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“ Today, solar energy is one such topic in which the entire world sees its future. And for Indians, Sun has not only been worshipped for centuries but has also been at the centre of our lifestyle ”

Shri Narendra Modi
 Prime Minister



Gratitude to
Prime Minister of India
 for keeping Assam close to heart

Foundation Stone Laying for
70-MW Solar Power Plant
 Khudigaon Pt-II

At Bilasipara, Dhubri

By

Shri Narendra Modi
 Prime Minister

On 4 March 2024

Completion timeline
April 2025

Cost
₹ 400 cr

Towards reaching goal of **3000 MW**
 renewable energy projects by **March 2027**

An initiative of **Assam Power Distribution Company Ltd (APDCL)**
 Implementing agency: **SJVN Green Energy Ltd**



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Tata Motors to demerge passenger, commercial biz into two separate listed entities

NEW DELHI, March 4: Tata Motors on Monday announced the demerger of its commercial and passenger vehicle segments into two separate listed entities to better capitalise on growth opportunities.

The commercial vehicles business and its related investments would be housed in one entity while the passenger vehicle business, including electric vehicles, Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) and its related investments, would be part of the second entity, the auto major said in a regulatory filing.

Tata Motors Chairman N Chandrasekaran said that Tata Motors has scripted a strong turnaround in the last few years.

"The three automotive business units are now operating independently and delivering consistent performance. This demerger will help them better capitalise on the opportunities provided by the market by enhancing their focus and agility," he added.

The demerger would lead to a superior experience for customers, better growth prospects for employees and enhanced value for



shareholders, Chandrasekaran stated.

According to the proposal approved by the company board in a meeting on Monday, the demerger will be implemented through an NCLT scheme of arrangement and all shareholders of Tata Motors shall continue to have identical shareholding in both the listed entities.

Chandrasekaran said the scheme of arrangement for the demerger shall be placed before the company board for approval in the coming

months and will be subject to all necessary shareholder, creditor and regulatory approvals which could take a further 12-15 months to complete.

"The demerger will have no adverse impact on employees, customers, and our business partners," Chandrasekaran stated.

The auto major stated that the demerger is a logical progression of the subsidiarisation of PV and EV businesses done earlier in 2022.

The move shall further empower

the respective businesses to pursue their respective strategies to deliver higher growths with greater agility while reinforcing accountability, the company said in the filing.

Furthermore, while there are limited synergies between commercial vehicles and passenger vehicle businesses, there are considerable synergies to be harnessed across PV, EV and JLR particularly in the areas of EVs, autonomous vehicles, and vehicle software which the demerger will help secure, the company stated.

Part of the USD 128 billion Tata group, Tata Motors is a manufacturer of cars, utility vehicles, pickups, trucks and buses.

As of March 31, 2023, Tata Motors' operations included 88 consolidated subsidiaries, two joint operations, three joint ventures and numerous equity-accounted associates, including their subsidiaries, in respect of which the company exercises significant influence.

Tata Motors shares on Monday ended 0.12 per cent down at ₹987.20 apiece on the BSE. (PTI)

India permits 64,400 tonnes of onion exports to UAE, B'desh

NEW DELHI, March 4: The government has permitted exports of 64,400 tonnes of onion to the UAE and Bangladesh through the National Cooperative Exports Ltd (NCEL), according to notifications of the commerce ministry.

While export of 50,000 tonnes of onion is permitted to Bangladesh, shipments of 14,400 tonnes were allowed to the UAE.

"Export of 14,400 tonnes of onions, with a quantity ceiling of 3,600 MT (metric tonnes) quarterly, to UAE through NCEL is notified," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a notification. DGFT is an arm of the commerce ministry, which deals with norms related to imports and exports.

For exports to Bangladesh, it said that the modalities for the exports will be worked out by the NCEL in consultation with the department of consumer affairs. Though onion exports are banned, the government allows specified quantities to friendly nations.

The exports are allowed on the basis of permission granted by the government to other countries based on their request.

On December 8 last year, the government banned exports of onion till March 31 this year with a view to increase domestic availability and to keep prices in check.

Earlier, the Centre in October 2023 had decided to step up the sale of buffer onion stock at a subsidised rate of ₹ 25 per kg in retail markets in order to provide relief to consumers.

To control prices, the government has earlier taken several steps. It had imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 800 per tonne on onion exports on October 28 till December 31, 2023.

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

Between April 1, 2023 and August 4, 2023 this fiscal, 9.75 lakh tonnes of onions have been exported from the country. The top three importing countries in value terms are Bangladesh, Malaysia and the UAE. (PTI)

Bandhan Mutual Fund unveils Bandhan long duration fund

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 4: Bandhan Mutual Fund has announced the launch of its latest offering, the Bandhan Long Duration Fund, positioning itself to capitalize on anticipated changes in India's economic landscape. This open-ended, long-term debt scheme targets investors who foresee a decline in near-peak interest rates, driven by structural enhancements in the economy. Scheduled to commence on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, the New Fund Offer (NFO) will run until Monday, March 18, 2024. Investors can access the Bandhan Long Duration Fund through licensed mutual fund distributors, investment advisors, online platforms, or directly via the Bandhan Mutual Fund website. In discussing the fund's objectives,

Vishal Kapoor, CEO of Bandhan AMC, highlighted the evolving macroeconomic environment. He emphasized the convergence of structural and cyclical improvements that are poised to alleviate deficits, alleviate inflationary pressures, and attract foreign capital into Indian bond markets. These factors are expected to pave the way for a sustained period of lower interest rates, presenting an attractive proposition for bond investors. Kapoor underscored the strategic advantage of long-duration funds like the Bandhan Long Duration Fund in capitalizing on favourable interest rates over the long term. By mitigating reinvestment risks and offering potential capital gains as interest rates decline, such funds provide investors with a com-

PELLING avenue for portfolio diversification and wealth accumulation. Distinguished by its steadfast commitment to investing in the highest-rated instruments, the Bandhan Long Duration Fund will explore opportunities across government and corporate bonds, with a portfolio duration exceeding 7 years. However, investors should be mindful that the long duration of the fund may entail higher volatility compared to other debt fund categories. With its latest offering, Bandhan Mutual Fund aims to position itself as a leading player in the evolving landscape of India's debt market. By leveraging its expertise and strategic foresight, the fund seeks to deliver long-term value to investors amidst shifting economic dynamics.

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance sets industry standard with exceptional claims settlement ratio

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 4: Life insurance remains a cornerstone of financial planning, offering crucial protection to families and dependents in times of need. With the promise of ensuring financial security in the event of the policyholder's untimely demise, it serves as a vital tool to mitigate the impact of such a loss. For consumers, the reliability of an insurance provider during the claims process is paramount. Evaluating factors such as the claims settlement ratio and turnaround time can offer insights into the insurer's customer-centric approach. In this regard, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance emerges as a frontrunner, boasting

a consistent track record of claims settlement. With a commendable 98.6% claims settlement ratio for the initial nine months of FY2024, the company underscores its commitment to policyholders' financial well-being. Breaking down the numbers, ICICI Prudential Life's performance in Q1-FY2024 stood at a noteworthy 98.10%, followed by 98.14% in Q2-FY2024, and a robust 98.52% in Q3-FY2024. Moreover, the average claim settlement turnaround time for non-investigated claims was a mere 1.3 days for the nine months ending December 2023. Notably, the company's 'Claim For Sure' service initiative ensures swift settlement of eligible death claims within one day upon

receipt of all necessary documents. In instances of any delay, ICICI Prudential Life compensates beneficiaries with accrued interest on the claim amount. Beyond efficient processing, the company prioritizes customer convenience by offering home pick-up of claim-related documents and leveraging digital platforms like WhatsApp, Mobile App, and Website for seamless claims submission and tracking. In the fiscal year's first nine months, ICICI Prudential Life settled 3,070 claims under the 'Claim For Sure' initiative, amounting to ₹ 214.70 crore. The majority of claims are electronically settled, ensuring beneficiaries have prompt access to their claim proceeds.

Lighthouse invests ₹ 229 cr in Safari for undisclosed stake

MUMBAI, March 4: Private equity fund Lighthouse on Monday said it has invested ₹ 229 crore in luggage brand Safari for an undisclosed stake. The investment by the mid-market consumer and healthcare-focused platform is the second bet taken by its newest fund, Lighthouse India Fund IV AIF, as per an official statement. It was not immediately clear how the company intended to deploy the newly raised funds. Lighthouse's co-founder and partner Sachin Bhartiya said the Private Equity (PE) fund sees structural tailwinds to the travel sector, and added that the Indian luggage market has been a beneficiary of increasing leisure travel and wedding spends. "Safari is uniquely positioned to capture this opportunity with the confluence of expanding discretionary spends and changing consumer behaviour in favour of branded luggage with aspirational appeal," he said. (PTI)

Moody's raises 2024 growth forecast to 6.8 pc India to remain fastest growing G-20 nation

NEW DELHI, March 4: Global rating agency Moody's on Monday raised India's growth forecast for 2024 calendar year to 6.8 per cent on "stronger-than-expected" economic data and said that the country will remain the fastest growing among G20 countries.

In its Global Macroeconomic Outlook for 2024, Moody's Investors Service said with global headwinds fading, the Indian economy should be able to register 6-7 per cent real GDP growth comfortably. For 2025, the GDP growth is estimated at 6.4 per cent. Moody's had projected a 6.1 per cent growth for 2024 earlier.

"India's economy has performed well and stronger-than-expected data in 2023 has caused us to raise our 2024 growth estimate to 6.8 per cent from 6.1 per cent. India is likely to remain the fastest-growing among G-20 economies over our forecast horizon," Moody's said.

India's real GDP expanded by 8.4 per cent year-on-year in the fourth quarter of calendar year 2023, resulting in a 7.7 per cent growth for full-year 2023. The GDP grew by 8.2 per cent in the April-June quarter and by 8.1 per cent in the July-September quarter.

Capital spending by the government and strong manufacturing activity have meaningfully contributed to the robust growth outcomes in 2023, Moody's said in its report.

The agency said high-frequency indicators show that the economy's strong September and December quarter momentum carried into the March quarter of 2024.

"Robust goods and services tax collections,



rising auto sales, consumer optimism and double-digit credit growth suggest urban consumption demand remains resilient. On the supply side, expanding manufacturing and services PMIs add to evidence of solid economic momentum," Moody's said.

This year's interim budget targets capital expenditure allocation of ₹ 11.1 lakh crore or 3.4 per cent of GDP in 2024-25 (fiscal year 2025), 16.9 per cent above the 2023-24 estimates.

"We expect policy continuity after the general election and continued focus on infrastructure development," Moody's said. The agency said while private industrial capital spending has been slow to pick up, it is expected to pick up with ongoing supply chain diversification benefits and investors' response to the government's Production Linked Incentive scheme to boost key targeted manufacturing industries.

The year 2024 is an election year for several G-20 countries, including India, Indonesia,

Mexico, South Africa, the UK and the US.

Implications of elections can go beyond borders and economic and public policy in today's increasingly fractious world, it said.

"Leaders elected this year will influence domestic and foreign policies for the next four to five years. Businesses are accordingly responding to evolving geopolitical dynamics by reorganizing supply chains and capital sources," Moody's said. Headline inflation in January eased to 5.1 per cent from 5.7 per cent in the previous month. Core inflation also moderated to 3.5 per cent, down from 3.8 per cent in December. The RBI held the repo rate steady at 6.5 per cent in February — the same level since March 2023. Given the solid growth dynamics and inflation above the 4 per cent target, we do not expect policy easing any time soon.

"The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept its policy rate on hold at its February meeting. The RBI will likely keep rates on hold in the coming months given strong growth and firm inflation," Moody's said.

It said geopolitical realities will be influencing international trade flows, capital flows, international migration trends and international organizations in the years to come. Domestic, industrial and trade policies of several countries are intertwined with foreign policy.

Moody's further said that the global economy is transitioning to a post-pandemic equilibrium with a steady normalization in economic activity across major advanced and emerging markets. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Kamrup (m) set for

The chief minister also said that with the inauguration of the elevated corridor, commuters coming from Adabari areas and going to Kachar Ghat can directly take the elevated corridor bypassing Bharalukmukh. Giving a snapshot of the latest infrastructural developments of Guwahati, he said that the construction of the Neelachal Flyover, Shradhanjali Flyover, Dispur Super market Flyover, extension of Ganeshguri Flyover have led to the smooth traffic movement in the city. The under-construction flyover at Kalapahar and the one from Dighali Pukhuri to Bamunimaidan will lead to a total transformation of the traffic movement in the city. He also said that another elevated corridor from Pandu to Kamakhya Temple over the Brahmaputra is on the pipeline, which will be materialized very soon.

The Chief Minister further said that necessary steps for construction of a flyover at Rani would be taken. He also spoke about the government's initiatives aimed at massive infrastructure development near Deepor Beel with the aim of boosting tourism potential of the Ramsar Convention site. He further stated that the existing railway line passing through Deepor Beel shall be upgraded to elevated railway corridor so as to minimise casualties of elephants inhabiting in the nearby areas.

State housing and urban affairs Ashok Singhal, MP Queen Oja, MLA Ramendra Narayan Kalita, chief minister's wife Riniki Bhuyan Sarma, GMC mayor Mrigen Sarania and a host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

State gets 2nd Ayurvedic

that those had neglected traditional forms of medicines. The new ayurvedic college will be developed at an estimated cost of ₹70 crore. It will have an intake capacity of 100 students for the undergraduate course (BAMS). Provisions have been made to start the postgraduate courses later on, the release said. The campus will also have a herbal garden along with a manufacturing unit of ayurvedic medicines. The 50-bed integrated AYUSH hospitals in Kokrajhar and Baksa will be developed at an investment of ₹ 30 crore. (PTI)

SC to hear BBC's plea against

with BBC, Discovery and Netflix to broadcast them though the KFD had specified the film would not be commercially used. The film was also released in theatres. The original footage shot was of 400 hours and the KFD had copyright over all the raw footage, the petitioners/complainants claimed. The HC passed an interim order on June 29, 2021 on the petition forbidding all the respondents from publishing or telecasting the film.

However, the film was released in theatres and telecast on broadcaster platforms. The complainants then filed the contempt petition before the HC. The original petition is still pending before the high court. On January 17, the respondents submitted they are willing to pay compensation to the KFD. The BBC offered ₹ 3.5 lakh as compensation and Netflix ₹ 4.5 lakh.

Icon Films and Discovery also offered ₹ 3.5 lakh each to the Tiger Conservation Foundation. The filmmakers and other accused also promised to pay compensation. The high court, however, agreed with the advocate of the petitioners that the "apology appears to be sham in the light of the compensation offered by the accused," and went ahead with the framing of charges. (PTI)

Lawmakers taking bribe to

and 194 from prosecution on a charge of bribery in connection with a vote or speech in the legislature". It said such a claim to immunity fails to fulfill the two-fold test that the claim is tethered to the collective functioning of the House and that it is necessary to the discharge of the essential duties of a legislator.

The apex court said bribery is not rendered immune under Article 105(2) and the corresponding provision of Article 194 because a member engaging in bribery commits a crime which is not essential to the casting of the vote or the ability to decide on how the vote should be cast. "The same principle applies to bribery in connection with a speech in the House or a Committee," the court said, adding, "Corruption and bribery by members of the legislatures erode probity in public life". It said the offence of bribery is "agnostic" to the performance of the agreed action and crystallises on the exchange of illegal gratification. "It does not matter whether the vote is cast in the agreed direction or if the vote is cast at all. The offence of bribery is complete at the point in time when the legislator accepts the bribe," it said. (PTI)

'Family' is INDIA bloc's

Dynasty parties have no connect with hard work and they do not see working hard for the people as their responsibility. "So dynasty brings arrogance also. If a dynast comes to power, he thinks the country and its people are his slaves and forgets the honour of his post." Modi said the country is his family and the 140 crore people, the youth, farmers and poor are all his family.

"To make their future bright, I am working day and night. Sisters, daughters, they are my family. I am working to give them more and more opportunities." Furthermore, he said: "Those who don't have anyone, they belong to Modi and Modi belongs to them. Mera Bharat Mera Parivaar (My Bharat My family)." He said today, the entire country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kutch (Gujarat) to Kamarup (Assam), the whole country is saying in one voice, "I am Modi's family."

The BJP's public meeting here, reverberated with the slogan 'Namadhu Kudumbam, Modi Kudumbam' (Our family is Modi's family), as saffron party members chanted it after state leaders repeated the slogan in response to Lalu Prasad Yadav's taunt. Targeting Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK, he alleged that the state government did not do flood management during the severe inundation Chennai faced last December, but instead "managed" the media to send out the message that everything is fine.

Against the background of the DMK sacking its functionary Jaffer Sadiq, over allegations of his connection to a drug cartel, the PM said the information he received was worrisome and drug availability is rampant in Tamil Nadu. "I am worried about future generations." The PM said the people should be very careful about 'such a party' that is just a mute spectator while the future of children was getting spoiled. Exhorting the people to support the BJP, he said it would expedite the probe against 'Tamil Nadu's enemies,' and asserted that it is Modi's guarantee.

The PM detailed the development projects worth thousands of crores including the Chennai Port-Madurai-vayal expressway and a slew of other initiatives like the COVID vaccines, free ration for the poor and credit facilities to the MSMEs. The Central schemes facilitate direct disbursement of payout to beneficiaries. The DMK is troubled that lakhs of crores of this benefit goes directly to beneficiary accounts. In a slew of initiatives covering piped water supply, roads, rail, and highway and so on, development work worth lakhs of crores is on and the DMK men have difficulty in 'looting,' he alleged. They are worried; but think that if money cannot be swindled, at least why should they not take credit for such development work. (PTI)

Majuli's mask making, manuscript

is an age-old art form in the island, dating back to the 16th century. It is one of the most famous traditional crafts still practiced in Majuli, the world's largest inhabited river island. 'Mukha Shilpa' has been an integral part of the 'Sattriya' culture of Assam. It has been mainly confined to the Satras, Vaishnavite monasteries or centres of learning, and individual craftsmen residing in the villages of Majuli, officials said. Manuscript painting is practiced on the banks of Aquilaria malaccensis, locally known as 'Sashi' (agarwood tree).

A long-lasting indigenous impermeable ink and colours extracted from natural ingredients are used to paint on the bark, they said. The art form patronised by Ahom kings illustrate numerous stories and chapters from the Hindu epics Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana. Both the art forms grew in medieval Assam under the guidance of Neo-Vaishnavite saint Srimanta Sankardev, the officials said. (PTI)

Over 300 join BJP in Jorhat

the chief minister to achieve the goal of Assam in finding a place among the top five developing states of the country. "They (Congress leaders who left the party) were fed up with the present leadership and have realised there was no policy, no ideology left in the Congress and it was futile to be in the party," Hazarika observed. Rana Goswami who returned to his hometown for the first time after joining BJP, said that he was overwhelmed by the warmth and affection bestowed on him by BJP leaders and workers.

Goswami said that his experience of three days after joining BJP was remarkable as being evident by the affectionate treatment given to him by the party. He said that he has been inspired by the spirit of party rank and their resolve to work for the nation's development.

Stating that several Congress panchayat and leaders of Jorhat were among those who joined BJP at the party office, Goswami thanked the party leadership for entrusting him an important responsibility by appointing him as the vice-president of the state unit. Recollecting his experience of working together with chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma when the latter was in the Congress, Goswami said that Sarma is an able administrator and a hard-working leader. He also heaped praises on the Prime Minister by stating that the country has reached new heights by accomplishing phenomenal transformation in all spheres and India's stature in the global scenario has been elevated under his dynamic leadership.

Primary school dropout

that the rate was the same at 74 per cent in 2019-20. However, the GER is considerably low for senior secondary schools at 40.1 per cent in 2021-22, up from 30.9 per cent in 2020-21, according to UDISE data.

"Education empowers people with skills and knowledge, which ultimately help boost economic growth. A number of schemes have been initiated by the government for encouraging development of education among various sections of the population in the state," the report said.

It said that altogether 46,69,501 students were provided with free textbooks before the commencement of the academic year 2023-24. In 2022, 41,51,498 students from Class 1 to 8 were given free textbooks by the government. (PTI)

NHPC says mega hydro projects

with the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), ISRO.

"A GLOF event originating from South Lhonak lake (located approximately 70 km upstream of Teesta III Dam) could have been triggered by various factors, such as an earthquake, flash flood, glacier calving or breaches due to the detachment of moraine sidewalls or a combination of these events. Most of the glacial lakes present in Subansiri, Siang and Dibang river catchments are present in the Chinese portion of these river catchments, which are far away from NHPC projects. Hence they pose insignificant threat of GLOF induced flood," Mohammed said. The topography, catchment characteristic, glacial lake locations in river basins in Arunachal Pradesh are different in following aspects, which indicated there are no chance of GLOF induced flood disaster for projects in Subansiri, Siang and Dibang Basins as it was in Teesta Basin GLOF case.

The glacial lakes are located far away from NHPC dams as a result of this GLOF get attenuated to a very low flood values. The slopes of rivers are mild. Hence, flow velocities of flood water is lower, also leads to higher travel time and more time to take action to mitigate the effect of flood. Due to presence of huge reservoir storage volume the GLOF volume will be completely absorbed into reservoirs and hence, there is no threat to any dam or to the downstream population. As per existing studies the peaks of GLOF at dam sites are even much lower than average monsoon floods for Subansiri, Siang and Dibang basin projects of NHPC.

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● BJP was never so weak as party: Akhilesh on candidates withdrawing from LS polls
● BJP's second list of LS candidates likely tomorrow, says Yediyurappa

'Family' is INDIA bloc's new formula to abuse me, says PM

CHENNAI, March 4: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the opposition INDIA bloc's "new formula" to abuse him is to say he does not have a family but the people have rejected it by chanting in one voice that they belong to Modi's family.

"tough questions." Modi alleged that "insulting" the faith of crores of people is an identity of the dynasts. The Supreme Court on Monday rebuked Udhayanidhi, also the DMK's Youth Wing Secretary, over his "eradicate Sanatan Dharma" remark.

Modi asked. He alleged the Congress and the DMK are steeped in corruption and dynasty. "For them, their family alone is everything. For them corruption is everything."

Modi in that bloc, the tears have not dried up, they are afraid and shivering as they do not know anything but graft. For decades, INDIA alliance parties did politics of loot and due to them, young people are frustrated with politics.

Without naming Tamil Nadu Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, son of Chief Minister M K Stalin, Modi, in his address at the BJP's rally here, said the Supreme Court posed the DMK Minister

Kamrup (m) set for ₹ 1,208 cr projects

CM lays foundation of, inaugurates several projects as part of Bikash Yatra

GUWAHATI, March 4: As a part of Bikash Yatra chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday inaugurated, laid foundations and performed bhumi puja of projects worth ₹ 1,208 crore in Kamrup (metro) district in different programmes held across the district.



Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said that Assam Public Works Roads Department undertook the ambitious project for construction of six-lane extra-dosed PSC bridge over the Brahmaputra connecting Guwahati and North Guwahati at a cost of ₹ 2608.69 crore.

State gets 2nd Ayurvedic college

GOALPARA, March 4: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday laid the foundation of the second ayurvedic college of the state at Dudhnoi in Goalpara district. He pointed out that the state was getting its second Ayurvedic college after a gap of 76 years.



Sonowal asserted that the central government is committed to build a robust healthcare delivery system in the country, which is rich with integrated modern and traditional forms of medicine, aimed at holistic care of people.

SC to hear BBC's plea against contempt proceedings for airing documentary

NEW DELHI, March 4: The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to hear a plea filed by BBC challenging the contempt proceedings initiated by the Karnataka High Court against its OTT platform for showing the documentary 'Wild Karnataka' despite a restraining order.

and platforms involved from engaging in any use, publication, reproduction, broadcasting, telecasting, marketing, selling, or dealing with the film and its raw footage obtained from the forest department.

NHPC says mega hydro projects in Arunachal safe

DIBRUGARH, March 4: There is no possibility of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) induced flood disaster for mega hydel projects in Arunachal Pradesh and those living in downstream areas, claimed NHPC officials.

Drug peddlers held

GUWAHATI: The police arrested a couple and seized drugs worth over ₹ 1 crore in the Kamrup district on Monday. Acting on a tip-off, a team of the Special Task Force (STF) intercepted a bus on NH-27 near North Guwahati Multi Specialty Hospital at Amingaon and nabbed the two peddlers, police sources said.

Foundation laid

BOKAJAN: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang laid the foundation stones for several development works in Bokajan Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency area in Karbi Anglong.

Ammunition recovered

SILCHAR: A huge quantity of ammunition, including gunpowder, has been recovered from Cachar district, police sources said on Monday. A joint team of police and the army recovered the ammunition buried near a pond inside the campus of a house at Rajghat village in Dholai area on the evening of March 2.

Lawmakers taking bribe to vote, make speech not immune from prosecution

NEW DELHI, March 4: MPs and MLAs taking bribe to vote or make a speech inside the legislature are not immune from prosecution, the Supreme Court ruled on Monday in a landmark verdict overturning its 1998 judgement, and said bribery and corruption by lawmakers "erode the foundation" of Indian Parliamentary democracy.



On Monday, a seven-judge bench held that Articles 105 and 194 of the Constitution, which deal with the powers and privileges of MPs and MLAs in Parliament and legislative assemblies, seek to sustain an environment in which debate and deliberation can take place within the legislature.

Over 300 join BJP in Jorhat

JORHAT, March 4: More than 300 people, including several Congress workers joined the BJP at its district office in Jorhat. These new members joined the party during a joining ceremony held at the BJP's district office on Sunday evening.

Primary school dropout rates rising every year in Assam: Eco Survey

GUWAHATI, March 4: Student dropout rates in state-run primary schools across the state have been continuously rising for the last few years despite the government taking various initiatives to improve the situation, the latest Economic Survey said.

'Mukha Shilpa' confined to Satras, Vaishnavite monasteries, individual craftsmen residing in Majuli's villages

Majuli's mask making, manuscript painting receive GI tags



GUWAHATI, March 4: 'Mukha Shilpa' or mask making and manuscript painting of Majuli, an island-district of the state have received geographical indication (GI) tags, an official statement said on Monday.

GI registration of unique products, said in a statement that the GI tags are recognition to rich cultural tapestry of the state, with the two products representing its heritage.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.
— Oscar Wilde

LS polls: BJP list, Cong's future

The recent unveiling of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) initial list of candidates for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections reflects a stark display of regimentation within the party under the leadership of Narendra Modi. This move, marked by the replacement of many ministers and sitting MPs with new faces, underscores the firm grip of the high command over the organization. While touted as a display of confidence and strength, this exercise also reveals deeper pitfalls lurking beneath the surface. The authoritarian manner in which candidates were selected, purportedly based on internal surveys of winnability, has led to discontent among senior politicians, some of whom have announced their retirements from active politics. Reports of ground-level realities contradicting the party's internal assessments further highlight the risks of such centralized decision-making. However, amidst these challenges lie strategic moves in the BJP's candidate selection process, which demand attention from the INDIA bloc, particularly the Congress party. While the BJP may have demonstrated its willingness to drop sitting MPs and ministers, Congress, as a democratic entity, must chart a different course. It cannot succumb to autocratic control but must establish a level of democratic discipline within its ranks. Recent trends within the Congress party have been marred by instances of indiscipline, with some leaders defecting to the BJP camp. This erosion of faith in democratic principles poses a threat to the party's ethos, especially in the face of an ascendant RSS-BJP alliance that seeks to reshape India's secular democratic fabric into a Hindu Rashtra.

The BJP's candidate list serves as a wake-up call for the Congress and the INDIA bloc, urging them to craft a compelling political narrative and field stronger candidates in every constituency. The BJP's decision to drop sitting MPs suggests a recognition of weaknesses within its own ranks, presenting an opportunity for the opposition to capitalize on. Congress must emulate the BJP's boldness in candidate selection, prioritizing not only winnability but also the integrity and past records of its candidates. The party cannot afford to tolerate controversial figures who undermine its values with reckless statements. It must also hold accountable those accused of corruption, exposing the partisan favouritism of the Modi government. Moreover, the Congress-INDIA alliance must pay heed to the BJP's emphasis on social engineering in candidate selection. By fielding candidates from diverse backgrounds and demographics, including women and younger individuals, the BJP seeks to broaden its appeal. Congress must respond with a similar commitment to inclusivity and representation.

In navigating the electoral landscape, Congress must remain steadfast in upholding the principles of a socialist, secular, democratic, and federal republic. It must resist the temptation to mirror the BJP's regimented approach, instead championing a vision of governance that embraces diversity and dissent. As the countdown to the Lok Sabha elections begins, Congress stands at a critical juncture. It must rise to the occasion, demonstrating resilience in the face of authoritarianism and offering a compelling alternative to the BJP's divisive agenda. Only through principled leadership and democratic discipline can Congress hope to reclaim its place as the vanguard of India's democratic ethos.

George Galloway's big win in Rochdale marks a welcome turn in British politics

By: Ben Chacko

By-election results are not necessarily the most perfect indicators of likely general election results, but George Galloway's stunning victory in the Rochdale constituency in Britain highlights factors which have an important national significance.

As the victorious candidate said, it is a victory for the Palestinian people and for Gaza. But it is also a powerful blow against the consensus politics of the Establishment "parties of government." It reflects the deep crisis of legitimacy that decades of neoliberalism, austerity and war have produced.

As the mainstream media suppressed coverage of the Rochdale campaign, local issues joined with a heightened sensitivity to global politics to produce a thoroughgoing rejection of Westminster-style politics.

It would be wrong to characterise Galloway's votes as exclusively harvested by his long-standing anti-imperialism and his solidarity with the Palestinian people. At slightly below 40 per cent and with a total bigger than the Westminster parties combined, it was also a pointed expression of the deep alienation of much of working-class Britain from consensus politics. The 6,000 votes cast for a local independent candidate that otherwise might have gone to the "parties of government" are another expression of this sentiment.

Turnout in Rochdale was higher than usual for by-elections. Drill deeper into the statistics and we find that the highest-ever Labour vote in Rochdale was won by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour in 2017 and that even the subsequent campaign of character assassination that the former Labour leader endured only eroded the 2019 votes by a small margin and resulted in the second-highest Labour vote ever recorded in this overwhelmingly working-class town.

There are some signs that people in the Labour Party are beginning to grasp the depth of the crisis of working-class confidence in Labour.

The logic of the first-past-the-post electoral system inevitably results in a powerful subjective pressure to corral progressive and working-class voters around whoever wears the red and yellow rosette. This is an objective fact of politics everywhere — until it isn't.

Labour's collapse in Scotland was a demonstration of this increasingly salient fact of political life. Keir Starmer's sabotage of the pledge to respect the referendum result was another factor in alienating working-class support. The block-headed loyalty much of Westminster Labour gives to the new cold war foreign policies of the Anglo-US corporate coalition has cost the party much of its political capital.

Labour may become the next government less by its own efforts and more by the collapse in the credibility of the Tories as a party of government, while our ruling-class increasingly demonstrates a measure of confidence that the continuity of capitalist orthodoxy will be best represented by a Starmer cabinet.

And even the most Labour-loyal of trade union leaders have little confidence that Labour will deliver much to restore employment rights or trade union freedoms while none has any confidence that Labour's economic policies will shift the burdens the capitalist crisis has imposed on workers to the rich.

If the politics of working-class Britain cannot be contained in the outdated model of Westminster parliamentary politics, the question is raised: what is to be done? The solution to this political problem is not likely to be found exclusively in Galloway's vehicle, the Workers Party, or any other of the many micro-organizations, some fallen from Labour's orbit or from longer-established socialist groupings.

An electoral challenge will come from the left and it would be desirable and more effective if co-operation and unity could be found — but the realisation of a working-class intervention into national political life depends more on the mass movement. (IPA Service)

India's robust GDP growth: Factors, challenges, and future trajectory

The latest GDP estimates paint a highly optimistic picture for the economy's performance in the current fiscal year. These findings reaffirm India's status as the swiftest expanding major economy, set to maintain this momentum for another year. Notably, the growth projection for FY24 has been adjusted upward to 7.6%, surpassing all other private estimates that previously stood at 7.3%. What factors have contributed to this favorable outcome?

Two key elements have played a pivotal role in bolstering the economy. The initial factor involves noteworthy growth across diverse sectors, showcasing commendable performance. However, agriculture stands as the sole exception, experiencing a modest growth of 0.7% for the year. This was anticipated, considering the lower kharif output compared to the previous year and the scattered nature of rabi sowing. The growth rate was inevitably subdued due to the additional impact of erratic monsoons affecting allied activities.

Other sectors demonstrated a positive upward trend, and a closer examination of the dynamics reveals an interesting narrative. Manufacturing, commencing from a modest base with a growth rate of -2.2%, enjoyed a significant advantage, culminating in an impressive peak at 8.5%. It is conceivable that industries integral to infrastructure, such as cement and steel, took the lead in this surge, especially considering the subdued performance of consumer industries as indicated by corporate commentaries throughout the initial three quarters.

Furthermore, the services sectors exhibited commendable performance, driven primarily



DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Dipak Kurmi

by the pent-up demand phenomenon observed in 2023. Similar to the surge in demand witnessed by manufacturing in 2022, services experienced a more pronounced replication of this trend. Consequently, trade, transport, communications, and related sectors recorded a growth of 6.5%, while financial services and real estate demonstrated an even more substantial growth at 8.2%. The public administration and other services segment, reflective of government expenditure, remained on a positive trajectory with a growth rate of 7.7%.

In the third aspect, the construction sector witnessed a remarkable upswing, posting a substantial growth of 10.7% atop the previous 9.4%. Recognized for its labor-intensive nature, particularly in blue-collar domains, this sector established robust backward linkages with other segments of the economy. Notably, the growth in construction stimulated demand across industries dealing with infrastructure products like steel, engineering, and cement.

The government's proactive initiatives, particularly in bolstering roads and housing, played a pivotal role in this suc-

cess. The fiscal year 2023 stands out as a prosperous period for the real estate sector, with widespread house bookings spanning all price segments. This, coupled with the impetus on highways, has contributed significantly to the sector's commendable performance.

The second pivotal contributor to this impressive growth stems from the tax dynamics. GDP, as conventionally defined, encompasses the sum of gross value added (reflecting the production value across all sectors) and net taxes. The latter essentially entails indirect taxes minus subsidies. Throughout the year, this component has exhibited notable elevation, exerting a significant influence on the overall GDP growth. While gross value added (GVA) achieved a growth rate of 6.9% for the year, the typical trend indicates that GDP growth tends to be 0.2-0.3% higher. However, in this instance, the unexpected factor lies in the 0.7% increase, surpassing the usual pattern and contributing substantially to the heightened growth.

Notably, the impact of taxes became even more pronounced in the third quarter. With a GVA growth of 6.5%, the GDP

growth surpasses this figure by a notable 1.9%, reaching an impressive 8.4%. This heightened growth suggests robust collections, evident in the monthly GST figures released. The adept control exercised over subsidies, particularly in the domains of food and fertilizers, has played a pivotal role in the significant upswing in net tax collections. This leads to the inference that there might be some savings on the initially budgeted subsidies as the fiscal year concludes.

Another positive facet of the GDP figures lies in the investment ratio, often represented by the gross fixed capital formation expressed as a percentage of GDP. Witnessing a steady climb, it has progressed from 29.6% in FY22 to 30.7% in FY23 and further to 31.3% in FY24. This development is particularly heartening, considering the lackluster performance of the capital formation rate in recent years. Surpassing the significant threshold of 30% marks a notable achievement in this regard.

The GDP growth figures have delivered a substantial surprise, particularly in light of the majority of forecasts for the year, which projected figures below 7%. Even the initial advance estimate hinted at 7.3%. Notably, as of December, the RBI had forecasted a Q3 growth rate of 6.4%, making the actual figure of 8.4% a pleasantly shocking revelation.

While the overall scenario appears promising, there are contradictory signals when individual indicators are scrutinized. Notably, private sector investment seems to be trailing, evident in lower investment announcements this year. The debt market landscape has witnessed a tilt towards Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) in terms of fund-raising, whereas

bank credit has predominantly favored the services and retail segments. It's worth noting that increased investments by companies are more concentrated in infrastructure-related sectors such as cement and steel, rather than being widespread across various industries.

Indicators such as two-wheelers and tractors suggest that rural demand is still trailing, with the farm sector's subpar performance contributing to this phenomenon. Inflation has remained elevated, averaging over 5% and accumulating to more than 20% in the last 3-4 years, thereby eroding purchasing power. Consequently, the real consumption growth for the year was modest at 3%, despite nominal growth hovering around 8%. The uncertainty persists regarding whether employment numbers have improved across the board, a trend that ideally aligns with higher GDP growth. A more definitive understanding of the situation is expected to emerge by the close of this fiscal year.

Therefore, when analyzing the headline growth figure of 7.6%, it's essential to consider these additional factors. Starting from a position of strength, the trajectory for FY25 appears relatively clear. Barring any adverse monsoon impact and maintaining stability in global commodity prices, growth is anticipated to continue its upward trend, with the potential to achieve another commendable growth rate of 7%. While this projection is somewhat lower than the previously sustained trajectory of 8% and above, there's optimism that we can steadily approach those figures in the coming years, making the pursuit of the \$5 trillion milestone more achievable. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Bangladesh can be a game changer for northeast India

By: Saleem Samad

Landlocked northeast Indian states do not have easy access to cost-effective seaports. Imports and exports of northeast Indian states are very time-consuming, loaded with frustration, and most importantly, the high cost of transportation.

Politicians, business bodies and state governments of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura underscore boosting connectivity, transit and trade with Bangladesh and through Bangladesh territory, which is expected to be a game changer for the northeast.

They have realised that connectivity with Bangladesh to access the ports is vital to economic growth and rapid industrialisation in the landlocked region.

Bangladesh ports to ease northeast trading
The connectivity projects have gained momentum after Bangladesh allowed the use of its Chattogram and Mongla ports and transit facilities to India's northeastern states. The road distance between Kolkata and northeastern states is more than 1,200 km, while Chattogram and Mongla ports are located at almost half the distance.

Recently, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha said Tripura will be the gateway to southeast countries by using Chattogram Port in Bangladesh, which will substantially reduce the time and costs associated with transporting goods to the northeastern states.

Bangladesh has already allowed India to use its Chattogram Port through South Tripura's Sabroom sub-division. The Maitri Setu (bridge) built on the Feni River has already been inaugurated for transportation and passengers through the bridge.

Once the bridge is operational, Tripura will have direct access to Chattogram Port and will widen new possibilities in business and trade.

Saha said that not only South East Asian (SEA) nations, Tripura will have access to many countries by using Chattogram Port on the Bay of Bengal.

Saha also highlighted the Indo-Bangladesh railway project connecting Bangladesh's Gangesagar station with Agartala railway station.

Agartala-Kolkata train via Padma Bridge in 10 hours

Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Social Empowerment, Pratima Bhoumik, said the Indo-Bangladesh rail link will be a game changer once the connectivity is operational.

The 32-hour train journey from Agartala to Kolkata through Bangladesh will be completed in 10 hours. It will boost trade, business, investment, and people's movement in the northeastern state into the heart of India, she added.

Dhaka-Delhi relation enhances connectivity
Dhaka and New Delhi have been closely cooperating in implementing numerous bilateral and sub-regional rail, road, and waterway initiatives.

In recent years, the two countries have launched several bus, train and air services, opened immigration checkpoints and upgraded border infrastructure boosting bilateral ties and enhancing trade and connectivity.

In a significant development in November 2023, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated three New Delhi-assisted infrastructure development projects including the Agartala-Akhaura cross-border rail link and Khulna-Mongla rail line through video conferencing.

Earlier, External Affairs Minister Dr Subramanyam Jaishankar noted that five operational bus services, three cross-border passenger train services and two inland waterway routes are facilitating greater trade and people-to-people contacts, which are integral parts of India's broader engagement with South Asian neighbours.

After the Indo-Pakistan 1965 war, six decades ago the river transportation began to connect Rajshahi to Murshidabad in February. A cargo vessel carrying two tonnes of cotton departed from Tatanagar port to Maya port in Murshidabad.

Similarly, the first cargo vessel sailed from Kolkata in the first week of August 2022 carrying 16 tons of iron pipes in a container via Mongla Port with destination Meghalaya using the Tamabil-Dawki border points and 8.5 tons of pre-foam in another container for Assam using the Bibir Bazar-Srimantapur border points.

Once the official protocols are completed, the passenger ships will soon connect Dhaka with Kolkata.

The four northeastern states, namely, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram share a 1,879 km-long border with Bangladesh and India has sought transit facilities through the neighbouring country for the transportation of goods to and from these states.

In August 2022, the Union Minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) G Kishan Reddy told the Lok Sabha (parliament) that enhancing comprehensive connectivity between India and Bangladesh through the northeast was crucial for strengthening bilateral ties and significant progress has been made in recent years.

During a parley between Hasina and DoNER Minister Reddy in September 2022, in New Delhi, the Bangladesh government proposed that the chief ministers of the seven northeastern states could visit Dhaka for a sharing meeting for enhancing cooperation in connectivity, trade and security.

Reports say the union government accepted the proposal in principle, and, work is underway to decide on a suitable time for the visit which will involve coordinating the schedules of seven chief ministers.

Unfortunately, the grand meeting of the Chief Ministers of northeastern states did not materialise for the coronavirus pandemic and national elections in Bangladesh.

Awami League's commitment

The ruling Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina is keen on engaging northeastern states to expand trade, connectivity, and people-to-people ties with Bangladesh.

The AL leaders have pointed out that Hasina decided on principle to grant transit facilities to India's landlocked northeastern states in 2015, when her government was facing severe political instability in the country, and this demonstrated her firm conviction in forging friendly ties with India.

The AL leaders maintain that Prime Minister Hasina has taken a big political risk and steadily cemented Bangladesh's ties with India.

In a major development in April 2023, Bangladesh's National Board of Revenue (NBR) granted permission to transport goods from one Indian state to another using the country's key ports under a bilateral agreement signed in October 2018.

The NBR issued the permanent standing order to use Chattogram and Mongla seaports for transit and transhipment to carry goods to and from India through Bangladesh's territory following the completion of trial runs for the operationalization and regular movement of goods.

India has extended three Lines of Credit (LoCs) amounting to \$7.35 billion over the last 12 years for the development of infrastructure in various sectors, according to Dr. Rupak Bhattacharjee, an independent public and foreign policy analyst.

Exploring riverine routes for trade

Bangladesh and India have plans to develop an Eastern Grid with 5,000 km of navigable waterways connecting neighbouring countries including Bangladesh.

Both countries believe that the development of this grid will accelerate development but will further deepen eastern India's trade with Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) initiative.

With the seamless connection between National Waterway (NW)-1 (Ganges), NW-2 (Brahmaputra) and NW-16 (Barak), India is keen to create an economic corridor linking the northeast with the rest of India via Bangladesh.

During the September 2022 bilateral summit, the

prime ministers of India and Bangladesh directed their respective officials to work together to address the issues of pollution in rivers and to improve the riverine environment and river navigability concerning common rivers.

Bangladesh has decided to dredge in the old Brahmaputra River for the restoration of its dry season flow, which will enable navigation through the Brahmaputra, which will vastly improve and reduce the 116 km distance in the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route.

Road connectivity with northeast

Dr Bhattacharjee writes that the Bangladesh government has initiated 42 infrastructure development projects under Indian LoCs, of which 14 have been completed, and the remaining 28 projects are at various stages of implementation till February 2023.

The construction and timely maintenance of high-quality roads capable of taking ever-increasing loads of passengers and goods, the building of modern, user-friendly river ports for ensuring safe and easy navigation and the development of a multimodal logistics hub are key components of India's overall framework of cooperation with Bangladesh on the connectivity front.

The ongoing four-lane project, which is expected to be operational by June 2026, will connect the Sylhet-Chattogram National Highway as well as the Ashuganj river port and Akhaura land port.

The approved routes include transportation to Dawki in Meghalaya via Tamabil in Sylhet, Sutarkandi in Assam via Sheola, and Srimantapur in Tripura via Bibir Bazar in Cumilla, as well as the reverse directions. Cargo originating from India and arriving at Chattogram and Mongla ports can be directed to Agartala, through Akhaura in Bangladesh will reach the northeastern states quickly.

Delays in fund disbursement

However, reports suggest that the Cumilla-Brahmanbaria road project is progressing slowly due to delays in loan disbursement.

Similarly, the Benapole-Jashore-Narail-Bhatipara-Bhanga road project is facing funding issues.

The Ashuganj-Sarail-Dhakar-Akhaura road project is also moving slowly due to a cash flow problem of the Indian contractor.

Both the Benapole-Bhanga and Ashuganj-Akhaura road projects have been taken up to improve cross-border connectivity between India and Bangladesh and need to be fast-tracked.

The delay in the execution of various projects has led to cost escalation. For example, the cost of the Ashuganj inland container river port project will increase by 10 to 15 per cent.

The Bangladesh government's Economic Relations Division has noted that some slow-moving projects including the Bay Container Terminal Project at Chattogram Port (with a \$400 million loan) and the Saidpur Airport Project have to be reviewed.

Air connectivity with northeast

India has greenlit four new air routes that connect the country's northeastern states with international destinations, including Dhaka and Chattogram, under a project for improving regional air connectivity called "Udan". Officials of the Indian civil aviation ministry said fares on these routes — Guwahati-Bangkok, Guwahati-Dhaka, Imphal-Mandalay and Agartala-Chattogram — will be subsidised by the state governments of Assam, Manipur and Tripura to facilitate air travel.

Guwahati is all set to get its first international flight under the International Air Connectivity Scheme (IACS) Guwahati-Dhaka flight from 1st July. The northeastern passengers on their onward journey to the Gulf, South-East Asia and European destinations will have lesser layovers during transit in Dhaka and Chattogram. (The author is Deputy Editor of The Daily Messenger and an award-winning journalist. An Ashoka Fellow and recipient of the Hellman-Hammett Award. He can be reached at saleemsamad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @saleemsamad)

Smart watches are not medical devices but are collecting all our health data

By: Pin Lean Lau

For millions of people, smartwatches aren't just a piece of technology. They can use them to take control of their health in ways never thought possible.

As you go on your morning run, a smartwatch can monitor the rhythmic pounding of your feet and your heart's steady beat. The watch can record the distance covered and the intensity of your workout, guiding you towards your fitness goals.

During lunch, you can use it to log calories for a BLT sandwich. As deadlines loom, they can offer gentle reminders to take a moment for yourself. As you doze off, they might pick up instances of apnoea or other sleep disturbances.

But some users could also conflate health tips with medical advice. Device and app developers have consistently made it clear that their products cannot replace a professional medical doctor's advice or treatment.

A smartwatch is not a medical device as defined by law. In the UK, medical devices are strictly regulated in a way that

other devices such as smartwatches are not. These regulations provide users with better legal protections and clarity as well as providing for resolution in the event of a mishap.

What qualifies

The key legal framework in the UK is the Medical Devices Regulations, 2002, or UK MDR. Once a product has been identified as a medical device under UK MDR, further classification of it takes place, ranging from low risk (stethoscopes and wheelchairs) to high risk (pacemakers, heart valves, implanted cerebral stimulators).

If a device is designed to go inside the body, or if it contains medicinal substances, it is more likely it is treated as high risk. Depending on the risk classification, the law then imposes stringent standards to protect users from harm. These include obligations on the manufacturers and developers to ensure their devices are safe, through conducting risk impact assessments, periodic audits and other actions.

All matters relating to medical devices in the UK fall under the responsibility of the

Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency conducts surveillance of medical devices available in the UK and has the authority to make decisions regarding their marketing and distribution. It is also the agency's duty to ensure that manufacturers and developers are complying with the regulations.

Pursuit of wellnessAn important question is how one distinguishes a device, digital tool or app as one used for a medical purpose – which is how the UK MDR defines a medical device – versus one that is used for general health and wellness. The latter would include, for example, meditation apps or step counters.

Traditionally, smart watches have been treated as smart, wearable technology. On the face of it, they offer users insight into their general health and wellness, helping them make necessary lifestyle adjustments to improve their health or fitness goals.

In recent years, however, such technologies have become increasingly advanced.



Tens of thousands of digital tools and applications have flooded app stores. These include monitoring apps for mental health, symptom checkers based on information entered by patient users, or medical calculators for drug dosing.

Smartwatches may have electrocardiogram, or ECG, functions. An ECG is a test used to check a person's heart's rhythm and electrical activity. Medical professionals have traditionally used ECGs to look for signs of coronary heart disease or other cardiovascular conditions. The same functions on a watch may not have the right sensitivity to

pick up on medical conditions.

The latest version of the Apple watch has embedded sensors that may be able to detect atrial fibrillation, a type of irregular heart rhythm. In the US, Apple has obtained clearance from the Food and Drug Administration allowing it to be used for this purpose, marking a bold move into the regulated medicine and healthcare space.

Biosensors, previously thought of as devices that were administered only in clinical settings have now evolved by design into slim patches for consumer use.

Take the Nix Biosensor device. When paired with Apple

Watches, it is designed to measure a user's optimal hydration level in real time by identifying molecular markers in sweat and determining the loss of fluid and electrolytes (substances that maintain a balance of fluids inside and outside cells).

Finally, emerging trends also indicate that more and more women are relying on fertility and cycle trackers in smartwatches and sophisticated apps. However, there have been concerns that users might use the information in place of actual birth control.

Hence, as smartwatches and trackers evolve, it's possible that they may approach the threshold for what authorities could consider a medical device.

Privacy protections

There's something else to consider too. Users of devices and digital tools regularly hand over their personal data. Businesses must ensure compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA).

Personal health data is a "special category of data".

This would fall under the application of Articles 6 and 9 of the UK GDPR and Schedule 1 of the DPA. This means that more stringent standards are imposed for the collection and use of such data (in its processing), including potentially an obligation to conduct an extensive data impact assessment.

Indeed, the UK's privacy watchdog, the Information Commissioner's Office issued a statement on February 8 2024 reminding all app developers to ensure they protect users' privacy following the regulator's review of period and fertility apps.

Other potential safeguards for users' privacy could come from the Medicines and Medical Devices Act 2021, from the appointment of the Patient Safety Commissioner and from the National Health Service, which can now evaluate digital tools using the digital technology assessment criteria.

Clear guidelines in this area are not just necessary, they're imperative. Without them, we potentially risk both stifling innovation and compromising user care. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Why are Indian daily soaps obsessed with their toxic male leads? Why journalists do not use philosophy

By: Varun S. Bhatta



By: Avesha

Ever find yourself glued to the screen, engrossed in those dramatic TV serials with male leads who are a bit problematic? I'm talking about those possessive, aggressive, and emotionally manipulative dudes who somehow manage to steal the spotlight. Now, here's the question – why do we, against all common sense, end up cheering for these toxic leading men?

When we say "toxic," we're not just talking about your everyday drama that spices up the storyline. We're delving into behaviours that are downright harmful, damaging, and not the best for the overall vibe of a relationship or community. It's the kind of stuff that messes with your emotions, plays mind games, and creates an unhealthy dynamic.

Toxic Male Lead Archetype:

This Toxic Male Lead Archetype in TV serials is kind of a big deal. It's a recurring theme playing on loop, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and making us think these problematic behaviours are okay. Misogyny, aggression, dominance, emotional manipulation, obsession – you name it, they've got it in the script. And here's the kicker: these traits are often tossed out there without much reflection or consequence.

Flawed characters can make storytelling interesting, but when toxic masculinity becomes the go-to plot device, it's like saying, "Sure, go ahead and be possessive and aggressive – you can always fix it with some grand gesture or an apology later." And that "princess treatment" they often throw in – where the toxic guy magically transforms into Mr. Perfect? Well, that might be a bit too much of a shortcut. It's like they're saying, "You can sweep all that toxic behaviour under the rug with a bit of charm and drama." But in real life, it's not that simple, is it?

Toxic Traits in Indian TV Leads

Let's dive into the world of serial obsession and unpack the mystery behind our love for characters who make 'bad relationship decisions' in art form.

Misogyny:

Take Raman Bhalla from "Yeh Hai Mohabbatein," played by the talented Karan Patel. He's not just a successful businessman but also brings a whole new meaning to the term 'arrogant.' His love saga with Ishita (played by Divyanka Tripathi) is more like a rollercoaster ride filled with harsh words, accusations, and a sprinkle of possessive control.

Classic patriarchal vibes, anyone? Raman, struggling with trust issues, tends to throw accusations at Ishita instead of addressing his concerns maturely. His possessiveness goes to the extent of trying to dictate Ishita's choices, limiting her independence – a true reflection of traditional and patriarchal attitudes.

Controlling:

Then, there's our man Asad Ahmed Khan from "Qubool Hai," played by Karan Singh Grover. Starting all

stern and disciplined, he's a bit old-school, and his love story with Zoya (played by Surbhi Jyoti) isn't exactly smooth sailing. Asad has this thing about traditional gender roles – he's all about them. But Zoya? She's got her own ideas, her own fire.

So, naturally, sparks fly. Asad struggles with Zoya's independence, and instead of celebrating her uniqueness, he sometimes gets frustrated. It's like he's wrestling with his protective instincts, which can veer into controlling territory – making decisions for Zoya without even batting an eye at her feelings or desires. It's a classic case of a clash of personalities, wrapped in a love story that's anything but conventional.

Dominance:

RK, portrayed by Vivian Dsena, is quite the intense character in "Madhubala." His dominance is a defining trait. He's a successful but temperamental Bollywood actor. RK's aggression often comes to the forefront in his relationship with Madhubala, played by Drashti Dhami, resulting in heated arguments, explosive confrontations, and a general flair for the dramatic. RK's dominant demeanor is not just restricted to verbal sparring; there are instances of physical altercations as well, adding an extra layer of intensity to his character.

Aggression:

And oh, "Saubhagyavati Bhava?" introduces Viraaj Dobriyal, played by Karanvir Bohra. He's not your average problematic boyfriend/husband; he's a full-blown antagonist. His character takes aggression and violence to a whole new level. Viraaj's extreme measures to control his partner, Jhanvi (played by Sriti Jha), include physical and emotional abuse, instilling fear through manipulative tactics that will make you cringe.

It's like watching a horror movie, but scarier because it's a relationship. Despite all these flaws, the decision to bring back a second season of a show like "Saubhagyavati Bhava?" raises questions about the narrative's focus on constant forgiveness, potentially glorifying harmful behavior, which is concerning.

Obsession:

Krishna played by Arhaan Behl in "Mann Ki Awaaz Pratigya" is quite something. The guy is head over heels for Pratigya (Pooja Gor), and it's not your typical love story. It's more like an obsession. He's all in, chasing after her like there's no tomorrow. And guess what?

This whole intense thing leads to a forced marriage. Krishna doesn't hold back – he's persistent, sometimes way too much, and ends up marrying Pratigya against her wishes. The show dives into the complications of their relationship, showing how obsession can mess things up big time.

Emotional Manipulation:

Lastly, in "Barsatein," Reyansh, played by Kushal Tandon, starts off with deep-rooted issues and a disdain for women. He falls for Aradhna, played by Shivangi Joshi, and despite

their contrasting emotions, they develop mutual affection. But things take a dark turn when Reyansh releases a private video, insulting Aradhna publicly. It's emotionally manipulative, and despite realizing his mistake, he tries to seek forgiveness by professing his love and expressing a desire to marry her.

Partners' Endurance and Viewer Sentiment:

Now, here's the crazy part – despite all this toxic drama, their partners stick around. They endure insults, aggression, and emotional manipulation like it's just another day in a soap opera. It's the age-old tale of forgiveness and redemption but with a side of intense drama. Above mentioned are just a few examples; TV serials are filled with flawed toxic characters such as Anay Singh Raizada, Shivay Singh Oberoi, Abhimanyu Birla, Abhishek Mehra, Ram Kapoor, and many more.

And you know what's wild? Viewers eat it up! These flawed characters somehow become the 'best jodis,' and fans can't help but root for them. It's like we're all collectively invested in this chaotic love story, even if it's wrapped in toxicity.

Implications of Portraying Toxic Men on TV:

As we immerse ourselves in these shows, it's crucial to consider the far-reaching implications of romanticizing flawed characters, particularly toxic male leads. Why do we, as viewers, passionately support these characters, treating them as the epitome of power couples?

Does the continual portrayal of toxic male archetypes inadvertently normalize detrimental behavior, blurring the lines between fiction and reality? Might the predominantly female audience subconsciously absorb the notion that possessiveness, aggression, and emotional manipulation are acceptable traits in a partner or even romantic?

These narratives play a role in perpetuating stereotypes, subtly shaping societal expectations. It prompts us to reflect on the potential impact they might have on our understanding of what constitutes a 'normal' relationship. The challenge lies in balancing the creative freedom of storytelling with a responsibility to address the potential consequences of glorifying toxic traits.

Conclusion:

As we get lost in the world of TV serials, it's worth pondering how these stories impact our thoughts about relationships. Are they just entertainment, or do they subtly shape our views? The big question remains: should there be a board, like a censor board, to check how toxic characters are shown on TV? These questions ask us to think about the blurry line between fiction and real life, urging us to consider if it's time to look closer at what we watch on our screens.

In conclusion, our fascination with toxic male lead archetypes in TV serials raises concerns about the normalization of harmful behaviors. The blurred lines between fiction and reality, coupled with the constant forgiveness and redemption arcs, might inadvertently influence societal expectations. As we continue our binge-watching habits, it's essential to remain mindful of the potential impact these narratives have on shaping our perception of what constitutes a 'normal' relationship. Perhaps, it's time to reflect on the stories we consume and whether they contribute positively or inadvertently perpetuate harmful stereotypes. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Newspaper journalists, while writing on topics, use ideas from history, sociology, sciences and other disciplines to establish the relevance of a topic and analyse pertinent questions. Indian journalists, however, rarely seem to draw upon philosophical ideas despite being relevant to the discussion. For instance, moral philosophers' views are not used or presented in articles on social conflicts.

Science journalism mentions historical and sociological perspectives but does not include insights from the philosophy of science. The only kind of newspaper articles that draw from philosophy in India are opinion pieces written by a handful of philosophers.

Why is that philosophy is glaringly absent in Indian newspaper journalism that otherwise seamlessly synthesises ideas from numerous disciplines while discussing a topic?

The non-engagement with philosophy is a characteristic of journalism across the world. Although there have been a few initiatives in the Global North to bridge this gap. Most of these have been confined to the opinion columns section of newspapers.

One of the well-known projects was The Stone column in The New York Times. Some philosophy foundations have started projects to enable philosophers to write for public media.

Bringing philosophy to journalism requires a proactive philosophy community. And this not happening in the Indian context — says something about the health of Indian academic philosophy.

However, this aspect just accounts for Indian philosophers not writing for newspapers. It is still not clear, though, why Indian journalists are sidestepping philosophy. Are there any pragmatic constraints of the profession that filter out philosophical ideas? What presumptions of journalists about philosophy are at play here?

Philosophy is unknown and abstract

For deputy editor of The Hindu, Mukunth V, the main reason for the absence of philosophy in Indian newspapers is the public's unfamiliarity with the subject. This makes the journalists' job difficult to present pertinent discussions.

As senior associate editor of The Telegraph, Uddalak Mukherjee points out, the "antagonism" of journalists towards scholarly work also contributes to the situation. This attitude is not without a cause. The jargonised academic discourse renders philosophy a subject that deals with "abstract ideals that have no practical applications".

Probably because of this, Jitesh Pandey, Mass Communication faculty, Karnavati University thinks philosophy cannot be articulated in a simple manner to the public.

These diagnoses identify important challenges and also bring forth the vicious circle that perpetuates the problem. The underlying factor here is philosophy being specialised knowledge accessible only to a few experts.

This, however, cannot be the only reason as other disciplines are equally technical and inaccessible. Why is it that journalists, who toil through other difficult ideas, do not put similar effort into philosophy?

Instance of a larger problem?

The asymmetry in journalism's coverage of disciplines clarifies some aspects of the problem. News and research developments in sciences and some social science disciplines are reported more extensively than others. There is also a difference in the way disciplines' professionals and their work are portrayed in media.

For instance, scientists are often referred to as "researchers". In contrast, scholars of humanities and social sciences usually appear as "commentators on pre-existing news stories". This distinction stems from the non-acknowledgement of the expertise in the concerned domains, as these disciplines are presumed to study everyday activities and phenomena.

Moving from the communication of disciplines to their uses in journalism, another preference can be noticed. Journalism has gradually come to use social science methods and ideas to make sense of news. This way of doing journalism started some decades back with the intention of not just reporting but interpreting the news as well. This development also correlates with the steady increase of social scientists appearing as expert commentators on general news.

These two features of contemporary journalism explain, to some extent, the absence of philosophy. Given that humanities is on the periphery of journalism's coverage radar, philosophy events will hardly be considered newsworthy. More importantly, having evolved to use social sciences techniques, journalism would not be interested in queries for which philosophy can provide answers.

A recent survey of science journalism practice in India substantiates these observations. Among the topics covered by Indian science journalists, "Philosophy of Science" is absent. However, "Science and Society" and "History of Science" are among the dominant topics.

"Unfamiliarity and omissions

Philosophy's absence in journalism can be traced to journalism education. The BA and PG diploma programmes on mass communication, as Pandey attests, dominantly focus on technical skills. The remaining quota for theoretical courses in the syllabus only covers some social science topics.

Aman Khanna, senior associate editor, Scroll, cautions that not all journalists have a journalism degree. Since people from various educational backgrounds enter the profession, school curricula not having philosophy need to be factored in. Also, Khanna thinks that there might not be many philosophy graduates doing journalism. Even if there are only a few, whether they are implementing their philosophy training in the work remains to be explored.

When journalists are largely ignorant of philosophy, they can hardly be blamed for not drawing from it. Sayantan Datta, science journalist and faculty, Krea University, however, mentions instances where philosophy is invisibilised.

Sometimes journalists use philosophical ideas unknowingly but do not acknowledge them as they do not put the effort to trace their origin. In other cases, the ideas involved during the framing of an article get buried as the "angle" of the article is "not told, but shown". These kinds of omissions are of concern.

Contrasting conceptions of philosophy

The unfamiliarity with the discipline has cultivated two contrasting images of philosophy in journalism.

Some journalists, who acknowledge that philosophy is not explicitly used, add that journalism implicitly involves it.

According to Mukunth, journalists are employing philosophy when deciding the basics – what, why and how – of a story.

Shubashree Desikan, adjunct faculty, Asian College of Journalism believes that philosophy is present "implicitly in the practice and teaching" of science journalism. Especially, knowing the science required for an article demands understanding the "underlying philosophy".

Philosophy, as a discipline, does study things – like reasoning and foundations of science – that are integral to journalism practice. But someone merely doing these does not imply they are using philosophy.

For instance, even though science explains how a ball moves, someone need not be using it whenever they throw the ball. In the case of philosophy, this kind of confusion happens when the discipline and its ideas are not distinguished from other colloquial meanings of "philosophy", like "the most basic beliefs, concepts" of something.

Mukherjee, for instance, thinks opinion columns are more amenable for philosophy articles as they provide the



space for "deeper engagement". Similarly, Mukunth opines that magazines, unlike newspapers, provide the required space and time for philosophical deliberations.

These suggestions though arising from pragmatic concerns presume that the articulation of philosophical ideas usually requires detailed discussions and that these ideas are relevant only for an in-depth examination of something.

The presence of these two extreme conceptions of philosophy has resulted in the current state of affairs. On one side, the bare conception of philosophy reduces it to aspects implicitly present everywhere and hence, obvious to mention. Contrary to this, its conception as a specialised knowledge makes philosophical ideas elusive, hard and better restricted to opinion articles.

The way forward

If journalism's role is just to observe and report, then the philosophy's absence is not surprising, as journalism is merely mirroring its absence in society. However, when journalism is construed to be collaborative, radical and constructive, it can address the absence within and in society.

As philosophical ideas are presently confined to opinion articles, having dedicated philosophy columns, like the one edited by Mukherjee at The Telegraph, will give the required initial push. Philosophy articles have steadily increased in Indian platforms, primarily due to the trend of republishing from international websites. Instead of this, editors can collaborate with Indian scholars and foster a community of philosophers who can write for newspapers.

For philosophy to eventually be used in mainstream journalism practice, journalists need to become familiar with it. Without that, philosophy will remain dual-faced, both trivial and extraordinary. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Haley received 1,274 votes (62.9%) against 676 votes (33.2%) received by Trump

Nikki Haley beats Donald Trump in Washington DC for first primary victory

WASHINGTON, Mar 4: Indian-American presidential candidate Nikki Haley has won her first Republican nominating contest by defeating rival Donald Trump in Washington DC, injecting new life into her campaign ahead of the crucial Super on Tuesday contest.

Haley, 51, received 1,274 votes (62.9 per cent) against 676 votes (33.2 per cent) received by her main rival and former President Trump.

Haley will receive all 19 Republican delegates who were up for grabs in Washington DC, giving her 43 delegates nationwide - well behind Trump's 247.

The contest took place over the weekend in a downtown hotel just steps away from the heart of DC's lobbying hub.

With this, Haley has created history by becoming the first woman ever to win a Republican presidential primary.

She is also the first Indian-American to have won either the Democratic or the Repub-



lican primaries. The three other previous Indian American presidential aspirants - Bobby Jindal in 2016, Kamala Harris in 2020 and Vivek Ramaswamy in 2024 - had failed to win even one primary.

Haley, the former US envoy to the UN, lost in South Carolina, her home state. But she is the first woman to win a Republican primary in US history.

The former South Carolina governor's victory came after she was crushed by Trump in caucuses in Missouri and

Idaho and at a Republican convention in Michigan on Saturday.

"It's not surprising that Republicans closest to Washington dysfunction are rejecting Donald Trump and all his chaos," Haley's campaign national spokesperson Olivia Perez-Cubas said.

However, the Trump campaign said the results showed that Haley is being crowned "Queen of the Swamp."

"Tonight's results in Washington DC reaffirm the object of President Trump's campaign - he will drain the

swamp and put America first," said Karoline Leavitt, Trump Campaign's Press Secretary.

"While Nikki has been soundly rejected throughout the rest of America, she was just crowned Queen of the Swamp by the lobbyists and DC insiders who want to protect the failed status quo. The swamp has claimed their queen," she said.

"Trump will fight for every American who is being let down by these very DC insiders and devastated by Joe Biden's failures," Leavitt said.

Trump, 77, is likely to face 81-year-old incumbent US President Joe Biden, a Democrat, in the November 5 election.

Trump has dominated every other early nominating contest and is poised to rack up more delegates on Super Tuesday on March 5.

Haley has for weeks pledged to stay in the race through Super Tuesday when

15 states and American Samoa will hold nominating contests.

Super Tuesday is an important new phase of presidential primaries when the early contests are over and voters from multiple states cast ballots in primaries timed to occur on the same date.

Primaries on Tuesday may offer the final opportunity for Haley's quixotic and lacklustre effort to challenge Trump for the Republican presidential nomination.

Haley's victory, though a first, did not come as a major surprise. Many in Washington believed the District represented her best, and perhaps only, chance to win a primary.

Trump's hold on the capital's Republicans, which counts roughly 22,000 registered voters, has never quite reflected his dominance across the country. Trump won the primary in 2020, running uncontested, but finished third in the 2016 cycle, CNN reported. (PTI)

Nepal PM forges new alliance with Oli's party after splitting with Nepali Cong

KATHMANDU, Mar 4: Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Monday decided to form a new alliance with former premier KP Sharma Oli's party after terminating its nearly 15-month partnership with the Nepali Congress due to differences between the top leadership.

The alliance between the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) led by Prachanda and the Sher Bahadur Deuba-led Nepali Congress has been terminated as the growing differences between the two top leaders reached a climax, a CPN-Maoist Centre party leader said.

"As (the) Nepali Congress did not cooperate with the Prime Minister, we are forced to look for (a) new alliance," Ganesh Shah, Secretary of the CPN-Maoist, told PTI.

Prachanda became the prime minister for the third term with the support of the Nepali Congress on December 25, 2022.

After breaking the alliance with the Nepali Congress - the largest party in the House of Representatives - Prachanda joined hands with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), led by Oli, who was regarded as Prachanda's top critic.

Last year, the CPN-UML withdrew its support to the Prachanda-led government following a rift over backing the main opposition party's candidate for the presidential poll. The new cabinet will be formed on Monday afternoon, and the size of the cabinet will be smaller, said Surendra Pandey, Vice-chairman of the CPN-UML.

The rift between the Maoist Centre and Nepali Congress grew after differences grew between Nepali Congress leader and Finance

Minister Mahat and Prachanda over the issue of budget allocation to certain projects.

The rift grew as Nepali Congress President Deuba wanted the party's senior leader and newly elected lawmaker Krishna Sitaula to be made the Chairman of the National Assembly against Prachanda's plan to appoint his party's fellow to the key post.

On Monday, the CPN-UML Chairman Oli met Prachanda at the Prime Minister's quarters at Baluwatar and discussed matters relating to forming a new alliance, Shah said.

"The two leaders discussed the formation of a new government, a future course of action and possible leftist alliance among others, according to sources close to Baluwatar," Shah said.

Soon after the meeting, leaders of three political parties, including Prime Minister Prachanda, CPN-UML chairman Oli and Rastriya Swatantra Party's (RSP) Ravi Lamichhane met at Baluwatar and discussed the modality of the new alliance and the formation of the new government.

Nepali Congress emerged as the largest party in the House of Representatives during the November 2022 general election, securing 89 seats out of a total of 275. The CPN-UML secured 78 seats, followed by the Maoist Centre, which got 32 seats. The RSP, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Janata Samajwadi Party and CPN-United Socialist won 20, 14, 12 and 10 seats respectively. It is necessary for a party to win the support of at least 138 members of the House of Representatives to form the government.

CPN-UML, the second largest party in Parliament, will be a major alliance with Prachanda-led new government. (PTI)



China and Myanmar likely to be high on the agenda when Southeast Asian leaders meet in Australia

MELBOURNE, Mar 4: An increasingly assertive China and a humanitarian crisis in Myanmar are likely to be high on the agenda when Southeast Asian leaders meet in Australia for a rare summit this week.

The ASEAN-Australia Special Summit that starts in Melbourne on Monday marks 50 years since Australia became the first official partner of the Asian bloc.

Leaders of nine of the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations are expected to attend the three-day summit, with Myanmar excluded from political representation over its failure to stem violence in that country since a military junta seized control in 2021. East Timor's leader has been invited as an official ASEAN observer and Australian Prime Anthony Albanese invited his New Zealand counterpart to Melbourne to meet regional leaders.

"Australia sees ASEAN at the center of a stable, peaceful and prosperous region," Albanese said in a statement on Friday.

"Strengthening our relationship ensures our shared future prosperity and security," he added. Australia has hosted ASEAN leaders once before in Sydney in 2018. The leaders issued a statement with the host country then that called for a code of conduct covering the contested waters of the South China Sea, where China has become increasingly assertive over its competing territorial claims with a number of ASEAN countries. Australia and the Philippines, an ASEAN member, conducted joint sea and air patrols in the South China Sea for the first time in November last year. Also in November, Australia proposed to ASEAN members that they declare in a joint statement at the end of the Melbourne summit their support for the 2016 arbitration ruling in The Hague in favor of the Philippines that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims in the South China Sea, Australian Broadcasting Corp said in December. China has rejected that ruling.

Other ASEAN countries with territorial claims in conflict with China are Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam. China's increasingly assertive posture in the South China Sea and violence in Myanmar topped a meeting of ASEAN diplomats in January in Laos, the



group's poorest nation, which has taken over the bloc's rotating leadership this year.

International Crisis Group's Asia program deputy director Huong Le Thu, who is attending the summit in Australia, said ASEAN has always been divided over how to approach China, with each member nation maintaining a unique bilateral relationship with the economic giant. "I don't see the commonality of one approach being feasible. They are working out the best way to manage this power asymmetry that they have with China," Le Thu said.

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar that hangs over the summit challenges ASEAN's credibility as an organization, she said. "It poses the question for its existence in the first place: why the countries' governments in the region get together and what is the purpose of this intergovernmental institution if it cannot act on the internal crisis that affects its own organization and the region?" Le Thu said.

Around 200 protesters, mostly from the Myanmar diaspora, demonstrated outside the summit on Monday morning demanding the restoration of democracy in Myanmar and that ASEAN not engage with the country's military leaders.

Australia, as the summit host, is focused on maritime cooperation, economic ties, climate change and clean energy. Melissa Conley Tyler, executive director of the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy and Defense Dialogue think tank, expects leaders will focus on what they share in common rather than their differences on issues such as China and Myanmar. (AP)

Newly enlarged NATO starts drill in Finland, Norway and Sweden

HELSINKI, Mar 4: NATO will kick off Monday an exercise to defend its newly expanded Nordic territory when more than 20,000 soldiers from 13 nations take part in drills lasting for nearly two weeks in the northern regions of Finland, Norway and Sweden.

With over 4,000 Finnish soldiers taking part, the Norway-led Nordic Response 2024 represents the NATO newcomer's largest ever participation in a foreign exercise, according to Finland's military.

"For the first time, Finland will participate as a NATO member nation in exercising collective defense of the alliance's regions," the Finnish Defense Forces said in a statement. Finland, which shares a 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) border with Russia, joined NATO in April 2023 in a historic move following decades of military non-alignment. With its bid now ratified by all NATO members, neighboring Sweden is currently finalizing formalities to enter the military alliance as its 32nd member - most likely in March. For years, the biannual NATO drill, which has been conducted in the Arctic extremes of northern Norway, was called "Cold Response."

However, "thanks to the NATO expansion with Finland and eventually Sweden, we are now expanding the exercise to a Nordic Response," the Norwegian Armed Forces said on its website. This year, the drill is hosted equally by Finland, Norway and Sweden. The participating nations in the exercise that runs through March 15 are Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United States.

Roughly half of the participating troops will drill on land. The rest will train at sea, with over 50 participating submarines, frigates, corvettes, aircraft carriers, and various amphibious vessels, and in the air with more than 100 fighter jets, transport aircraft, maritime surveillance aircraft and helicopters, according to the Norwegian military. The combined joint training will focus on the defense and protection of the Nordic region, Norwegian military officials said.

"We need to be able to fight back and stop anyone who tries to challenge our borders, values and democracy," said Brigadier Tron Strand from the Royal Norwegian Air Force, Commander of the Norwegian Air Operations Center, in a statement. "With the current security situation in Europe, the exercise is extremely relevant and more important than ever before," he added.

"The High North represents an important and strategically located area for NATO" and the Nordic Response 2024 exercise "increases Nordic preparedness and the capability to conduct large-scale joint operations in challenging weather and climate," NATO said on its website. Finland's new president, Alexander Stubb, will inspect the drill together with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre in northern Norway on March 7. It's the first foreign trip for Stubb since he was sworn in as Finland's new head of state and its supreme military commander on March 1. (AP)

4 new astronauts head to the International Space Station for a 6-month stay



CAPE CANAVERAL, Mar 4: Four astronauts headed to the International Space Station on Sunday where they will oversee the arrivals of two new rocketships during their half-year stint.

SpaceX's Falcon rocket blasted off from Kennedy Space Centre, carrying NASA's Matthew Dominick, Michael Barratt and Jeanette Epps and Russia's Alexander Grebenkin.

The astronauts should reach the orbiting lab on Tuesday. They will replace a crew from the US, Denmark, Japan and Russia, who have been there since August.

"When are you getting here already?" space station commander Andreas Mogensen asked via X, formerly Twitter, after three days of delay due to high wind.

There was almost another postponement Sunday night. A small crack in the seal of the SpaceX capsule's hatch prompted a last-minute flurry of reviews, but it was deemed safe for the whole mission.

The new crew's six-month stay includes the arrival of two rocketships

ordered by NASA. Boeing's new Starliner capsule with test pilots is due in late April. A month or two later, Sierra Space's Dream Chaser, a mini shuttle, should arrive. It is for delivering cargo to the station, but not passengers yet.

Epps was originally assigned to fly Boeing's Starliner, which got bogged down with problems and stalled.

NASA finally switched her to SpaceX. She's the second Black woman assigned to a long station mission. She said before the flight that she is especially proud to be a role model for Black girls, demonstrating that spaceflight "is an option for them, that this is not just for other people."

An engineer, she worked for Ford Motor Co. and the CIA before becoming an astronaut in 2009. Epps should have launched to the space station on a Russian rocket in 2018, but was replaced for reasons never publicly disclosed.

Also new to space are Dominick, a Navy pilot, and Grebenkin, a former Russian military officer.

Barratt, a doctor on his third mission, is the oldest full-time astronaut to fly in space. He turns 65 in April.

"As long as we stay healthy and fit and engaged, we're good to fly," he said.

Flight controllers are monitoring a growing cabin leak on Russia's side of the space station.

The leak has doubled in size in the past few weeks and the area has been sealed off, NASA programme manager Joel Montalbano said. He stressed there is no impact to station operations or crew safety. (AP)

Thai court acquits ex-PM Shinawatra on charges of mishandling govt funds



BANGKOK, Mar 4: A Thai court on Monday acquitted former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, now living in exile, on charges of mishandling expenditures for a government project in 2013, the latest legal victory for the powerful family of former premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

The action comes shortly after Thaksin, Yingluck's brother, was released on parole for corruption-related offenses. Last year, he returned home after more than a decade of self-imposed exile, and was detained in a hospital for six months before being granted clemency because of his age and ill health.

Thaksin's release, after almost two decades of antipathy between his populist political machine and Thai-

land's conservative royalist ruling class, raised speculation that Yingluck also might be returning soon.

It was the latest favorable verdict for Yingluck, who was prime minister from 2011 until she was forced from office in 2014. In December last year, the same court cleared Yingluck of abuse of power in connection with a personnel transfer she had overseen.

But to return to Thailand without facing prison, she would also need a pardon from King Maha Vajiralongkorn or other form of clemency.

In 2017 she was sentenced in absentia for alleged negligence in implementing a rice subsidy program that lost the government a massive amount of money, estimated to be as much as 500 billion baht (\$14 billion).

Yingluck and her supporters said she is innocent and being persecuted in an effort to dismantle Thaksin's political machine. He was toppled from power by a military coup in 2006, after being accused of abuse of power, corruption and disrespect for the country's

monarchy.

The Thaksin-backed Pheu Thai Party came to power last year after a general election in coalition with military parties connected to the coups that twice removed the family from power, and Thaksin's daughter Paetongtarn has since become the party's leader and a prospective future prime minister.

The judges unanimously acquitted Yingluck and five other defendants accused of mishandling 240 billion baht (\$6.7 billion) that had been earmarked for a roadshow to tout investors on an ambitious infrastructure plan, according to a press release from a special body under a division of the Supreme Court that handles criminal cases against political officeholders.

Yingluck, now 56, was the first female prime minister of Thailand.

His supporters, who delivered him unprecedented electoral victories, believe his only offense was challenging the power of the country's traditional elite, led by monarchists and the military and supported by the urban middle class. (AP)

SKorea takes steps to suspend licenses of striking doctors after they refuse to end walkouts

SEOUL, Mar 4: South Korea's government began steps on Monday to suspend the medical licenses of thousands of striking junior doctors, days after they missed a government-set deadline to end their joint walkouts, which have severely impacted hospital operations.

Nearly 9,000 medical interns and residents have been on strike for two weeks to protest a government push to sharply increase the number of medical school admissions. Their action has led to hundreds of cancelled surgeries and other treatments and threatened to burden the country's medical service.

On Monday, officials were sent to dozens of hospitals to formally confirm the absence of the striking doctors as the government began steps to suspend their licenses for at least three months, Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo told a briefing. Park said authorities will later notify the striking doctors of their expected license suspensions and give them a chance to respond. He suggested the license suspensions would take weeks to go into effect.

"Despite repeated appeals by the government and other parts of society, the number of trainee doctors returning to work is very insignificant. Starting from today, we begin the execution of law with the on-site inspection," Park said.

Park again repeated the government's call for the doctors to end their walkouts. "We again strongly urge them to return to patients by not ignoring the pains of patients hovering between life and death - and their families," he said.

South Korea's government earlier ordered the striking doctors to return to work by February 29. South Korea's medical law allows the government to make such back-to-work orders to doctors when it sees grave risks to public health. Anyone who refuses to follow such orders can be punished with a suspension of his or her license for up to one year, and three years in prison or a 30 million won (roughly USD 22,500) fine.

Last month, the South Korean government announced it would raise the country's medical school enrolment cap by 2,000 starting next year, from the current 3,058. Officials said it's urgent to have more doctors to deal with a fast-aging population and resolve a shortage of physicians in rural areas and essential yet low-paying specialties like pediatrics and emergency departments.

Officials say South Korea's doctor-to-population ratio is one of the lowest among developed countries. But many doctors have opposed the plan, arguing universities can't offer quality education to such an abrupt increase in students. They also say adding so many new doctors would also increase public medical expenses since greater competition would lead to excess treatments.

They also predict newly added students would also want to work in high-paying, popular professions like plastic surgery and dermatology.

Critics say many doctors oppose the government plan simply because they worry adding more doctors would result in a lower income.

The striking junior doctors are a small fraction of the country's 140,000 doctors. But they account for 30-40 per cent of the total doctors at some major hospitals, where they assist senior doctors while training. (AP)

US VP Kamala Harris calls for immediate ceasefire in Gaza for next six weeks

WASHINGTON, Mar 4: US Vice President Kamala Harris has called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza for at least the next six weeks, as she called on the Israeli government to "do more" to increase the flow of aid in the war-ravaged enclave.

Harris made the ceasefire call on Sunday during a speech in Selma, Alabama, to commemorate the 59th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the annual remembrance of the landmark civil rights movement.

"The threat Hamas poses to the people of Israel must be eliminated, and given the immense scale of suffering in Gaza, there must be an immediate ceasefire for at least the next six weeks, which is what is currently on the table," Harris, 59, said.

"This will get the hostages out and get a significant amount of aid. This would allow us to build something more enduring to ensure Israel is more secure and to respect the right of the Palestinian people to dignity, freedom, and self-determination," the Indian-American leader said amidst applause from the audience.

"Hamas claims it wants a

ceasefire. Well, there is a deal on the table. And as we have said, Hamas needs to agree to that deal. Let's get a ceasefire. Let's reunite the hostages with their families. And let's provide immediate relief to the people of Gaza," Harris, a Democrat, said.

Meanwhile, Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal immediately welcomed the call.

"The Vice President has called for an immediate ceasefire and urgent aid into Gaza. This is the first time this language has been used by the administration. It is important. Now let's back it up with a policy shift," said the 58-year-old Democratic lawmaker.

Addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Harris said, "What we are seeing every day in Gaza is devastating. We have seen reports of families eating leaves or animal feed, women giving birth to malnourished babies with little or no medical care, and children dying from malnutrition and dehydration."

Asserting that too many innocent Palestinians have been killed, she said, "Just a few days ago, we saw hungry, desperate people approach

aid trucks, simply trying to secure food for their families after weeks of nearly no aid reaching Northern Gaza."

"And they were met with gunfire and chaos. Our hearts break for the victims of that horrific tragedy and for all the innocent people in Gaza who are suffering from what is clearly a humanitarian catastrophe," Harris said amidst applause from the audience.

"People in Gaza are starving. The conditions are inhumane. And our common humanity compels us to act. As President Joe Biden said on Friday, the United States is committed to urgently get more lifesaving assistance to innocent Palestinians in need," she said. "Yesterday, the Department of Defence carried out its first airdrop of humanitarian assistance, and the United States will continue these airdrops. And we will work on a new route by sea to deliver aid," she said.

"And the Israeli government must do more to significantly increase the flow of aid. No excuses. They must open new border crossings. They must not impose any unnecessary restrictions on the delivery of aid. Harris said. (PTI)

Mizoram will continue to provide relief to 42,000 people from Myanmar, Bangladesh, Manipur: Minister

Kuki-Zo people from Manipur took refuge in Mizoram after the ethnic violence began in the neighbouring state



AIZAWL, March 4: The Mizoram government will continue to provide relief to over 42,000 people from Myanmar, Bangladesh and Manipur who have taken shelter in

the state, Home Minister K Sapdanga told the assembly on Monday. Replying to a question, he said the number of asylum seekers from Myanmar and Bangladesh, and

those who have come here from Manipur keep changing, and it was difficult to maintain a record on a daily basis. According to the latest record of the Home De-

partment, there are 9,248 people from Manipur, 32,161 people from Myanmar and 1,167 from Bangladesh in the state, he said.

"We will continue to provide relief to asylum seekers from Myanmar and Bangladesh, and internally displaced people from Manipur on humanitarian grounds as much as we can," Sapdanga said, replying to the question asked by MNF MLA K Laldawngliana.

He said the Centre provided Rs 3 crore to the previous Mizo National Front (MNF) government for the assistance of the people from Myanmar, Bangladesh and Manipur.

Last week, chief minister Lalduhoma had said that the state government

was handling the influx of people from Myanmar.

Those from Myanmar started fleeing to the state after the military junta seized power in February 2021. The Bangladeshis fled to Mizoram in November 2022 after the army of that country began an offensive against an ethnic insurgent group in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The Kuki-Zo people from Manipur took refuge in Mizoram after the ethnic violence began in the neighbouring state in May last year.

The Chin people of Myanmar, the Bawm community of Bangladesh and the Kuki-Zo people of Manipur share ethnic ties with Mizos. (PTI)

Nagaland gears up to conduct urban local bodies election after two decades

KOHIMA, March 4: The Nagaland State Election Commission (NEC) has initiated a special summary revision of the electoral rolls for municipal and town councils to conduct the urban local bodies (ULBs) polls after a gap of 20 years.

Addressing a press conference at his office here, state election commissioner (SEC) T. John Longkumer said the draft publication of the electoral rolls will take place on March 8, while the period for lodging claims and objections will be from March 11 to 20.

The period for disposal of claims and objections has been fixed from March 21 to 27, while the period for filing appeals to the respective appellate authorities will be from March 28 to April 3, he said, adding that the appellate authorities will dispose of the claims and objections from April 4 to 6.

Preparation of list of amendments after the decision of the appellate authority will be done from April 8 to 10 and final publication of electoral rolls is fixed for April 12, he said.

He said it was necessary to revise and update the electoral rolls for all the 39 municipal and town councils for the conduct of general elections since the last revision was held on November 24, 2022.

The state government has conveyed administrative approval for the conduct of special summary revision of electoral rolls in the municipal and town councils on February 27, he said.

The government had announced conduct elec-

tions to ULBs several times, but objection from tribal bodies and civil society organisations against the 33 per cent women reservation and tax on land and properties had held back the polls.

In 2017, when the state government led by TR Zeliang tried to hold the elections, there was violence. Two persons were killed and government properties and offices were damaged. It also led to the fall of the Zeliang ministry.

The Neiphiu Rio-led all party government in March last year also announced conduct of an election with 33 per cent women reservation as directed by the Supreme Court.

However, following stiff resistance again, the government cancelled the elections and also repealed the Act of 2001 in March 2023.

Subsequently, the assembly passed the new Nagaland Municipal Act 2023 with 33 per cent women reservation in November.

The ULB elections matter is under the scrutiny of the apex court and the latest direction dated December 11, 2023 is that the entire process should be completed by April 30.

The election commissioner said the final call on the date of the poll will be taken only after the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls.

Longkumer expressed confidence to complete the process as per the directive of the Supreme Court.

The last ULB elections in Nagaland were held in 2004. (PTI)

Foster synergy between health care and humanitarian assistance: Guv

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 4: Nagaland Governor and president of Indian Red Cross Society Nagaland (IRCSN) branch, La Ganesan urged the new chairman of the IRCSN P Paiwang Konyak, state health and family welfare minister, to commit to fostering synergy between health care and humanitarian assistance in ensuring that no one is left behind in their hour of need.

Ganesan said during the induction programme of the chairman of IRCSN and flagging off of the new ambulance donated by the former at Raj Bhavan in Kohima on Monday.

He hoped that Paiwang's tenure would be marked by compassion, empathy and unwavering dedication to the service of humanity.

Ganesan apprised the participants that the health and family welfare minister has to assume the role of the chairman of the IRCSN because of the symbiotic relationship that exists between health and humanitarian work.

"As the head of the public health delivery system in the state, the minister and his officials are uniquely positioned to address the multi-faceted challenges facing our society today and the challenges that may arise during emergencies," he added.

In his address, Konyak expressed his gratitude to IRCSN and the governor for allowing him to serve the IRCSN and added that it is crucial for an organisation like the Red Cross Society to stay prepared and updated with technology for an effective response to emergencies and disasters.

He called upon the people to commit to fostering collaboration and partnership, both within the IRCSN and with all the external stakeholders, to maximise "our impact and reach". He also appreciated everyone involved in the mission of the Indian Red Cross Society for their unwavering commitment to building a brighter future grounded in the values of humanity and love.

Arunachal Pradesh: 57 species sighted during Aalo bird walk



AALO, March 4: As many as 57 bird species were sighted during the inaugural Aalo bird walk held in West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh from March 2-3, an official statement said.

The walk, named 'Feathers and Footsteps', was organised jointly by the West Siang district administration and the Siang team of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE-Siang), in col-

laboration with the forest and tourism departments.

"It was very exciting to see such an enthusiastic response to the maiden Aalo bird walk, particularly from the local youths. We want to continue this effort in the future too," West Siang Deputy Commissioner Mamu Hage, an avid birdwatcher, said in the statement.

The event packed an array of engaging activities, including educational talks on bird identification, the significance of bird conservation, and a quiz.

"The bird walk, despite cold, cloudy and misty weather, was a huge success and the biggest highlight was the sighting of at least 1,000 Common Cranes in flight, probably on their way back to the breeding grounds," said Rajkamal Goswami, who leads the ATREE-Siang team based at Pasighat in East Siang district. (PTI)

Rising People's Party slams Nagaland budget as lacklustre and deceptive

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 4: The Rising People's Party (RPP) on Monday said the 2024-25 Nagaland budget passed recently in the state assembly lacked imagination and was more or less a con job as it had nothing for the common man, sports persons, entrepreneurs, elderly and farmers.

In a release, the RPP said the media and communication committee of the ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NPP) describing the budget as 'visionary' would make any sane person wonder if there is any limit to sycophancy and stupidity.

According to the party, the central government funds under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) for construction of office buildings, roads, stadiums and other infrastructural activities, for drinking water or the government of Japan or FORTIS Group, Delhi, constructing hospitals in the state have nothing to do with the state budget.

It asked the NDPP what correlation the Rs 180 crore sanctioned for the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation areas under PM-DevINE has with the state budget. It said the NDPP should first grasp the term "state budget".



The party further sought to know the connection between hosting the Khelo India University games in the state with the state budget. It pointed out that the Khelo India Games was hosted before the budget was passed and that Khelo India is the initiative of the central government.

It said chief minister Neiphiu Rio, who also holds the finance portfolio, took credit for the games held in the past for which the state government did not incur even a single

expenditure. It wondered how the NDPP media and communication committee dared to term the budget 'visionary'.

The RPP stressed the budget passed by the governments are future-oriented, probable expenditures and incomes for the coming financial year.

It said the chief minister, very disingenuously, brought together all the developmental works sponsored by the Centre by way of CSS - past and present ongoing works - and the donations given by private agencies and collated all these heads as state budget for the financial year 2024-25 as if these were state government initiatives for the future. It added that the block-making unit at Wazeho cement factory which has been operating for the last 2-3 years has been highlighted in the budget as if it is a new initiative to be undertaken.

"Going through the state budget one gets the feeling that it is copy-paste straight from Nirmala Sitharaman's budget speech," the RPP said.

Tripura assembly passes resolution to thank PM Modi for Ram temple consecration

AGARTALA, March 4: The Tripura Assembly on Monday passed a resolution expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his unwavering effort in the consecration of Ram Lalla in Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya.

Following the question hour, BJP legislator Kishore Barman read out the resolution, extending thanks to the PM for fulfilling the holiest duty of performing the pran pratishtha of Ram Lalla on January 22.

"I thank chief minister Manik Saha and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ratan Lal Nath for giving me the opportunity to present the resolution expressing our thanks to the PM for the consecration of Ram Lalla after 500 years. This event was not merely about performing a puja in front of an idol; it has instilled confidence among people", he said.

Barman asserted that Lord Ram is not just an ideal figure for Hindus, but also for millions of people

from various faiths. He emphasised that the consecration of Ram Lalla will serve as an inspiration for millions, reminding them of their duty towards the motherland.

"It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who observed an 11-day fast and slept on the floor amidst chilly weather to follow the sanidhi of the process. And, then he went to Ayodhya to consecrate Ram Lalla and opened the doors for the people, who had been waiting for years to offer prayers", he said. (PTI)

Zoramthanga to continue as MNF president

AIZAWL, March 4: Zoramthanga will continue as the Mizo National Front (MNF) president for three more years until March 2027, a party leader said on Monday.

He was elected unopposed, as no other candidate filed nomination for the president's post, he said.

Despite expressing a desire to retire from active politics and declining to continue as president, 79-year-old Zoramthanga was nominated by the party nomination committee as the candidate for the top post.

Former health minister R.

Lalthangliana has been selected as the party senior vice-president, MNF legislature party leader and opposition leader Lalchhandama Ralte, former Lok Sabha member Vanlalzawma as party vice-presidents, and former minister Lalruatkima as treasurer.

Zoramthanga, who will turn 80 in July, had tendered his resignation as the MNF president on December 5 last year following the party's defeat in the assembly polls held in November. However, his resignation was rejected by the party.

In the 2023 assembly polls, MNF

was defeated by the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) and managed to win only 10 seats, down from its tally of 26 in the 2018 assembly polls. Zoramthanga has been serving as the MNF president for over 30 years since 1990, following the death of Laldenga, who had founded the party.

Zoramthanga joined the MNF underground movement in 1966 and held various positions within the party, eventually becoming chief minister for three terms from 1998 to 2008 and again from 2018 to 2023. (PTI)

Ganja seized, one arrested

SHILLONG, March 4: In a huge cache, nearly 5,000 kg of ganja was seized in Ri Bhoi district of Meghalaya on Sunday night. One was arrested.

District SP Jagpal Singh Dhanoa on Monday informed that the seizure was made during a joint intensive naka checking by Ri Bhoi DEF and E/67 Battalion of the CRPF at Lad Umsaw after receiving credible information that a truck was suspected of carrying illegal contraband.

The checking was also in view of the run up to the Lok Sabha elections. Subsequently, on the same evening the vehicle was detained at the said naka along with the named suspect.

"Further, after observing all formalities under the

provision of NDPS Act and in the presence of the independent witnesses search of the vehicle was conducted and 280 packets of suspected ganja (marijuana) was recovered," he said while adding that preliminary test of the suspected contraband was conducted and gave positive result for ganja (marijuana), weighing 4,746.409 Kg.

Cash amounting to ₹ 3,760 was also seized from the possession of the truck driver Babulal Sheikh (48), who was arrested by the police.

In this regard, a case under appropriate sections of NDPS Act is being registered at Umiam PS and investigation is on to trace the backward and forward linkages, the SP said. (NNN)

Reconciliation team set up in Manipur; 213 dead in the ensuing violence: CM Singh

IMPHAL, March 4: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh, while speaking on Monday in the Manipur Legislative Assembly on the efforts to bring peace in Manipur, disclosed that under the chairmanship of Hill Areas Committee (HAC), Dinganglung Gangmei, a "reconciliation team" has been set up and talk has started with "various members of the house who have abstained from this assembly session to bring peace and normalcy in the state".

The chief minister also that "time has brought this crisis and time will bring change also, and we need to end this crisis at the earliest so that we can live in peace and harmony like it was before".

He also sought the support and advice from the legislators to bring peace in the state.

Meanwhile, N Biren Singh, while replying to a question raised by MLA K Ranjit Singh, informed the house that 213 persons died due to the ongoing violence that erupted on May 3 last year. Out of this, 198 have been identified as civilians including 20 women and 8 children. He further said, ex-gratia of 114 persons has

been distributed and the remaining are in the process and will be distributed after verification.

In another question, the Chief Minister said the weapons used by the militants are trying to be identified and as it is a sensitive issue, the matter cannot be placed in the house. In another question raised by MLA Th.Lokeshwar Singh, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh said that the deployment of state force depends on the ground situation and not on constituency-wise.

In a question raised by MLA Th. Lokeshwar, the Chief Minister informed the house that as on February 27, 6746 "illegal Myanmarese" were detected and 259 were pushed back to their native place. After verification, biometrics were taken up and are kept in a temporary shelter.

Replying to another question raised by MLA K. Meghachandra, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh said pending amounts of benefits to be given to the pensioners is ₹ 859.36 crore and the pending amount will be given by August, 2024. (NNN)

USTM Pays Tribute to Late PA Sangma on 8th Death Anniversary with 7th Memorial Lecture

Former Guv RS Mooshahary and USTM Officials Laud PA Sangma's Contributions and Legacy

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: The University of Science and Technology (USTM) solemnly commemorated the 8th death anniversary of the distinguished former Lok Sabha Speaker and chief minister of Meghalaya, Late Shri PA Sangma.

Marking the occasion, USTM organised the 7th Memorial Lecture on the theme "Role of PA Sangma for Progressive Meghalaya," which witnessed the participation of esteemed dignitaries, faculty members, staff, and a multitude of students.

Delivering the memorial lecture, RS Mooshahary, Former Governor of Meghalaya, paid glowing tribute to the late statesman, hailing him as the epitome of Northeastern representation and a stalwart dedicated to the welfare of his



constituents. Mooshahary remarked on PA Sangma's exemplary integrity and credited him for fostering a legacy of probity, notably highlighting the honorable conduct of his offspring. Singling out Conrad Sangma, chief minister of Meghalaya, as a beacon of ethical leadership, Mooshahary lauded the Sangma family's commitment to public service devoid of any taint of corruption. Reflecting on PA Sangma's towering presence in Indian politics, Mooshahary

lamented the missed opportunities for Sangma to ascend to the highest offices of the nation, attributing these setbacks to internal political dynamics.

Nonetheless, Mooshahary emphasised Sangma's enduring influence in shaping the identity and prominence of Meghalaya on the national stage.

Chancellor of USTM, Mahabul Hoque, expressed profound gratitude towards Late PA Sangma for his instrumental role in the establishment of USTM through the enactment of the USTM Act in the Meghalaya Assembly in 2008.

Hoque lauded Sangma's visionary outlook towards education, underscoring his unwavering support for nurturing young minds in Meghalaya. Acknowledging the pivotal contributions of

RS Mooshahary, Hoque credited both Sangma and Mooshahary as the driving forces behind the inception of USTM.

Prof GD Sharma, Vice Chancellor of USTM, reiterated PA Sangma's enduring impact on the institution and Meghalaya's development.

Prof Sharma highlighted various initiatives undertaken by USTM to honor Sangma's memory, including the establishment of the PA Sangma International Medical College and Hospital, and the institution of the PA Sangma Best Undergraduate Award.

As USTM continues to commemorate the legacy of Late PA Sangma through diverse endeavors, his vision and dedication to the progress of Meghalaya remain indelibly etched in the institution's ethos.

Janasanyog/DF/2953/23/5-Mar-24

PUBLIC NOTICE

No. SSA/Esstt/Engagment/Legal Consultant/718/2023/10761

In pursuant to the advertisement published vide No. SSA/Esstt/Engagment/Legal Consultant/718/2023/10298 dated 08.02.2024, it is for general information of all concerned that the interview for the post of Legal Consultant under Samagra Shiksha Axom will be held on 11.03.2024 from 10.00 am onwards in the State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19.

The list of short-listed candidate is uploaded in the official website of Samagra Shiksha Axom at <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>

The short-listed candidates are requested to attend in the interview on 11.03.2024 at 10.00 am in the State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19 with the original testimonial relating to Educational Qualification, Experience and other documents, etc.



Sd/-Executive Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Delhi govt presents ₹ 76,000 cr budget; to give ₹ 1,000 monthly to every woman

NEW DELHI, March 4: The Delhi government on Monday presented a ₹ 76,000-crore budget for FY25, which it claimed to be inspired by the vision of 'Ram Rajya', and announced a monthly payment of ₹ 1,000 to all women under a scheme that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal termed the world's biggest step towards women empowerment.

Presenting the 2024-25 budget in the Delhi Assembly ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, state finance minister Atishi also announced the implementation of Business Blasters scheme in universities and industrial training institutes (ITIs). The scheme is already being implemented in government schools.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal said that the budget takes care of every sector, asserting that the AAP government is inspired by the vision of 'Ram Rajya'.

However, the overall budget for the financial year 2024-25 has witnessed a 3.7 per cent reduction compared to ₹ 78,800 crore allotted in the preceding fiscal.

The allocation for health and education sectors also reduced in the latest budget.

The government allocated ₹16,396 crore for education, slightly down from the previous fiscal's allocation of ₹ 16,575 crore. Similarly, the health sector's outlay of Rs 8,685 crore is less than ₹ 9,742 earmarked in the previous budget.

"We do not get a single penny out of the central pool of taxes. Earlier, we would get ₹ 325 crore, but even that has stopped now. This is like strangulating the hen that lays golden eggs," Kejriwal said.

While presenting her maiden budget, Atishi announced the 'Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana' under which all women aged 18 and above will get ₹ 1,000 every month. The government has set aside ₹ 2,000 for the implementation of the scheme.

"The Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana is perhaps the world's biggest programme of women empowerment. It will incur a huge amount. We will implement the scheme after the Lok Sabha polls," Kejriwal told the press conference after the budget announcement. There are around 67 lakh women voters in Delhi, the chief minister said, adding that the scheme excludes the income tax payers and those who avail benefits of other government schemes. According to him, the scheme will benefit around 45 to 50 lakh women.

While presenting the budget in the assembly, the finance minister said that any woman who is eligi-

ble will have to fill a form and give a self-declaration that she is not a part of any government scheme. She is also not a government employee and is not an income tax payer.

"On the basis of self-declaration, those women will start getting the benefits of this scheme. Along with the form, every woman will have to provide her Aadhaar card and bank account information. For the financial year 2024-25, I propose ₹ 2,000 crore for 'Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana'," Atishi said.

The government allocated ₹ 8,423 crore for the civic bodies, which is more than ₹ 8,241 crore budgeted in 2023-24.

An allocation of ₹ 16,396 crore has been made for the education sector. Atishi said the priority of the state government is to focus on providing quality education to the residents of the city.

The minister highlighted that the government schools under the Kejriwal-led state government have transformed significantly.

About the city's healthcare system, she said in the last nine years under the Arvind Kejriwal dispensation, the healthcare has moved from a state of 'majboori se majbooti' (helplessness to strength) and 'nirasha se vishwas' (despair to faith).

She said the second principle of Ram Rajya is curing every ailing person.

To ensure the right to water and sewerage facilities for every household in Delhi, a total of ₹ 7,195 crore has been allocated for the Delhi Jal Board (DJB).

The finance minister also announced an allocation of ₹ 902 crore for unauthorised colonies.

Talking about the transport sector, she said that Delhi will have over 10,000 buses in its fleet, including 80 per cent electric buses.

She announced ₹ 510 crore for induction of electric buses in DTC and cluster buses fleet and ₹ 500 crore for Delhi Metro.

Atishi said that after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) came to power in Delhi, a total of 9,34,000 homes have received water supply for the first time. The AAP government allocated ₹ 664 crore for all nutrition-related schemes in its annual budget, Atishi said, adding that in "Ram Rajya", no one sleeps hungry. During her budget speech, the finance minister said that the government has provided an ex-gratia of ₹ 1 crore to families of 35 martyrs in the last nine years.

It has also provided financial assistance to families of 92 Covid warriors during the pandemic. (PTI)

BJP was never so weak as party: Akhilesh Yadav

LUCKNOW, March 4: Amidst announcements by some sitting BJP MPs and a couple of candidates not to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Monday took a jibe at the ruling party, saying that the "BJP was never so weak as a party".

In a post on X in Hindi, Yadav said, "Who would have thought that such days would come for the BJP that some candidates will give up their claim on the pretext of saying that some other work is more important before getting the ticket."

"Someone will talk about going out considering sports as more serious than politics. Someone will write an application to get out of the deciduous BJP on the pretext of environment," he said.

Yadav further said someone will announce his retirement after getting a ticket. And even after getting a ticket, someone will reject the ticket from a distance on social media due to personal reasons, he said.

He added, "BJP was never so weak as a party. Now apart from the public, even the BJP people themselves are saying, 'don't



want BJP'."

Former Gujarat deputy chief minister and senior BJP leader Nitin Patel on Sunday had said that he has withdrawn his claim to contest from Mehsana Lok Sabha seat in Gujarat.

Patel did not assign any reason for this decision, which he announced on social media, even as the BJP is yet to officially announce the contestant from Mehsana.

In a post on social media, Patel said he had staked a claim for

Mehsana seat and requested the party to field him as its nominee.

He said he is withdrawing his claim before the BJP has come out with the name of the candidate for Mehsana seat.

BJP's Asansol candidate Pawan Singh also withdrew his candidature for the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

Singh withdrew his name on Sunday, a day after the BJP named him as its candidate from the constituency currently represented by TMC's Shatrughan

Sinha.

In a post on X, Singh thanked the BJP leadership for his candidature but added that he will not be able to contest from Asansol "due to some reason", even as he did not specify the reason behind his decision.

With the sitting MP Harsh Vardhan's name not figuring from his Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency in the list of candidates announced by the BJP for the Lok Sabha elections, he on Sunday announced bowing out of active politics.

In a post on X, Vardhan said he will return to his roots after over 30 years of a "glorious electoral career".

Looking back at his journey, he said, "I shall continue to pursue my work against tobacco and substance abuse, against climate change and teaching simple and sustainable lifestyles."

"After over thirty years of a glorious electoral career, during which I won all the five assembly and two parliamentary elections that I fought with exemplary margins, and held a multitude of prestigious positions in the party organisation and the governments at the state and centre I finally bow out to return to my

roots," he said on X.

BJP's Lok Sabha MP from East Delhi Gautam Gambhir too on Saturday requested party president JP Nadda to relieve him of political duties so that he can focus on his upcoming cricket commitments.

"I have requested Hon'ble party president JP Nadda ji to relieve me of my political duties so that I can focus on my upcoming cricket commitments. I sincerely thank Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi ji and home minister Amit Shah ji for giving me the opportunity to serve the people. Jai Hind!," Gambhir had said on X.

Former minister and BJP MP from Hazaribagh Jayant Sinha on Saturday expressed desire not to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, saying he wants to focus on combating climate change in India and around the world.

In a post on X, he said he has "requested" party president Nadda to relieve him of "direct electoral duties" so he can focus on "efforts on combating global climate change in Bharat and around the world".

"Of course, I will continue to work with the party on economic and governance issues," he added. (PTI)

Kejriwal skips 8th ED summons, says ready to appear virtually before agency after Mar 12

NEW DELHI, March 4: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who skipped the eighth Enforcement Directorate summons in connection with the excise policy case on Monday, has expressed readiness to appear before the agency through video-conferencing after March 12, government sources said.

Sources in the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said the agency is examining Kejriwal's response.

The probe agency might not allow Kejriwal's request for appearing virtually and might issue a ninth summons to him for questioning in the case, they said.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) alleged that the probe agency's intention is to arrest party national convener Kejriwal in the "middle of the Lok Sabha polls".

The schedule for the polls expected to be held in April-May is yet to be announced by the Election Commission.

Kejriwal has skipped the summonses of the ED, calling



them illegal and asking the agency to wait as the matter was in court.

In his latest reply to the ED, the sources said, Kejriwal has stated that the summonses are "illegal" but still he is ready to answer the questions of the probe agency.

Kejriwal also has to appear before a city court on March 16 as it has sought his personal appearance in a com-

plaint filed by the ED over skipping of its summonses by him.

The AAP demanded that Kejriwal be questioned by the ED through video-conferencing and it be live telecast.

Hitting out at the chief minister, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said no further relaxation should be given to him.

"What kind of a message is he (Kejriwal) giving to the

children of Delhi? I believe that no further relaxation should be given to him. Now, he should be dealt with strictly," Tiwari told PTI Videos.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana alleged that Kejriwal has disrespected the law by skipping the ED's summonses. "He (Kejriwal) is now saying that he will appear before the ED virtually on March 12. He can do this even today if he wants to appear virtually," Khurana said.

Delhi Health Minister and AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said several BJP ministers and spokespersons were claiming that Kejriwal is trying to avoid giving answers but the AAP kept saying that the matter is not about the questions but about his arrest.

"So, now the CM has found a middle path. He has said that as soon as the Budget session ends, he will give the answers to every question via video-conferencing," Bharadwaj told PTI Videos. (PTI)

Rahul to visit Swaraj Ashram during yatra

AHMEDABAD, March 4: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will offer prayers at temples and visit the historic Swaraj Ashram at Bardoli to pay tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel during the Gujarat leg of the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', party functionaries said on Monday.

The yatra will enter the state at Dahod at around 3pm on March 7 and will cover 400 kilometres across seven districts over four days, Congress leader Shaktisinh Gohil said.

"There will be 27 corner meetings and six public gatherings as part of the yatra's Gujarat leg. Some of the distance will be covered using cars and buses, while foot marches will be held in urban areas," Gohil told reporters.

On March 8, Gandhi will offer prayers to mark Mahashivratri and tribal women in traditional attire will welcome him since it will also be International Women's Day, he said.

During the yatra, Gandhi will also visit the historic Swaraj Ashram in Bardoli in Surat district, which is associated with Sardar Patel, on March 10.

It was built in 1922 by Sardar Patel as his residence and served as a centre for planning and executing the Bardoli Satyagraha, a farmers' agitation and nationalist movement against increased taxation on farmers by the British. Mahatma Gandhi stayed at the ashram for a month every year between 1936 and 1941, party leader Siddharth Patel said.

"On March 10, the Nyay Yatra will visit Swaraj Ashram at Bardoli. When we are talking about justice, then Bardoli Satyagrah assumes significance. It established that people can themselves fight for justice. Sardar Patel stayed here for several years in a room named Sardar Nivas," he said. (PTI)

'Mera Bharat, mera parivaar', says Modi to Lalu's 'you don't have family jibe'

ADILABAD (TELANGANA), March 4: In a major counter-offensive to the opposition's 'no family' jibe, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday asserted that 140 crore Indians are "my family" and attacked the "dynasty parties", saying that they may have different faces, but "jhoot and loot" was their common character.

Modi's comments came a day after RJD supreme Lalu Prasad at a rally of the grand alliance in Patna said, "What can we do if Narendra Modi does not have a family of his own? He keeps bragging about the Ram temple. He is not even a true Hindu. In Hindu tradition, a son must shave his head and beard upon the demise of his parents. Modi did not do so when his mother died".

Hitting back at the opposition par-

ties, Modi reiterated that his commitment was to the people of the country and that he had left home at a young age with the dream of serving the people.

Addressing a well-attended public rally in this district, the Prime Minister also said he had dedicated himself to public welfare as a "sevak".

Countering the opposition's point that he had no family, the PM said "140 crore people of this country are my family. Mera Bharat mera parivaar hai (my India is my family). My life is like an open book. People of the country know about it."

"When I left home in my childhood, I left with a dream that I will live for the countrymen," he said.

Following Modi's assertion at Adilabad rally, BJP president JP Nadda and senior party leaders, including

ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari, Nirmala Sitharaman and Anurag Thakur added 'Modi Ka Parivar' to their social media profiles.

Further, attacking "dynasty parties," in the country, the Prime Minister said: "The face of dynasty parties may be different but they have a similar character—jhoot and loot (lies and loot)".

Modi said that while "TRS became BRS," it did not change anything and now the Congress was in power in the state, but "nothing is going to happen".

He alleged that BRS did 'scams' like the Kaleshwaram lift irrigation project during its tenure and charged the ruling Congress with "sitting on files instead of taking action."

The K Chandrababai Rao-founded Telangana Rashtra Samiti

(TRS), which ruled the state for about a decade till late 2023, was later rechristened as Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS).

The PM also listed out several developmental works undertaken in the past 15 days in the country and said this was to further strengthen "Atmanirbhar Bharat" to 'Viksit Bharat'.

He said he had detailed discussions with all his ministers and top officials in New Delhi on Sunday about an action plan for a developed India.

He also talked about various steps taken by his party for the welfare of Adivasis and said the highest priority was being accorded to this.

The "Sammakka-Sarakka" central tribal violence to be established in the state was proof of his government's priority for Adivasi welfare, he added. (PTI)

2 involved in INLD leader Rathee's killing arrested in Goa

CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI, March 4: Two people have been arrested from Goa in connection with the killing of INLD's Haryana unit president Nafe Singh Rathee, police said on Monday. Rathee and Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) worker Jai Kishan were killed after multiple rounds were fired on their vehicle in Bahadurgarh in the state's Jhajjar district on February 25.

Ashish and Saurabh were arrested from Goa in a joint operation by the Haryana Police's Special Task Force, the district police and the Delhi Police's Special Cell, officials said.

They were flown to Delhi from Goa and then taken to Jhajjar in the afternoon, police officials in the national capital

said. They added that the duo was arrested from North Goa, where they were staying in a hotel.

A senior Delhi Police official said Ashish, Saurabh, Nakul and Atul were the four who opened fire on Rathee and Kishan's vehicle on February 25. A team of the Delhi Police's Special Cell (Southwestern Range) was involved in the operation in Goa, the official said. Ashish and Saurabh -- residents of Delhi's Nangloi -- are associates of UK-based gangster Kapil Sangwan, who, through a purported social media post, took responsibility of killing Rathee.

An official in Delhi said Sangwan is involved in around two dozen cases of extortion,

murder and attempt to murder, and had fled to the UK in 2020.

In the purported social media post, Sangwan had said that Rathee became the friend of his enemy Manjeet Mahal.

Sources said Sangwan had provided arms and ammunition to the four shooters. Nakul and Atul had left the hotel in Goa on Saturday, they said.

Sangwan's elder brother Jyoti Prakash alias Baba is lodged in the Tihar jail in a case of murder and could be interrogated by the Haryana Police in the coming days, another Delhi Police official said.

The attack on the INLD leader, which came ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, drew sharp reactions from opposition parties in BJP-ruled Haryana. (PTI)

FAITTA welcomes the commerce ministry order to route 100% dust tea through auctions

KOLKATA (WEST BENGAL), March 4: The Federation of All India Tea Traders Association (FAITTA), the apex body of Tea Traders, Buyers, Packers and Retailers of Tea in India reiterates its total commitment towards offering Food Safety compliant Teas to both Indian and global markets.

The FSSAI enforces all Food Business Operators (FBOs) to adhere to the quality and safety Standards prescribed under the Act and Regulations in furtherance of which the FBOs are mandated to conduct, as per laid down parameters.

FAITTA has, in furtherance of this position, conducted over the last few years several rounds of Tests and reported the results to appropriate authorities.

FAITTA has always underscored the position that the Quality and Food Safety parameters are set at the primary tea production and manufacturing stage over which Buyers and Packers have no direct control.

It is however the duty and obligation of Buyers, Blenders, Packers and Retailers of Tea to adhere to the FSSAI provisions and ensure that their sourcing/procurement processes are fully aligned. This can only happen when there is adequate visibility and transparency of Food Safety compliant teas in the market.

The Public Auction system in India regulated by the Tea Board under the Tea Act and Tea Marketing Control Order



and accounts for close to 50% of total tea sales. Auctions therefore provides a significant gateway for the supply chain to operate making for the transparency and visibility which has been referred to earlier.

In point of fact the prevailing Regulations stipulate that all teas offered for sale through the Public Auction system carry the Promissory / Warranty that they are in full compliance of the quality and Food Safety standards prescribed under FSSAI and its Regulations.

FAITTA's view that food safety testing needs significant ramping up is in furtherance of implementing this Promis-

sory / Warranty as a prerequisite for buying and trading in quality and Food Safety compliant tea.

FAITTA therefore welcomes the recent Order issued by the Ministry of Commerce Govt of India mandating 100% routing of all Dust grade teas (with the exception of exempted categories) through the Auction system.

Dust grade teas constitute around 20% of total tea manufactured. This is a limited yet significant beginning and the Order is a bold and decisive step towards subsequent structuring and implementation of a stepped up process of testing and reporting of food safety results prior to sale.

In summary the FAITTA's positive response to the Order is guided by the following considerations: the routing of all Dust grades provide a significant starting point to put around 20% of total manufacture under a much needed scanning process; visibility and transparency through this scanning and assurance will boost Buyers confidence to operate in the Auction thereby enhancing the attractiveness of the system and price discovery; this will be win win situation for all stakeholders in the tea supply chain as more statistically significant quality and food safety assurance steps will enhance and reinforce the healthy and safety attributes of Tea among consumers.

In deference to the FSSAI's request FAITTA has worked on a comprehensive Food Safety Road Map for Tea which is shortly due for formal submission to the FSSAI. (PTI)

BJP's 2nd list of LS candidates likely by tomorrow: Yediyurappa



BENGALURU, March 4: BJP's Parliamentary Board member and former Karnataka chief minister B S Yediyurappa indicated on Monday the party's second list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections is likely to be finalised on Wednesday.

BJP came out with its first list of 195 candidates across 16 States and Union Territories on March two. Yediyurappa said he is going to the national capital on Wednesday.

"Day after tomorrow, there is a meeting in Delhi. I am going there. Most probably the second list (of Lok Sabha candidates)

(also) comprising Karnataka may be finalised. In view of that, I am going to Delhi. I believe that the list will be finalised day after tomorrow. National leaders will take a final decision on the list," he said.

Asked if the second list of candidates will have names of nominees for all the 28 constituencies in Karnataka, Yediyurappa said: "Most probably there will not be any delay. All the seats may be declared."

On the likelihood of some new faces being fielded in Karnataka, he said he has no clue as to what's on the minds of the party's national leaders. "Final decision will be taken by the leaders in Delhi", he added.

The party stalwart also did not say how many seats would be allotted to NDA partner JD(S) in the State but added that an agreement would be reached with the outfit led by former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda. (PTI)



Guwahati MP Queen Ojha speaking during a function organised by Assam State Commission For Protection of Child Right on the occasion of 14th Foundation Day and 10th Child Protection Day, at Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati on Monday. HT photo

Himanta lays foundation of 100-bed hospital in Assam's Kamrup



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday laid the foundation of a 100-bed hospital at Azara in Kamrup district that will offer several essential healthcare facilities.

14 essential healthcare facilities," Sarma said on X. He also inaugurated the south bank corridor of the Guwahati-North Guwahati bridge. "Built at ₹326cr this iconic project will decongest the city and comes with a noise barrier," he said. As part of the Assam government's 'Vikas Yatra', Sarma will be inaugurating or laying foundations of projects worth Rs 1,208 crore for the greater Guwahati region during the day. (PTI)

Bharat Steam Boiler Expo 2024 today



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: The Bharat Steam Boiler Expo 2024 will be held in the city today. The expo will be held by the Inspectorate of Boilers, Assam in collaboration with Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Oil India Limited (OIL), Numaligarh Refinery Ltd. (NRL), Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Ltd. (BCPL), Assam Petro Chemicals Limited, and NTPC Limited. Sanjoy Kishan, minister of welfare of tea tribes, minister of labour & employment, government of Assam and B Kalyan Chakravarty, IAS, principal Secretary, skill, employment and entrepreneurship department are likely to be present.

Guwahati couple arrested for drug peddling

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: Assam Police have arrested a couple in Guwahati for allegedly peddling narcotic substances, officials said on Monday. Following an operation in the Amingaon region of North Guwahati by the Special Task Force (STF) of the Assam Police, which was prompted by a covert tip-off, the pair was taken into custody on Monday morning. The individuals apprehended were named as Mahammad Kharshed Ali, 53, and his spouse Hamida Begum. Police claimed that an attempt was being made to peddle suspected heroin through a bus. The accused couple was taken into custody after the STF stopped the bus in the city. At least 139.5 grams of drugs thought to be heroin were taken from the drug dealers' possession by the STF squad. They were concealed within twelve soap boxes. According to a police officer, the accused individuals' two cell phones were also taken from their possession. Taking to X handle, STF team wrote, "A team led by Insp. Kapil Pathak intercepted a bus at Amingaon following a tip-off on drug trafficking. Two suspects apprehended with 139.5 grams of suspected heroin concealed in soap boxes."



A scene from the drama titled 'Tritiy' Directed by Ranhang Choudhury during the 5th Adingiri Rashtriya Natya Utsav, at Pragiyoti IITA Cultural Centre, Machkhwa in Guwahati on Sunday, evening. HT photo.

Son kills father in city

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: In a shocking incident that took place on the outskirts of Guwahati city on Sunday, a father was fatally attacked by his own son. The tragic event unfolded in Chapaidang, within the jurisdiction of the Panikhaiti police station. The victim, identified as Daya Bhatta, succumbed to the assault inflicted by his son, Prantus Das. The altercation reportedly erupted following Daya Bhatta's excessive alcohol consumption on Sunday night, during which he allegedly assaulted both his wife and son. Following the incident, police responded to the scene and apprehended accused Prantus Das.

City Bus service woes

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: Expressing utter dismay over the inconsistent city bus service in the virtual capital of northeast India, a forum of nationalist citizens urged Assam government to ensure reliable transportation service covering all important routes till at least 11 pm (if not late night hours), so that the Guwahatians, who are still deprived of local & metro train service, can enjoy their rides with no uncertainties. "When the state government at Dispur recently bought a number of CNG and electricity operated city buses, why the transport department cannot ensure timely service after dusk? The law & order situation has already improved and there should be no trepidation in operating the government city buses in all routes till the midnight hours," said the Patriotic People's Front Assam (PPFA), adding that the concerned department must not show interest only in buying the vehicles. Those should also run on the roads for the benefit of common citizens as they may not afford private vehicles for their movements, asserted the PPFA. For any reason new buses should not be subscribed to showcase (the failure of concerned authorities!) in ISBT Guwahati for months now, said the forum.

Family members of Nandini Kumari had filed a missing report on February 11 Police makes breakthrough in Nandini Kumari 'abduction case'

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: Hatigaon police have allegedly arrested two persons in connection to Nandini Kumari abduction case, police sources said. Police have arrested Rafikul Islam and Abu Maten in this connection, sources said. Sources further revealed Kumari's current location. According to sources Kumari has been 'kept hidden' at Mandia village under Sindhuri police station in Barpeta. Sources further said that all males in neighbourhood where Kumari has been kept hidden have been allegedly currently absconding. Family members of Nandini Kumari had filed a missing report on February 11 at Hatigaon police station when they found that Kumari didn't reach home that evening. Kumari was working as a beautician at Infinity parlour located nearby Global Hospital in the city. Meanwhile, family members of Kumari has written an application



to sub-registrar of Kamrup(M) objecting to the alleged marriage application of Kumari. The family members of Kumari have suspected one Gulam Nazir Azad of abduction of Kumari and forcefully compelling her to marriage. "...I object to any marriage application having the bride and groom involved namely Nandini Kumari and Gulam Nazir Azad (accused) as because he abducted my daughter and forcefully compelled my daughter Miss Nandini Kumari for marriage. Hence I object and appeal to the court to not entertain, accept or authorize any such marriage application that may have or will appear before the court...." the application read.

53rd National Safety Week at Guwahati International airport



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: Guwahati International Airport has observed the National Safety Week at new project side premises. The event started with a flag hoisting ceremony of NSD. Hoisting the flag, chief airport officer Utpal Baruah says, "National Safety Week is an annual observance dedicated to promoting safety awareness and encouraging practices to prevent accidents and injuries in various settings, including workplaces

and communities. "The base of any organisation is made by the employees engaged in the construction from its beginning. Therefore, the safety of the employees is a major responsibility of that organisation. Today, on National Safety Day, we have taken a pledge to ensure that employees can work safely here. We have planned a 6-day programme to raise safety awareness to the workers working in the construction," Baruah said. He also congratulated all the employees for their dedicated day and night hard work. Chief project officer of the new airport Jaiswal presented a plaque of appreciation to the workers at the end of the programme. Many senior officials of GIAL & project side were present in the programme. Notably, a week-long agenda of many awareness programs, drives, initiatives, Mockdrill, campaigns and event are planned to be organised.

Dipti Basumatary, Monica Konjengbam and Ridamaya Passah crowned winners

20th Sunsilk Serum Mega Miss North East concludes

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: In a grand ceremony held at the ITA Cultural Complex in Machkhwa on Saturday evening, Dipti Basumatary from Assam, Monica Konjengbam from Manipur, and Ridamaya Passah from Meghalaya emerged victorious in the 20th edition of the Sunsilk Serum Mega Miss North East 2024 pageant. There were no runners-up titles in Sunsilk Serum Mega Miss North East 2024, and all three winners were awarded equally as winners of the beauty pageant, with equal prize packages and benefits. Apart from winning the Sunsilk Serum Mega Miss North East crown, two of the winners were also chosen to represent India at international beauty pageants. Monica Konjengbam from Manipur won the title of Mega Miss India- Continental World and will represent India at Miss Continental World to be held at Thailand later this year. On the other hand, Ridamaya Passah from Meghalaya was awarded the title of Mega Miss India - Top Model of Universe and will represent India at Top Model of Universe pageant to be held in Turkey this year. Mega Entertainment is gearing up to provide both the winners with a comprehensive series of preparation and training sessions, ensuring that they are primed to shine on the global stage.



Speaking at the grand finale of the event, Abhijeet Singha, Founder of Mega Entertainment said, "We are delighted to introduce the triumphant trio from the 20th Sunsilk Serum Mega Miss North East competition: Dipti, Monica, and Ridamaya! Against all odds, they've emerged victorious, surpassing fierce competition

to claim the crown. Our hearts swell with pride as we witness their remarkable journey. Particularly thrilling is the prospect of witnessing Ridamaya and Monica harness this platform to hone their skills for the international arena. Mega Entertainment stands steadfast in offering unwavering support and guidance throughout their expedition." Mega Miss North East is the brainchild of fashionpreneur Abhijeet Singha. It has been produced by Mega Entertainment, and is marketed by Mega Activation. All the three winners will win a prize package of ₹ 1,00,000 each. Additionally, they will win travel opportunities, professional representation from Mega Entertainment, brand engagements, shoots, appearances at youth and fashion events, and public relations and reputation management for the reigning term from Life's Purple. Apart from the main winners, the contestants also competed for a series of subtitles. The title of Sunsilk Serum Miss Shine Queen was awarded to Dipsikha Deka from Assam, Hotel Daayso Oley Allo Miss Congeniality was awarded to Monica Konjengbam from Manipur, Dazler Eterna Miss Glamorous was awarded to Emichwa Daka B Ladia from Meghalaya, Butterfly Miss Fashion Icon was awarded to Dipti Basumatary from Assam.

BTR govt distributes financial aid to FPOs, inaugurates solar powered cold storage Farmer Producer Organisations meet held at Bijni

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 4: A one-day Farmer Producer Organisations (FPO) meeting under the Bodofa Livelihood Mission, Government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), was held at Barlawga playground, Bijni in Chirang district on Monday.

The Government of Bodoland Territorial Region has been emphasising empowering the farming communities in the region and initiated this noble venture.

Thousands of farmers representing various FPOs from the districts of Bodoland Territorial Region participated in the program, organised by the BTR Government to discuss at length the ushering of sustainable development of agricultural farming in the region.

A total of 104 FPOs and 22 cooperative societies were given cheques as financial assistance under the Bodofa Livelihood Mission across the BTR region. Each FPO and cooperative society received ₹ 1.5 lakh and ₹ 50,000 respectively.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, Rongwra Narzary, Rajya Sabha MP, BTR executive members Dhananjay Basumatary, Dharna Narayan Das distributed the cheques to the FPOs and cooperative societies amidst a huge gathering of farming fraternities.



ering of farming fraternities.

CEM Boro stated that the BTR government is committed to empowering the farming fraternities across the Bodoland region to usher in sustainable development in the farming sector. He informed that financial

assistance has been provided to the FPO beneficiaries, supporting collective efforts while enhancing the well-being of farming communities.

He further mentioned that the BTR government has initiated steps to financially

support farmers to celebrate and uplift farmers, who are the true heroes of society, aiming for a brighter and more prosperous future for the agriculture sector in Bodoland Territorial Region districts.

"It was a gratifying moment to be part of the get-together program of the FPO members from different parts of the Bodoland region and engage in a healthy discussion over the well-being of farming communities," Boro said.

Meanwhile, CEM Pramod Boro also inaugurated the newly constructed 5 MT (metric ton) solar-powered cold storage unit situated at Panbari in Chirang district.

The unit was built in collaboration with the North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Ltd. (NERAMAC), which is expected to greatly augment the agricultural infrastructure of BTR.

"It was a great pleasure to inaugurate the cold storage unit, as now the perishable agro produce of Bodoland region's farmers can be preserved for a longer time, thus reducing spoilage and helping to enhance our farmers' incomes in days to come," Boro added.

Among others, BTR executive members Ghanshyam Das, MCLA Madhab Chandra Chetry, commodore Rajiv Ashok (retd), managing director, NERAMAC, and several dignitaries were present on the occasion.

NF Railway's carriage and wagon workshops achieve remarkable performance

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: Continuing on the path of excellence, the New Bongaigaon and Dibrugarh workshops under Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) have achieved remarkable increases in the maintenance of train coaches and goods wagons. Both workshops have delivered a higher quantity of maintenance output for coaches and wagons during the month of February 2024. Overhauling of coaches and wagons is conducted to provide a comfortable travel experience to passengers and ensure safety in operations.

During February 2024, the New Bongaigaon workshop carried out Intermediate Overhauling (IOH) of 64 sets of Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) and ICF (conventional type) trolleys, surpassing the target of 50 sets per month. Periodical Overhauling (POH) of 55 coaches (27 LHB and 28 ICF), including 2 power cars, was also completed during the month. Additionally, 206 wheel sets were turned out from the wheel lathe and supplied to divisions to reduce the detention of rolling stocks. Furthermore, 154 wagons and 6 brake vans were turned out with the conversion of 12 trolleys of 6 wagons into high-speed trolleys. Moreover, for effective and faster braking, 46 wagons were converted to the twin pipe air brake system from the conventional single pipe air brake system.

Similarly, during February 2024, the Dibrugarh workshop conducted periodical maintenance of 33 LHB coaches and 34 ICF coaches, exceeding the target of 20 LHB coaches and 30 ICF coaches. The POH output for conventional coaches in the Dibrugarh workshop reached 67 against the target of 50 for the month. A total of 614 wheel sets (355 LHB and 259 ICF) were overhauled in the workshop. In an effort to resist fire in trains, 19 LHB AC coaches were fitted with fire detection systems in the workshop and user depots. Additionally, modifications in the air brake system with standardised fittings were carried out in 15 coaches. Scrap disposal by the Dibrugarh workshop in February 2024 reached 322.70 MT, almost 160 percent higher than January 2024.

Maintenance and repair of train coaches and goods wagons are conducted in the workshops as per the prescribed maintenance schedule. Both rolling stock workshops have undertaken several infrastructure augmentation works for refurbishing LHB coaches and increasing their POH capacity.

RTU hosts scientific outreach activities

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: The department of Physics at Rabindranath Tagore University (RTU), Hojai, in collaboration with the Outreach Division of the Institute for Plasma Research (IPR), Bhat, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, is organising a scientific outreach activity at the university's campus from March 18 to March 22, from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. The outreach activities will include an interactive exhibition on plasma (the fourth state of matter), its applications, and nuclear fusion, as well as a quiz, tokamak toy assembly competition, and interaction with esteemed scientists. The university authorities invite all interested professors, researchers, and students to attend the program.

MLA Rupak Sarma spurs massive infrastructural development

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, March 4: Within two days, local MLA Rupak Sarma laid the foundation stone for over 38 new construction projects, including roads, drainage systems, and other development projects under various government-sponsored flagship schemes in the Nagaon-Batadroba delimited legislative assembly constituency.

MLA Sarma, on Sunday, laid the foundation stone for construction works on roads at various spots in the newly delimited Nagaon-Batadroba assembly constituency under the 'Mukhyamantri Pakiipath Nirman Yojana' for the year 2023-24. Following this series of events,

MLA Sarma also laid foundation stones for over 28 construction projects, including new roads, drainage systems, and other development projects under the same scheme at various places in the constituency on Monday.

While addressing the occasion, Sarma asserted that under the leadership of CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, a wave of development was sweeping across the district, and he thanked CM Sarma for sanctioning and approving the funds for these flagship construction schemes here.

The series of events were witnessed by Ambika Mazumder, chairman of the Nagaon Municipality Board, Simanta Bora, vice chairman of the Nagaon Municipality Board, Drubajyoti Sarma, chairman of the District Development Authority, Nagaon, senior officials from the Public Works Department, Nagaon, and other ward commissioners of the municipality board, as stated in a press note here.



officials from the Public Works Department, Nagaon, and other ward commissioners of the municipality board, as stated in a press note here.

Workshop on understanding gender organised at Nagaon



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, March 4: The District Hub for Empowerment of Women, Nagaon, organised a workshop on understanding gender, positive masculinity, and ways to address gender-based violence under the Department of Women and Child Development, Nagaon, in collaboration with the NSS unit of Nowgong College (Autonomous) here. The program was supported by

the Nagaon district administration. Over 180 students from Nowgong College (Autonomous), Khagarijan College, and ADP College participated in the workshop, during which they were encouraged to engage in meaningful conversations and activities aimed at fostering understanding and promoting gender equality.

The highlight of the workshop was the engaging presentation by Dr Poonam Kakoti Bora, assistant professor, department of Women's Studies, Gauhati University, on 'Positive Masculinity'. Dr Sabreen Ahmed, department of English, lent her expertise on the topic of understanding gender in the workshop. Besides, Barnalika Goswami, district mission coordinator, District Hub for Empowerment of Women, Nagaon, conducted a session on addressing gender-based violence.

The workshop received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants who expressed gratitude for the opportunity to engage in important conversations and deepen their understanding of gender equality issues. During the workshop, certificates of participation were also distributed among all the participants, an official press note asserted here.

Tezpur University hosts workshop on AI and data sciences

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 4: In an effort to introduce researchers, students, and faculty members to the cutting-edge fields of artificial intelligence and data science, the department of Computer Science & Engineering (CSE) at Tezpur University has commenced a transformative five-day workshop on 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data Sciences' starting from Monday.

The workshop aims to instill confidence among the participants in the emerging areas of data science and artificial intelligence, providing them with a thorough understanding and practical use of python packages and libraries to

effectively address complex problems, thereby shaping the future of technology.

Addressing the gathering as the chief guest, Prof Shambhu Nath Singh, vice chancellor of Tezpur University, emphasised the significant role that artificial intelligence and data sciences play in driving innovation across various sectors in today's rapidly advancing technological landscape. Prof Singh highlighted the widespread discussion on AI, from the level of the Prime Minister to the layman, and expressed the university's intent to explore the possibility of introducing AI & data science as a post graduate program. "We are considering the introduction of AI & data science as a post graduate program in the university, and this workshop may pave the way in that direction," remarked the vice chancellor.

Speaking as a special guest, Prof DK Saikia, former faculty member of the department of CSE, emphasised that artificial intelligence is often associated with the development of cognitive abilities akin to humans, such as voice interpretation, game play, and pattern recognition. He underscored the importance of data science aspects, particularly big data, which are gaining immense significance with the exponential growth of data.

Biswanath Police's educational videos on traffic signs gain traction Biswanath DRSC utilises social media for road safety awareness

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 4: Social media has emerged as a powerful platform for raising awareness about social issues and conducting educational sessions. Leveraging this, Biswanath Police has taken proactive steps to educate the public about road safety through their Facebook official page. The District Road Safety Committee (DRSC), comprising Biswanath Police, District Transport Office (DTO), Biswanath Traffic Police, and Biswanath Civil Administration, has initiated the uploading of weekly videos focusing on various road signals and traffic signs. These concise video sessions, resembling compact classes, have garnered significant attention and engagement from the public.

In an interview with The Hills Times, Biswanath SP Subhasish Baruah, APS, highlighted the objective of the initiative, stating, "As part of DRSC Biswanath's efforts to prevent road accidents, Biswanath Police has been disseminating information on various traffic signs through our official social media han-



des." He further noted that the initiative has received widespread appreciation, with one specific video accumulating over 2.97 lakhs views to date.

Biswanath Police consistently uploads informative videos on their social media platforms, particularly Facebook (Biswanath Police), which have received remarkable responses from the public. To date, 22 videos on

traffic education have been shared on the Biswanath Police's official Facebook page. Apart from these online classes, Biswanath Police also conduct regular duty on NH 15. The jurisdiction of superintendent of police, Biswanath covers a total of 7 police stations, including Sootea PS, Biswanath Chariali PS, Biswanath Ghat River PS, Gingia PS, Behali PS, Helem PS, and Gohpur PS, along with 6 outposts and 1 patrol post, all actively involved in promoting road safety. Police teams, in collaboration with the traffic branch, are stationed at every crossing zone within their respective areas.

It's worth mentioning that the introduction of a four-lane road in the northern belt of the Brahmaputra region, although a positive development, has also brought challenges related to road safety awareness among the local populace. To address this gap and mitigate the incidence of road accidents, Biswanath Police's innovative measures have been warmly welcomed and appreciated by the conscientious citizens of the area.

National Immunisation Day launched in Dima Hasao

District Health Society initiates National Birth Defect Awareness Month



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 4: The inauguration ceremony of the National Immunisation Day (NID) targeting polio vaccinations for children aged 5 years was conducted at the Urban Health Centre in Haflong on Sunday. The event was presided over by Samuel Chngsan, the executive member of the medical, NC Hills Autonomous Council, Haflong, who graced the occasion as the chief guest. Also present were TT Daulagup, ACS, principal secretary, NCHAC; Partho Jahari, ACS, secretary, We Health, NCHAC; Dr Duleshwar Gogol, joint director of Health Services, Dima Hasao, Haflong; Dr Marine L Chngsan, district immunisation officer; Dr L Vaiphel, Dr Lina Hakmoasa, SDMSHO in-charge of Urban Health Centre, Haflong, along with several other dignitaries.

In his address, the executive member applauded the relentless efforts of healthcare workers, particularly those in the field, for their dedication in delivering health services, especially in remote areas. He commended frontline

healthcare workers for their role in implementing government initiatives in the health sector. Dr Marina L Chngsan emphasised the significance of administering two drops of the polio vaccine, highlighting its potential to safeguard future generations from poliomyelitis, a debilitating disease caused by the polio virus.

Dr Duleshwar Gogol and Dr Lina Hakmoasa urged parents and guardians to ensure that children aged 0-5 years are taken to the nearest polio booth for vaccination, underscoring the importance of timely immunisation.

Meanwhile, alongside the launch of the National Immunisation Day, the District Health Society initiated National Birth Defect Awareness Month, aiming to raise awareness about birth defects and promote preventive measures.

The collaborative efforts of healthcare professionals, government bodies, and community organisations underscore a concerted commitment towards safeguarding public health and ensuring the well-being of future generations.

Noted writer Mukul Nath's collection of essays released



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, March 4: A collection of 98 articles, titled 'Jiwan, Nadi aru Sabhyata', written by the noted writer Mukul Nath, was re-

leased through a simple function at No 1 Town Primary School. The release was officiated by Prema Gogoi, former president of Asom Kobi Sammilan. Gogoi, in his ad-

dress, expressed his delight in releasing a book at a school where he had studied some sixty years back. He also commended Mukul Nath as an inspiration to new writers. Dr Sabyasachi Mahanta, principal of Gargaon College, who wrote the preface to the volume, addressed the gathering and praised Mukul Nath for maintaining simplicity and precision throughout the entire collection, which he deemed vital for a modern essayist.

Manoj Kumar Borthakur, a senior journalist, remarked in his speech that the writer of the volume carries on the tradition set by the great historian, journalist, and humorist Benudhar Samrah of Charing. Dr Dhruvajyoti Nath, principal of Namti SPP College, highlighted Mukul Nath's talent for writing rich with metaphor and humour. Mukul Nath expressed his gratitude to all who had inspired him to write over the three decades.

Indian Army constructs & donates sports clubhouse



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, March 4: The Indian Army has constructed and handed over a Sports Clubhouse at Konapathar village, Phillbari camp, under Tinsukia district on Monday. Bhaskar Sharma, MLA of Margherita, attended the inauguration ceremony as the chief guest. This initiative aims to support sports and community involvement among tribal and local youth by providing necessary facilities.

The clubhouse was constructed under Operation Sadbhavana to address infrastructure requirements in remote Upper Assam. Elders from Konapathar village, as well as tribal and local youth, expressed their gratitude to the Army for its role in their development.

MLA Bhaskar Sharma of Margherita extended his appreciation to the Army for its dedication to community welfare. The opening ceremony witnessed enthusiastic participation from villagers, civil dignitaries, and Army officers. It concluded with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and traditional dance performances during the official opening.

Cummins was bought by SRH for a whopping ₹ 20.50 crore in the IPL auctions in December last year New season, new captain: SRH make Pat Cummins skipper, their fourth in 3 years



HYDERABAD, March 4: Australia's World Cup-winning skipper Pat Cummins was on Monday named captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad for the upcoming Indian Premier League, becoming the fourth player to be handed the responsibility in the last three years. The 30-year-old pacer was bought by

SRH for a whopping ₹ 20.50 crore in the IPL auctions in December last year, making him the second costliest player in the event's history. He replaced South African Aiden Markram, who led SRH in the 2023 season.

"Our new captain Pat Cummins," SRH posted on its social media platforms, along with a picture of Cummins.

In the 2023 season, SRH finished bottom of the heap under Markram's captaincy with only four wins in 14 league games.

Markram's feat of leading Sunrisers Eastern Cape to the inaugural SA20 title this year did not help him retain the SRH captaincy, though he remains in the squad.

The SRH leadership role has been changing hands for the last three years.

It began with the infamous 2021 satta when swashbuckling Australian batter David Warner, who led the team to its only title win in 2016 and spent six years

with the side, was sacked in the middle of the season.

Warner was replaced earlier too, by New Zealand's Kane Williamson in 2018 and 2019, when he was serving a ban for his involvement in the ball-tampering scandal during Australia's tour of South Africa.

The big-hitter returned to the position in 2020 and was a fan favourite at SRH before his relationship with the team management began to turn sour during the 2021 season.

He was sacked from the captaincy in May that year after SRH lost five of their six games and was then axed altogether later in the season.

Williamson was handed the reins of the side once again and Warner was blocked by SRH on Instagram. This came to light when the controversial player tried to congratulate his Australian team-mate Travis Head for joining SRH in December last year.

Williamson continued at the helm during the 2022 season and under him, the team finished eighth in the standings. He was eventually released from the team.

Cummins earlier played for Kolkata Knight Riders and Delhi Daredevils, now Delhi Capitals, but this will be his first stint as captain in the lucrative T20 league. He has not led a team in top-flight T20 cricket before.

But he has achieved huge success as Australia captain, leading the team to victory in the World Test Championship and the 2023 ODI World Cup, with both wins in the finals coming against India.

In 42 IPL matches, Cummins has taken 45 wickets with 4/34 being his best bowling figures in a match. With the bat, he has scored 379 runs at an average of 18.95 with 66 not out being the highest.

He made his IPL debut in 2014 for KKR but played just one match that season. He had a stint with Delhi Daredevils in 2017 and opted out of the IPL for a

few years. Cummins returned to KKR as the costliest player of IPL 2020 auction with a whopping price tag of ₹ 15.50 crore. He was with KKR till 2022 and withdrew from IPL 2023 to focus on international cricket.

He entered the auction for the 2024 season, where he became the first player in IPL history to get a bid of ₹ 20 crore and above, though his national team-mate Mitchell Starc overtook him with a ₹ 24.75 crore bid from KKR.

Besides the captaincy change, SRH has also named a new head coach ahead of the new season. Former New Zealand left-arm spinner and captain Daniel Vettori has taken over from Brian Lara. Apart from this, former New Zealand all-rounder James Franklin will take over as SRH bowling coach in place of South African Dale Steyn.

SRH will begin their IPL 2024 campaign against Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on March 23. (PTI)

I won't return to competitive wrestling: Sakshi Malik

NEW DELHI, March 4: Olympic bronze-winning grappler Sakshi Malik on Monday ruled out a return to competitive wrestling, saying the long-standing protest against former national federation chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for alleged sexual harassment has left her mentally tormented.

The 31-year-old Malik had announced retirement in December last year after Sharan Singh's close aide Sanjay Singh was elected president of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) in a tearful press conference.

She, along with another Olympic-bronze medalist Bajrang Punia and Vinesh Phogat, have been protesting for months, demanding Sharan Singh's removal and arrest.

"It's been more than a year, there is so much mental pressure and we have been trying to fight in every possible way to make this protest a success, so I'll not be able to continue wrestling," Malik said in a panel discussion on the impact



of the #MeToo movement in India. "I got (Olympic) bronze for India and I want my juniors to get silver and gold. I would love to see each and every girl in India pursuing her dreams," she added.

Malik, Punia and Phogat have continued protesting against Sharan Singh even after his removal as WFI head.

They have alleged that the new

federation president is merely a figure-head and Sharan Singh is actually calling the shots.

Her refusal to come out of retirement rules Malik out of this month's national trials for the Olympic qualifiers. Punia has already withdrawn, saying he would not participate in any event organised by the Sanjay Singh-led WFI.

The WFI was recently granted a

reprieve when the provisional suspension on it was lifted by United World Wrestling (UWW) on the condition that the protesting wrestlers would be invited for all trials and there would be no discrimination.

"Many people have told me to continue but I don't want to wrestle among people like Brij Bhushan. It feels bad when you see him walking around freely. It seems he is still in control," she said.

"I have not just heard about these incidents, I have personally experienced the harassment. I have given up wrestling but youngsters are hoping that our movement will boot out people like Brij Bhushan. We have done everything we could."

"I am once again pleading with government to ensure that people related to him are not allowed into wrestling's administration. I will always stay positive and I am hoping for a positive outcome," she added. (PTI)

James Franklin replaces Dale Steyn as Sunrisers Hyderabad pace bowling coach

HYDERABAD, March 4: Sunrisers Hyderabad on Monday named former New Zealand quick James Franklin as their pace bowling coach for the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League.

The Kiwi replaces former South African fast bowler Dale Steyn, who has requested the franchise to give him a break for this season owing to personal reasons.

"Dale Steyn will not be joining us this season due to personal reasons and James Franklin will be the Pace Bowling coach for this season. Welcome on board, James!" SRH announced on its social media platforms.

Franklin, who has represented New Zealand in 31 Tests, 110 ODIs and 38 T20Is between 2001 and 2013, had earlier played for Mumbai Indians in the 2011 and 2021 seasons, but this will be his maiden stint as coach in the IPL. (PTI)

Indian men's, women's TT teams script history, qualify for Paris Olympics



NEW DELHI, March 4: The Indian men's and women's teams on Monday scripted history as they qualified for the Olympics for the first time ever based on their world rankings. After the conclusion of the World Team Championships Finals in Busan last month, which served as the last qualifying event for the Paris Olympics, seven spots in the team events remained, which have been awarded to sides based on their rankings.

"The highest-ranked teams not yet qualified in the latest World Team Ranking booked their ticket to Paris 2024," ITTF said.

In the women's event, India, ranked 13, Poland (12), Sweden (15), and Thailand have secured their passage to Paris.

While Croatia (12), India (15), and Slovenia (11) have secured their spots in the men's team event.

"Finally!!!! India qualifies for the team event at the Olympics! Something I have wanted for a long long time! This one is truly special, despite it being my fifth appearance at the Olympics! Kudos to our Women's Team who also secure a historical quota!" veteran Sharath Kamal tweeted.

This marks a significant milestone for Indian table tennis history, as it will be the first time the nation competes in the team event at the Olympics since its inception at the Beijing 2008 Games.

Both the Indian teams had missed Olympic berths at the ITTF World Team Championships Finals after making pre-quarterfinals exits.

The men's table tennis team, led by veteran Sharath were blanked 0-3 by South Korea, while the Manika Batra-led women's team lost 1-3 to Chinese Taipei. (PTI)

Rathod's unbeaten 97 leads Vidarbha's spirited fightback against MP

NAGPUR, March 4: A spunky unbeaten 97 by Yash Rathod helped Vidarbha script a superb fightback and reach 343 for six in their second innings against Madhya Pradesh on the third day of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Monday.

Rathod, who faced 165 balls, received excellent support from his captain Akshay Wadkar (77, 139b) and the pair added 158 runs for the stubborn sixth wicket stand as the hosts recovered from a shaky 161 for five.

Vidarbha, now, lead by a handy 261 runs. The first hint of resistance came when Dhruv Shorey (40, 65b) and Aman Mokhadde (59, 100b) made 84 runs for the third wicket after Vidarbha lost nightwatchman Akshay Wakhare in the second over of the day after resuming from 13 for one.

However, left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya broke the alliance when he induced an edge from Shorey to press Himanshu Mantri into action behind the stumps.

Vidarbha were 90 for three then, and from there they lost Mokhadde and Karun Nair (38) to be at 161 for five and a mere 79 runs ahead.

But Rathod, who is playing in only his seventh First-Class game, and Wadkar built a wall against the waves of MP attack. The pitch too seemed to have eased out a lot more compared to the first two days, with the bounce getting low and slow.

Both Rathod and Wadkar exploited the conditions to the hilt to pile runs without much alarm as MP bowlers looked ragged.

However, Wadkar fell towards the end of the day to pacer Anubhav Agarwal. Wadkar's loose drive away from the body was taken at second slip by a diving substitute fielder Sumit Kushwah.

Brief scores: Vidarbha: 170 & 2nd innings: 343/6 in 90 overs (Yash Rathod 97 batting, Akshay Wadkar 77, Aman Mokhadde 59, Dhruv Shorey 40; Anubhav Agarwal 2/68) vs Madhya Pradesh: 252. (PTI)

Khel Maharan State Level Football Tournament kicks off across Karbi Anglong



HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 4: Khel Maharan state level football tournament for under 19 boys and girls kicked off with a glittering start here at Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) stadium on Monday where teams from 35 districts from the state are participants.

The Khel Maharan tournament, aimed at uncovering latent talent among young players and fostering a deeper understanding of sports, is organized jointly by the Director of Sports & Youth Welfare, Govt. of Assam, the District Administration of Karbi Anglong, and the District Sports & Youth Welfare department under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

The inaugural ceremony was graced by the presence of notable dignitaries

including Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang, MLA Darsing Ronghang, Executive Members, and Members of Autonomous Council. District Commissioner Madhumita Bhagawati and Director of Sports & Youth Welfare, Govt. of Assam, Pradip Timung were also among the attendees.

In his inaugural address, CEM Tuliram Ronghang underscored the ongoing efforts to bolster sports infrastructure in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. He emphasized, "For promoting sports, sports complexes under chief minister's special package worth Rs. 10 crore have been constructed in every 26 MAC constituencies." He also highlighted Karbi Anglong's recent victories in various state-level championships, reflecting

the burgeoning sports culture in the region.

CEM Ronghang further announced incentives for players and athletes, stating that those who excel in national events will be rewarded with appointments at officer and inspector ranks within KAAC.

The inaugural ceremony witnessed a colorful march past by players representing the 35 participating districts, accompanied by their respective officials.

The football action began with thrilling encounters at different venues across Karbi Anglong. Golaghat secured a narrow 1-0 victory against Udalguri at the Diphu Sports Complex ground, while West Karbi Anglong triumphed over Sonitpur with a commanding 4-1 win. In another fixture, Nalbari succumbed to a 0-1 defeat against Majuli.

At the KASA stadium, Tinsukia outplayed Hojai with a convincing 3-0 win. Tamulpur emerged victorious with a 3-0 scoreline against Kamrup (Rural), and Karbi Anglong clinched a 2-0 victory over Nagaon in the evening match, with Jirmili and Serbrika Terangpi netting a goal each for their team.

The opening day of Khel Maharan set the stage for an enthralling display of football prowess, promising an action-packed tournament ahead.

'Have to make sure that you are in position a little bit quicker' Ashwin always trying to find ways to get you out: Joe Root

BENGALURU, March 4: Mighty impressed with Ravichandran Ashwin's range, aggressive mindset and relentless pursuit of wickets, senior England batter Joe Root has said that the veteran Indian off-spinner is a constant threat who hardly believes in the concept of wearing the opposition down.

Ashwin, who recently went past the 500-wicket milestone in the traditional format becoming only the second Indian after Anil Kumble to do so, will play his 100th Test during the fifth match against England, starting on March 7 at Dharamsala.

"Ashwin is always trying to find ways of getting you out rather than trying to wear you down, over long periods of time," Root said on Sky Sports cricket podcast hosted by former England captains Mike Atherton and Nasser Hussain.

Root, who along with his team-mates is currently enjoying a break



in the series, said the infinite variety that Ashwin has in his bowling keeps the batters guessing.

"He uses creases differently from traditional off-spinners. He uses over-spin, side-spin, can get

really tight to the stumps, can go wider and he has got the carrom ball, you know, a lot of different tricks.

"So, you will have to be really wary of different threats that he poses and make sure that you have very good skill sets to counter (him) and be on top of him," said the ex-England skipper.

Giving an insight into the way Ashwin operates, Root said the Tamil Nadu man often bowls six different deliveries in an over.

"Ashwin is making sure that you don't play the previous ball. He is very good at trying to drag you across the crease and get your head to one side of it and beat both edges quite frequently," he said.

Root said Ashwin poses different threats while bowling with new and old balls.

"There are different things to contend with because of his seam position and how cleverly he can

move around the shiny side that has got some extra skid.

"So, you have to make sure that you are in position a little bit quicker. He can also drift the ball away and bring the slip fielder into play," he explained.

Root also offered a comparison between Ashwin and Nathan Lyon, the other premier off-spinner of this generation. The 36-year-old Australian has taken 527 wickets from 128 Tests.

"With Lyon it is all about, I think, especially in the first half of the Test match, to get over the top of the ball, get the bowl bounce, knee roll high, in between and try to bring short leg and leg slip into the game as much as he can.

"Then just slowly, get slower with his pace and drift wider into that. There are those footmarks, you know, Mitchell Starc has so kindly done for him for such a long period of time," added Root. (PTI)

Inzamam questions PCB's decision to remove Hafeez, demands respect for players

KARACHI, March 4: Former Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq has criticised the country's cricket board for removing Muhammad Hafeez as Team Director due to recent poor results, asserting that it is unfair to "target" ex-players in administrative roles when officials are refusing to shoulder any responsibility for the side's performance. The PCB had last month parted ways with Hafeez after a 0-3 Test defeat in Australia followed by a 1-4 T20 International series loss to New Zealand.

Hafeez's contract, initially short-term, concluded after the T20 series in New Zealand, following the sports ministry's recommendation against a long-term agreement.

"Can someone explain the reasoning behind removing Muhammad Hafeez as team director but retaining Wahab Riaz as chief selector after the Australian and New Zealand tours?" Inzamam said on a TV show.

"Weren't both appointed at same time and given same responsibility



ties so why has only Hafeez been held accountable and not Wahab Riaz?" he asked.

The former cricket great, who resigned as chief selector in acrimonious circumstances during last year's World Cup, also urged the PCB to start respecting players.

"The PCB Chairman no doubt is a highly respectable position but don't former captains and stalwarts deserve the same amount of respect from the top board officials," said Inzamam.

Inzamam alleged that during his

dispute with the Board over conflict of interest allegations, he was shown no respect by former PCB Chairman Zaka Ashraf.

"We had a meeting scheduled at the PCB offices after this story about me having a conflict of interest as chief selector broke out.

"I was sitting with (PCB officials) Salman Naseer and Aliya Rasheed waiting for the chairman to come," he recalled.

"But he went to the academy and from there called Naseer and Aliya to meet him and I was told to wait as he would not be seeing me. Only Aliya returned after a time and told me about the inquiry committee," he added.

Inzamam said the Ashraf's attitude was hurtful.

"I was hurt by this behaviour from the Chairman. Every detail of agents and their companies who work with players are available with ICC and PCB and it was not such a big deal and I told them I would resign and they can complete their inquiry," Inzamam stated. (PTI)

Mumbai crush TN by innings and 70 runs to storm into Ranji Trophy final



MUMBAI, March 4: Shardul Thakur's all-round brilliance was the central point of Mumbai's massive innings and 70-run win over clumsy Tamil Nadu inside three days as they marched to their 48th Ranji Trophy final here on Monday.

After his stunning 109 on the second day that handed 41-time champions Mumbai a big 232-run lead, Thakur ripped the TN top-order with two wickets that saw the visitors getting felled for 162 in their second innings in the semifinal.

Baba Indrajith (70) waged a lone battle for Tamil Nadu, whose other top-order batters walked back without any significant contribution and the middle-order too crumbled against the pressure.

However, the pair of Indrajith and Pradosh Ranjan Paul put some

resistance, stitching 73 runs for the fourth wicket.

The catalyst of Mumbai's win was Thakur's mighty effort - 109, 2/48 and 2/16. He dragged them back into the contest from a perilous 106/7 in the first innings to a handy lead while making his maiden century across formats.

Thakur was all over TN with a two-wicket burst early on day three, helping Mumbai reduce the visitors to 10/3.

B Sai Sudharsan was given a reprieve by Shreyas Iyer at mid-wicket, spilling a sitter, but Thakur had the left-handed opener caught behind with a superb inswinger that took an inside edge.

Thakur swung the new ball dangerously and snaffled the key wicket of N Jagadeesan for a seven-ball duck.

Pacer Mohit Avasthi also tasted success when he had Washington

Sundar, who was promoted to No. 3, caught behind by Hardik Tamore.

With the top-order blown away, recovery was a Herculean task for TN but the pair of Indrajith and Paul did well to take the attack to the opposition and keep their side in the contest.

Indrajith was back in his elements, cracking nine fours to make 70 off 105 balls but his resistance ended after nicking one behind to Tamore off Avasthi.

Mumbai spinners Tanush Kotian (2/18) and Shams Mulani (4/53) joined pacers in piling up further misery on the TN batters, sharing the remaining six wickets to wrap up the win for the hosts.

But it was Kotian, who took the initiative with wickets of Pradosh (25) and skipper R Sai Kishore (21) before tea, while left-arm spinner Mulani, who had no wick-

ets to show so far, grabbed final four batters to return with figures of 13.5-1-53-4.

Earlier, Mumbai were bowled out for 378 with Sundar taking the final wicket to break the 10th-wicket stand for 88 runs between Tushar Deshpande (26) and Kotian (89 not out).

While Thakur was named the player of the match for his exploits, the game also witnessed the 25-year-old Kotian making some good strides towards being a dependable lower-order batter.

"I am taking the game as deep as I can and making a good contribution. We have a deep batting order with Shardul at No. 9," Kotian told the media after the match.

"We have made runs down the order, most of the time our team was 100 for five but we have the confidence of reaching 400-450.

"Mohit (Avasthi) also can bat and Tushar (Deshpande) can too. We have the confidence of playing session-by-session. I am happy wherever the team tells me to play and make my contribution," added Kotian.

Kotian also revealed his personal goals for the season.

"I had (my) target set, 500 runs and 30-odd wickets. I had made (around) 350-380 runs down the order last year. I had that in mind that I can do well this year also," he said.

"I have one more game (left) so I will try to get one more hundred," said Kotian, who scored his maiden ton in the quarterfinal against Baroda.

He so far has amassed 481 runs and 22 wickets from nine matches this season.

Brief scores: Tamil Nadu 146 and 162 in 51.5 overs (Baba Indrajith 70; Shardul Thakur 2/16, Shams Mulani 4/53, Tanush Kotian 2/18) lost to Mumbai: 378 all out in 106.5 overs (Musheer Khan 55, Shardul Thakur 109, Tanush Kotian 89 not out; R Sai Kishore 6/99) by an innings and 70 runs. (PTI)

Satwik-Chirag will be the ones to beat in Paris; Sindhu too can deliver again: Gopichand



KOLKATA, March 4: Chief national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand on Monday singled out world number one doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty as favourites for an Olympic medal and said two-time medallist PV Sindhu too is on the right path and can deliver once again at the Paris Games.

Returning after a long injury layoff, double Olympic medalist Sindhu led India's women's team to a historic gold at the Badminton Asia Team Championships.

Satwik and Chirag, on the other hand, have been on a dream run with successive runner-up finishes in 2023 China Open and Malaysia Open Super 1000 and India Open Super 750 this season to emerge as the world No 1 doubles pair.

"It would be fair to say that, as the world number ones today, they are definitely a prospect to win at the highest level," Gopichand said at the announcement of 'Revsportz Sports Conclave' at Calcutta Sports Journalists' Club.

"They are a solid pair; whenever they step on the court, they are one of the favorites. Months away, today, if I have to pick across sports, across countries, any one pair which is the pair to beat at the Olympics, it will have to be Satwik and Chirag."

Asked about India's total medals' count in Paris, he said: "It's elections time, so everyone is guessing big. But I won't give a number, I think it will definitely be

more than what we had last time.

Playing her first match in four months at BATC in February since retiring in the second round of the French Open in October due to an injury, World No. 11 Sindhu beat Han Yue of China, Lo Sin Yan Happy of Hong Kong and Supanida Katethong of Thailand to help India win the gold at BATC.

"I'm definitely with Sindhu. Here is someone who has performed well in the past. I do believe that she is on the right track. The next few months will be crucial," he said.

"She had lost to Supanida (Katethong) previously, so beating her in the final was a significant victory."

Sindhu will be seen in action next at the French Open Super 750 beginning on Tuesday.

"I'm confident that she played well in the BWF Asia Team Championships, and in the upcoming tournaments, whether in France, All England, or the Asian Championships, she will face higher-ranked players. Nevertheless, I am convinced that she is in good form.

"She certainly faces tough competition against players like Korean world number 1 An Se Young, Chinese number 2 Chen Yu Fei, or Japan's world number 4 Akane Yamaguchi.

"However, she has proven herself in the past, and I believe she has the potential to deliver again in Paris. (PTI)

Satwik-Chirag pair eyes 2022 en core in French Open

PARIS, March 4: Former champions Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will be hoping to be fourth time lucky after three successive runner-up finishes when they begin their campaign at the USD 850,000 French Open Super 750 badminton tournament starting here on Tuesday.

The world No. 1 Indian pair faltered at the finishing line thrice to sign off as second best at 2023 China Masters Super 750 in November, Malaysia Open Super 1000 and India Open Super 750 events in January and will start as title favourites this week.

It will also be an opportunity for the top Indian shuttlers to look to get a feel of the conditions at the Adidas arena at Porte de la Chapelle which is set to be the venue for the Paris Olympics.

The top seeded Indians, who won the French Open in 2022, have been the epitome of consistency in men's doubles, which is considered to be highly competitive and are likely to make the weekends once again after opening their campaign against Malaysian combination of Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi.

"I feel losing sometimes it is better than winning all the time. When it really matters it will come. We just need to hang in there," Satwik had said after the India Open.

"We played three finals, we lost three, it was very close in those matches. We could've kept calm in crucial situations." The event holds extra significance for two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu, who made a return to the circuit after four months at the Asia Team Championships in Malaysia.

While not all the super stars competed in Shah Alam last month, the French Open will see them back in action and it will be a big test for Sindhu, who lost one and won twice at the continental tournament.

The world No. 11 Indian will open her campaign against Canada's Michelle Li and a win is likely to put her across three-time former world champion and nemesis Carolina Marin of Spain, their first meeting since that ill-tempered match between the two in the Denmark Open semi-final. (PTI)

Services serve Railways a 2-0 defeat to march into Santosh Trophy semifinals

ITANAGAR, March 4: Six-time champions Services sailed into the semifinals of the Santosh Trophy with a comfortable 2-0 win over Railways at the Golden Jubilee Stadium here on Monday.

Forced to play second fiddle for most of the match against a rampaging Services, the Railwaymen were swept off their feet as early as in the ninth minute when a foul in the area allowed their opponents to take the lead through a penalty converted by Shafeel PP.

Another goal came almost at the stroke of half-time when a brilliant effort by Samir Mumru saw Services increase their lead.

That Services, who made the semi-finals in the last edition too, were the better team on the pitch was clear from the very beginning. (PTI)

Wushu Talent Abhijit Buragohain shines at Wushu Star Int'l C'ship 2024

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, March 4: Abhijit Buragohain, a rising star from the Nitaipukhuri area near Demow in the Sivasagar District, has brought immense pride to India, Assam, and his hometown by clinching the gold medal in the 60 KG Junior Boys category at the Wushu Star International Championship 2024 held in Moscow. Representing the India Wushu Team, Abhijit showcased exceptional skill and determination to emerge victorious in a highly competitive field.

Despite being a student at Science Academy Demow and a candidate for the HSLC Examination 2024, Abhijit made the tough decision to prioritize his passion for Wushu and represent his country on the international stage. His dedication and sacrifice have paid off handsomely, as he returns home adorned with the coveted gold medal, symbolizing his excellence in the sport.

The people of Demow, Nitaipukhuri, and well-wishers of Abhijit Buragohain have flooded him with congratulatory messages, acknowledging his remarkable achievement and the honor he has brought to their community. Abhijit's success serves as an inspiration to aspiring athletes across the region, demonstrating that with hard work, perseverance, and talent, dreams can indeed be turned into



reality.

The Wushu Star International Championship 2024, where Abhijit showcased his prowess, is set to conclude on March 5, marking the end of an exhilarating event that has seen athletes from around the globe compete at the highest level.

Abhijit Buragohain's triumph not only underscores his individual brilliance but also highlights the potential of local talent to shine on the international stage, reinforcing the importance of nurturing and supporting athletes like him to reach their full potential.

Jaiswal among ICC Men's Player of the Month nominees for February



DUBAI, March 4: Prolific India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, the leading run-scorer in the ongoing Test series against England, has been nominated for ICC Men's Player of the Month Award for February alongside New Zealand's Kane Williamson and Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka.

"The International Cricket Council (ICC) revealed the shortlists of nominees for the ICC Men's and Women's Player of the Month awards for February 2024," the ICC said in a release on Monday.

"Several high stakes battles took place last month in the ICC World Test Championship (WTC), and among the contenders for the ICC Men's Player of the Month prize are two premier run-scorers

in the longest format, plus a record-breaking ODI batter from Sri Lanka."

Jaiswal has been nominated for the first time in the ICC Player of the Month awards following a sensational month in Tests against England. So far, the left-hander has scored 655 runs from four Tests with a match to go.

The 22-year-old scored back-to-back double hundreds in Visakhapatnam and Rajkot to help India overturn a 0-1 deficit against England and win three Tests on the bounce.

In Rajkot, Jaiswal equalled the record for most sixes in a Test innings slamming 12 maximums. With more runs coming in the fourth Test, he ended February having amassed 560 runs at an average of 112. The back-to-back double hundreds at the age of 22 years and 49 days made him the third youngest batter in the world to record two double centuries in Tests after Sir Donald Bradman and Vinod Kamble.

Jaiswal's prolific run ensured that India climb to the top of the ICC World Test Championship table.

Williamson, on the other hand, has also been piling runs as New Zealand recorded their first-ever Test series vic-

tory over South Africa.

The New Zealand veteran slammed two hundreds in the first Test in Mount Maunganui, and then made 133 not out to help his team chase down a tricky fourth-innings target in Hamilton to ensure the series victory.

New Zealand thus climbed to the second spot of the WTC table at the end of February with three wins in five Tests.

Completing the lineup is Nissanka, who shone across three ODIs and three T20Is against Afghanistan.

The opener struck Sri Lanka's first-ever ODI double-century in Pallekele (210 not out in 139 balls) to kick the series off in blistering fashion.

More runs came in the third ODI, as Nissanka raised the bat once more with 118 in 101 balls to seal another convincing win, before a half-century in the final T20I showdown capped a fine month.

In all, Nissanka hit 346 ODI runs and 91 T20I runs to earn his first nomination for the award.

The ICC also nominated UAE duo of Kavisha Egodage and Esha Oza and Australia's Annabel Sutherland for the Women's Player of the Month award for February. (PTI)

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ACCEPTORS for PPIUCD/PAIUCD will be given incentives of Rs. 300/-

ACCEPTORS for NSV will be given incentives of Rs. 3,000/-

ACCEPTORS for L.S. Minilap will be given incentives of Rs. 2,000/-

ACCEPTORS for PPS will be given incentives of Rs. 3,000/-

Incentives will be credited to ACCEPTORS' bank accounts.

Dial 104 for details or contact your ASHA/ANM (NHM/D/2023-24/1972)