including land grabbing, extortion, abduction, contract

killings, murders, attempt to murder and arms acts.

He had been facing two more cases -- including POTA and MCOCA -- lodged by the Delhi Police Special Cell in 2009.

Goel was travelling in his red colour Maruti car and was going to attend a birthday party of his friend in Pandara Road when he was kidnapped on December 7, 1993.

The family, which was living in west Delhi, next day got a call from a landline number. The caller demanded Rs 1 crore as ransom from Goel's family for his safe rescue.

Chand said Ansari and two of his associates had kidnapped Goel from Tilak Marg area, which is just a few kilometers away from Parliament.

A case under Section 365 (kidnapping or abducting with intent secretly and wrongfully

to confine person) and Section 387 (putting person in a fear of death or grievous hurt in order to commit extortion) was registered at the Tilak Marg police station the next day. The investigation was handed over to the crime branch.

"The call was found to be made from a local PCO booth in Panchkula, near Chandigarh. Our team laid a trap and managed to nab both the kidnappers and also rescued Goel from a flat in Panchkula," Chand said.

"At that time, we did not know that both the accused were associates of Ansari, who was a notorious gangster of eastern Uttar Pradesh," he said.

Before 1993, Ansari was booked in over 12 cases of crime in various districts of eastern UP, Chand said.

"We also recovered a rope, some tape, a stitched coffin,

some injection needles, distilled water, chemical panthalene, etc. from the house where Goel was kept," Chand said.

The accused told the police that Ansari was staying in the guest house in south Delhi and they subsequently apprehended him too. "We recovered rifles and a large number of live cartridges from them," he said.

Ansari was a very good shooter. He was known for his accurate shots, he said.

"We overpowered him and he got arrested. He never showed any resistance. He was very confident and was aware of what is going to be next," Chand said.

The gangster-politician was later booked under POTA as arms and ammunition were recovered from him. He was convicted as well in the case, he said. (PTI)

# Marginalised communities reaching top govt positions due to 'affirmative action': Justice B R Gavai

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Members of marginalised communities have been able to reach top government positions due to "affirmative action" of the constitution, Supreme Court Judge Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai has said while citing that his elevation to the apex court was advanced by two years as there was no judge from the Dalit community.

Speaking at a cross-cultural discussion hosted by the New York City Bar Association, Justice Gavai shared that when he was appointed as a judge in the Bombay High Court in 2003, he was a leading lawyer, and that there was no judge from Dalit/Scheduled Caste community in the High Court.

The SC judge said his appoint-

ment to the Supreme Court of India in 2019 was made solely on the account of giving representation to the Scheduled Castes in the Supreme Court, as there was no judge in the apex court who came from the SC community for almost a decade.

He added that it is only because of the Indian Constitution and its mandate of affirmative action and inclusion, that he would be able to serve in the highest judicial office.

"If not for giving representation to Scheduled Castes, I would have been elevated maybe two years later," said Justice Gavai, who is in line to become the Chief Justice of India in May 2025.

On being asked about his background, Justice Gavai shared his

humble origins of growing in a slum area, and going to a municipal school, and then taking up law and subsequent elevation as a judge.

When a question was posed on the duties of the Chief Justice of India, Justice Gavai responded that the CJI provides equal leadership to the entire judiciary in India, and maintains independence of the judiciary.

Born on November 24, 1960 at Amravati, Justice Gavai joined the Bar on March 16, 1985.

He was elevated as Additional Judge of the High Court on November 14, 2003 and became a permanent Judge of the Bombay High Court on November 12, 2005. (PTI)

# 10 people killed in J&K's Ramban

**BANIHAL/JAMMU, March 29:** Ten people were killed after an SUV skidded off the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and fell into a gorge in Ramban district on Friday, officials said.

The vehicle, a Tavera, was on its way to Jammu from Srinagar and it fell into a 300 feet gorge at the Battery Cheshma area of the district around 1.15 am, they said.

Ten people have died, the officials said. Police and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel are at the spot. The bodies of 10 passengers have been recovered amid heavy rains, the officials said.

They said that the car's driver, Balwan Singh (47), of Amb Ghrotha in Jammu and Vipin Mukhiya Bhairangam of West Champaran in Bihar are among the deceased.

Rescue operation is underway, the officials said.

In a post on X, Union Minister and Udhampur MP Jitendra Singh said personnel

of the police, SDRF and civil quick response teams are at the spot and the rescue operation is underway. "My sincere condolences to the bereaved families," he said.

"Spoke to Ramban Deputy Commissioner Baseer-ul-Haq after learning about the tragic road accident in which a passenger taxi rolled down a deep gorge on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway near Battery Chashma leading to loss of 10 lives," Singh said.

In his condolence message, Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said, "I am deeply shocked to learn of the unfortunate road accident in Ramban today, in which precious lives have been lost. I send my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families."

Sinha said he has issued instructions to the district administration and divisional commissioner to render all assistance to the kin of the victims. (PTI)

# NIA announces ₹10 lakh reward each on two accused wanted in Rameshwaram Cafe blast case



**NEW DELHI, March 29:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday announced a reward of ₹ 10 lakh each for sharing information leading to the arrest of two key accused, one of them using Hindu names to hide identity, in Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case.

The agency requested the general public for information on the duo -- Mussavir Hussain Shazib alias Shazeb alias Md Juned Hussain alias Mohammed Juned Sayed and Abdul Mathen Ahmed Taahaa alias Abdul Mathen Taha alias Mathen alias Taha alias Vignesh D alias Sumit "or any other assumed Hindu name" -- wanted in the case, according to its posts on X.

Taha, aged about 30 years, has been using Hindu identity documents, forged Aadhaar card in the name of Vignesh or other similar forged ID documents to conceal identity, the NIA said.

The agency shared their pictures and identified men's/boys' hostel, PG/sharing accommodations/ low budget hotels and lodges as their preferred places of stay.

The NIA said accused Shazib, aged 30 years, prefers to wear "jeans, T-shirt and shirt" and "black smart watch".

Both Shazib and Taha often wear "mask, wig and fake beard", it said.

Whoever provides any information leading to the arrest of the accused person shall be given ₹ 10 lakh reward, the NIA said in identical public notice on each of the accused, shared on X.

People can share details regarding these two accused through email at info.blr.nia@gov.in or through telephone numbers 080-29510900, 8904241100, besides the NIA's office in Bengaluru.

"Identity of (the) informer will be kept secret," it said.

In a major breakthrough, the NIA had on Wednesday arrested Muzammil Shareef, the key conspirator in the blast case.

NIA investigations have revealed that Muzammil Shareef had extended logistic support to these two wanted accused in the case, involving an IED explosion at the cafe located at ITPL Road, Brookefield, Bengaluru, on March 1.

Muzammil Shareef was picked up on Wednesday and placed in custody as a co-conspirator after NIA teams cracked down at 18 locations, including 12 in Karnataka, five in Tamil Nadu and one in Uttar Pradesh.

The NIA took over the probe on March 3. (PTI)

# Notify guidelines by July 15 to make films accessible to hearing, visually impaired: HC to Centre

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** The Delhi High Court has asked the Centre to notify by July 15 the guidelines to make films accessible to persons who are hearing and visually impaired.

Justice Prathiba M Singh said accessibility was enforceable as a legal right and even private parties have to take "reasonable accommodation measures" to enable greater accessibility for the hearing and visually impaired persons.

The court observed that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has framed the "Draft Guidelines of Accessibility Standards in the Public Exhibition of Feature Films in Cinema Theatres for Persons with Hearing and Visual Impairment", and was in the process of finalising the same.

"The guidelines shall now be finalised by the MIB and shall be notified on or before 15th July, 2024. It is made clear that the said guidelines shall make the provision of accessibility features mandatory and provide a reasonable period for compliance by all stakeholders, in an expeditious manner," the court ordered recently.

"A hearing or visually impaired person, may get easy physical access to a film theatre but may not be able



to enjoy the film at all, if measures to make it enjoyable are not taken by the other stakeholders, including producers, theatre managers, OTT platforms, etc.," the order said.

The court stated that non-provision of accessibility features would constitute an offence under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and the State has a positive obligation to ensure that all reasonably possible steps

are taken to ensure access to them.

The central government said it "fully intended" to notify the guidelines as soon as possible and its counsel prayed for time up until August 1 to notify as the responses of all the stakeholders had to be considered in detail.

It informed that the guidelines would be applicable for those feature films that are certified by the Central

Board of Film Certification for public exhibition in cinema halls for commercial purposes.

The court said that MIB shall nominate one Under Secretary as the designated officer for receipt of any representations on inclusion of accessibility features in films

The representations, if received, shall be responded to within three

working days and attempt shall be made that even in the interregnum, while the guidelines are to be notified, such features are included in feature films, including on OTT platforms, it stated.

"Accessibility is crucial and is enforceable as a legal right. Even private parties have to ensure that 'reasonable accommodation' measures are taken in order to enable greater accessibility for the hearing and visually impaired persons," the court said.

The court's order came on a petition by four persons suffering from visual and hearing impairments who sought directions to make Shah Rukh Khan-starrer "Pathaan", accessible to them.

The four petitioners -- a law student, two lawyers and a disability rights activist -- have contended that under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD Act), the government has to take measures to ensure access to content to those suffering from disabilities. While three of them are visually impaired, the fourth one is hearing impaired.

The petitioners were represented by lawyer Rahul Bajaj. (PTI)



# Have taken backseat in terms of screen time: Prithviraj Sukumaran on 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan'

**MUMBAI, March 29:** As an actor, Prithviraj Sukumaran says he doesn't mind taking a backseat for a film and letting other stars shine, like in his upcoming big-ticket release in Hindi, "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan", where he plays the antagonist.

The Malayalam star, who has starred in Hindi titles such as "Aiyya", "Aurangzeb" and "Naam Shabana", features alongside Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff in the action movie, directed by Ali Abbas Zafar.

"I believe that rather than placing yourself first, place the film and make sure the casting is done in a way that justifies the story... If you look at my filmography in Malayalam, there are multiple films where I've taken a backseat in terms of screen time," Sukumaran told PTI.

The 41-year-old actor gave the example of his 2021 movie "Kuruthi", in which he played the antagonist, even though he was offered the main lead part by the film's director Manu Warrier. "Kuruthi" was first pitched to me to play the lead, which was played by Roshan Mathew. It took a lot of convincing on my part to convince the director Manu Warrier that I should play the villain, and someone else should be the hero," said the actor, known for starring in "Salaar", "Lucifer", "Kaaviya Thalaivan"

and "Ravananan" in the south.

"Bade Miyan Chote Miyan" will see Akshay and Tiger perform death-defying stunts as they play two elite soldiers who embark on a mission to recover a stolen AI weapon.

Though the movie features Kumar and Shroff in lead roles, it is incomplete without the presence of his character Kabir, Sukumaran added. "In 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan', there's Akshay sir, he is one of the biggest stars of the country, and there's Tiger, a very popular young star from Hindi. I can assure that without Kabir, the film is incomplete."

Sukumaran praised Kumar for leading a disciplined lifestyle where he is able to strike a balance between his professional and personal life. "They are professional, focused and good at action. Working with Akshay sir has been an eye-opening experience. The way he approaches work, like he is ready at 7:00 am and you will never see him tired on a set. He is always full of energy and leads a rigid, disciplined lifestyle," he said.

"There's an amazing fun side to him. When we were shooting in Glasgow, Scotland, he would take us out for dinner. I got to see the wonderful relationship that he shares with his son (Aarav), he is a great dad," he recalled. (PTI)



## Alex Garland's 'Civil War' to open Red Lorry Film Festival

**MUMBAI, March 29:** Filmmaker Alex Garland's upcoming movie "Civil War" will serve as the opening film for the inaugural edition of the Red Lorry Film Festival, the organisers have announced.

The film gala, which will be held from April 5 to 7 at Maison Inox and Madison PVR at the BKC here, will present a slate of over 100 titles, including movies and TV series in different languages such as English, French, Spanish, German, Turkish, and Russian.

It will screen movies through partnerships with leading global studios and production giants such as Sony Pictures, Warner Bros, Disney, Lionsgate, TrustNordisk, and Indie Sales. The festival is curated by BookMyShow.

Described as an "adrenaline-fuelled thrill ride through a near-future fractured America", Garland's "Civil War" features an ensemble cast of Kirsten Dunst, Wagner Moura, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Cailie Spaeny, Jesse Plemons, and Nick Offerman.

The film's story takes place in a near-future where the United States finds itself embroiled in a rapidly escalating second Civil War, pitting the oppressive government against the separatist 'Western Forces' led by Texas and California.

The plot revolves around a courageous team of journalists who embark on a perilous journey across the war-torn nation.

"We are thrilled to present 'Civil War' as the opening film of the Red Lorry Film Festival. From its visually stunning poster to its high production value, this film is a testament to the excellence of cinema," said Ashish Saksena, COO - Cinemas, BookMyShow.

"With impeccable sound design, cinematography of A+ quality and critics debating if it's Alex Garland's finest work, 'Civil War' promises an unforgettable cinematic experience. Its gripping narrative and sheer brilliance across every cinematic sphere ensure that watching this film on the big screen will be an experience you won't want to miss," he added. (PTI)



## SURIYA, KARTHIK SUBBARAJ JOIN HANDS FOR NEW FILM

**MUMBAI, March 29:** Actor Suriya is teaming up with filmmaker Karthik Subbaraj for his next feature film. The National Award-winning actor shared the news of the untitled movie on his official social media handles on Thursday evening.

"New beginnings!! Need all your good wishes! #LoveLaughterWar @karthiksubbaraj," Suriya posted along with an announcement poster of the movie, which is the 44th project of his career.

Subbaraj, known for hits such as "Jigarthanda", "Petta" and "Jagame Thandhiram", also announced the movie on his official X page.

"My Next Film is with the Ever-Awesome. @Suriya\_offl sir. So pumped up for this #Suriya44," the filmmaker posted. The new film's announcement comes more than a week after the actor revealed that his next movie with "Soorai Potru" director Sudha Kongara has been delayed.

Suriya was also supposed to team up with director Vetrimaaran for "Vaadi Vasal" but that film has been put on hold as well.

His latest is fantasy-action film "Kanguva" from filmmaker Siva. The movie, which will also star Bobby Deol and Disha Patani, will be released later this year. (PTI)

*Waited more than 9 years to work with Imtiaz Ali: Parineeti Chopra on 'Amar Singh Chamkila'*

**MUMBAI, March 29:** Actor Parineeti Chopra on Thursday said she had to audition for the role Amar Singh Chamkila, a film that also fulfilled her wish of collaborating with director Imtiaz Ali.

Chopra, who earlier lent her voice to songs of her films "Meri Pyaari Bindu" and "Kesari", said Ali and the film's composer, A R Rahman, wanted to test her singing skills before casting her in the biopic on the life of the slain Punjabi singer Amar Singh Chamkila. She stars opposite Diljit Dosanjh, who plays the title role in the movie. "I remember it was a Zoom call with Rahman sir, Imtiaz sir and Diljit. I thought it would be just an introduction but then Rahman sir asked me, 'Do you know how to sing?' I answered 'I like singing'. And then he said, 'Ok sing and show.'"

"I sang 'Dama Dam Mast Qalandar' and whatever Punjabi songs I could sing. That's how he auditioned me," Chopra said at the trailer launch of the film here.

The film revolves around the life and time of Amar Singh Chamkila, a popular Punjabi singer in the '80s who was shot dead with his singer-wife Amarjot in 1988.

Chopra said she was waiting to work with Ali, known for films such as "Jab We Met", "Rockstar" and "Love Aaj Kal", for almost a decade.

"I have been waiting to work with him for more than nine years. The day I had come into the movies, I had made a list of directors and sir's name was on number one. Even though I felt he would never work with me, I still put him on the list. Now, it has happened," she said.

Working on "Amar Singh Chamkila" has spoiled her, added the actor. "Chamila" has ruined the experience of every other film that I am ever going to do now because I worked with the best director, co-star, and music director. I got to immortalise a person, musician and legend like Amarjot ji (on screen). I wonder what I will do in my next film. (PTI)

## Benedict Wong on starring in Netflix's '3 Body Problem' series: It piqued my interest

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** British star Benedict Wong, who features in the Netflix series "3 Body Problem", says he was drawn to the show's world because of the popularity of its source material, Chinese author Liu Cixin's novels. Wong, best known for playing a superhero in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) as well as movies such as "The Martian" and "Sunshine", said he was intrigued by Cixin's books, whose fan base includes former US president Barack Obama and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

"This trilogy of books are incredibly popular in China, and George R R Martin, Barack Obama and Mark Zuckerberg are its fans. So, it piqued my interest and I devoured the first two books. "The first one was so science heavy. It was a massive challenge of how this is going to be filmed and I love a challenge. So I picked up the gauntlet and took on the quest with all of them (cast and crew)," Wong told PTI in an interview. "3 Body Problem", an eight-episode series, currently streaming on Netflix, is developed by "Game of Thrones" duo of David Benioff and DB Weiss in collaboration with Alexander Woo. Wong said he was contacted by the showrunners when he was working on the 2022 movie "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness".

"I didn't know of the story. I just kind of got contacted that Dan and Dave and Alex wanted to see me whilst I was filming Dr. Strange. And I was just very

intrigued that there were three showrunners needing to take on this massive project," he added.

"3 Body Problem" begins with a young scientist's decision to contact an alien civilisation during 1960s China, a moment that echoes across space and time. And many years later, a group of scientists come together to tackle humanity's greatest threat.

In the series, Wong essays the role of Da Shi, the London-based detective investigating the mysterious deaths of top scientists all over the world.

One of the highlights of the show is the camaraderie between Wong and co-star Liam Cunningham's characters. Cunningham plays the role of Da Shi's boss Thomas Wade, who is also the enigmatic leader of an elite intelligence agency in charge of the planetary defence. In a series that explores darker themes such as existential threats and moral and ethical dilemmas, the two often bring a much needed respite with some of the light-hearted moments in the story.

Wong said he has been a "massive fan" of Cunningham, who has also featured in films such as "Clash of the Titans" and "War Horse".

"I've been a massive fan of this guy. He was my tennis partner, dance partner and ice skating partner. It's a real pleasure once that sort of environment is there. It allows even more to play. I think that's what we did with our scenes," he added. (PTI)





# WFI decides to function at 'no cost to govt' model if suspension not lifted

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Friday decided at its Special General Meeting (SGM) that it will start functioning at 'no cost to the government' model if its request to lift the suspension is not considered by the Sports Ministry.

The WFI had its SGM in Noida after the UWW (the sport's world governing body) lifted its suspension and the IOA also dissolved the ad-hoc panel that was managing the affairs of the body.

The two developments paved the way for the elected office bearers to take back control of the federation, though the government is yet to lift its suspension.

The government had contended that the WFI flouted rules and put it under suspension, three days after it conducted polls to elect Sanjay Singh as president.

All 25 state associations attended the SGM even as secretary general Prem Chand Lochab, who is from the rival camp, skipped the meet.

"It was agreed that we will request the government to lift the suspension. The UWW has lifted the suspension and ad-hoc committee has also been dissolved, so there is no point of continuing with the suspension of the body," a WFI source told PTI.

"If the ministry will not consider the request and decide against providing financial assistance, then we have decided unanimously that we will start functioning at no cost to the government," added the source.



The government funds wrestlers' training, competition and exposure trips to foreign countries.

If the WFI goes ahead with the plan then it will also have to arrange and conduct the national camps on its own.

The WFI also brought out an amendment to its Constitution to ensure that any candidate contesting the election for a new post is not required to win by a two-third majority.

"From now onwards only a simple majority will do if a joint secretary or a secretary decides to contest for a different post such as president. Only if a candidate is attempting to get elected to the post he is holding, he will be required to win by a two-third majority," explained the source.

At WFI's recent election Sanjay Singh was required to win the polls for the post of president by a two-third majority because

he was a joint secretary in the previous dispensation.

The WFI has removed from its Constitution the clause that required a state association to fulfil the condition of having recognition from the State Olympic Committee (SOC) to get affiliated with the national body.

"From now onwards only WFI recognition is enough for a state association. A few state bodies had misused this clause to pres-

ent them as genuine bodies despite suspension from WFI. They showed SOC recognition to claim that they are genuine affiliated state bodies. We have done away with this," informed the source.

All the 25 state bodies were asked to ensure that the Sports Code is followed while conducting the elections and functioning. Age and tenure guidelines will have to be followed by all. (PTI)

## Barca win to set up semifinal vs. Chelsea; PSG advances to face Lyon



**BARCELONA, SPAIN, March 29:** Aitana Bonmatí led Barcelona to its sixth straight Women's Champions League semifinals on Thursday, scoring the opening goal in a 3-1 win over Brann that sets up a last-four clash with Chelsea.

The Ballon d'Or winner put the Catalan team in the driver's seat with a curling shot in the 24th minute before Fridolina Rolfo made it 2-0 from close range in the second half. Defender Tomine Svendheim cut the deficit 20 minutes from time before Patri Guijarro sealed Barcelona's win with two minutes left from Bonmatí's pass. Defending champion Barcelona advanced 5-2 on aggregate after winning 2-1 in the quarterfinal first leg in Norway.

Chelsea reached the semifinals Wednesday following a 1-1 draw with Ajax. Chelsea advanced 4-1 on aggregate after winning the first leg 3-0 in Amsterdam.

Barcelona has now equaled Lyon's record of consecutive semifinal appearances.

Barcelona beat Chelsea in last year's semifinals before going on

to win the competition.

"We've got huge impetus for this rematch with Chelsea," Bonmatí said. "This is the type of rivalry which inspires you every morning when you get up to go to work. You feel things are different. This type of match is why we became footballers in the first place." Later Thursday, Paris Saint-Germain set an all-French semifinal against Lyon by defeating Håcken 3-0 after winning the first leg 2-1.

Tabitha Chawinga, the French league's top scorer and leading assist maker, scored the opener at the Parc des Princes in the 27th minute. Korbin Albert doubled PSG's lead with a second-half long-range shot into the top corner and Marie-Antoinette Katoto completed the win with a header.

Lyon advanced to the last four for a record 13th time after a 4-1 win over Benfica. The record eight-time champion won 6-2 on aggregate after a 2-1 first leg win in Portugal.

The home-and-away semifinals will be played on April 20-21 and 27-28. (AP)

## Anuja's century gives West Zone upper hand against Central

**PUNE, March 29:** Former India all-rounder Anuja Patil hit an attacking century as West Zone took a substantial 111-run first-innings lead against Central Zone on the second day of the Women's Inter-Zonal Multi-Day Cup here.

After Central scored 245 in their first essay, Patil's 122 off 120 balls was well supported by Jemimah Rodriguez (69 of 97 balls) as the pair added 155 runs for the fifth wicket with West ending their first innings at 356.

At stumps, Central reached 68 for no loss in the second innings, cutting down the deficit to 43. Openers Punam Raut (32 batting) and Nuzhat Parveen (35 batting) safely negotiated the 25 overs bowled in the final session of the day. Earlier, starting the day at 26 for no loss, West were reduced to 98 for 4 before Patil counter-attacked with 20 fours and a six, scoring at more than a run a ball.

Jemimah was rock solid at the other end.

Only Devika Vaidya looked good in the top order, scoring an

aggressive 52 off 58 balls while West skipper Smriti Mandhana only came down to bat at number 8 but contributed a stylish 50 off 52 balls.

Among Central bowlers, leg-spinner Poonam Raut got 7/116 in 25 overs.

In another match, East Zone are cruising towards an easy innings win against North East after getting 18 opposition wickets in the allotted overs on the second day with skipper Deepti Sharma already enjoying a match haul of seven wickets.

At the start of the second day, East declared their first innings on the overnight score of 385 for 8 and then dismissed North East for 108 in their first essay. The inexperienced North East women found it difficult to handle Deepti's off-breaks as she enjoyed figures of 5 for 9.

NEZ fared slightly better after being asked to follow-on, ending the second day at 156 for 8 and still needing 121 runs to avoid an innings defeat on the final day. (PTI)

**BREISGAU, GERMANY, March 29:** Xabi Alonso will stay as coach of Bayer Leverkusen, ending speculation linking him with the soon-to-be vacant Liverpool and Bayern Munich jobs.

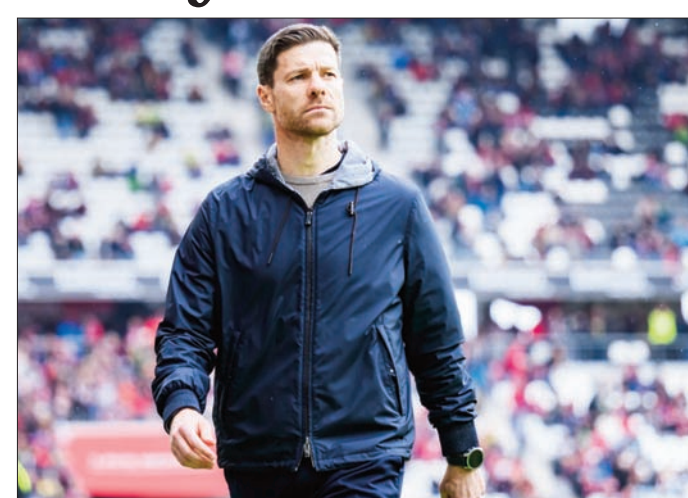
"This is the right place for me to be, to develop as a coach," Alonso said Friday, adding that his squad's drive to succeed was a key reason to remain.

"They gave me so many reasons to keep believing in the team, for their commitment, for their desire, for their hunger to have a great season. I feel that my job is not over here," the 42-year-old Alonso said.

"I want to help the team and I want to help the young players to develop. And if I am part of the process, I'm happy with that. So putting all the things together, this important decision, hopefully, I'm convinced is the right one. I'm happy. I'm still young, so time will tell, but right now I feel like that." Alonso said he reflected on his future during the recent international break before informing Leverkusen. Leverkusen is on course for its first German title, 10 points clear in the Bundesliga with eight games remaining. Lev-

erhusen, which was in the relegation zone when Alonso took charge in October 2022, is still unbeaten in all competitions this season. That record has made Alonso one of the most sought-after coaches in world soccer. He has two more seasons left on his contract at Leverkusen. It's the first head coach job of Alonso's career and he emphasized he believes he's still learning as he goes.

The former Spain midfielder was a player for both Bayern and



Liverpool. Both clubs are seeking new coaches for next season. Bayern is parting company with Thomas Tuchel, in part because it lags so far behind Alonso's Leverkusen, while Jürgen Klopp is stepping down as Liverpool manager after nine years.

Alonso didn't say how much contact, if any, he had with Bayern or Liverpool.

"I think that it wouldn't be correct for me to talk about other clubs when they are in this situa-

tion, for sure. They are clubs that I have a strong link (with), I play there, so I respect them, but it's not correct for me to talk about them right now," he said. "It's more about the conviction that I have that I am in the right place in Bayer Leverkusen and that I want to keep growing with the club, growing with the players, learning from them." Alonso added that he wants to help build Leverkusen into a Champions League contender, with its return to Europe's top competition all but certain for next season.

In Liverpool, Klopp said he understood Alonso's decision, having been in a similar situation. The German had extended his stay at Borussia Dortmund in 2013 despite interest from other clubs.

"I had a similar situation and did pretty much the same, and ever regretted it," Klopp said at a news conference ahead of Liverpool's Premier League match against Brighton on Sunday. "The club is doing an incredible job there. Leverkusen has a good team, probably will keep the team together. It's not in all years like that. So I understand that he wants to do that." (AP)

He could be in more trouble after the FA said he breached its rules on 50 occasions by allegedly placing bets on matches from Aug. 12 to Oct. 12 last year.

On Oct. 12, Tonalì was sent home from Italy's training camp after being notified by police of his involvement in a betting investigation. The 23-year-old Tonalì joined Newcastle from AC Milan last July for a fee reportedly worth up to 60 million pounds (\$76.3 million). But he made only 12 appearances for the Premier League club after being caught up in a wider betting investigation that saw Juventus midfielder Nicolò Fagioli banned for seven months.

Tonalì told prosecutors he bet on Milan and Brescia when he played for those clubs. His agent, Giuseppe Riso, acknowledged his client had a gambling problem. Tonalì agreed to a plea bargain with the Italian federation that included therapy for a gambling addiction.

His ban ends on July 14.

Newcastle said last year it would give Tonalì and his family its full support. Tonalì is the latest Premier League player to be charged with breaching betting rules. Brentford and England striker Ivan Toney was banned for eight months last year and fined 50,000 pounds (\$62,000) after 232 breaches.

An independent commission said Toney's punishment could have been more severe had he not been diagnosed with a gambling addiction.

Last September, Nottingham Forest defender Harry Toffolo was given a suspended five-month ban and fined 20,956 pounds (\$26,100) after admitting to 375 breaches. (AP)

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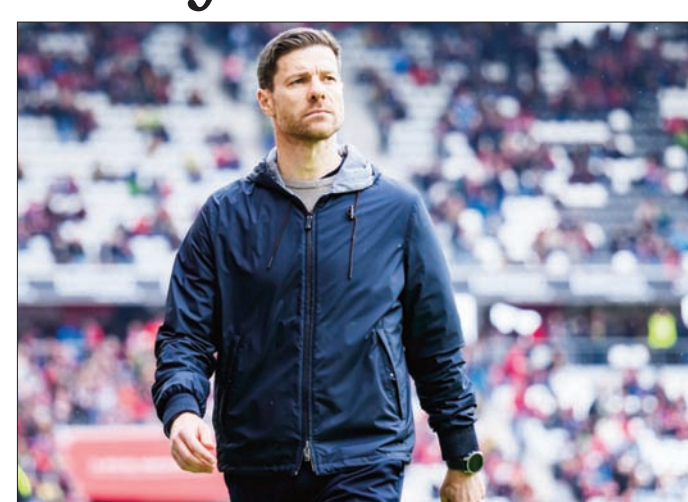
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## Block it out, it's all irrelevant: Smith on Hardik facing boos

**NEW DELHI, March 29:** Australian star batter Steve Smith has advised Hardik Pandya to simply "block out" the constant jeers and boos the new Mumbai Indians skipper is receiving from spectators at the IPL so far, as they are "all irrelevant".

Hardik, who replaced five-time IPL-winning captain Rohit Sharma as skipper this season, had a dismal start to his captaincy tenure as MI suffered back-to-back defeats.

On top of the two losses, the former Gujarat Titans skipper was booed by fans at Ahmedabad and Hyderabad -- the venue of MI's first two matches -- as they were clearly not happy with the way Rohit was removed from captaincy.

"I'd try and just say, to block it out, it's all irrelevant," Smith, who has faced abuse from fans across the world for his role in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal in Cape Town, told ESPN-cricinfo.

"No one outside knows what you are going through. No one (from outside) is in that change

room." Smith, who was called "cheat" by fans during the 2019 ODI World Cup in England, feels all these abuse will come as a big surprise for Hardik as he is getting it from his Indian fans at home.

"Personally, for me, it doesn't bother me. I don't care. I don't pay any attention," said Smith, who had to resign as Rajasthan Royals captain in 2018 after the ball-tampering scandal.

"You know it's all white noise, but certainly players do hear things and everyone's entitled to their own emotions and how they respond to those. So is it affecting him (Hardik)? Maybe. It's possible. He probably hasn't experienced that before in, in any walk of life. So it's natural, I suppose, and particularly being in India and a star Indian player, to be in that position where some fans are booing you, it's certainly something he wouldn't have experienced."

Hardik had led Gujarat Titans to IPL title triumph in their maiden season in 2022 after he

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was released by Mumbai Indians.

However, last November, he returned to Mumbai Indians via a monetary trade and was soon made the captain, replacing Rohit, which did not go down well with the Indian captain's fans.

"Hardik is in the middle of a challenging time, losing the first two games their IPL season. It's a big one for him," said Smith, who had replaced MS Dhoni as captain of now-defunct Rising Pune Supergiant in 2017.

"He's filling big shoes with Rohit Sharma, who's been the most successful captain (with Dhoni) in IPL history, lifting five titles, and it hasn't started well for

him."

MI will face Rajasthan Royals on April 1 next at home and Smith is waiting to find out how Hardik is received by the local fans at the Wankhede Stadium.

"So he's under a little bit of pressure at the moment and it'll be interesting to see what the reception's like in their first home game at Wankhede in a couple of days' time. We have heard a few boos going around at the grounds, which, that's been disappointing from my aspect. But I'm intrigued to see what the reception's like in Mumbai. We know how big a star Rohit is and how much he is loved inside that stadium." (PTI)





# Rahul-led LSG eye all-round effort against PBKS to pull things back



**LUCKNOW, March 29:** Lucknow Super Giants will aim for an improved all-round effort when they take on Punjab Kings in their second Indian Premier League match here on Saturday.

K L Rahul-led LSG faltered in the opening game against Rajasthan Royals, losing by 20 runs in Chandigarh.

Barring Krunal Pandya, all the LSG bowlers leaked runs and also looked ineffective.

In the absence of Mark Wood and David Willey, LSG's pace battery looks thin with the likes of Mohsin Khan, Naveen-ul-Haq,

and Yash Thakur expected to do the heavy lifting.

Fighting for a place in the upcoming T20 World Cup squad, Ravi Bishnoi too looked ordinary in the team's tournament opener.

Skipper Rahul, who has decided to play the wicketkeeper-batter's role keeping the T20 World Cup in mind, made 58 in his comeback game and would be looking to build on that.

He would be hoping his opening partner Quinton de Kock returns to his belligerent best against Punjab after missing out against Royals. The team is also banking on the likes

of Devdutt Padikkal Ayush Badoni, Deepak Hooda, and Krunal to deliver down the order.

LSG's success will also depend on the form of Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis, who was the leading run-getter for the team last year with 408 runs.

PBKS, on the other hand, have a 50-50 record so far, winning one and losing one.

The Shikhar Dhawan-led side needs more fluency in the powerplay and that is bound to come if Jonny Bairstow gets going after failing in the first two games. Dhawan, who only plays IPL, needs to up his strike

rate going forward. He himself admitted to batting a bit "slowly" against RCB.

Prabhsimran Singh, who came of age last season, has not been able to capitalise on his starts yet.

While all-rounder Sam Curran has shown his prowess with the bat in the two matches, the left-arm seamer has been wayward with the ball.

Vice-captain Jitesh Sharma, who is in the running for a World Cup berth, needs to have a stellar season to convince the national selectors.

In the pace bowling department, Kagiso Rabada will look for more support from Curran, Arshdeep Singh and Harshal Patel. Left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar has been impressive while leg-spinner Rahul Chahar needs to up his game.

**Teams(from):**

**Lucknow Super Giants:** KL Rahul (c), Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Kyle Mayers, Marcus Stoinis, Deepak Hooda, Devdutt Padikkal, Ravi Bishnoi, Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya, Yudhvir Singh, Prerak Mankad, Yash Thakur, Amit Mishra, Shamar Joseph, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan, K. Gowtham, Shivam Mavi, Arshin Kulkarni, M Sid-dharth, Ashton Turner, David Willey, Mohd. Arshad Khan.

**Punjab Kings:** Shikhar Dhawan (captain), Matthew Short, Prabhsimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidvath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajann, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.

Match starts at 7.30 PM IST. (PTI)

# Bopanna-Ebden sail into men's doubles final of Miami Open



**MIAMI, March 29:** Indian tennis stalwart Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden sailed into the men's doubles final of the Miami Open with a straight-set win over Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos here.

Bopanna and Ebden, the Australian Open winners, hardly broke a sweat to get the better of Spain's Granollers and Argentina's Zeballos 6-1 6-4 in the semifinals on Thursday night.

Bopanna had slipped to second spot in the doubles rankings after a quarterfinal loss at the Dubai Championships and a round-of-32 exit at the Indian Wells Masters, but the semifinal win here will help the Indian regain the top spot when they are updated on Monday.

Following the Australian Open triumph, the 44-year-old

Bopanna had climbed to the world No.1 spot in the ATP rankings, becoming the oldest player to do so.

In the final, Bopanna and Ebden will take on Ivan Dodig of Croatia and American Austin Krajicek, who beat the German duo of Kevin Krawietz and Tim Putz 6-4 6-7(7) 10-7 in the other semifinal.

For Bopanna, this will be his 14th ATP Masters 1000 final and the first in Miami. Overall, this will be his 63rd ATP Tour level final. He has so far won 25 doubles titles. This will also be the fifth appearance in an ATP Masters 1000 final for the Bopanna and Ebden pairing.

Bopanna also achieved a rare feat as he became the second Indian after Leander Paes to reach the final of all 9 ATP Masters events. (PTI)

## Andy Murray to miss Monte Carlo and Munich tournaments because of ankle injury

**LONDON, March 29:** Andy Murray still has no timetable to return from an ankle injury as the three-time Grand Slam champion's management team confirmed on Friday that he'll miss upcoming clay-court tournaments in Monte Carlo and Munich.

The 36-year-old Murray tore ligaments in his left ankle on Sunday during a match at the Miami Open and announced the next day that he'd be sidelined "for an extended period."

"At this stage, it is still not clear how long Andy will be out of action, and he is continuing to review options with his medical team," Friday's statement from his management team read.

"Obviously this is very disappointing news for Andy and he has reiterated his desire to get back on court as soon as possible."

The former world No. 1 rolled his ankle on an approach to the net late in the third set against Tomas Machac. Murray finished the match, losing 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 (5).

The Monte Carlo Masters begins April 7, and the BMW Open in Munich is the following week.

Murray, who has said he's unlikely to play past this summer, has been holding out hope of competing for Britain again in the Paris Olympics. (AP)

# KASA-FCC launches new jersey

**DIPHU, March 29:** Karbi Anglong Sports Association-Football Coaching Centre (KASA-FCC) has launched a new jersey for its players at a launching ceremony held here at KASA stadium on Friday. The jersey was dedicated to former KASA vice president and president, Greater Diphu Sports Association (KASA), late Gautam Terang.

The KASA-FCC was opened by KASA in 2022 to train young budding children from the district on football at grassroot level. There are a total of 70 children both boys and girls of different age groups i.e. Under - 13, Under -15 and Under - 17. Children are trained under the guidance of four coaches whereas Horen Engti Kathar with AFC - C license coach and chief coach and three other coaches with AIFF - D license Rustom Engti, Angtong Teron and Jamna.

Launching the New Jersey for the coaching centre the chief coach Engti said, "We are launching the new jersey as an alternate jersey for children so that they can wear on



alternate days during coaching sessions. The newly launched jersey is dedicated to our loving former KASA vice president and president, Greater Diphu Sports Association (KASA), late Gautam Terang sir, who has a passion for sports."

The jersey launching ceremony was at-

tended by KASA general secretary, Dr. Pankaj Teron; assistant secretary, Dr. Jacqueline Teronpi; KASA football secretary, Horen Engti Kathar; adventure sports secretary, Khorsing Terang and members Helen Engthipi and Melina Terangpi. Parents of KASA FCC children were also present.

# Assam sub junior Sepak Takraw team wins national championship, makes history



**GUWAHATI, March 29:** The Assam Sub Junior Sepak Takraw team emerged victorious in the recent national championship held in Bengaluru. The Assam team etched their name in history by clinching the championship trophy, showcasing exceptional skill and determination throughout the tournament.

A significant highlight of their journey to the top was their stunning victory over the formidable Manipur team in the semifinals.

Manipur, known for its dominance in Sepak Takraw for the past two decades, faced a surprising defeat at the hands of the young and spirited Assam team. In a thrilling encounter, Assam secured a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Manipur, marking a historic milestone in their Sepak Takraw journey.

The Assam team carried their momentum into the final showdown against Bihar. The Assam team dominated the final match, securing a convincing 2-0 victory over Bihar to clinch the championship trophy.

# France asks for foreign police and military help with massive Paris Olympics security challenge



**PARIS, March 29:** France says it has asked 46 countries if they would be willing to supply more than 2,000 police officers to help secure the Paris Olympics this summer, as organizers finalize security planning for the French capital's first Games in a century while on heightened alert against potential attacks.

The Interior Ministry said Friday that the request for foreign security assistance was made in

January, seeking nearly 2,185 reinforcements. The officers are sought to help with Games security and "the spectator experience" and to "strengthen international cooperation," the ministry said.

"This is a classic approach of host countries for the organization of major international events," the ministry added.

It noted that France sent 200 of its gendarmes to soccer's World Cup in Qatar in 2022 and also wel-

comed 160 officers from other European security forces for the Rugby World Cup that France hosted last year.

Separately, the French Defense Ministry has also asked foreign nations for "small numbers" of military personnel who could help with "very specific" tasks at the Games, including sniffer dog teams, said Col. Pierre Gaudillière, spokesman for the army general staff.

Poland's defense minister said

his country will be sending soldiers to the Paris Games. The Polish armed forces delegation will include dog handlers and "its main goal will be to undertake activities related to the detection of explosives and counteracting terrorist phenomena," the minister, Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz, posted on X.

Security is the biggest challenge for Paris Games organizers in a city that has been repeatedly hit by deadly attacks by Islamic extremists and which is expecting as many as 15 million visitors for the July 26-Aug. 11 Games and Paralympics that follow.

Security concerns are notably high for the opening ceremony, which will involve boats along the Seine River and huge crowds watching from the embankments. France's government increased its security alert posture to the highest level in the wake of the recent deadly attack at a Russian concert hall and the Islamic State's claim of responsibility.

French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal announced the decision in a post on X, saying authorities were "taking into account the Islamic State's claim of responsibility for the (Moscow) attack and the threats weighing on our country." (AP)

# Advani, Causier storm into last 16



**MUMBAI, March 29:** World champion Pankaj Advani of India and David Causier of England recorded their third successive wins and stormed into the pre-quarterfinals of the All India CCI Billiards Classic 2024 here on Friday.

The Bengaluru-based Advani staged off a spirited challenge from Mumbai's talented cueist Raayan Razi to pull off a 603-418 victory in a Group A match at the CCI's Wilson Jones billiards hall.

Advani started with a run of 235 and later compiled a break of 90 to secure the win, while Raayan

made a 93 and followed it with a neat 124 to stay in the fight.

Raayan with two wins also advanced to the pre-quarters.

The Englishman Causier, winner of multiple world titles, was on a roll and constructed substantial breaks of 203, 124, 160, 152, 162, 93 and 70 to tame Maharashtra number one Mahesh Jagdale by a massive 1168-418 margin in a Group C match.

Causier joined Advani and Raayan in the knockouts.

Earlier, world championship runner-up Sourav Kothari regained his winning touch as he outshone

seasoned pro Alok Kumar by scripting a convincing 889-200 point victory in a Group F match.

The Kolkata-based Kothari and Mumbai cueist Rohan Jambusaria qualified for the pre-quarterfinals from this group.

Meanwhile, former CCI billiards champion Siddharth Parikh and seasoned Arun Agrawal won their respective final-round matches in Group H and also progressed to the knockout round. Siddharth with three successive wins topped the group.

Parikh with steady breaks of 183, 71, 96 and 72 outplayed England's Chris Taylor by posting a fluent 671-254 win.

On an adjacent table, Mumbai's veteran player Agrawal played fluently to tame CCI cueist Kanishk Jhanjhar 702-280. Agrawal produced breaks of 157, 61, 95 and 79.

**Results:**  
**Group A:** Pankaj Advani beat Raayan Razi 603-418.

**Group C:** David Causier beat Mahesh Jagdale 1168-335.

**Group E:** Kamal Chawla beat Rishabh Thakkar 503-267; Dhruv Sitwala beat Shahyan Razi 817-196.

**Group F:** Sourav Kothari beat Alok Kumar 889-200.

**Group H:** Siddharth Parikh beat Chris Taylor 671-254; Arun Agrawal beat Kanishk Jhanjhar 702-280. (PTI)