

6 WORLD Biden and Trump sweep Super Tuesday primaries Executed former Pak PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did not receive fair trial: SC
8 NATION Storm of Sandeshkhali will reach every part of Bengal, decimate TMC: PM Modi CBI team reaches CID headquarters to take custody of Shajahan Sheikh

ECI officials review poll preparedness in Assam



GUWAHATI, March 6: A team of officials of the Election Commission of India on Wednesday held a review meeting with all district election officers (DEOs), superintendents of police (SPs) and others to assess the poll preparedness in Assam.

Along with the DEOs and SPs, the Guwahati police commissioner, DIGs and senior civil administration officials took part in the meeting, it added.

The deputy election commissioner directed all the officials to ensure that the polling in Assam must be conducted in a free and fair manner with high voter turnout.

The team also held a meeting with Assam chief electoral officer Anurag Goel and state police nodal officer P K Bhuyan to review the poll preparedness.

Opposition Tipra Motha to join BJP-led govt in Tripura

AGARTALA, March 6: The Tipra Motha, the main opposition party of Tripura, will join the BJP-led government before the Lok Sabha elections, a senior leader of the saffron party said on Wednesday.

Manik Saha. According to rule, the state can have 12 ministers including the CM. Leader of the opposition in the assembly, Animesh Debbarma of the Tipra Motha, told reporters that he is "not officially authorized" to speak on the issue.

'Nyay Yatra' violence: Police quizzes Debabrata Saikia Leader of Oppn grilled for 3 hours at CID headquarters

GUWAHATI, March 6: Leader of the opposition in Assam assembly Debabrata Saikia was on Wednesday interrogated by police over a case related to the clash when 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' entered Guwahati in January.

Sikdar and the party's Guwahati City general secretary Ramen Kumar Sarma, and both of them have already been questioned by police.



Lok Sabha elections. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will also be issued a summons regarding the clash and the opposition leader will have to be physically present before police

after the Lok Sabha polls. On January 23, Congress workers in presence of Gandhi and other leaders broke police barricades, which were put up after Sarma threatened to file an FIR if the Yatra attempted to enter the main Guwahati city.

HT BRIEFS

Drug peddlers held GUWAHATI: A team of the special task force of Assam police on Wednesday arrested two drug peddlers from Hotel Bijita in Paltan Bazar in Guwahati.

Plantation drive TEZPUR: The Assam Rifles has organized a plantation drive in collaboration with the locals at Sonaimiri Village, Lokra, in Sonitpur district.

Civic body upgradation DIBRUGARH: The Dibrugarh Municipal Board (DMB) has been upgraded to the Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation on Wednesday.

Will recommend implementation of NRC in Manipur: Biren Singh

IMPHAL, March 6: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday said that he will send a recommendation to the Centre for implementing the National Register for Citizens (NRC) in the state as his government cannot do it alone.

He also claimed that the Meitei, Kuki and Naga communities are not behind the violence in the state and blamed those people "who want to break Manipur".

Congress will repeal CAA if voted to power, says Pawan Khera

GUWAHATI, March 6: Senior Congress leader Pawan Khera on Wednesday said the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 will be repealed if the party comes to power after the Lok Sabha elections.



Indian citizenship to people entering the state from Bangladesh as per the Assam Accord.

years of residence here. "Any law on refugees must be based on the Constitutional provisions, nothing is above it like the BJP is trying to do and impose on Assam. The Congress will repeal the CAA if voted to power," Khera said.

Will not go against BJP: Diphu MP

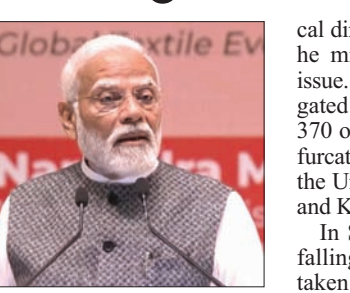
DIPHU, March 6: The sitting member of Parliament (MP) from three Diphu (ST) Parliamentary constituencies, Horensing Bey on Wednesday said that although the BJP denied him a ticket, he is not disappointed.

Waris Punjab De associates hospitalised after heath deteriorates

DIBRUGARH, March 6: Kulwant Singh, an associate of Waris Punjab De chief Amritpal Singh has been admitted to the Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) in Dibrugarh due to health issues caused by epilepsy.

PM Modi to address 1st rally in Srinagar since abrogation of Art 370

SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, March 6: In his first visit to Kashmir after abrogation of Article 370, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will unveil multiple development projects worth more than ₹ 6,400 crore and address a public meeting in Srinagar on Thursday.



for boosting the agri-economy in the Union territory, according to an official statement.

Chargesheet filed against govt employee on corruption charges

GUWAHATI, March 6: The police submitted a chargesheet against Md Chamed Ali, a government employee on corruption charges.

had acquired disproportionate assets which substantiated the allegation. The police registered a case against him under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018).

Guest house embodies dedication of former Golaghat SP Manabendra Dev Ray Dreams behind Assam Police Guest House at Kohora

GUWAHATI, March 6: Assam police guest house amidst the picturesque Kohora range of the Kaziranga National Park in Golaghat district enthralled visitors.



impossible tasks are achieved with the generosity and co-operation of these groups. One such example is the well-planned Assam Police

Guest House at Kohora in Kaziranga. Way back in 2018, whether be it monitoring law and order situation or the arrival of high profile guests or other matters, a need for a government residence was mostly felt.

Naval base INS Jatayu in Lakshadweep Islands to combat piracy, security threats better

MINICOY (LAKSHADWEEP), March 6: Strengthening the operational prowess of the Indian Navy within the strategically vital Lakshadweep Islands, a significant development unfolded on Wednesday.



"Similarly, we expect that this unit will provide situational awareness to the Indian Navy in maintaining good maritime domain awareness of the entire region.

85% Paytm wallet users not to face disruption; rest asked to link wallet to other banks: RBI Gov

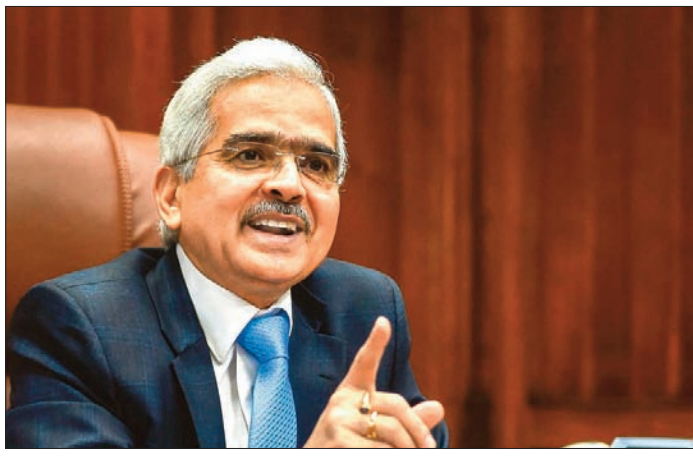
NEW DELHI, March 6: As many as 80-85 per cent Paytm wallet users will not face any disruption because of regulatory actions, and the remaining users have been advised to link their apps to other banks, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Wednesday.

The Reserve Bank of India on January 31 barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) from accepting deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups in any customer accounts.

The deadline for linking the wallet attached with PPBL with other banks has been fixed for March 15, the governor said, ruling out any further extension.

The time given up to March 15 is sufficient and there is no need for further extension, he said, adding that 80-85 per cent Paytm wallets are linked to other banks, and the remaining 15 per cent have been advised to move on to other banks. He said that the RBI has taken action against a regulated entity, which in this case is PPBL and has nothing against Fintech companies.

Instead, Das stressed that the RBI favours innovation in the financial technology sector and has



even introduced Sandbox for testing new tools.

"RBI is and remains fully supportive of Fintech...RBI is all for Fintech to grow," he said in an interview with ET Now.

Giving an analogy, he said, one may own and drive a Ferrari but still one has to obey the traffic rules to avoid accidents.

Asked by when the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) will take a decision on the Paytm payment app licence, Das said it has to do its internal due

diligence.

"So far, as RBI is concerned, we have informed them that we have no objection if NPCI considers the Paytm payment app to continue because our action was against the Paytm payment bank. The app with the NPCI...NPCI will take a call...I think they should be taking a call shortly," he said.

Following regulatory actions, promoter Vijay Shekhar Sharma last month stepped down as part-time non-executive Chairman of Paytm Payments Bank Limited

and the board of the bank has been reconstituted.

Former Central Bank of India chairman Srinivasan Sridhar, former Bank of Baroda Executive Director Ashok Kumar Garg, and two retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers were inducted on the board of the bank.

On growth, Das said, "Our sense and understanding of the high-frequency indicators and the momentum of economic activity tells us that 5.9 per cent growth in the fourth quarter could be exceeded.

"And when that happens, obviously, the annual growth will be more than 7.6 per cent. There is quite a good chance of the GDP number for the current year being very close to 8 per cent," he said.

He also said the latest policy has projected a 7 per cent growth for the next financial year.

On the price rise, Das said the latest inflation print of 5.1 per cent is still 110 basis points away from the target of 4 per cent.

However, he said, the trend of inflation is on the decline and the RBI is now focused on taking inflation to the target of 4 per cent on a durable and sustainable basis. (PTI)

Nothing Unveils Phone (2a) with Powerful Features and Innovative Design

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: Nothing, a prominent technology company, has officially launched its highly anticipated smartphone, Phone (2a), aiming to redefine the daily smartphone experience with a focus on core user needs and innovative design. Carl Pei, CEO and Co-founder of Nothing, expressed enthusiasm about the company's progress, stating that Phone (2a) marks a significant step forward. He anticipates it to become Nothing's best selling product, offering users access to the brand's beloved innovations. Phone (2a) boasts a range of impressive features, including a Dimensity 7200 Pro processor co-engineered with MediaTek, ensuring unparalleled power efficiency and speed. With a 20 GB RAM configuration, the device promises smooth multitask-

ing and enhanced performance. The smartphone is equipped with a dual 50 MP rear camera system powered by the TrueLens Engine, capturing moments with precision, and a 32 MP front camera for stunning selfies. In terms of display, Phone (2a) features a 6.7" flexible AMOLED display with a peak brightness of 1,300 nits and a refresh rate of 120 Hz, providing users with immersive visuals. The device showcases Nothing's unique design expression with an industry-first 90° angle unibody cover and innovative camera placement. Running on Nothing OS 2.5 with Android 14, Phone (2a) offers a seamless user experience with enhanced widgets and AI-powered features. It will be available in Black and White colors starting Tuesday, March 12, 2024, at leading outlets including

Flipkart, Croma, and Vijay Sales. Customers using HDFC Cards can enjoy exclusive benefits, including an immediate discount of Rs. 2,000/-. Additionally, on Flipkart, purchasers can avail of the 8/128 GB variant for as low as Rs. 19,999/- with an additional Rs. 2000/- bump up. As part of a special launch offer, customers can also purchase CMF Buds (Pro) and CMF GaN Charger at discounted prices. Alongside Phone (2a), Nothing also unveiled Buds and Neckband Pro under its sub-brand CMF by Nothing, offering superior sound quality, ergonomic design, and long-lasting battery life. The Neckband Pro is touted as the first 50 dB Hybrid ANC device in its category, while Buds deliver best-in-class ANC across the price segment, catering to modern lifestyles.

Udaan reports over 2.25 billion products shipped across Bharat in 2023

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: Udaan, India's leading e-business-to-business (eB2B) platform, has disclosed its remarkable achievements for the calendar year 2023, boasting the shipment of over 2.25 billion products catering to more than 23 million orders across all states of India, commonly referred to as Bharat. The platform's robust performance was particularly notable in the Essentials category, encompassing Fresh, FMCG, Staples, and Pharma products, where it facilitated a staggering 20 million orders, equating to nearly 10 lakh tonnes of products shipped. Additionally, under the Discretionary category, comprising Electronics, General Merchandise, and Lifestyle items, over 70 million products were shipped to fulfill over 3 million orders. In a testament to its support for small retailers and kiranas, Udaan has been actively encouraging the digitization of payments. In 2023, 22% of retailers on the platform embraced digital payment methods, marking a significant stride towards modernizing Kirana commerce. Key highlights from Udaan's performance in the Essentials category include a remarkable repeat purchase rate of over 90%, underscoring the platform's strong partnership with its retailer base. Notable products shipped include over 504 million biscuit packets, 437 million units of Personal Care products, and approximately 251 million units of beverages. The highest demand for these products was observed from states like Uttar Pradesh,

Delhi, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Telangana. Moreover, Udaan facilitated the shipment of over 9.6 lakh tonnes of Food products, including staples and FMCG items, with staples alone accounting for 7.9 lakh tonnes. The platform also recorded substantial demand for FMCG products from key states such as Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Telangana.

In the Discretionary category, Udaan's Electronics segment saw orders for over 31 million products, while the General Merchandise & Hardware category witnessed orders for over 7.5 million products. The Lifestyle category, comprising Clothing, Accessories, and Footwear, saw shipments of over 19 million products. Vaibhav Gupta, Co-Founder and CEO of Udaan, reiterated the platform's commitment to empowering small businesses across India through technology. He highlighted Udaan's relentless focus on customer service excellence and its robust supply chain network, enabling the platform to serve the needs of millions of shopkeepers and kiranas nationwide.

In a strategic move to bolster its capabilities further, Udaan secured USD 340 million in Series E financing in 2023. The funds will be utilized to enhance customer experience, expand market penetration, forge strategic vendor partnerships, and reinforce long-term supply chain and credit capabilities, aiming to capitalize on the substantial opportunities presented by the Indian eB2B market.

Sensex, Nifty scale new lifetime highs on gains in banking, IT shares

MUMBAI, March 6: Benchmark Sensex and Nifty rebounded from early lows and settled at fresh record high levels in a volatile trade on Wednesday following buying in private bank and select IT shares. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 408.86 points or 0.55 per cent to settle at a new record high of 74,085.99. During the day, it went up by 474.14 points or 0.64 per cent to hit an all-time high of 74,151.27. The index had opened lower and later fell to a day's low of 73,321.48 in the first half.

The broader Nifty climbed 117.75 points or 0.53 per cent to settle at a lifetime high of 22,474.05. During the day, it jumped 140.9 points or 0.63 per cent to reach its record high of 22,497.20. The benchmark indices traded lower in the first half of the session but gains in private banks and pharma shares and firm European markets helped erase losses, analysts said. Among Sensex firms, Kotak Mahindra Bank rose the most by 2.47 per cent. Axis Bank, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, HCL Technologies, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan and Tata Consul-

tancy Services were among the major gainers. UltraTech Cement, NTPC, Maruti, JSW Steel, Power Grid and Tata Motors were among the laggards. "Global markets witnessed mixed signals ahead of the US FED chair's testimony to Congress. The domestic market exhibited a smart recovery in the second half, reversing initial losses as buying picked up in large-cap stocks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

The tone was negative in the first half, tracking weak global cues, however, resilience in banking combined with sharp recovery in the IT and FMCG majors completely changed the mood as the day progressed, Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research at Religare Broking Ltd, said.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 1.91 per cent and midcap index fell by 0.65 per cent. Among the indices, bankex climbed 0.99 per cent, teck jumped 0.87 per cent, IT (0.66 per cent), consumer durables were among the gainers. Services declined 2.03 per cent,

realty dipped 1.40 per cent, power (1.07 per cent), oil & gas (0.85 per cent) and commodities (0.76 per cent). Shares of JM Financial closed nearly 11 per cent lower after the Reserve Bank imposed restrictions on group firm JM Financial Products Ltd. IIFL Finance Ltd tanked 20 per cent to hit the lower circuit at Rs 382.80 on BSE, extending losses for the second day after RBI action against the company. Indian-Canadian billionaire Prem Watsa-backed Fairfax India announced its commitment to provide up to USD 200 million (about ₹ 1,650 crore) liquidity support to IIFL Finance after the Reserve Bank of India barred the non-bank lender from disbursing gold loans.

Sun Pharma, on the other hand, hit a 52-week high before closing at ₹ 1603.90, up by 1.89 per cent, after reports said that the USFDA has classified its Anklekshwar unit as No Action Indicated.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled lower while Hong Kong ended with gains. European equity markets were trading in the green. The US markets ended lower on Tuesday. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Leader of Oppn grilled for

break law" and moved through its permitted route along the NH-27 in Guwahati.

This episode forced the Chief Minister to term the action as "maximalist" style and instructed the police to register a case. The Guwahati Police lodged a suo motu FIR against Gandhi and other leaders for "wanton acts of violence". Sarma even announced that the "instigators", including Gandhi, will be arrested after Lok Sabha polls as he does not want to "politicise" the issue before the general elections. Along with Gandhi, other senior Congress leaders like KC Venugopal, Jitendra Singh, Jairam Ramesh, Srinivas BV, Kanhaiyya Kumar, Gaurav Gogoi, Bhupen Kumar Borah, Debabrata Saikia and others have also been named in the FIR. The chief minister, who also holds the home department in the state, later announced that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) will be formed to probe the case and accordingly, it was handed over to the CID. The case was initially filed at the Basistha Police Station under 10 different sections, including non-bailable ones, such as 120B (criminal conspiracy), 143 (unlawful assembly), 147 (rioting), 188 (disobedience of order), 283 (causing danger, obstruction or injury) and 332 (causing hurt to deter public servant from his duty) of the IPC. Section 3 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984 for alleged mischief causing damage to public property has also been slapped in the FIR. Similarly, another FIR was registered against the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' and its organisers like KB Byju, Assam Congress Chief Bhupen Kumar Borah and others for allegedly deviating from its permitted route inside Jorhat town, leading to a "chaotic situation" in the area. The Jorhat District Police issued notices to the accused persons and several of them have already been interrogated. Referring to the police cases against him and other Congress leaders in Assam, Gandhi had dared the BJP-ruled state to file "as many cases as it can", asserting that he would not be intimidated. The Yatra, led by the Congress MP, commenced from Manipur on January 14 and will culminate on March 20 in Mumbai. The Assam leg of the march, which started on January 18 and concluded on January 25, covered a distance of 833 km in 17 districts. The Yatra plans to cover 6,713 km in 67 days while passing through 110 districts in 15 states. (PTI)

Will recommend implementation

implementation of Inner Line Permit (ILP) which was introduced in the state in December 2019 and came into effect in January 2020. The chief minister also said that the ruling BJP will start campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections from Friday, though no candidate has been announced by the party for Manipur so far. The Northeastern state has two Lok Sabha seats - Inner Manipur and Outer Manipur. The former is held by the BJP while the latter was bagged by the NPF in the 2019 polls. "Ask yourself whether the BJP has done anything wrong for the state and its people. The BJP is not wrong. I can confidently say this because I am not wrong. We have to send two MPs (to Lok Sabha). We will start our campaign from the day after tomorrow," Singh said. No party other than the BJP can save Manipur, he claimed. "This conflict we are facing is not because of the Kuki, Meitei or Naga people but because of those who want to break Manipur. This government is not against any community," Singh said.

More than 180 people were killed since the violence erupted on May 3 after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts. (PTI)

Congress will repeal CAA

CAA will be issued before the Lok Sabha polls and the Act will be enforced accordingly. On Modi's scheduled visit to Assam later this week, the Congress leader criticised him for not visiting neighbouring Manipur.

"Why is the Prime Minister afraid of visiting Manipur? Please visit Manipur, that's also a part of our country. We request him to visit the state for at least half-an-hour when he comes here," he added.

Khera also suggested that Sarma, who travels mostly in a chopper within the state, can offer his helicopter to Modi for visiting Manipur later this week and it will take just half-an-hour from Assam. At least 219 people have been killed in Manipur in the ethnic strife since May last year. Alleging that Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was involved in corruption, the Congress leader claimed that the people would give him a befitting reply. "People of Guwahati are worried that if their houses, lands, hotels come under the notice of CM's family, it will be taken away. Let us come to power, all the corruption by the CM, all the land occupied by him - all will get justice," he added. Khera also claimed that the Congress will perform well in Assam in the Lok Sabha election.

"According to a Congress survey we will do very well with more seats. This time, Assam will break records and our win is sure. That is why Himanta Biswa Sarma calls the PM to visit the state on regular intervals," he claimed.

He said unemployment is the biggest issue and that too has come out in the Congress survey, besides price rise. On the Rahul Gandhi-led 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Khera said the Congress is announcing various guarantees as the march progresses through various states. "When Rahul Gandhi speaks about justice, people realise and remember what the UPA government had done for farmers. Nyay Yatra is marching ahead against injustices done in the last 10 years. In one hour, one farmer is committing suicide. In such a situation, the talk of justice by Congress has become more relevant," he added. The opposition leader claimed that after the BJP published its first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, several of their leaders are in touch with the Congress. He also said the Congress is in consultation with various people and its list for the upcoming general elections will be declared soon.

On BJP leaders and supporters adding the phrase 'Modi Ka Parivar' (Modi's family) with their names on X, Khera said, "I am sure Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi - all will change their bio and say Modi Ka Parivar. I think Lalu Yadav ji laid a trap, in which Modi and the entire BJP went running and got caught."

Modi on Monday asserted that 140 crore Indians are "my family" as he mounted a counter-offensive on RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav's "no family" jibe at him, while the BJP rallied around the PM by launching the "Modi Ka Parivar" campaign to corner the opposition in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls.

Asked about Congress leaders leaving the party ahead of the polls, Khera gave an example of Telangana and said, "One year before the election in the southern state, the condition of the party was such that we didn't know what to do. 'Several MLAs, who had won the last election on Congress ticket, had left the party and joined the BRS. What happened after elections?'"

Khera claimed that all those leaving the party have reasons and they will regret soon. "As Rahul Gandhi has rightly said this is a time of struggle, all of us are struggling to protect the Constitution. People who are afraid, who have something to hide or who are greedy, are in a hurry, and gaddars have left the party. The biggest gaddar Himanta Biswa Sarma will also be punished by the people of Assam. Just wait and watch," he added. Khera also questioned Sarma why he was afraid of Gandhi and attempted to obstruct the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' while it was passing through Assam. "Rahul Gandhi and every citizen of India has every right to participate in the Nyay Yatra. Why is it that the Assam CM got nervous? Actually, he had promised to the PM that he would not let the Nyay Yatra enter the state. 'He had sent his police to arrest me. Do you think I am afraid of him? We are Congress people. We are not afraid of Himanta Biswa Sarma and he cannot scare us. Let him come,'" he added. (PTI)

Will not go against BJP

Autonomous Council (KAAC). Addressing the media at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, BJP-KADC, East office Bey said, "Yes, I tried for the MP ticket, but did not get it. However, I am not upset. The decision taken by the party is absolute and I have nothing to say on it." He further said, "Many sitting MPs and ministers have been left out in the race for the party ticket. Central ministers like Protima Bhowmik from Tripura and Rameshwar Teli also did not get party tickets. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given responsibility to the MPs and ministers through Namu App, but I was late in accessing the Namu App for which I might have missed the party ticket." About the BJP's performance in the forthcoming Parliamentary election, Bey said, "In the last 2019 Parliament elections the BJP had won from the three Diphu (ST) Parliamentary constituencies by a huge margin of 2.5 lakh votes, which was a record. It managed to bag the highest percentage of votes among all the Parliamentary constituencies in Northeast India. This time the new BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso will win double of the previous number of votes." The people of India have faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and people are ready to elect him for the third consecutive time, Bey asserted. BJP-EKADC president, Roland Killing and MAC Kache Rongpipi and Tilutoma Hasnu were also present.

Waris Punjab De associates

of Amritpal Singh, who are currently lodged at the Dibrugarh Central Jail, have also been booked under the National Security Act (NSA). The nine associates of Amritpal Singh, who were booked under NSA are Daljeet Singh Kalsi, Palpreet Singh, Kulwant Singh Dhaliwal, Varinder Singh Johal, Gurmeet Singh, Bukkanwal, Harjit Singh, Bhagwant Singh, Basant Singh and Gurinderpal Singh Aujla. Assam director general of police (DGP) GP Singh recently visited the Dibrugarh Central Jail to review the security after spy-camera, smartphone and other essential staffs were recovered from the NSA cell where the 'Waris Punjab De' chief and his nine associates were lodged.

PM Modi to address 1st

Darshan' and 'PRASHAD' (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive) schemes, including a project for the integrated development of the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar. He will launch the 'Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice Tourist Destination Poll' and the 'Chalo India Global Diaspora' campaign as well, besides announcing tourist destinations selected under the Challenge-Based Destination Development (CBDD) scheme. Modi will distribute appointment letters to nearly 1,000 newly recruited government employees in Jammu and Kashmir and also interact with the beneficiaries of various central schemes, including women achievers, farmers and entrepreneurs, the statement said. (PTI)

Chargesheet filed against govt

his known sources of Income. On receipt of the prosecution sanction accorded by the state public works department against the accused the police submitted the chargesheet comprising of 658 pages on Wednesday.

Dreams behind Assam Police

for this beautiful guest house. The current special director general of police (DGP) of Assam, Harmit Singh, assisted in this regard. A large fund is required to build a state-of-the-art guest house to suit the wishes and circumstances. But the first condition for accomplishing anything is sincere desire. And Roy was conscious of this. In addition to government funds, he received funds under social responsibility funds from NRL, ONGC etc. The guest house was completed by Manbendra Dev Ray during his tenure in Golaghat with assistance from the Golaghat Police, and financial assistance and cooperation of the local people. He completed the construction of the guesthouse within six months without hesitation to commute twice a day to Kohora, 75 km from Golaghat. The result was a testament to his sincere efforts, goodwill and determination.

This destination became the ultimate escape from the hustle and bustle of city life, where tranquility and serenity soothes the soul. That is perhaps the reason why two of the country's Presidents, Ram Nath Kovind and Dauphin Murmu, as well as many top officials including the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, have spent their nights at this guest house in peace and enjoyed the beauty of Kaziranga. The current Vice President of India, Jagdeep Dhankhar, also rested at the guesthouse.

The building is built with state-of-the-art facilities in a beautiful natural environment and has been upgraded to the level of a state guest house. Now all eyes are on this guest house as accommodation has been arranged for the country's efficient and visionary Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his upcoming visit to Assam. The Prime Minister will spend one night at the guest house and enjoy the natural beauty of Kaziranga. This news has delighted the people as well as one person in particular- Manbendra Dev Ray.

MARRIAGE AFFIDAVIT

Sri Leazer Terang, DoB-05/10/1991, S/o- Barnobas Terang and Basapi Timungpi, permanent resident of Jirjar Aklam, Diphu, Lorulango Garo Basti, PO & PS- Diphu, Karbi Anglong district, Assam and Smt. Mercy Rongpipi, 12/03/1984, D/o- Late Rensing Rongpi and Kareh Millickpi, permanent resident of village Jirikendeng, PO & PS- Jirikendeng, West Karbi Anglong, Assam swear on Marriage Affidavit that they are legally wedded husband and wife and Miss Klarjir Terangpi, DoB 15/11/2022 is their daughter.

NAME CORRECTION

My actual name is Rajnath Chauhan, whereas my name has been recorded as Munna Chauhan in my LIC Policy bearing No.- 485005930 under Hojai Branch. Therefore, Rajnath Chauhan and Munna Chauhan are both my names, i.e., the names of the same and one person.

Rajnath Chauhan, S/o- Ramjanam Chauhan, R/o- Vill. Bagisadubi, PO and PS- Kheroni, Dist.- West Karbi Anglong, Assam

Celebration is set to honour Assamese movies released between January 1 to December 31, 2023

Filmfare announces inaugural 'Filmfare Awards Assamese 2024'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: Filmfare, the unparalleled media institution in Indian film industry, has announced a groundbreaking chapter in its illustrious legacy – the inaugural edition of Filmfare Awards Assamese 2024 with Jeewan Ram Mungi Devi Goenka Memorial Public Charitable Trust. The grand celebration is scheduled to unfold at the prestigious Taj Vivanta in Guwahati on March 10 promising an unforgettable evening in the heart of Assam. Steering the gala affair with charm and finesse will be the dynamic duo, Kopil Bora and Aimee Baruah, who are set to infuse the event with their infectious energy and charisma. The awards ceremony will feature captivating performances by some of the biggest names in Assamese cinema, including Jatin Bora, Nishita Goswami, PreetyKongana, Urmila Mahanta, Priyam Pallabee, Ranjit Gogoi, Gayatri Hazarika and Dikshu Sarma.

The curtain rose on the eagerly awaited ceremony with a virtual press conference on Wednesday announcing the commencement of the celebration. The esteemed panel included Jitesh Pillai, Shankar Lall Goenka, Sanjive Narain, Partha Sarathi Nandy, along with actor and anchor Kopil Bora and actor and director Aimee Baruah. This significant milestone underscores Filmfare's unwavering commitment to acknowledging and celebrating the remarkable achievements in Assamese cinema, an industry rich in culture and creativity.

The Filmfare Awards Assamese will serve as a platform to honour the artistic and technical bril-

liance that defines Assamese cinema. As the esteemed platform expands to include Assam's lively cinematic heritage, it deeply recognizes the region's impact on the ever-changing story of Indian cinema.

Rohit Gopakumar, director -Worldwide Media, and CEO ZENL BCCL TV & Digital Network expressed, "Filmfare has always been at the forefront of recognizing and celebrating the best in the Indian film industry. With the launch of 'Filmfare Awards Assamese 2024', we are thrilled to extend our legacy of excellence to the dynamic and burgeoning film industry of Assam. This marks a significant moment in the history of Filmfare, and we are committed to providing a platform that honours and showcases the immense talent and creativity present in Assamese cinema. From timeless narratives rooted in tradition to contemporary stories that resonate globally, Assamese cinema has carved its own niche, and Filmfare is proud to be a part of this cinematic journey."

Jitesh Pillai, the editor of Filmfare said, "Assam's cinematic legacy is an invaluable tapestry of storytelling, culture, and artistic prowess. The introduction of Filmfare Awards Assamese is a testament to the vibrant narratives and untapped talent that define the Assamese film industry. It's an honour to witness and celebrate this rich legacy, and with the Filmfare Awards Assamese, we embark on a journey to spotlight the brilliance that has long deserved the national stage. We look forward to a grand celebration of the indomitable spirit and cultural heritage that Assam brings to the world of cinema."



Adding on, Shankar Lall Goenka, managing director, "Jeewan Ram Mungi Devi Goenka Memorial Public Charitable Trust", said, "I am delighted and honoured to be associated with the prestigious Filmfare Awards Assamese, recognizing the remarkable talent in Assamese film industry. The iconic 'Black Lady' embodies prestige across India's entertainment landscape and with this property, it is a dream come true moment for us to illuminate our rich cultural heritage and showcase the authenticity of our cinematic legacy."

Actor and anchor Kopil Bora added, "Having witnessed the evolving landscape of creativity and the dynamic tastes of our audience, it gives me immense pride that the coveted 'Black Lady' is honouring the Assamese cinema. As Assamese cinema blossoms, it promises not just cultural enrichment but a platform for new talent and innovations. I look forward to hosting this prestigious award, as I raise a toast to the timeless power of storytelling."

Sharing her sentiments, actor and director

Aimee Baruah said, "As an integral part of Indian cinema, the iconic Black Lady's presence for the Assamese cinema will undoubtedly pave the way for newer talents to shine on a grand stage. I am extremely excited to host this marvelous event, which not only celebrates our rich cinematic heritage but also opens doors for aspiring artists to present their brilliance."

Sanjive Narain, MD, Prag News, said, "We at Prag News are committed to showcasing diverse cultural expressions and are honoured to bring the magic of Filmfare Awards Assamese to audiences nationwide. This partnership underscores our commitment to celebrating regional talent and promoting the rich cinematic heritage of Assamese cinema."

Partha Sarathi Nandy, MD, Lalbaba, added, "It is truly a moment of pride that Filmfare is honouring the Assamese cinema with Filmfare Awards Assamese 2024 and opening doors for us to take the Assamese culture to a grander level with this edition. We are proud to support the celebration of creativity and storytelling that goes beyond borders and resonates with audiences far and wide."

Set against the enchanting backdrop of Guwahati, the 'Filmfare Awards Assamese 2024 with Jeewan Ram Mungi Devi Goenka Memorial Public Charitable Trust' is poised to transcend expectations, promising an extravagant evening that acknowledges artists and technical brilliance. As the curtain rises on this landmark occasion, it stands as a testament to the vibrancy of the Assamese film fraternity and a momentous experience for audiences alike.

Jewellery House by Harshitah launched in Guwahati



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: Jewellery House by Harshitah, a beacon of elegance and sophistication, is excited to announce the grand opening of its exquisite showroom at Fancy Bazaar, near Lachit Ghat, Guwahati.

Founded by the dynamic mother-daughter duo, Anu Agarwal and Harshitah Agarwal, Jewellery House by Harshitah promises to be a haven for discerning jewellery enthusiasts seeking unparalleled craftsmanship and unique designs in Gold, Diamond and Polki jewellery.

The showroom was jointly inaugurated by Actress Zerifa Wahid, eminent educationist Anubha Goyal and a renowned Mahavastu Acharya Prakhar Dixit ji, Fitness Coach Ruchi Bharadwaj Borah in presence of Anu Agarwal & Harshitah Agarwal, founder of Jewellery House by Harshitah.

Located in the heart of Guwahati City, our showroom is poised to become the epitome of luxury, offering a curated selection of hand-crafted pieces that blend traditional artistry with contemporary flair. Each creation at Jewellery House by Harshitah is a testament to our commitment to excellence and our passion for preserving the timeless allure of fine jewellery.

Jewellery house by Harshitah is focused at developing concepts that speak about the heritage and culture of Assam.

"Our showroom represents the culmination of a lifelong dream to share our love for jewellery and our love for our state with the world," said Harshitah Agarwal, founder of Jewellery House by Harshitah.

"We are thrilled to invite all to experience the elegance and beauty that define our brand."

At Jewellery House by Harshitah, customers can expect to dis-

cover a diverse range of designs that cater to every taste and occasion. From classic heirlooms to modern statement pieces, our collection is designed to inspire and captivate.

"Our jewellery is more than just adornment; it is an expression of individuality and style," said Anu Agarwal.

"Each piece is meticulously crafted to reflect the unique personality and essence of its wearer."

The 3 day grand opening gala celebration promises to be an unforgettable event, featuring an exclusive preview of our latest collections, live demonstrations by our master craftsmen, and special offers for our esteemed guests. Join us as we embark on this exciting journey of creativity, innovation, and unparalleled luxury at Jewellery House by Harshitah. Together, let us celebrate the timeless beauty and elegance of fine jewellery.

Fake doctor arrested in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: In a startling case, the Guwahati police apprehended a fake doctor in Lal Ganesh locality, police said.

The accused person has been identified as Premananda Rai.

According to information, Rai had been allegedly practicing and treating patients at the New Mahamaya Medicos in Lal Ganesh locality.

Reports have said that Rai was using the registration number of a doctor named Surendra Narayan, hailing from West Bengal and treating patients.

Using the fake doctor degree and fake registration number, Rai has been allegedly treating patients since 1983, reports added. Not only this, further allegations have also been leveled against Rai for supplying fake death certificates.

On Tuesday night, the Odal Bakra Police reportedly apprehended the fake doctor after an operation was conducted in the pharmacy based on a complaint lodged by a doctor named Abhijit Neog.

Right after this, the police sealed the pharmacy belonging to Premananda Rai. An interrogation has been lodged into the incident, sources said.

Firing at Borbari

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: One Bapan Debnath, a plumber, opened fire at a youth from Amguri at Borbari in the city.

The youth from Amguri has been identified as Saddam Husain. An electrician by profession was injured following the incident.

As per reports, a feud erupted between two friends which went so far that one of them shot at the other. Bapan was reportedly furious after coming to know that Saddam had an illicit relationship with his wife.

According to the information at hand, the victim had fled with the wife of the accused about 10 days ago. After coming to know about it, the accused Bapan located Saddam and brandished his firearm with which he shot at Saddam. Following the incident, the victim was rushed to the nearby Pratiksha Hospital where he is fighting for his life.

Local police reached the scene after receiving information about the matter and apprehended the accused Bapan. However, it remains unclear at the moment as to how Bapan managed to acquire a weapon.

BCCI Jt Sec Devajit Saikia inaugurates 'NE Trophy World' in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: Fond of trophy collecting or need one for a special occasion? Head straight to 'NE Trophy World' at Royal Arcade, B.Boroah Road, Ulubari in Guwahati.

One of the premium and exclusive showroom of trophies was inaugurated on Wednesday by Advocate General, Assam & joint secretary BCCI Devajit Saikia in presence of renowned social worker Sriram Khoria and Ashok Kumar Agarwal. Speaking on the occasion chief guest Devajit Saikia said, "I am happy to inaugurate this kind of exclusive Trophy showroom in Guwahati where all kinds of Trophy and Memento are available under one roof."

Saikia further said, "Getting a trophy in any competition or for your achievement means alot for you and your family. Whether you win a competition in school or you were awarded for your hard work. You will cherish the occasion lifetime. According to me, trophies are



the best gift to remember throughout life. Speaking on the occasion, partner of the showroom Mr. Amit Khoria said that our store spread over 800sq.ft has a huge collection of trophies of all sizes from fitting a flat to tall ones at pocket friendly rates and as per the requirements of our esteemed customers."

Young entrepreneur and partner of the store Ankit Agarwal said, "Nowadays trophies are required in all types of events. Such as sports events in school, colleges,

universities, Sports academy etc. Apart from this trophies were required in corporate meetings, club meetings, annual meets etc to encourage them. We are expertise in making customised trophies according to the need of the occasion."

He further said, "In our showroom customers will get all kinds of trophies under one roof from printing to cutting and sublimation. NE Trophy World is one stop destination for any kind of trophies within your budget."

Assam Cong protests against SBI over electoral bonds

GUWAHATI, March 6: The Assam Congress on Wednesday staged a protest in front of the SBI's Northeast headquarters, demanding immediate disclosure of details regarding electoral bonds in compliance with the Supreme Court order.

Led by Assam Pradesh Mahila Congress (APMC) president Mira Barthakur Goswami, senior leaders such as Pawan Khera and Mahima Singh shouted slogans in front of the SBI Northeast head office, situated opposite the Assam Secretariat on GS Road.

"The government talks about digital India, so why does SBI need so much time to disclose the data? Is this the efficiency of digital India? BJP is the biggest gainer of this notorious scheme, named electoral bonds," Goswami said.

The BJP is trying to hide all information regarding who funded them, she alleged.

"We demand the SBI to follow the Supreme Court guidelines and make the list public," the opposition leader said.

The State Bank of India on Monday moved the Supreme Court seeking an extension of time till June 30 to disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties.

In a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court on February 15 scrapped the Narendra Modi government's electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding, terming it "unconstitutional" and ordering disclosure of



the names of the purchasers, value of the bonds and their recipients.

Holding that the 2018 scheme was "violative" of the constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression and right to information, a five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud did not agree with the Centre's contention that it was meant to bring about transparency and curb black money in political funding.

Ordering closure of the scheme forthwith, the

top court also directed the SBI, the authorised financial institution under the scheme, to submit by March 6 the details of electoral bonds purchased since April 12, 2019 till date to the Election Commission, which will publish the information on its official website by March 13.

As per the order, the SBI must disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties. The information should include the date of encashment and denomination of the bonds. (PTI)



Congress MLA and opposition leader Debabrat Saikia along with other congress leader heading towards CID office in Guwahati on Wednesday. HT photo

British Council launches Women in STEM Scholarships for 2024-25

25 scholarships are reserved for women STEM scholars from India and other South Asian countries

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 6: British Council, the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations, in partnership with UK universities, has announced the launch of British Council Scholarships for Women in STEM programme. This prestigious scholarship is designed for female STEM graduates wanting to pursue their Masters' in the UK.

The presence of women in STEM fields is essential for promoting diversity, ensuring a range of perspectives, and driving innovation. Their presence not only addresses gender disparities but also enriches the workforce with unique skills, ultimately advancing scientific and technological progress for the benefit of society. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 by the World Economic Forum, women account

for 27% of India's STEM workforce. This represents a small fraction considering that women make up nearly 43% of STEM graduates in India.

25 scholarships are reserved for women STEM scholars from India and other South Asian countries. These are across five UK higher education institutions – Queen Mary University of London, Anglia Ruskin University, Greenwich University, The University of Southampton and Coventry University. The scholarships will empower the beneficiaries to advance their careers in STEM and facilitate their ability to drive research and innovation in their home country by immersing them in the expertise of the UK's esteemed STEM fields. The UK is currently ranked third in the world for citable research, with 55.2% of all UK publications the product of international research collaborations.



The scholarship will cover tuition fees, stipend, travel costs, visa, health coverage fees, and English language support. The scholars can pursue courses like Data Science, Computer Science, Pharmaceutical Science, Elec-

tronic and Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Engineering Management, Civil Engineering Management, Intelligent Healthcare, Actuarial Science, among others.
Rittika Chanda Parruck MBE,

director Education India, British Council, said, "Almost half of the world's population is female and represents half the potential brain power of researchers and innovators. The global challenges facing the world can only be addressed through science and research and we cannot solve these problems with one hand tied behind our backs, with only one half of the population working towards the solutions. Gender equity is not just a nice idea, it is essential for the progress of mankind. Through programmes like the Women in STEM Scholarships, we aim to provide the financial assistance needed for women to pursue their education and unleash their full potential in STEM fields, thereby driving transformative change and contributing to the sustainable development goals in a more meaningful way."

Since 2020, the programme has

awarded over 300 scholarships. In the 2023-24 global cohorts, 92 scholars were enrolled in their selected courses. So far, 52 Indian women have been awarded the scholarships and pursued their one-year postgraduate studies in the UK. Through these scholarships, British Council maintains its commitment to creating opportunities for women to succeed in a globalised world and gain global credentials in STEM fields.

The scholarship aims to inspire young women to remain in STEM fields by supporting their progression towards leadership roles and fostering networking opportunities with peers both in their region and in the UK. The scholarship also welcomes applications from women with dependents, offering additional support. The application deadlines vary depending on the university, typically between March and April 2024.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall.
-William Shakespeare

Humanitarian crisis in Moreh

In the shadow of escalating tensions and violence, the once vibrant town of Moreh has been plunged into a state of desolation and despair. What was once a bustling marketplace and a symbol of bilateral friendship between India and Myanmar has now become a ghost town, haunted by the spectre of conflict and uncertainty. The root cause of this turmoil lies in the longstanding ethnic tensions between the Meitei and Kuki communities, exacerbated by the presence of military forces and allegations of misconduct on both sides. Accusations of arson, physical attacks, and even fatal ambushes have become distressingly common, leaving a trail of fear and mistrust in their wake. The consequences of this strife are not confined to the realm of politics and security; they extend deep into the fabric of everyday life for the people of Moreh. Educational institutions lie shuttered, their halls echoing with the absence of students who have fled in fear. The imposition of a curfew, while slightly eased, still casts a pall over the town, restricting movement and stifling normalcy.

Perhaps most concerning of all is the state of healthcare in Moreh. With limited resources and personnel, the town's sole healthcare centre struggles to meet the needs of its population, numbering nearly 20,000. Chief nurse Chongneo Haokip's account of their plight paints a stark picture of resilience in the face of adversity, as she and her colleagues work tirelessly to provide care amid the chaos. Yet, even in the midst of this crisis, acts of compassion and dedication shine through. Moinu Singson, the sole auxiliary nurse and midwife left in Moreh, exemplifies the spirit of service as she continues to immunise newborns and support pregnant and nursing mothers. Her selfless dedication, often going so far as to purchase supplies out of her own pocket, is a beacon of hope in dark times. However, the challenges facing healthcare providers like Haokip and Singson are compounded by the erosion of essential services, such as the Free Movement Regime, which facilitated cross-border healthcare access. The cessation of such initiatives threatens to further exacerbate the already dire situation, leaving vulnerable populations even more isolated and in need.

In the face of such adversity, it is imperative that the international community take heed of the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Moreh. The people of this town, regardless of ethnicity or background, deserve access to basic healthcare, education, and safety. It is incumbent upon governments, both regional and national, to prioritise the well-being of their citizens and work towards a peaceful resolution to the underlying tensions fuelling this conflict. Moreover, it is crucial that healthcare providers like Haokip and Singson receive the support and resources they need to continue their vital work. Their dedication and sacrifice are a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, and they deserve nothing less than our full admiration and assistance. The plight of Moreh serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of conflict and division. It is incumbent upon all of us to stand in solidarity with the people of this town and work towards a future where peace, prosperity, and dignity are afforded to all. As tensions persist, urgent international intervention is needed to address the humanitarian crisis and support healthcare providers on the ground.

Japan to tie landlocked Northeast India with Bangladesh

Hopes for the Red Sun finally glimmer lights over landlocked northeast India and plans to connect with landlocked states with Bangladesh, which has been deemed as geostrategic significance to Japan.

Japan after the brutal Second World War has developed several proven friends of South Asia and is edging closer to Bangladesh and India for socio-economic development.

Many think tanks say Japan has enlarged its diplomatic vision in a bid to counter the economic hegemony of China, which has set its eyes towards South Asia.

Well, Japan has been a major donor and development partner since the war-ravaged Bangladesh, 52 years ago and has a strategic understanding of the region and the Bay of Bengal.

Against the backdrop of huge Japanese investment in the country recently being outsmarted by China, particularly after the launch of Beijing's controversial Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and half of South Asia including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are signatories of the mega plan to revitalise the ancient silk roads to the heart of the world.

A series of top Japanese officials' visits to New Delhi, Guwahati (Assam), Agartala (Tripura) and Dhaka come against the background of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Vision.

These developments in conjunction with initiatives like the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and regressive naval exercises jointly by the United States, Japan and Australia in the disputed South China Sea off the Philippines in response to a recent show of Chinese aggression in the disputed waters.

Japan wants her physical presence in the Bay of Bengal. As

Nikkei Asia writes, Bangladesh's ambitious deep-sea port promises a strategic anchor for Japan and India.

A mega seaport under construction is shaping up to be a strategic linchpin for Japan and India as the Quad partners aim to counter Chinese influence.

Development of the gigantic port of Matarbari will put a Japan-backed facility just north of Sonadia, another prime location on the Bay of Bengal where China proposed to develop another port. The Chinese project never materialised, and Dhaka reportedly dropped the idea, reports Nikkei Asia.

A mega deep-sea port at Matarbari, in Bangladesh waters is underway and is expected in 2027, the complex will take a major load off of the country's main Chattogram (formerly Chittagong) port and a trade gateway for northeast India, which would be less than 100 kilometres to the massive port facility.

Whatever the geopolitical strategy, the deep-sea port project has the potential to improve regional trade ties, boost investment, create jobs, and support infrastructural development, spurring economic growth for Bangladesh, Northeast India, Nepal, and Bhutan, as well as the surrounding countries along the Bay of Bengal.

Earlier regional studies suggested both Bangladesh and Northeast India need to scale up their multi-modal connectivity, which would not only help the region to raise its competitiveness but also narrow long-standing regional development gaps.

The connectivity will bring synergy in trade facilitation, and build express corridors for the trans-shipment and transit of goods from northeast India to Bangladesh port in Chattogram.



Currently, nearly 350 Japanese companies are operating in Bangladesh, with more than \$380 million in combined investment.

Japanese investment in Bangladesh has reached USD 123 million in 2022. Japan and India are two major export and destinations in Asia where Bangladesh's export earnings reached \$2 billion, said a top official Ministry of Commerce.

Japan has proposed developing an industrial hub in Bangladesh with supply chains to the landlocked northeast states of India, Nepal and Bhutan beyond by developing a port and connectivity in the region.

Improve connectivity in the region through the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) initiative. Japan plans to build road connectivity in the Indian states of Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura to connect to the seaport in the Bay of Bengal.

Calling India an 'indispensable partner', after Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida listed three important regions - Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific Islands - where multi-layered connectivity could overcome vulnerabilities and boost economic growth, writes Fumiko Yamada, a Research Associate at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

The comprehensive collaboration among Bangladesh, India

and Japan provides the blocked-in northeast with access to the Bay and access to ASEAN countries, which plays a crucial role in unleashing the enormous potential for growth and prosperity based on better access to the Indian Ocean, becomes crucial for the improvement of people's lives of the northeast region, opines Ishita Singh Bedi of Amity University in India.

The Red Sun has plans to build a Bengal-Northeast India industrial value chain in cooperation with India and Bangladesh to foster growth in the region.

Earlier in 2019, the Government of Japan invested 205.784 billion Yen, equivalent to approximately BDT 152 billion in several ongoing and new projects in different states of India's northeast region. None of the projects would be sustainable unless the connectivity with Bangladesh is augmented to rip huge economic benefits.

Regarding port development, Japan could hardly ask for a better spot than Matarbari — a natural gateway to South and Southeast Asia. Tripura state, around 100 kilometres from the proposed seaport, might serve as a gateway for regional exporters, Bedi writes.

Japanese Prime Minister's FOIP vision focused particularly on emerging economies and developing countries in the Indo-Pacific region and territories vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters.

It comes after Japanese Prime

Minister Kishida visited India last March, where he touted the idea of a new industrial hub for the Bay of Bengal and northeast India that could bolster development in the impoverished region of 300 million people.

After Kishida visited India, Japan approved \$1.27 billion in funding to Bangladesh for three infrastructure projects - including an enormous commercial port in the Bay, which will be equivalent to the Port of Colombo in Sri Lanka or the Singapore Port in terms of water depths, said a JICA official in charge of the project.

India and Japan have a comprehensive economic partnership, with trade worth \$20.57 billion in 2021-2022. Of this volume, India imported Japanese goods worth \$14.49 billion, reported Reuters.

The FOIP and new mega project investment further solidified when Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Tokyo and held an official parley with Kishida in late April.

With infrastructure projects set to be completed over a five to ten-year horizon, the proposal for joint discussions on investment promotion, customs, and tariffs will set the stage for an economic boom in India's northeast.

India, Japan, and Bangladesh need to create a mechanism to discuss three key stumbling blocks to regional investment: tariffs, customs procedures, and connectivity. India and Bangladesh are negotiating a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that is expected to boost bilateral trade. (The author is the 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 salem.samad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @salemsamad)

India's Defense policy: Challenges and imperatives for the 2024 manifesto

By: Dipak Kurmi

As the Lok Sabha elections loom on the horizon, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has initiated a two-week-long campaign to gather insights for its election manifesto. Demonstrating its robust organizational capabilities, the party has deployed video chariots to collect suggestions from various assembly constituencies. Utilizing diverse channels, the BJP encourages inputs through the NaMo App, has stationed 6,000 suggestion boxes nationwide, and engaged its cadres in direct interactions with potential voters. By March 15, the BJP aims to accumulate perspectives from ten million Indians for its 2024 general elections manifesto, known as the "Sankalp Patra" or Letter of Resolution. Subsequently, the party will distill key defense and security-related issues to shape the BJP's 2024 manifesto.

The BJP's manifestos for both 2014 and 2019 highlighted four significant and various minor defense-related concerns. Initially, the manifesto criticized the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government for what it perceived as lax security measures, attributing it to multiple border intrusions by China and Pakistan. The manifesto also pointed out deficiencies in combat aircraft, warships, and submarines, as well as several accidents involving naval warships. Additionally, the document underscored the escalating pressure from "Pakistan-backed terror groups" and the issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh. While these concerns are provocative, they are not novel occurrences in the political discourse.

The second focal point in the BJP manifesto involved a commitment to "update" India's nuclear doctrine, sparking speculation about a potential shift from its longstanding "No First Use" policy. The 2014 manifesto specifically pledged to "Study in detail India's nuclear doctrine, and revise and update it, to make it relevant to challenges of current times." The ambiguity surrounding this statement left room for interpretation, raising questions about whether it implied a bolstering of the overall nuclear deterrent or the development of a tactical

nuclear weapons (TNWs) arsenal to counter Pakistan's similarly touted TNW capabilities. However, despite the initial discourse, no concrete developments materialized on this front.

In its 2014 manifesto, the BJP made a commitment to reorganize higher defense management, a notable proposal despite the NDA's historical reluctance to appoint a tri-service Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) during its own tenure. The manifesto specifically pledged to "ensure greater participation of Armed Forces in the decision-making process of the Ministry of Defence (MoD)." This envisioned a seamless integration of the military with the ministry, fostering a collaborative environment where uniformed soldiers would collaborate with bureaucrats, breaking down traditional hierarchies. Notably, a similar proposal had been put forth by a Group of Ministers (GoM) in 2001. However, faced with staunch opposition from bureaucrats, the BJP had to compromise, resulting in the creation of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS). While the three services collaborated within the IDS, the civilian bureaucracy remained somewhat detached. This compromise persisted throughout the UPA's decade-long tenure in power.

In the concluding segment of its 2014 manifesto, the BJP outlined various minor commitments. Among these, addressing a critical 25% shortfall in officers by recruiting higher-caliber individuals was pledged, although this goal has not been entirely realized to date. Notably, the promise to construct a national war memorial was successfully achieved, marking a tangible accomplishment. Reflecting the rising political influence of ex-servicemen, the BJP committed to establishing a "veterans' commission" dedicated to addressing the concerns of retired soldiers, sailors, airmen, and their families. Additionally, the party vowed to implement the "one rank, one pension" policy, a goal that has largely been fulfilled. In a bid to bolster indigenous defense production, the BJP expressed its commitment to encouraging private sector participation and investment, including foreign direct investment (FDI) in selected defense industries.

Both the BJP and its predecessor, the Congress, refrained from including commitments on defense spending in their manifestos. This is noteworthy, especially considering the decline in allocations from 4 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the late 1980s to less than 2 percent at present. In contrast, all 31 member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are obligated to allocate 2 percent of their GDPs to defense, benefiting from the assurance of collective defense as military allies. Article 5 of the NATO Treaty underscores the commitment that an act of violence against one member is deemed an armed attack against all members, prompting necessary actions to aid the attacked ally. In the Indian context, where the nation chooses an independent stance against an enemy attack, some advocate for defense allocations to be fixed at 3 percent of GDP. However, amidst the continuous decline in real defense allocations, achieving a 3 percent defense spending pledge appears increasingly improbable.

The frugality in resource allocation extends to growth targets within the aerospace and defense industry, a domain where political parties opt for the articulation of objectives through policy documents rather than in their political manifestos. The trajectory of indigenous defense production growth in the past two decades aligns with the objectives outlined in the 2018 Ministry of Defence roadmap known as the Defence Production Policy of 2018 (DPrP 2018). According to this policy, the annual target for aerospace and defense services and production turnover by 2025 was set at ₹ 1.7 trillion (then \$26 billion). Achieving this target necessitated an additional investment of nearly ₹ 70,000 crores (then \$10 billion), fostering employment opportunities for approximately 2 to 3 million individuals. Furthermore, the 2018 policy aimed at fostering exports of defense goods and services amounting to ₹ 35,000 crores (then \$5 billion) by the year 2025.

In a departure from the conventional approach of revising production targets through upcoming manifestos, the recent upward adjustment in the pro-

duction target, specifically in industrial production, took a different avenue. Defense Minister Rajnath Singh, rather than awaiting the 2024 manifesto, made the announcement. According to his statement, aerospace and defense services and production are projected to reach ₹ 3,00,000 crore (US \$36 billion) by the fiscal year 2028-29. Simultaneously, he outlined plans to elevate export production to ₹ 50,000 crore (\$6.25 billion) within the same time frame. This shift in strategy underscores a dynamic and responsive approach to goal-setting within the aerospace and defense sector.

To accommodate the heightened production levels of goods and services, it becomes imperative for the 2024 manifesto to incorporate a well-defined policy aimed at bolstering exports. India, once predominantly an arms importer, has now secured a position among the top 25 arms-exporting nations. A mere seven to eight years ago, defense exports languished below the ₹ 1,000 crore mark. Presently, there has been a remarkable surge, with defense exports soaring to an impressive ₹ 16,000 crore. This transformative shift underscores the need for a strategic and comprehensive approach to further elevate India's standing in the global arms export landscape.

The BJP's forthcoming 2024 manifesto should elucidate the practicalities behind ambitious statements such as preparing for a "two-front war." This scenario entails the military triumph over Pakistan, deterring China, addressing insurgency challenges in Jammu & Kashmir, all while maintaining control over the Indian Ocean. At first glance, the prospect of a two-front war suggests a comprehensive breakdown in Indian strategy, diplomacy, border and military management, as well as internal security. Preparing for such a worst-case scenario could distort our defense planning, financial allocations, and troop deployment. Strategic prudence dictates that the nation's top security strategists collaboratively work to ensure that India never finds itself in a situation where it confronts full-scale warfare on multiple fronts. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewsive@gmail.com)

China's National People's Congress gives all focus on speedy economic growth

By: Satyaki Chakraborty

The seven day session of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China began in Beijing on March 5 with the whole world, especially the international financial institutions like World Bank and IMF monitoring and analyzing every statement made by the Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang on the plans for the regeneration of the economy after some setbacks in 2022 and 2023. LI's work report presented during the day on the economic policies to be pursued in 2024 portrayed a picture of strong confidence in the goal of the Chinese Communist Party to emerge as the largest economy of the world surpassing the USA within a short period.

China said 2024 GDP should grow around 5%, with CPI of about 3%. The deficit target is 3% of GDP, while the jobless rate should be about 5.5% as China moves to create over 12 million new urban jobs in 2024. In fact, IMF had earlier projected the global economy to grow by 2.9 per cent in 2024 taking into account China's declining level in the last two years, but reports say that IMF is inclined to scale up the global growth to 3.1 per cent on the basis of the expected revival of Chinese economy in 2024 and beyond.

Chinese Prime Minister was quite candid in admitting that the challenges facing the world's second largest economy are manifold and it is not that easy to fulfill the targets. This needs policy supports and joint efforts from all fronts. The report mentioned that the top priorities are still technological innovation and upgrading the industry including new energy cars. Without saying so in report, it was apparent that the Chinese leadership accepted its failure in speedy modernization of the automotive sector, especially the electrical vehicles industry.

Interestingly, the housing sector, the bubble of which created doubts about the sustainability of the booming real estate market, was dealt in a friendlier manner compared to earlier years. Chinese supreme Xi Jinping, on a number of occasions mentioned the role of speculators in the housing market, but this time in the PM's report, a reconciliatory tone was seen towards the market. Taking into account the role of the real estate in the growth of Chinese GDP, the PM's report mentioned of efforts to stabilize the

property market.

In fact economic activity in China picked up in 2023, but the recovery remained fragile. Real GDP growth accelerated to 5.2 percent y/y in the first three quarters of 2023, driven by demand for services, resilient manufacturing investment, and public infrastructure stimulus. The initial phase of economic reopening triggered a surge in economic activity in Q1, but growth momentum decelerated rapidly in Q2 before recovering modestly in Q3. The volatile growth performance, compounded by persistent deflationary pressures and still weak consumer confidence, suggested continued fragility in the recovery.

Earlier the World Bank mentioned in its report that China's growth is projected to slow to 4.5 and 4.3 percent in 2024 and 2025, respectively, reflecting short term headwinds but also growing structural constraints to growth, including high levels of debt, population ageing and persistent economic imbalances. Now following the Chinese PM's report at the NPC, reviews will be made whether the growth targets are sustainable.

As the World Bank sees it, the outlook is subject to considerable downside risks. The property market downturn could last longer than expected, weighing on consumer sentiment and spending and adding pressure on upstream suppliers and creditors. This would further squeeze local government revenue and dampen public investment.

Externally, the economy is vulnerable to softer global demand due to tighter-than-expected financial conditions and heightened geo-political tensions. Climate change and associated extreme weather events, the frequency of which has increased in recent decades, also pose a downside risk. In contrast, stronger-than-expected policy support and further progress on structural reforms could present upside risks.

According to the Bank economists, the sustained policy support and deeper structural reforms are needed to hedge against downside risks to growth, stem deflationary pressures, and restore confidence. Given acute fiscal constraints at the subnational level, shifting a larger share of stimulus financing measures to the national government would expand the necessary fiscal space.

The recently adopted budget

amendment which envisages the use of national treasury bonds to finance natural disaster recovery and enhance relief capabilities is a welcome development in this regard.

The WB earlier recommended, deeper reforms of the intergovernmental fiscal system are necessary to resolve structural imbalances in local government finances and effectively tackle the local government financing vehicles (LGFV) debt problem. This should include corporate and financial restructuring of LGFVs, for example by unbundling - and possibly divesting from - purely commercial assets. Similarly, in the real estate sector, short-term regulatory easing and liquidity support need to be complemented by the development of a framework to resolve the corporate debt overhang.

Chinese economists have also found that China's investment deceleration has been one of the key drivers of the overall growth slowdown in recent years. Together with the decline in aggregate investment growth, there has been a marked shift in the composition of investment. The prolonged real estate slump has led to a sharp and persistent decline in real estate investment which fell by a cumulative 18 percent in the past two years. In contrast, investment in the manufacturing sector, where returns are generally higher, has been much more resilient, expanding by a cumulative 16 percent in the same period. The resilience of manufacturing investment, to a certain degree, is a response to surging demand for products such as electric vehicles (EVs), batteries, and other low carbon technologies, but also reflects growing government support for priority manufacturing sectors such as semiconductors.

The first day's work report on economy signifies that the Chinese Communist Party leadership is taking a soft position now taking into account the need for bridging the gaps in economic performance. There is every signal that during the current year, the focus will be on economy, bringing synergy in all the sectors which are responsible for the growth momentum, specially housing and manufacturing. The political situation may remain as it is till the year end - the holding of Presidential elections in November 5 this year. So for the CPC and the NPC, the economy is getting maximum focus in the seven day session. (IPA Service)

Is this 'age of the delta' coming to an end?

By: Boyce Upholt

The land near the mouth of the Mississippi River is barely land at all. Muddy water forks into a labyrinth of pathways through a seemingly endless expanse of electric-green marsh grass, below skies thick with birds. Shrimp and crabs wriggle in the water below and oak and cypress sprout from wet soils on higher grounds. Stretching for more than a hundred miles along the coast of Louisiana, this is one of the world's largest, and most famous, river deltas.

Similar landforms – flat and wet and rich with wildlife – have built up wherever rivers dump their mud and sand into shallow oceans. There are thousands of such deltas across the world, ranging in size from just a few acres to, in the case of the Mississippi River's, thousands of square miles. Many of these places, including the marshes in Louisiana, are now disappearing, often quite rapidly.

The soils are sinking, for varied and complex reasons. Worse, as the climate warms, the seas are rising. In Louisiana, a football field's worth of land is gone every hundred minutes, a fact that is devastating for the hundred-million birds that stop here on their migrations – and for the people whose families have lived amid these wetlands for generations, and sometimes millennia. Hundreds of millions of people that live on other deltas, too, could lose their homes and their livelihoods.

Later this year, a state agency in Louisiana will begin construction on what has been called the largest ecosystem restoration project in US history. A set of gates in the levee will allow water to once more carry mud into the marshes, an effort to rebuild tens of thousands of acres of land. The project has been controversial, particularly because it's likely to affect fisheries, a major local industry.

Deltas are inherently impermanent: As climate changes through the epochs, as the seas rise and fall, deltas are formed and then buried underwater. Still, these past few thousand years can be thought of as an "age of the delta," says Utrecht University geomorphologist Jaap Nienhuis. Not coincidentally, it has also been an age of human flourishing. "Human civilisation started when modern river deltas started to appear," Nienhuis says. "It's scary to think of what could happen if river deltas disappear."

Nienhuis, lead author of a 2023 paper on river deltas for the Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences, spoke with Knowable Magazine about what deltas face in the coming centuries, and whether strategies like Louisiana's "sediment diversion" can make the needed difference. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What are river deltas, and why are they important?

River deltas are places where river sediments settle. Rivers slow down when they reach the sea, and then all the sediments that rivers carry are dropped out. That builds land over time.

A typical delta is a place that's flooded, sometimes by tides every couple of hours, while some deltas flood only once a year, during a monsoon or a big hurricane. The ecology and biology have to be very well adapted to this periodic inundation.

So what we typically find are swamps: cypress wetlands or mangrove forests or salt marshes, which are well-adjusted to dealing with inundation by tides. These are great places for fish. The river-carried sediment is rich with organic material, which is good for agriculture. So it's not a surprise that many population centres are on river deltas: New Orleans, Shanghai, Tokyo, Jakarta. Much of the Netherlands is a delta. In total, 500 million people live atop river deltas across the world.

How do deltas form?

Deltas exist on a balance. Some forces are constructive. Basically, you need the river to supply a lot of sediment. That can happen naturally, through mountain-building and then erosion – that's why we have a lot of big deltas downstream of the Himalayas. Then there are destructive forces. Sea level is a first-order control on the evolution of deltas. When the seas are rising, it's hard for rivers to supply enough sediment to keep up.

To understand today's deltas, we have to go back 20,000 years, to a time when most of the planet was covered by ice sheets. A change in the Earth's orientation toward the sun kickstarted a melting of the ice and a rise in sea level. So from 20,000 years ago to 10,000 or 8,000 years ago, we had a long period of very quickly rising seas. There wasn't a lot of delta-building happening, and older deltas were being smothered by the water.

Then, when most of these ice sheets were nearly melted, the rates of sea-level rise began to slow. That's when all the sediments that came out of rivers were able to build the modern deltas. That happened for most river deltas roughly around the same time – 7,000 years ago. Of course, when they first appeared, these deltas were very small. They've built over time.

Interestingly, the start of several ancient civilisations and ancient cities coincides with that deceleration in sea-level rise. This is not a coincidence. Humans and deltas are very intertwined.

It sounds like our species has depended on deltas throughout our recent history. Have we also affected deltas?

We have. Humans can actually be a constructive force for deltas. What we've seen over the past few hundred years is that deforestation upstream in a river's watershed can cause an increase in the amount of sediment that is brought down by a river. So in that sense, humans have greatly accelerated delta growth over the past centuries.

But humans can be a destructive force, too. There is subsidence, for example: land lowering, which happens a lot in deltas because they are built from young, soft soils.

Here in the Netherlands, we started to drain the delta because we wanted to use it for agriculture. And then subsidence accelerates and the land sinks beneath your feet, since the water in the soil dries out. So now you build levees to protect yourself from all the extra flooding.

But now, because of the levees, sediments are no longer supplied to your part of the delta, so you sink even further. So you build more levees. The reason why the Netherlands – and also parts of New Orleans – are below sea level is because of that cycle. You create a situation you cannot get out of. We call that a "lock-in."

If the constructive and destructive forces are in balance, deltas will stay the same. But it's a very,

very, very thin balance. And humans, most of the time, we're destructive.

Sea level is rising across the world at the same time that many deltas – like the Mississippi River delta, in Louisiana – are sinking. Zooming into the scale of a single city, New Orleans, reveals how complex land subsidence can be. For coastal landscapes like the Mississippi River delta, rising oceans and sinking ground amount to the same thing: an increase in relative sea level, which is signalled in these images by deeper shades of red.

Do we have a sense of how big of a problem subsidence is?

We have a very good overview of all the things that could cause subsidence. But it's very hard to measure it.

Subsidence happens on many scales at once. If ice sheets melt in, to give just one example, Canada, that can take weight off the Earth's mantle, causing it to tilt. That means that as the ice melts – and land lifts – in Canada, the land as far away as the Mississippi delta can wind up sinking. So there are changes happening on a scale of thousands of miles.

At the same time, if you build a house and add weight to the soil, you also sink the soil. Even just standing on it, jumping on the ground – you're changing the pore structure in the grains of soil below.

Imagine trying to also integrate what vegetation does with its roots, plus worms that go through the ground. Then you have oil extraction or taking out groundwater – changes on a medium scale. So it's hard to validate and test our models. It's very much a limiting factor in our ability to say something about the future of deltas.

Really, though, given how big a control sea-level rise is on delta construction, the biggest problem now is climate change. As ice sheets begin to melt again, that's causing seas to rise much more quickly than they have in thousands of years.

It sounds like we've been in an "age of the delta," but that's now coming to an end.

Definitely. If we zoom out and look at deltas as a whole, we could lose as much as 5% of the land by the end of this century, mostly because of sea-level rise. And as much as 50% of the land – 130,000 square miles – in only a few hundred years.

So it could go very, very fast. Since sea level is so important here, a lot of that depends on what we do in terms of CO2 emissions and climate change.

Over the past few decades, rivers have continued to build deltas. But as the world warms and oceans rise, many deltas will begin shrinking (dark red), rather than growing (green). Just how much delta land is lost will depend on how much the world warms. This chart shows projections for delta land change between 2050 and 2100 for three different "shared socioeconomic pathways," or SSPs, which the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change uses in its reports. The highest emissions scenario, SSP5-8.5, shows high rates of land loss across the world.

We're not going to lose every delta. When deltas are very small, and uninhabited by humans, it's very easy for them to respond to sea level. Think of Arctic deltas, for example. Basically, when seas rise, these deltas walk with sea level up the river – the delta advances upstream, replacing what was once solid ground with wetlands.

But for many deltas, we've built levees, so they're fixed – they're not moving anywhere. And big deltas are hard to sustain. They need a lot of sediment. Those deltas are much more uncertain.

Eventually, sea-level rise will slow again, and then we'll reenter an age of the delta, when rivers can build again. Ironically, if we continue emissions at a high rate that might happen sooner, because we will speed up the tipping point where the world's ice sheets collapse. If we continue emissions at a high rate, then sea-level rise might slow again around the year 2400, and deltas may be able to grow again by the end of this millennium, once much of Greenland and Antarctica have melted.

Is there anything we can do to save today's deltas?

There are adaptation methods that can work for individual deltas. One key idea is trying to use the sediments coming down from the river in a smarter way. That typically means breaking down levees and restoring the natural flow of the river into the delta's wetlands. These projects are sometimes called "river diversions." The biggest projects – both in terms of cost and in terms of how much sediment is delivered to the delta – are happening in the Mississippi River delta.

But even if you include all the projects that are still in the planning stage, these kinds of restoration strategies are being applied to save 0.1% of the world's deltas. That's very small compared to the potential loss of land.

I'm a little bit skeptical about our ability to scale these strategies up and solve the whole delta problem. River diversions lead to high sedimentation rates, but these rates decline over time. The sedimentation rate is dependent on the elevation difference, so as you build your land, it gets harder and harder to keep up. And diversions work on very small parts of a delta. If one sediment diversion works very well in the Mississippi, you can't say, "I'm going to build another right next to it." At some point, you're going to run out of sediment.

Most river deltas will persist throughout my lifetime. But to think about my daughter's lifetime, or my grandchildren's – that's going to be very, very different. It's very strange to think about these places not existing.

That's a dark future. Is there any reason to be optimistic?

If we really stick to the Paris Agreement, an international treaty that aims to keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius, then the picture is going to be much more nuanced. Then the optimism I have is that the age of the delta will last a long time still.

It's not really a question of whether we'll lose delta land, but more a question of when we'll lose it. If we really limit our emissions, we might be able to postpone the major losses for 500 years, or a thousand years – and by then, who knows? We might all be living in floating cities!

The optimism has to be that it goes slow enough that we come up with new solutions. But in order to give ourselves the time we need, we have to start addressing climate change now. (Courtesy: *The Wire*)

On the precipice

By Akshith Sangomla

Increased precipitation and rapid melting of the Greenland ice sheet is adding more fresh cold water to the North Atlantic Ocean, disrupting circulation of warm and cool surface waters.

A major ocean current system that helps regulate climate and weather patterns around the world may come to a halt this century, much sooner than earlier believed. The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), which moves warm ocean water from the tropics to the northern Atlantic Ocean basin, could collapse between 2025 and 2095 due to the impact of anthropogenic emissions, says a July 25, 2023 paper by scientists from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Based on the current rate of emissions, the collapse is likely to occur in the 2050s, the scientists say with 95 per cent confidence in the study published in *Nature Communications*.

If this prediction deems true, AMOC, which plays a crucial role in moderating the climate of Europe and North America and influences temperatures near the Equator, may be the first of the 16 climate tipping elements to be breached. Tipping elements are large-scale systems that influence the planet's climate and ecology, which are undergoing changes due to warming and accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere from anthropogenic emissions. If these elements cross certain thresholds due to rise in temperature, changes in them will become irreversible. AMOC's collapse could also have a cascading impact on the stability of other tipping elements and climate systems in a wider geography.

Slowed cycle

AMOC transports warm salty surface waters from the tropics to the northern regions. The waters then cool down, increase in density and sink in the North Atlantic Ocean, in a phenomenon called downwelling or overturning. Cold, fresh water from the melting ice of the Arctic is added to the cooler ocean that moves towards the equator. This cycle, therefore, acts like a heat conveyor belt, warming the northern latitudes and cooling the southern latitudes. But for the past few decades, more fresh cold water is added to the North Atlantic Ocean due to increased precipitation and rapid melting of the Greenland ice sheet, which is reducing salinity and density of the water.

In other words, the colder layer of the ocean is expanding and the warmer layer is contracting. This is slowing down AMOC and will lead to its collapse.

By: Ashoka Mukpo

The story of wheat as a cultivated crop is nearly as old as that of human civilisation itself. Few plants have played a bigger role in our history than the tall grass with its iconic amber kernels and wisps, which has fed cities, cultures and countries for some 10,000 years since it was first domesticated in the Middle East's Fertile Crescent. Today, it has been bred, crossbred and modified thousands of times to fit any number of climates and locations worldwide.

It's a hardy plant, capable of withstanding frost and other extreme temperatures. Partly because of that, wheat is now the most widely planted crop on the planet by land mass, with 217 million hectares (536 million acres) – an area the size of Greenland – devoted to growing it.

Milled, pounded, baked and boiled, wheat is a staple of cuisines across the world, from East Asia's noodles and dumpling wraps to the iconic French baguette. The 1.2 billion metric tonnes of it that are grown every year now supply around a fifth of the total calories and protein consumed by human beings, in a global market that's projected to be worth more than \$200 billion by 2028.

Since the 1960s, the per-hectare yield of wheat has tripled – an incredible accomplishment, thanks in part to the development of more efficient and resilient strains of the plant, but also due to the heavy application of synthetic fertilisers in its cultivation.

In the US, for example, 10% of all commercial fertilizer use goes to wheat; in China, a recent study showed that wheat had the highest fertilizer overuse rate of any cereal produced there.

But dumping all that synthetic fertiliser into the soil to make our pizza, pasta and udon noodles isn't great news for the planet and wildlife. The two nutrients that give those fertilisers their growing power, nitrogen and phosphorus, have a nasty

lapse.

For the latest study, the authors have assessed sea surface temperatures (SSTs) of a particular region in the North Atlantic Ocean known as the Subpolar gyre region, which is close to the southern coasts of Greenland and Iceland and the northeastern coast of Canada. Collating data for SSTs between 1870 and 2020, they have found that early warnings of the collapse are significant in this "fingerprint" region. Historically, collapse of AMOC has been associated with warming events. According to paleoclimatic data, in the past before the start of the planet's glacial periods or ice ages, there was abrupt warming. Scientists term these incidents Dansgaard-Oeschger events, which occurred over a few decades before gradual cooling heralds an ice age.

Over the last few decades, AMOC has already slowed down by about 15 per cent and is at its slowest in 1,600 years, a team led by a researcher from Maynooth University in Ireland says in a 2021 study published in *Nature Geoscience*. Another paper published in *Nature Climate Change* in September 2021 by Niklas Boers from Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany states that AMOC has lost its stability in the last century and might be much closer to collapse than previously thought. The study concludes this from analysis of eight datasets of temperature and salinity in AMOC dating back 150 years.

The paper also says that according to paleoclimatic data from the last 100,000 years, AMOC has two states: a fast and strong state that has been active for the past few thousand years and a slow and weak one towards which the system now seems to be turning. The analysis shows AMOC could switch between these two states in a few decades.

However, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its sixth Assessment Report series estimates that AMOC is unlikely to see a halt this century.

The 2023 study cautions that earlier assessments on the collapse may not be accurate, as research on current and future behaviour of the AMOC has a few model biases. These include overestimation of AMOC's stability and poor

representation of the cold deep water current, salinity and water input from melting glaciers in the Arctic region.

"There is uncertainty related to the extent of the SST proxy 'fingerprint' that we used to get information before direct measurements (which have only been available since 2004). But the fingerprint is in some sense the best we can do," Peter Ditlevsen, a professor of physics at the Niels Bohr Institute, University of Copenhagen and one of the study's authors, tells *Down To Earth* (DTE). He adds that the exact time and nature of the collapse depends upon the world's success in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. "Reductions will most likely postpone a collapse," he says.

Climate ripples

A collapsed AMOC would cause widespread cooling across the northern hemisphere and less precipitation in places such as Europe, North America, China and some parts of Russia in Asia. "AMOC is a kind of 'switch' for climate in the northern hemisphere, especially Europe. In its current state, with warm water flowing far to the north in the Atlantic Ocean, Europe is warm and the ice sheets over Scandinavia and North America are small. However, if polar water (fresher, cooler water) expands due to more freshwater input (for example, from the melting ice sheets in Greenland), it can initiate a sudden change to a much cooler European climate. This can be self-sustaining because of an expansion of sea ice in the Arctic, keeping the warm water below the surface and covered," says Ted Scambos, a climate scientist at the Co-operative Institute for Research in Environmental Science, US, who was not involved in the latest study. The cooling of western Europe and changed precipitation patterns may especially impact food production.

Ditlevsen adds that the collapse could also impact climate over a wider geography. "The heat not transported to the North will also stay in the tropics," he says. This could disrupt other tipping elements like the Amazon rainforest, West Antarctic ice sheet, and the West African monsoon, as well as the Indian monsoon (see 'Domino effect').

First, excess heat due to a collapsed AMOC could lead to

less rainfall over the Amazon rainforest and make it drought prone and dry, says Ditlevsen.

"There is fear that the collapse could change the hydrological cycle of the Amazon and potentially transform it to a savannah state. This is, however, still quite speculative," he says. Earlier in June 2021, a paper published in the *European Physical Journal* claimed that the weakening or collapse of AMOC would lead to stabilisation of the southern Amazon rainforest.

It explained that the accumulation of heat post AMOC collapse would make the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), a band of clouds and storms that circles the Earth near the Equator and is responsible for most of the rainfall in the tropical regions of Africa and Asia, shift southwards and bring more rainfall to southern Amazon.

More ocean heat in the southern hemisphere may also impact the stability and melting of the West Antarctic ice sheet. However, there are still uncertainties to the potential of this impact, says Ditlevsen. A slowdown of AMOC could hinder monsoon formation and rainfall in different regions. "Rainfall in the Sahel region (the West African monsoon) could reduce, the summer monsoon circulation in South Asia and India could weaken; and there might be more winter storms in Europe," Swapna Palickal, scientist F at the Centre for Climate Change Research, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, tells DTE.

Palickal has co-authored an April 2020 research study published in *Climate Dynamics* that says the northern latitudes may, along with the less ocean heat due to AMOC collapse, see more transport of atmospheric heat. This would decrease the large-scale temperature gradient between the northern and southern hemispheres and the regional land-sea thermal gradient.

"Weakening of the land-sea thermal gradient weakens the sea level pressure gradient and the summer monsoon circulation over Indian region," Palickal tells DTE. "However, the projected changes are for the later years of the 21st century, when more warming leads to more availability of moisture," she adds. As per IPCC's estimates, moisture in the atmosphere will increase 7 per cent with every 1°C rise in temperature.

"The increase in moisture can counteract the decrease in rainfall by the weakening of AMOC," she adds. It is therefore uncertain how AMOC's early collapse, if it occurs, could impact rainfall. (Courtesy: *Down To Earth*)

Wheat has fed humans for millenia but its vulnerability to climate change should sound alarm bells

By: Ashoka Mukpo

The story of wheat as a cultivated crop is nearly as old as that of human civilisation itself. Few plants have played a bigger role in our history than the tall grass with its iconic amber kernels and wisps, which has fed cities, cultures and countries for some 10,000 years since it was first domesticated in the Middle East's Fertile Crescent. Today, it has been bred, crossbred and modified thousands of times to fit any number of climates and locations worldwide.

It's a hardy plant, capable of withstanding frost and other extreme temperatures. Partly because of that, wheat is now the most widely planted crop on the planet by land mass, with 217 million hectares (536 million acres) – an area the size of Greenland – devoted to growing it.

Milled, pounded, baked and boiled, wheat is a staple of cuisines across the world, from East Asia's noodles and dumpling wraps to the iconic French baguette. The 1.2 billion metric tonnes of it that are grown every year now supply around a fifth of the total calories and protein consumed by human beings, in a global market that's projected to be worth more than \$200 billion by 2028.

Since the 1960s, the per-hectare yield of wheat has tripled – an incredible accomplishment, thanks in part to the development of more efficient and resilient strains of the plant, but also due to the heavy application of synthetic fertilisers in its cultivation.

In the US, for example, 10% of all commercial fertilizer use goes to wheat; in China, a recent study showed that wheat had the highest fertilizer overuse rate of any cereal produced there.

But dumping all that synthetic fertiliser into the soil to make our pizza, pasta and udon noodles isn't great news for the planet and wildlife. The two nutrients that give those fertilisers their growing power, nitrogen and phosphorus, have a nasty



habit of leaking into the environment. In fact, most studies show that somewhere between 65% and 80% of the nitrogen in fertilisers either evaporates or washes into waterways after being applied to cropland.

That's led to a massive, global ecological crisis directly tied to the way we produce food, including grains like wheat, as the amount of nutrients flowing around the planet's biosphere has crossed a "planetary boundary" – a threshold that we need to stay behind in order to protect life as we know it.

Across the world, freshwater lakes, rivers and estuaries are experiencing toxic algae blooms, as the foul-smelling microorganisms feed on an all-you-can-eat buffet of nutrients lost to the environment from synthetic fertiliser, gunking up the water with green ooze and causing red tides. In coastal areas where rivers carry agricultural runoff into the ocean, these algae can use up all the oxygen and cause "dead zones" where no sea life can survive.

Wheat isn't the only culprit in this problem. Corn and soybeans, often grown for animal feed, are a major cause of the Gulf of Mexico's annual hypoxic dead zone, for example. But as the biggest occupier of agricultural land, wheat plays a big role.

Synthetic fertilisers are also a big contributor to the climate crisis. Most manufacturing methods require natural gas to be burned in order to produce them, and when they're applied to fields they're a major source of planet-heating emissions.

Overall, 5% of total greenhouse gas emissions globally come from fertilisers, with one-third released during production and the rest through organic processes after they're spread onto farmlands. As much as half of the carbon emissions produced by wheat come from this type of fertilizer evaporation.

In 2017, researchers set out to calculate the environmental cost of the average loaf of bread. They found that the biggest impact came from growing the wheat used to bake it, with around 40% of the damage

they measured coming from the runoff of synthetic fertilisers into the environment.

Intensive wheat production also often involves heavy application of pesticides that can be harmful to biodiversity, killing insect populations that are necessary for healthy ecosystems elsewhere. Growing the amount of wheat that the world consumes takes a lot of water – in fact, it sucks up the second-highest quantity of any crop grown on Earth, after rice.

Compared to beef and other meat, though, wheat is a relatively minor contributor to climate change; in the US, it only accounts for about 1% of emissions. But climate change is almost certainly going to change what wheat production looks like worldwide in unpredictable ways.

Surprisingly, some studies show that wheat yields could rise in some countries, as parts of the world become more temperate. But others show that it has a high vulnerability to extreme weather events like drought, which are set to become more common in the coming years.

That should raise alarm bells for some of the world's major producer countries, including the US and India, both of which struggled with low-yield harvests in 2022 due to scorching heat and drought. Also, as production shifts toward higher and lower latitudes in a warming world, consumers in hotter, less wealthy countries could wind up in a tough spot, relying more on increasingly expensive imports as crops in their own countries fail.

To prepare for climate change, scientists are experimenting with the development of new, heat-resistant varieties. Many food systems experts are urging policymakers to move toward agricultural systems that approach fertilizer use differently. Studies have shown that planting nitrogen-fixing "cover crops" like legumes in rotation with wheat can reduce the need for fertilisers, for example, as could other farming practices associated with "circular" and "nature-inclusive" agriculture. (Courtesy: *Scroll.in*)

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

Biden and Trump sweep Super Tuesday primaries; pressure on Haley to end her campaign

WASHINGTON, March 6: President Joe Biden and his Republican predecessor Donald Trump have swept in their parties' presidential nomination primaries held in 15 states across the US, paving the way for a rematch between them in November and putting pressure on Indian-American candidate Nikki Haley to quit the race despite her surprise win in Vermont.

After Super Tuesday's election results, Trump, 77, has established a commanding lead in the delegate count over his only Republican opponent, Haley, 52.

Trump secured impressive victories in Texas, California and 11 other states, although Haley denied him a full sweep by winning Vermont.

Though the 15 states that voted on Tuesday didn't have enough delegates for Trump to clinch the party's nomination, he moved much closer to it. More than a third of all the Republican delegates were at stake on Super Tuesday, the biggest haul of any date on the 2024 primary calendar.

To win the presidential nomination of the Republican party, either of the two candidates needs 1,215 delegates, who are elected during

the primaries.

After Super Tuesday, Trump had 244 delegates in his kitty, while Haley had just 86.

Seeking re-election, Biden, 81, swept almost all the Democratic primary states.

Biden was handed his first defeat so far in the Democratic primary by Jason Palmer in American Samoa. While Palmer won in the tiny US territory — where fewer than 100 people participate in the caucus — it will not slow Biden's commanding march to the Democratic nomination.

"Joe Biden isn't facing any major competition in the primary cycle, and has won all the Democratic contests so far tonight, CNN projects, as he gears up for a likely rematch with Trump in November," CNN said.

Super Tuesday is an important 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.

Almost all the results were one-sided in favour of Trump except for Vermont, where the winning difference was about one per cent.

Speaking from Palm Beach, Florida, Trump claimed that "we have a very divided country," and



vowed to unify it soon.

"This was an amazing night and an amazing day, it's been an incredible period of time in our country's history," Trump said at his election night watch party at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach.

"We have a very divided country. We have a country [where] a political person uses weaponisation against his political opponents," he said. He compared the state of the US political system to "third-world countries".

"Never happened here. It happens in other countries, but they're third-world countries. And in some ways, we're a third-world country."

Talking up some of his achievements from his time in office, notably the half-built border wall between the US and Mexico, Trump claimed he delivered "the safest borders in the history of our

country" and went on to rail against what he described as "migrant crime", without citing any evidence.

"And so the world is laughing at us, the world is taking advantage of us," he said.

He goes on to describe his aims to make the US "energy independent and energy dominant".

"All the... tragedy, you will not have to think of it. All of the problems we have today, we would not have had any of them," he said.

"You would only have success and that is what ultimately going to unify this country and unify this party," he added.

Trump again recited a familiar list of grievances, insisting that the nation was descending toward chaos under Biden's leadership and raising doubts about election integrity.

Earlier, Biden touted the work

his administration has accomplished in its first term in office while issuing a stark warning that a second Trump term would mean a return to "chaos, division, and darkness."

"Four years ago, I ran because of the existential threat Donald Trump posed to the America we all believe in," Biden wrote in a statement, highlighting progress under his administration on jobs, inflation, prescription drug prices, and gun control. He then warned that if Trump returns to the White House, the progress his administration has made will be at risk.

"(Trump) is driven by grievance and grift, focused on his own revenge and retribution, not the American people," Biden noted.

Haley, the former South Carolina governor, said she has not made a final decision as to whether or not she would endorse her ex-boss Trump if she ends her presidential bid, but her campaign is receiving a lot of feedback on the subject, sources familiar with recent discussions told CNN.

People who are close to Haley have different opinions. Some believe that it would be good for her to back Trump because she would be viewed as a team player.

Others ardently oppose her en-

dorsing him because that would give Haley the freedom to be critical of Trump and build her own movement. They have shared those opinions with Haley and her campaign in recent days and weeks, sources said, CNN said.

Haley herself has recently said she is not focused on endorsing anyone because she is focused on winning herself.

Trump, however, in an interview on Tuesday bashed Haley, saying she was angry because her campaign is "just getting nowhere."

Haley's campaign said on Tuesday that it was "honoured" by her win in Vermont's Republican presidential primary.

"We're honoured to have received the support of millions of Americans across the country today, including in Vermont where Nikki became the first Republican woman to win two presidential primary contests," Haley spokesperson Olivia Perez-Cubas said in a statement. "Unity is not achieved by simply claiming 'we're united.'"

Haley's campaign said there remains a "large block of Republican primary voters who are expressing deep concerns" about the former president. (PTI)

Palestinian death toll tops 30,700 in the latest count

RAFAH, March 6: Gaza's Health Ministry says the Palestinian death toll from the Israel-Hamas war has climbed to 30,717.

It said on Wednesday that 86 bodies were brought to local hospitals in the last 24 hours, in addition to 113 wounded people.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government and maintains detailed casualty records. Its figures from previous wars have largely matched those of the United Nations, independent experts and even Israeli counts.

The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tallies, but says women and children make up around two-thirds of those killed.

It says the real toll is higher as there are bodies buried in the rubble from Israeli airstrikes and in areas that paramedics cannot access. It says over 72,000 people have been wounded in the war.

Israel says it has killed over 10,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence.

The war began after Hamas launched a surprise attack into Israel on October 7, in which Palestinian militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages.

Israel's offensive has driven some 80 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million from their homes and pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation. (AP)

Executed former Pak PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did not receive fair trial: SC

ISLAMABAD, March 6: Former Pakistan prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, executed by the military regime in 1979, did not receive a fair trial, the Supreme Court observed on Wednesday.

Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa announced the unanimous opinion of a nine-member larger bench of the apex court during the hearing of a presidential reference related to the death sentence given to the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) founder.

It is based on a special case sent in 2011 by then president Asif Ali Zardari to the Supreme Court to revisit his father-in-law Bhutto's conviction for abetment in a murder case and his eventual hanging in 1979. Announcing the unanimous opinion, Isa said, "The proceedings of the trial by the Lahore High Court and the appeal by the Supreme Court of Pakistan do not meet the requirements of the fundamental right to a fair trial and due process enshrined in Articles 4 and 9 of the Constitution and later guaranteed as a separate and fundamental right under Article 10A of the Constitution."

The apex court voiced its opinion but also ruled that the verdict of Bhutto's death sentence could not be changed as the Constitution and law did not allow so, and it would be maintained as a verdict.

The Supreme Court will issue a detailed opinion later. The execution of Bhutto, 51, was carried out after a seven-member Supreme Court upheld the conviction, which many believe was done under coercion exercised by the then-military dictator Gen Ziaul Haq, who had toppled Bhutto's government in 1977. (PTI)

Jaishankar bats for expanding India's strategic partnership with SKorea in critical and emerging technologies, semiconductors

SEOUL, March 6: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has met South Korea's top leadership and called for expanding India's strategic partnership in new areas like critical and emerging technologies, semiconductors and green hydrogen to make the bilateral ties more contemporary.

Jaishankar said this as he co-chaired the 10th India-South Korea Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) with his counterpart Cho Tae-yul in Seoul. He said the two sides held a comprehensive and productive discussion on cooperation in the fields of defence, science and technology and trade.

"Co-chaired with @FM-ChoTae_yul a comprehensive and productive 10th India-South Korea Joint Commission Meeting in Seoul today," Jaishankar posted on X. The conversations covered the expanded bilateral ties, cooperation in the field of defence, science and technology, business and trade, people-to-people exchange and cultural cooperation, he said.

"Also spoke of advancing trilateral cooperation. Exchanged views on the developments in the Indo-Pacific, our convergences to chal-



lenges in the region and regional & global issues of mutual interest," Jaishankar posted on X. In his opening remarks, Jaishankar said that during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to South Korea in 2015 the bilateral relations were elevated to a special strategic partnership.

"It is important that we live up to that. We have grown from strength to strength in the years that have passed. We have become truly important partners for each other and our bilateral exchanges, trade, investments, defence and science and technology cooperation have all seen a steady growth while keeping up the momentum in the traditional areas of cooperation," the minister said. "We would be very much interested now in expanding into new areas, such as critical and emerging technologies, semiconductors, green hydrogen, human resource

mobility, nuclear cooperation, supply chain resilience, etc to make our ties more contemporary," he said.

The JCM was attended by representatives from many ministries and departments in the two governments. It provided the platform for a comprehensive review of bilateral cooperation under the India-Republic of Korea Special Strategic Partnership in areas of trade, investments, development cooperation, defence and security, science and technology, culture and people-to-people exchange, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

The two ministers also explored ways to further extend cooperation to new areas such as critical and emerging technologies, semiconductors, green hydrogen, human resource mobility and resilient supply chains, working both bilaterally and together with other countries, it said. The discussions also covered developments of common interest and concern in the shared Indo-Pacific region. They also shared perspectives on their respective Indo-Pacific visions and strategies and noted the commonality in their initiatives for the region, the statement said. (PTI)

US destroyer shoots down missile and drones launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels

DUBAI, March 6: A U.S. destroyer shot down drones and a missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels toward it in the Red Sea, officials said early Wednesday, as the Indian navy released images of it fighting a fire aboard a container ship earlier targeted by the Houthis.

The assault on Tuesday apparently targeted the USS Carney, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer that has been involved in the American campaign against the rebels who have launched attacks over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The Houthi attack involved bomb-carrying drones and one anti-ship ballistic missile, the U.S. military's Central Command said.

The U.S. later launched an airstrike destroying three anti-ship missiles and three bomb-carrying drone boats, Central Command said.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, acknowledged the attack, but claimed its forces targeted two American warships, without elaborating.

The Houthis "will not stop until the aggression is stopped and the siege on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip is lifted," Saree said.

Saree did not acknowledge the later U.S. airstrikes. The Houthis have not offered any assessment of the damage they've suffered in the American-led strikes that began in January, though it has said at least 22 of its fighters have been killed.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over the Israel-Hamas war. Those vessels



have included at least one with cargo bound for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, and an aid ship later bound for Houthi-controlled territory.

Despite more than a month and a half of U.S.-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels have remained capable of launching significant attacks. They include the attack last month on a cargo ship carrying fertilizer, the Rubymar, which sank on Saturday after drifting for several days, and the downing of an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars.

Meanwhile, the Indian navy released footage of its sailors from the INS Kolkata fighting a fire aboard the MSC Sky II, which had been targeted by the Houthis in the Gulf of Aden on Monday. Smoke poured out of one container aboard the vessel, which also showed scorch marks from the impact from a Houthi missile.

The Mediterranean Shipping Co., a Switzerland-based firm, said the missile struck the ship as it was travelling from Singapore to Djibouti.

"The missile caused a small fire that has been extinguished while no crew were injured," the company said. (AP)

Venezuela sets its presidential election for July 28 as the opposition candidate remains barred

CARACAS, March 6: Venezuela's highly anticipated presidential election will take place July 28 — the birthday of the country's late fiery leader Hugo Chávez — officials announced Tuesday, plowing ahead with a tight campaign season that deepens doubts over the participation of the opposition's leading candidate as well as of international observers.

President Nicolás Maduro is widely expected to run for reelection. His government initially negotiated details of the election with a faction of the opposition backed by the United States government, but differences between the sides have grown over the past two months.

The date announced by National Electoral Council President Elvis Amoroso did, how-

ever, meet at least one opposition demand that the election be held in the second half of the year.

When that broad timeframe was agreed upon by Maduro and his adversaries in October, the intervening months were meant to allow campaigns to mobilize, officials to update voter rolls, and international electoral observers to plan and deploy a mission.

Crucially, the October agreement, signed in the Caribbean island of Barbados and focused on conditions meant to level the playing field for the 2024 election, also called on both sides to "promote the authorization of all presidential candidates and political parties" to participate in the election as long as they comply with the law.

But in January, the country's top court rat-

ified an administrative decision banning Maduro's strongest adversary this year, Maria Corina Machado, from running for office.

Amoroso, under his previous capacity as the country's comptroller, signed the announcement of Machado's ban from office last summer.

He did not address her candidacy during his nationally televised announcement on Tuesday, just four days after lawmakers proposed to the ruling party-loyal National Electoral Council more than 20 possible options, ranging from as soon as mid-April to as late as December.

Last month, the opposition's chief negotiator, Gerardo Blyde, said the group favored a December vote. (AP)

Taiwan's Labour Minister apologises for "racist" jibe against Indian workers

BEIJING/TAIPEI, March 6: Taiwan's Labour Minister Hsu Ming-chun has apologised for her inappropriate comments on her government's plans to recruit Indian migrant workers from a particular region which drew sharp criticism for being "racist".

Taiwan plans to recruit Indian workers after signing an MOU with India on February 16 to bolster people-to-people exchanges between the two countries and help alleviate labour shortages in Taiwan's industries, according to a recent statement by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Elaborating on the recruitment plan, Hsu in a talk show on Taiwan television said her ministry will first recruit Indian workers from the North-Eastern states of India because "their skin colour and dietary habits are closer to ours," Taiwan's Central News Agency (CNA) reported on Tuesday.

In addition, Hsu reported to have said the Indians there are "mostly Christians" who are adept at manufacturing, construction, and farming.

Significantly, Hsu said the recruitment strategy was based on Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) assessments, according to the report.

Her comments drew sharp criticism from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party legislator Chen Kuang-ting who in a posting on X "strongly condemned" Hsu's comments, arguing that skin colour and race should not be criteria for recruiting mi-



grant workers.

"In response to recent statements from the Minister of Labour, I wish to express my strong condemnation. As a member of Parliament, I want to reaffirm that Taiwan values everyone, irrespective of their race, culture, or religion. It is my firm belief that individuals from all backgrounds deserve respect, and I am committed to upholding this principle in Taiwan," he said in a video post.

At a legislative hearing on Tuesday morning, Hsu apologised for her "inaccurate" comments that caused misunderstanding.

Taiwan's labour policies, whether directed at local or foreign workers, are crafted with equality in mind and are never discriminating, she said, according to the CNA report.

She said she praised Indian workers' abilities and performance in the interview because she had hoped to highlight these attributes, Hsu added.

In a statement, Taiwan's Labour Ministry apologised for Hsu's "inaccurate" choice of words, saying that the

ernment agencies have made remarks that were not entirely appropriate. This has led to criticism among Taiwan's society, Indian friends, and other international stakeholders," it said.

The government expresses sincere apologies for this situation. It will earnestly review its actions and make needed improvements going forward, it said.

"Taiwan boasts a civil society that embraces different views and allows for a wide array of voices to be heard. Taiwan also fully respects India's diverse and rich culture and cherishes the friendship between the peoples of Taiwan and India," it said.

Taiwan will spare no effort in advancing cultural exchanges and mutual understanding between the two countries, with the aim of further elevating cooperation and partnership between Taiwan and India, it said.

The Taiwan government also hopes that the people of Taiwan will support the country's efforts to engage with the world, further advance substantive interactions with partners in the Indo-Pacific region, and thereby bolster reciprocal and mutually beneficial exchanges, it said.

China claims the self-administered breakaway island of Taiwan is part of it under the "One China" policy. Beijing has repeatedly asserted that national reunification was its ultimate goal and it will not renounce the use of force if the island takes steps towards independence. (PTI)

Nawaz Sharif's PML-N becomes largest party in Pakistan's National Assembly: Report

ISLAMABAD, March 6: Premier Nawaz Sharif led-PML-N has become the largest political party in Pakistan's National Assembly after the number of its seats surged to 123, following the distribution of reserved seats denied to former prime minister Imran Khan backed-SIC, a media report said on Wednesday.

On Monday, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) ruled that 71-year-old former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) is not eligible for the reserved seats allotted to women and minorities in Parliament and their share of seats should be allocated to other parties.

Almost all 93 PTI-backed independent elected candidates had joined the right-wing SIC to receive its share of reserved seats for women and minorities.

In total, 266 seats of the lower

house of Parliament were up for grabs out of the 336. Another 60 seats were reserved for women and 10 for minorities, allotted to the winning parties based on proportional representation.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) initially won 75 general seats after last month's general election and was joined by nine independent candidates, the Dawn newspaper reported.

It was allocated 19 reserved seats for women and four reserved seats for minorities, taking its total tally to 107.

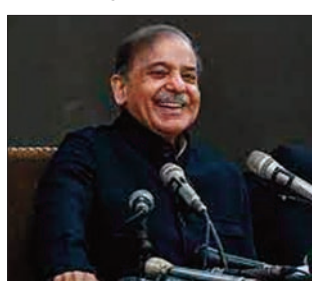
After the ECP denied the PTI-backed SIC of reserved seats, the three-time former premier Nawaz Sahrif-led PML-N was

allocated 15 out of the remaining 20 reserved seats for women and one out of the three remaining seats reserved for minorities.

Its tally reached 123 seats, making it the largest party in the National Assembly, the report said. The number of seats won

by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has also gone up to 73 from the earlier 68. The former finance minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari led party initially won 54 general seats and was allocated 12 seats reserved for minorities and two for women.

It was then allocated four more seats reserved for women and one for minorities. The Mutahida Quami Movement - Pakistan (MQM-P) party has 22 members in the National Assem-



Statement came after the recent surge in the distribution of demand notes to businesspeople

Meghalaya government to ensure no extortion by HNLC

SHILLONG, March 6: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday assured that the government is taking steps to ensure extortion activities by the banned Hynniewterp National Liberation Council (HNLC) are put to a stop in the state.

"We are now on the job, and we will ensure that this thing (extortion) is completely stopped and none of our citizens should be affected by this," Sangma told reporters.

His statement came after the recent surge in the distribution of demand notes to businesspeople and the subsequent arrest of HNLC's PSO Storgy Lyngdoh from Shillong.

Sangma said his government is very clear that no illegal activity in this form (extortion) will be tolerated.

"Hence, when this issue had come up to us, we had a very prompt meeting few weeks (ago) - I will not give details as it was a closed-door meeting - and we had given instruction to the police to go ahead



and do what it takes to ensure that this kind of activities don't take place," he said. Whether the cases of extortion is indicative of HNLC not serious for peace talks,

the chief minister said. "Of course, we have made it very clear to the HNLC in multiple discussions through our interlocutors at that point in time that if there are serious about the talks then all these other activities should stop because there were certain things that are happening earlier also I don't want to go into details but you are very correct we have already discussed with them in the past also and now also we reiterate that while we are working and moving towards peace talks and making efforts from all angles these kinds of activities must stop."

In regards to the regrouping of the disbanded GNLA in Garo Hills, the chief minister said three people have been arrested and police are on the lookout for another three more, which we are very sure will be able to catch them.

Further, the CM however claimed that the overall law and order situation has been peaceful in the state. (NNN)

PM Modi to visit Arunachal on March 9

Inauguration of strategic Sela Tunnel



ITANAGAR, March 6: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to embark on a day-long visit to Arunachal Pradesh on March 9 to inaugurate several development projects including the Sela Tunnel which will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang bordering China.

An official on Wednesday said that Modi will dedicate the tunnel to the nation at a function to be held at Baisakhi in West Kameng district. He will also lay the foundation stone for around 20 development projects, before proceeding to neighbouring Assam, the official said.

The Sela Tunnel, situated at an elevation of 13,000 feet, will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. The tunnel is strategically important due to its proximity to the Line of actual control (LAC), an official said.

The tunnel, located near Sela

Pass, was required as the Balipara-Charidwar-Tawang Road remains closed for a long period of the year due to snowfall and landslides caused by heavy rainfall.

The tunnel will enhance the Indian army's capabilities at the LAC by ensuring speedy deployment of troops, weapons and machinery to the forward areas along the Sino-India border.

The foundation of the project was laid by Modi in February 2019, with a cost estimation of ₹ 697 crore, but work got delayed due to various reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project comprises two tunnels. The first is a single-tube tunnel of 980 metres in length, and the second one is 1.5 km long with an escape tube for emergencies.

In 1962, Chinese troops had clashed with Indian forces in the region, and significantly, Tawang town was overrun on October 24 that year. (PTI)

Manipur govt introduces 'no work, no pay' rule for officials

IMPHAL, March 6: The Manipur government on Wednesday introduced a "no-work, no-pay" rule for its employees who have remained absent from office "without valid and accepted reasons."

An office memorandum by the department of personnel and administrative reforms said, "Officials who are unable to attend office at their usual place of posting on account of the prevailing law and order situation in the state had been attached with Deputy Commissioners/line departments/field level offices to enable them to function therefrom, or for discharging such responsibilities as may be assigned to them, by the Deputy Commissioners concerned, or such authorities duly authorised in this regard."

It further stated that there have



been reports that "many such officials so attached are not attending offices to which they have been attached or not reporting for duty."

Deputy commissioners, heads of departments have been informed to maintain register to record attendances of the said "attached officials", the circular stated, adding that the records along with "reports of improper conduct, if any" shall be shared with those responsible for disbursing salary of those officials. (PTI)

Sikkim: SDF demands CBI probe into attack on ex-Speaker

GANGTOK, March 6: The opposition Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) on Wednesday submitted a memorandum to Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, demanding a CBI probe into the assault on former state assembly Speaker KN Rai and another party worker.

Rai and SDF spokesperson SK Timshina were assaulted by unidentified men in Mellu town in Namchi district on March 1.

"We are not happy with the pace and progress of the ongoing probe by the Sikkim Police into the attack on Rai," SDF president and former Sikkim chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling told reporters after submitting a memorandum to the governor. (PTI)

Transgender activist for no violence

IMPHAL, March 6: Even as she was repeatedly arrested on the charge of committing suicide, undeterred transgender activist Malem Thongam is determined to achieve what she has been demanding for i.e. to end the ongoing violence in Manipur.

Thongam has been on a fast seeking an end to the ethnic violence in Manipur.

She started her fast on February 22 in Delhi where she was detained by the police and along with members Lamyamba Irabot Memorial Integrated Trust and Delhi Meetei Coordinating Committee (DMCC). After the police released her, she continued her fast in front of the official residence of Union minister of state for external affairs and education Rajkumar Ranjan Singh from where she was again detained by the police.

She returned to Imphal recently only to continue her stir at Khurai Komsam Leikai in Imphal East district from where she was arrested by a team of Porompat police station on March 1.

After being released on bail, she continued the stir at Singjamei from where she was again arrested only to be released on bail again. Soon after her release on bail, the transgender activist resumed her fasting stir today at the western gate of Kangla fort.

Talking to the reporters today, Santa Khurai, a fellow transgender activist who has been steadfastly supporting Thongam, alleged that the refusal to entertain a memorandum submitted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi prompted her to resort to the fasting stir.

She said that her fellow activist had submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Modi besides attempting to meet Union minister of state RK Ranjan but receiving negative responses.

Khurai said that she appreciated the decision Thongam had taken while asking whether there is an efficient government in Manipur. (NNN)

Will not give up the demand of 'Greater Tipraland': Pradyot Debbarma

AGARTALA, March 6: Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Debbarma said he would not give up the demand of 'Greater Tipraland'.

Debbarma made the statement on Tuesday, a day after the tripartite agreement was signed between his party, and the Centre and the Tripura government in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah to bring a lasting solution to the problems of the state's indigenous people.

"We will not give up on the demand of Greater Tipraland even as it may take time to achieve. The BJP never abandoned the demand for the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, and eventually, it achieved it after several years. Tipra Motha too will not give up the demand of Greater Tipraland," he said.

Debbarma was speaking to the press in the backdrop of a review meeting of his party that he chaired following the signing of the agree-

ment.

In a Facebook post, he said, "Held a crucial meeting with leaders today to deliberate about the next course of strategy regarding how Tiprasa accord will be implemented in the days to come. Also discussed various issues regarding how we can make our movement stronger."

Under the pact, it was agreed to amicably resolve all issues of the indigenous people of Tripura related to history, land and political rights, economic development, identity, culture and language, according to an official statement.

During the interaction with the press when he was asked whether the Tipra Motha would contest the Lok Sabha elections on its own, Debbarma said he would announce the party's decision at an appropriate time.

"Once the time comes, I will go



for Facebook Live," he said.

On his meeting with state Congress leaders, he said, "Sudip Roy Barman and Asish Kumar Saha are my friends. Congress MLA Birajit Sinha also maintains good rela-

tions. I have a personal relationship with Amit Shah-ji and Aaditya Thackeray."

"We have to understand there is a world beyond politics," he added. (PTI)

'Public emergency' declared in eastern Nagaland over 'Frontier Nagaland Territory'



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 6: The tribal bodies and frontal organisations under the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) have declared "public emergency" all over eastern Nagaland with immediate effect against the delay by the government of India to settle the offer for the creation of "Frontier Nagaland Territory" comprising six eastern districts of Nagaland.

The organisations took the decision to this effect at a joint meeting in Dimapur on February 5. The declaration was signed by ENPO president and general secretary and

presidents of Chang Khulei Setshang, Khamniung Tribal Council, Konyak Union, Phom Peoples' Council, United Sangtam Likhim Pümji, Yimkiung Tribal Council, Eastern Sumi Hoho, Eastern Nagaland Women's Organisation and Eastern Naga Students' Federation.

Before the last Nagaland assembly elections in 2023, the Union home ministry reportedly assured to settle the "Frontier Nagaland Territory" demand issue before the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Following the assurance, the ENPO which called for boycott of the state assembly polls withdrew its call.

As per the declaration, it was decided to strictly implement the February 23, 2024, "Chenmoho resolution" not to participate in any central and state election against the delay in settling the offer for creation of "Frontier Nagaland Territory" by the government of India through the ministry of home affairs.

On February 23 last month, the ENPO at a consultative meeting with its federating tribal bodies, frontal organisations, talk team and senior leaders in Chenmoho village in Mon district unanimously resolved not to participate in any central and state election against the delay to settle the offer for creation of "Frontier Nagaland Territory" by the ministry of home affairs to be implemented after the upcoming parliamentary election process.

As part of the next phase of public protest, the organisations, said there would be dawn to dusk bandh all over eastern Nagaland on March 8 to be followed by "intensive protest".

ED files prosecution complaint against 299 before Dimapur court

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 6: In a case relating to duping of investors in the name of mining Bitcoins and other Cryptocurrencies, the directorate of enforcement (ED) has filed a prosecution complaint before the Special Court (PMLA), Dimapur, against 299 accused persons and entities, including 76 Chinese controlled entities and two other entities controlled by other foreign nationals. Ten directors of the 76 Chinese-controlled entities are said to be of Chinese origin.

According to an ED release on Wednesday, the Special Court, Dimapur, has taken cognizance of the offense of money laundering in the said prosecution complaint on March 5, 2024, after finding that a prima facie case has been made out under PMLA, 2002, against the 299 accused.

The release said the ED initiated



investigation based on an FIR registered by the cyber crime police station, Kohima, under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and Information Technology Act, concerning duping of gullible investors, who were promised astronomical returns on investing money, claimed to be used for the

mining of Bitcoins and other Cryptocurrencies, for which an App based Token by the name of "HPZ Token" was used.

The ED investigation revealed that various bank accounts and merchant IDs were opened by various shell entities having dummy directors/proprietors only for rota-

tion/layering of proceeds of crime representing funds fraudulently received for illegal online gaming and betting and investment for Bitcoin mining.

It said for an investment of ₹ 57,000, returns of ₹ 4,000 per day for three months were promised but money was paid only once, and thereafter fresh funds were sought.

Earlier, the ED had conducted search operations at 44 locations throughout the country. An amount of ₹ 176.67 crore, maintained by shell entities in various banks/virtual accounts, was frozen. Further, movable and immovable properties to the extent of ₹ 278.70 crore held in the name of dummy entities were attached.

The ED said the total seizure and attachment stood at ₹ 455.37 crore, adding further investigation is in progress.

Mine Protected Vehicles for Manipur Police



IMPHAL, March 6: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh launched seven Mine Protected Vehicles (MPV) for Manipur Police on Wednesday at the 1st Manipur Rifles Parade Ground in Imphal.

Manipur DGP Rajiv Singh thanked the chief minister for the MPVs and for motivating the force. Stating that three more MPVs are to arrive, he assured that the vehicles will be used for dominating areas and keeping the people of Manipur safe and secure.

The launching of the vehicles was also attended by ministers, MLAs, chief secretary Dr Vineet Joshi, security advisor Kuldip Singh, senior administrative and police officers among others.

Manipur students' body welcomes bill to prevent malpractices in exams

IMPHAL, March 6: A students' body in Manipur on Tuesday welcomed the passing of "The Manipur Prevention of Malpractices in High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Higher Secondary Education (HSE) Bill 2024" by the state Assembly.

The Manipur Prevention of Malpractices in High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Higher Secondary Education (HSE) Bill 2024 was passed by the Manipur Legislative Assembly on Monday.

It is a legislative measure that aims at curbing malpractices in the examination processes for high school and higher secondary education in the state.

This bill encompasses a range of provisions to ensure integrity and fairness of conducting the examinations, including measures to prevent cheating, fraud, and other forms of misconduct during HSLC and HSE examinations.

The bill included stricter enforcement of examination rules and regulations, enhanced monitoring and surveillance during examination periods, penalties for individuals found guilty of malpractice, and measures to promote transparency and accountability in the examination process.

While welcoming the passing of the bill, Democratic Students' Alliance of Manipur (DESAM) hoped that the bill would surely get the assent of the Governor to convert it into Act.

The DESAM, in a statement, said that as a students' body, it has been pressing the state government, chief minister, education

minister and higher authorities of the pertinent department to enforce a law which can effectively check malpractices by the students in exams.

As a result of it, a cabinet meeting of the incumbent government, on December 4, 2023, decided to enforce a law to deal with the malpractices in the exams.

The long pending demand was translated into action by passing the bill by the house of the state Assembly on Monday (March 4), it said.

The DESAM expressed its gratitude to the members of the house for supporting the bill. It also thanked state education minister Thounaojam Basantakumar for his effort to materialize the demand.

The DESAM recalled and said that it had approached the Manipur Human Rights Commission (MHRC) in the form of a petition in 2020 to recommend the state government to enforce a law that will check malpractices in the exams effectively.

The MHRC took it up as a case and recommended the state government for making a legislation prohibiting unfair practices during X and XII examinations. For this, the DESAM lauded the then acting chairman, Khaidem Mani who sent the recommendation on March 11, 2021.

Following the recommendation, the DESAM has been pressing the state education minister, director of education and concerned authorities to consider the recommendation of the MHRC positively, it added.

Mizoram govt mulls corporatisation of power dept

AIZAWL, March 6: The Mizoram government is mulling an option to corporatise the state's power department so that it functions efficiently, the assembly was informed on Wednesday.

Replying to a question from ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) member H Ginzalala, power minister F Rodingliana said that steps are being taken to divide the department into three functional segments-transmission, generation and distribution strategic business unit (SBU) to corporatise the department.

The minister also said the state government is planning to construct three dams to generate electricity.

Measures are being taken to construct a 150-MW hydroelectric project in the Tuivai river in Saitual district near Manipur border, a 120-MW unit in the Tlawng river and a 24-MW project in the Tuirini river near Sawsaw village in Aizawl district, he said. Rodingliana had earlier said that the state government was planning to construct four more solar power plants, which together can generate 45 MW of electricity. (PTI)

Storm of Sandeshkhali will reach every part of Bengal, decimate TMC: PM

BARASAT (WB), March 6: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday tore into the Trinamool Congress, asserting that the "storm of Sandeshkhali" will echo throughout West Bengal, where "Nari Shakti" (woman power) would play a pivotal role in decimating the ruling party in the Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a rally in Barasat, the headquarters of North 24 Parganas district where Sandeshkhali is located, Modi said whatever happened with women in Sandeshkhali "is a matter of shame".

The riverine island of Sandeshkhali has been on the boil over allegations of sexual atrocities on women and land grabbing by suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh and his cohorts.

He accused the TMC government of prioritising appeasement politics over ensuring the safety of women in the state.

"TMC leaders are committing atrocities against sisters and daughters of poor, Dalit and tribal families at various places. The women of Bengal and the country are incensed. This storm of Sandeshkhali will reach every part of West Bengal, and decimate the TMC across the state," Modi said.

The PM highlighted the historical significance of West Bengal



as a beacon of women's empowerment, lamenting that under the TMC rule, the state has witnessed "grave atrocities" against women. "The land of Bengal has been a source of inspiration for women's power. But on this very land, women have been subjected to atrocities under the TMC rule. Whatever has happened in Sandeshkhali will lower anybody's head in shame. But, the TMC government here does not care about the sorrows of women," he said.

Alleging that the TMC was shielding criminals, Modi said that despite legal intervention, the state authorities resisted the arrest of those responsible for the

Sandeshkhali incidents.

"The TMC used all its power to protect the criminals. However, the state government suffered a setback, first from the high court and then from the Supreme Court," he said.

Hitting out at the TMC for acting at the behest of touts and playing appeasement politics, Modi said, "The TMC government, working under the pressure of touts, can never provide security to sisters and daughters. On the other hand, there is the BJP-led central government, which has made provisions for even death penalty in case of serious crimes like rape."

The prime minister also

slammed the Mamata Banerjee-led party for its failure to implement central initiatives such as a women's helpline, designed to aid them in distress.

"We had created this helpline so that our sisters can easily complain in times of crisis. However, the TMC government is not allowing this system to be implemented here. Such an anti-women government can never do any good for women," he said.

He described the TMC as a hindrance to Bengal's development and urged the electorate to reject the opposition bloc INDIA and vote in favour of the BJP.

"Bengal is faced with an eclipse called TMC. Therefore, all of you, the sisters and mothers, have to defeat the opposition alliance and make the lotus bloom in every corner of the country," the prime minister said.

Modi also asserted that 140 crore Indians are "my family", as he mounted a counter-offensive over the "no family" jibe at him by leaders of the opposition alliance.

"Sensing the return of the NDA (after the Lok Sabha polls), all the leaders of INDI alliance are nervous. They have started hurling abuses at me now. These corrupt leaders of the block are asking about my family, claiming that Modi does not have his own fam-

ily, this is because I speak against dynasty politics and nepotism," he said.

The PM's comments comes in the backdrop of a remark by RJD supremo Lalu Prasad during a recent grand alliance rally in Patna, where he questioned Modi's familial background and criticised him for not adhering to traditional Hindu customs.

"The entire country is my family, 140 crore Indians are my family. Every ounce of Modi's body and every moment of his life is dedicated to this family. When I face any problem, these mothers, sisters and daughters stand as a shield," he asserted.

He also said that the BJP-led central government has been working sincerely for the progress of West Bengal and the country. "Today, Kolkata Metro is also witness to the rapid pace of the BJP's development work. In the 40 years before 2014, only 28 km of Kolkata Metro route was built, whereas in the last 10 years of the BJP government, it has been expanded by another 31 km," he said.

Earlier in the day, Modi inaugurated the Kolkata Metro's Esplanade-Howrah Maidan section, which passes below the mighty Hooghly River through the country's first underwater transportation tunnel. (PTI)

Karnataka Deputy CM claims several opposition leaders will join Congress



HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA), March 6: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar claimed on Wednesday several leaders from opposition parties will be joining the ruling Congress in the coming days, and that he does not want to divulge the "secret" now.

He also did not rule out the possibility of "rebel" BJP MLAs S T Somashekar and Arabail Shivaram Hebbur joining Congress.

"Why take just two-three names?" Shivakumar asked reporters here, in response to a question on whether Somashekar and Hebbur are joining the Congress.

He subsequently nodded his head in agreement, when asked whether more people will be joining the party.

Questioned as to how many will be joining Congress from other parties, the state Congress chief said: "why talk about it now? I have told our party workers to induct all those willing and who have regards for the party, locally."

Asked if MLAs from other parties will be joining Congress, he

said, "How can I divulge the secrets?"

Hebbur, MLA from Yellapur, did not turn up for the voting despite a party whip, citing health grounds, while Yeshwanthpur MLA Somashekar cross-voted in favour of Congress in the name of "conscience", during the polls to four seats of Rajya Sabha from Karnataka on February 27, in an embarrassment to the BJP.

Somashekar and Hebbur were earlier in the Congress. They were among 17 Congress-JD(S) legislators, who had quit from their parties, which ultimately led to the collapse of the then H D Kumaraswamy-led coalition government in July, 2019. They had subsequently won the bypolls on BJP ticket and served as Ministers in the previous saffron party government.

Shivakumar and several other Congress leaders have earlier too made claims about more BJP and JD(S) leaders joining the party, especially in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls. (PTI)

CBI team reaches CID headquarters to take custody of Shajahan Sheikh

KOLKATA, March 6: A team of CBI officials on Wednesday evening reached the CID headquarters to take custody of Sandeshkhali ED official attack case accused Shajahan Sheikh, after a fresh directive by the Calcutta High Court this morning.

A team of CBI officials reached Bhawani Bhawan before 4 PM.

The CBI on Tuesday failed to get the custody of suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh from the West Bengal CID even after waiting for more than two hours.

The CID said the leader of Sandeshkhali was not handed over to the central agency as the

state government has moved the Supreme Court against an order of the Calcutta High Court.

In a fresh directive on Wednesday, the Calcutta High Court ordered the West Bengal government to hand over the Sandeshkhali ED official attack case accused Shajahan Sheikh to the CBI by 4.15 pm.

The high court directed the state government to "immediately implement" its Tuesday's judgement to transfer a case on the attack on Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials at Sandeshkhali to the CBI and hand over custody of the main accused Sheikh to the central agency. (PTI)

Under PM Modi's leadership, India has come from 'Fragile 5' to top 5 economies: Shah

MUMBAI, March 6: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India has transformed from 'Fragile Five' to top five economies in the world.

Before 2014, the Indian economy was fragile, inflation was high and fiscal deficit was beyond control, Shah said at the India Global Forum's annual investment summit NXT10 in Mumbai.

Today, India has emerged as a policy-driven state, he said, adding the country will be a USD 4 trillion economy by 2025," he said.

"Our target is to set up a space station by 2025," he said.

The home minister also said he was confident that India will be rid of the Left Wing Extremism in the next two years.

"We are approaching elections with our government's performance

of last 10 years and roadmap of next 25 years," the Union minister said ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Lauding Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a visionary PM, Shah said that by 2047, when the country celebrates its centenary of independence, Bharat will be completely developed, atmanirbhar (self-reliant) and among the top three economies in the world.

"Bharat is a self-confident and self-reliant country, which has transformed itself from a dormant to a dynamic government, from regressive to progressive growth, and from a fragile economy to a top economy," Shah said.

The progress made in the last 10 years should be compared with the previous UPA government's decade, he said.

"Unless you do not know how deep the pothole was, you cannot un-

derstand the progress we achieved," the senior BJP said

"Inflation reached double-digit growth during the Congress-led UPA regime; our government has contained it below 5 per cent. The country's confidence was shaken due to various scams of ₹ 12 lakh crore during the UPA's tenure, crony capitalism was at its peak," he said

"The fiscal deficit was beyond control, and we were at the bottom of the ease-of-doing-business rankings. The country's ratings declined while the banks struggled with their balance sheets. The country faced political instability for 30 years," he said. After the Congress, BJP became the only party which came to power with an absolute majority, Shah said.

He said the average inflation rate from 2004 to 2014 was 8.2 per cent and in double digits between 2010-11 and 2013-14.

"The ten years of UPA were almost missing from the country's growth story. You cannot even find those years. Nothing happened in those 10 years in the name of growth. Modiji took reins of the country in such conditions (in 2014)," he said.

The country's GDP growth in 2013-14 was 6.9 per cent, and today it stands at 8.4 per cent, Shah said.

"The per capita GDP was USD 3,889 in the UPA period, which jumped to USD 6,000 during the Modi government. The value of electronics exports was USD 7.6 billion during the UPA period, which increased to USD 23 billion under the Modi government. Forex reserves also jumped from USD 305 billion to USD 600 billion. There were 350 start-ups in the country before 2014, which now stand at 1,17,000," he said. (PTI)

'Cong committed to nationwide caste census'

NEW DELHI, March 6: The Congress on Wednesday reiterated its commitment to conducting a nationwide socio-economic caste census as part of its participatory justice agenda and asked the BJP to clear its stand on the issue.

Noting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be in Bihar's Bettiah on Wednesday, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh claimed that there would be a "barrage of lies and statements" and urged the prime minister to speak on the issue of caste census. Ramesh said the people of the country have four main questions for Modi, including why his government is not conducting the regular census that takes place every 10 years.

"This was to happen in 2021 itself but has not been conducted till now. The census will provide a complete picture of the population of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and linguistic and religious minorities, apart from other data," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

Why has the Modi government not released the caste-related data under the socio-economic caste census conducted in 2011, which was collected from 25 crore families, Ramesh asked.

"The INDIA coalition government in Bihar conducted the socio-economic caste census and released its results. What is the vision of the 'new' NDA government in Bihar to advance social and economic justice for the disadvantaged communities and families revealed in the census?" he asked.

"The Congress party is committed to conducting a nationwide comprehensive socio-economic caste census as part of its participatory justice agenda. Our state governments across the country are taking initiatives for this in their respective states. What is the BJP's stand on this issue?" the Congress leader asked. (PTI)

Commuters must prepare for traffic jams, say police; security mounted

NEW DELHI, March 6: Commuters may face traffic jams due to farmers' protest on Wednesday, police said. In morning, a huge jam was already witnessed at Delhi-Haryana's Singhu border, according to reports.

The Delhi Police **FARMERS PROTEST:** deployed at railway and metro stations and bus stands as the farmers would also be coming in public transport like trains and buses.

"Section 144 is already imposed in Delhi. We will not allow any gathering or assembly anywhere here," the officer said. Security has been mounted at ISBT Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar, and Sarai Kale Khan. "No one will be allowed to breach the law," the officer said.

The Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), the two umbrella bodies that are spearheading the farmers' agitation, had on Sunday called on

commuters at the Singhu and the Tikri borders. The deployment of police and paramilitary personnel is still there and (they) will ensure strict, round-the-clock vigil."

Additional police and paramilitary forces have been deployed at railway and metro stations and bus stands as the farmers would also be coming in public transport like trains and buses.

"Section 144 is already imposed in Delhi. We will not allow any gathering or assembly anywhere here," the officer said. Security has been mounted at ISBT Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar, and Sarai Kale Khan. "No one will be allowed to breach the law," the officer said.

The Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), the two umbrella bodies that are spearheading the farmers' agitation, had on Sunday called on

farmers across the country to reach Delhi on Wednesday. The call was made by farmer leaders Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal.

The two have also called for a four-hour nationwide 'rail roko' agitation on March 10 in support of several of their demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price for crops. The leaders said the sacrifice of a farmer will not go in vain and their struggle will continue until their demands are met.

A 21-year-old farmer was killed and a few others injured following a clash between security personnel and protesting farmers at Khanauri on the Punjab-Haryana border last month. The protesting farmers have been pitching their tents at the Shambhu and the Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana after their 'Delhi Chalo' march was stopped by security forces. (PTI)

At Bihar rally, Modi terms RJD supremo Lalu and family 'biggest offenders' of state

BETTIAH (BIHAR), March 6: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday called RJD president Lalu Prasad and his family "the biggest offenders of Bihar", accusing them of ushering in jungle raj in the state during its more than a decade-long rule.

Addressing a rally in Bettiah, West Champaran district, Modi alleged that the youths of Bihar had been compelled to migrate in large numbers due to the misrule of the RJD-Congress combine. He asserted that it was only after the NDA took charge that the state began to witness improvements.

"The family responsible for jungle raj...they are biggest offenders (sabse bade gunahgar) of Bihar. Their misrule imperilled the future of an entire generation. Youths were forced to migrate to other parts of the country, while only one family prospered", said Modi.

The PM also reacted to Prasad's barb that his attacks on dynastic politics stemmed from his having "no family" and said "had people like Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Karpoori Thakur been alive, these people would have attacked them, too,

for not promoting their own families".

"Their main grouse against me seems to be that I have no family. For me, the entire country is my family. And today the entire nation is saying that it sees itself as Modi Ka Parivar", the PM said.

Notably, leaders and supporters of the BJP have suffixed "Modi Ka Parivar" to their social media handles, in an obvious rebuff to the RJD supremo and in a show of solidarity with the PM.

In an apparent reference to DMK leader A Raja's controversial remarks, the PM said, "West Champaran is the land of Sage Valmiki, where Goddess Sita took shelter and Luv-Kush were born. The people here will not forgive the insults being heaped on Lord Ram by INDI alliance leaders. The people are also taking note as to who are encouraging such attacks on our culture and tradition".

The Prime Minister also renewed the pitch for a "400 plus tally" for the BJP-led NDA in upcoming Lok Sabha polls, asserting that it was "needed to make India the third largest economy in the world and to pull people out of the clutches of poverty". (PTI)

Bakshi Stadium draped in national tricolour for PM's visit

SRINAGAR, March 6: The Bakshi Stadium here has been draped in national tricolour for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on Thursday even as stringent security arrangements have been put in place to ensure the high profile event passes off peacefully.

Prime Minister Modi will participate in the 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Jammu Kashmir' programme at the stadium.

The officials said that tight security arrangements have been made for the visit of the prime minister, which will be his first to the valley since abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

The security forces have been deployed in numbers all along the routes to be taken by Prime Minister Modi during his stay in Srinagar while barricades have been established at many places to prevent movement of the people during the VVIP visit, the officials said.

Drones and CCTV cameras are being used for surveillance while

foot patrolling by the security forces has been intensified in a two kilometre radius around the venue.

Marine commandos have been deployed in river Jhelum and Dal Lake to prevent the use of these water bodies for any subversive activities, they said.

Several schools falling along the route to be taken by the prime minister have been closed for Wednesday and Thursday while board examinations scheduled to be held on Thursday have been postponed till next month.

Prime Minister Modi, during the visit, will dedicate to the nation ₹ 5,000 crore programme - the 'Holistic Agriculture Development Programme' - for boosting agriculture in Jammu and Kashmir, an official handout said here on Wednesday.

Modi will also dedicate to the nation and launch multiple projects worth over ₹ 1,400 crore under Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation



Drive) scheme, including the project for 'Integrated Development of Hazratbal Shrine', Srinagar.

He will also launch the 'Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice Tourist Destination Poll' and 'Chalo India Global Diaspora Campaign'. The prime minister will also announce tourist destinations selected under Challenge Based Destination Development (CBDD) Scheme.

The 'Holistic Agriculture Development Programme' (HADP) programme is expected to equip about

2.5 lakh farmers with skill development via dedicated Daksh Kisan portal.

Under the programme, about 2,000 Kisan Khidmat Ghars will be established and robust value chains will be put in place for the welfare of the farming community, the official handout said.

The multiple initiatives under the Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD schemes to be dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Modi include development of 'Integrated Development of Hazratbal Shrine' in Srinagar, J&K; tourism facilities developed in Northeast circuit in Meghalaya; Spiritual Circuit in Bihar and Rajasthan; Rural and Tirthankar Circuit in Bihar; development of Jogulamba Devi Temple, Jogulamba Gadwal District, Telangana; and development of Amarkantak Temple, Anuppur District, Madhya Pradesh.

Besides, Prime Minister Modi will distribute appointment orders to about 1,000 new government recruits of Jammu and Kashmir and will also interact with beneficiaries of various government schemes, including women achievers, lakshadi patis, farmers and entrepreneurs etc.

The 'Holistic Agriculture Development Programme' (HADP) programme is expected to equip about

2.5 lakh farmers with skill development via dedicated Daksh Kisan portal.

Under the programme, about 2,000 Kisan Khidmat Ghars will be established and robust value chains will be put in place for the welfare of the farming community, the official handout said.

The multiple initiatives under the Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD schemes to be dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Modi include development of 'Integrated Development of Hazratbal Shrine' in Srinagar, J&K; tourism facilities developed in Northeast circuit in Meghalaya; Spiritual Circuit in Bihar and Rajasthan; Rural and Tirthankar Circuit in Bihar; development of Jogulamba Devi Temple, Jogulamba Gadwal District, Telangana; and development of Amarkantak Temple, Anuppur District, Madhya Pradesh.

Prime Minister Modi will also launch about 43 projects that will develop a wide range of pilgrim-

age and tourist sites across the country.

These include important religious sites like the Annavaram Temple in Kakinada district of Andhra Pradesh; Navagraha temples in Thanjavur and Mayiladuthurai district of Tamil Nadu and Karaikal district of Puducherry, Sri Chamundeshwari Devi Temple, Mysore District, Karnataka; Karmi Mata Mandir, Bikaner District Rajasthan; Maa Chintpurni Temple, Una District, Himachal Pradesh; Basilica of Bom Jesus Church, Goa, among others.

The projects also include development of various other sites and experience centres like Mechuka Adventure Park in Ananuchal Pradesh; Rural Tourism Cluster Experience at Gunji, Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand; Ecotourism zone at Ananthagiri forest, Ananthagiri, Telangana; Meghalayan Age Cave Experience and Waterfall Trails Experience at Sohra, Meghalaya; Reimagining Cinnamara Tea Es-

tate, Jorhat, Assam; Ecotourism experience at Kanji Wetland, Kapurthala, Punjab; Julley Leh Biodiversity Park, Leh, among others.

During the programme, Prime Minister Modi will announce 42 tourist destinations selected under Challenge Based Destination Development (CBDD) Scheme. The innovative scheme, announced during Union Budget 2023-24, aims to provide end-to-end tourist experiences by catalysing development of tourist destinations while also promoting sustainability and ushering competitiveness in the tourism sector.

The 42 destinations have been identified in four categories (16 in Culture & Heritage Destination; 11 in spiritual destinations; 10 in Ecotourism and Amrit Dharohar; and 5 in Vibrant Village).

Prime Minister Modi will launch the first ever nation-wide initiative to identify the pulse of the nation on tourism, in the form of 'Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice 2024'. (PTI)

Illegal construction in Corbett: SC raps former Uttarakhand forest minister Rawat, ex-forest officer

NEW DELHI, March 6: Observing that the "public trust doctrine" has been thrown into the waste bin, the Supreme Court on Wednesday pulled up former Uttarakhand minister Harak Singh Rawat and a former divisional forest officer for allowing illegal construction and felling of trees in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR).

A bench headed by Justice B R Gavai said it was amazed at the audacity of Rawat, who was the forest minister in the BJP government in 2021 and is now with the Congress, and former divisional forest officer Kishan Chand in giving statutory provisions a total go by.

"Since the matter is pending investigation by the CBI, we do not propose to comment any further on the matter. We have also observed that this cannot be done by two persons only. Many other persons must have been involved," the bench, also comprising justices P K Mishra and Sandeep Mehta, said.

The apex court directed the CBI, which is already probing the case, to file its status report in the matter within three months.

"This is a case where bureaucrats and politicians have thrown public trust doctrine in the waste bin," it added.

The top court said even after the National Tiger Conservation Authority found Chand involved in serious irregularities, Rawat not only overruled the recommendation of the Secretary (Forest) for suspension but also justified his proposed posting to the Lansdowne Division.

"It was only after the then Forest Minister demitted his office, that Mr. Kishan Chand, DFO could be put under suspension," it said.



The court's judgement came on a petition filed by environment activist and lawyer Gaurav Bansal alleging destruction of the tiger habitat and a decline in the tiger density in the Lansdowne Forest Division owing to illegal construction in the Pakhro Tiger Safari as well as illicit felling of thousands of trees.

"They (Rawat and Chand) have, in blatant disregard of the law and for commercial purposes, indulged in mass felling of trees to construct buildings on the pretext of promotion of tourism," the bench said, adding that the state cannot run away from the responsibility of restoring the status of the forest.

The court said it was amazed at the audacity of Rawat and Chand in giving statutory provisions a total go by.

The Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court had earlier held Rawat and Chand responsible for various illegal activities, including constructions in connection with a tiger safari in 2021, in the Pakhro and Morghatti forest areas of the Kalagarh

Forest Division of the CTR. In its report submitted to the apex court, the committee held Rawat and Chand guilty of construction activities in connection with the tiger safari and other illegal projects in the Pakhro and Morghatti forest areas.

It had also given its green signal to the Uttarakhand vigilance department to continue with the legal proceedings against the forest officials involved in the irregularities.

The committee had said even when the media was reporting all kinds of disturbances in Pakhro and Morghatti, the then chief wildlife warden and the state government did not take action against the culprits.

The CTR, famous for the Royal Bengal Tiger, remains closed for tourists during monsoon and opens in October-November.

Spread over an area of 1,288.31 sq km, it is known for its biodiversity and the density of tigers here is the highest in the world.

Rawat was the forest minister in the BJP government in Uttarakhand in

2021. He was expelled by the saffron party ahead of the 2022 state assembly polls, following which he joined the Congress.

The bench said safaris which are already existing and the one under construction at Pakhrou will not be disturbed.

"However, insofar as the Safari at 'Pakhrou' is concerned, we direct the state of Uttarakhand to relocate or establish a rescue centre in the vicinity of the 'Tiger Safari'.

It directed the Union Environment Ministry to appoint a committee consisting of a representatives of the NTCA, Wildlife Institute of India, CEC and an officer of the MoEF not below the rank of joint secretary as its member secretary.

The committee shall recommend the measures for restoration of the damages, in the local in situ environment to its original state before the damage was caused.

"It shall assess the environmental damage caused in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) and quantify the costs for restoration and identify the persons/officials responsible for such a damage.

"Needless to state that the state shall recover the cost so quantified from the persons/delinquent officers found responsible for the same. The cost so recovered shall be exclusively used for the purpose of restoration of the damage caused to the environment," the bench said.

The apex court directed Uttarakhand to complete the disciplinary proceedings against the delinquent officers as expeditiously as possible and in any case, within a period of six months from today. (PTI)

RRTS now operational from Sahibabad to Modinagar North



NEW DELHI, March 6: With the flagging off of 17-km Dubai-Modi Nagar North section of the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor, the Namo Bharat train becomes operational on 34 km of the corridor, spanning eight stations from Sahibabad to Modi Nagar North.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the additional section on Wednesday remotely from Kolkata.

The extension encompasses three stations — Murad Nagar, Modi Nagar South and Modi Nagar North.

The Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor, stretching over 82 km, is expected to shrink travel time between Delhi and Meerut to less than an hour.

Speaking at the inauguration, Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said once the entire Rapid Rail Transit System is ready, it will be the "second largest metro system" in the

country. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we could develop this corridor at such a fast pace. The work of RRTS and its quality is the finest in the country. One the entire rapid rail transit system is ready, it will be the second largest metro system in the country," Puri said.

According to the National Capital Region Transport Corporation, or NCRTC, on the Murad Nagar Station, the work of Automatic Fare Collection (AFC) System, Platform Screen Door (PSD), CCTV installation, Customer Service Centre, Ticketing Counter, Railing and Washroom construction is over.

"Along with this, escalators and lifts have also been installed for movement from the concourse to the platform level.

"Presently the work of roof sealing, painting and lighting

of the station is going on. For the convenience of passengers, two entry and exit gates are being built in the station, the construction work of which is in the final stage," the NCRTC said.

The Murad Nagar Station has been connected with the Murad Nagar Bus Stand under multimodal integration to ease passenger movement.

Modi Nagar has been given two stations — Modi Nagar South and Modi Nagar North — under the project, in view of intractable traffic jams the stretch often witnesses.

The length of both these stations is approximately 215 metres, width approximately 25 metres, and height of the platform approximately 16 metres.

"There is usually a traffic jam in Modi Nagar from Modi Mill till Raj Chowpla. Many a time, it takes hours for people to cross this area.

"In view of the dense population of people in this area, NCRTC has decided to build two stations here, Modi Nagar South and Modi Nagar North. With these two stations, Modi Nagar will get relief from the problem of severe traffic jam," the NCRTC said.

The newly-added 17-km stretch of the Namo Bharat train extends the coverage of the Delhi-Meerut RRTS corridor beyond its initial operational 'priority section'.

The RRTS boasts a design speed of 180 kmph and operation speed of 160 kmph. (PTI)

NDRF rescuers patrol with ITBP to train for rescue operations in Himalayas

NEW DELHI, March 6: NDRF personnel are undertaking long-range patrols with ITBP troops along the India-China Line of Actual Control (LAC) to prepare themselves before getting stationed at high-altitude locations in the Himalayas for undertaking rescue operations during disasters like avalanches, landslides and glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs).

NDRF Director General (DG) Atul Karwal told PTI during an interaction that the federal contingency force is in discussion with border-guarding forces that have a presence in these forward areas. The aim is to have a small team of rescuers that can be co-located at the outposts of forces, such as the BSF and SSB, in the four states of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) prepared an action plan last year to train its saviours in tackling natural and man-made catastrophes in these fragile mountain ranges on India's north and northeast which, according to experts, may see a rise in disasters leading to loss of lives due to a variety of reasons, including climate change and increased human activity.

"We want to keep some of our small teams functional at higher altitudes at all times. Four areas have been chosen for permanently stationing these teams and they are in Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim. Once these teams are available at high altitudes, they can be rushed immediately," Karwal said.

Raised in 2006 as the national rescue-and-response force during calamities, the NDRF has felt over the last few years that if its personnel are not acclimatised to the mountain terrain, they cannot respond to a man-made or natural accident taking place there effectively. In fact, it feels they may suffer losses.

Mountaineering experts underline the principle of getting physically accustomed to the environment in the mountains before undertaking any task, as high altitude leads to difficult climatic conditions like thin oxygen levels and sub-zero temperatures.

"Even if my rescuers are based in a place like Srinagar (in Jammu and Kashmir), they cannot be airlifted immediately in case of a disaster that strikes in the higher reaches as they are not acclimatised. They need to be pre-acclimatised throughout the year..." Karwal said.

"We are coordinating with border forces like the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) with a request to accommodate a team of five-six NDRF rescuers at their high-altitude border posts ranging between a height of about 9,000 and 10,000 feet. It will be difficult

for us to deploy independent teams as logistics will be an issue," he added. Karwal said the rescuers will follow all the protocols that are undertaken by these forces for acclimatisation, including medical setup, ration etc.

"Our personnel are also undertaking long-range patrols (LRPs) with the ITBP in order to have familiarisation of the mountain areas and build confidence to operate there," the NDRF chief said.

The ITBP is primarily tasked with guarding the 3,488-km-long LAC with China, while the SSB guards the unfenced Indian frontiers with Nepal and Bhutan. Both the forces are present in far-flung mountain border areas in large numbers and their LRPs range anywhere between seven and 10 days, covering around 40 to 60 km, criss-crossing rivers and valleys.

Karwal said keeping this disaster-rescue challenge in mind, a mountaineering expedition was conducted in the NDRF for the first time last year, while another one is planned for 2024. "In all, about 650 of our rescuers have been trained in mountaineering till now," he added.

The NDRF DG said global climate data indicates that disasters like GLOFs, landslides and avalanches in the fragile ecology "will give us more challenges as time goes by".

The United Nations' data of 1980 to 2020 says the number of these disasters has gone up by almost one-and-a-half times and in the last two years, "we have seen that they are increasing in frequency, they are unseasoned and they are becoming more ferocious, more virulent when they hit", Karwal, who himself has scaled the Mount Everest, said.

During an event held last year, Karwal had highlighted how disasters in the Himalayas pose a challenge.

"The Himalayas are a young mountain range. The forces that made them are still at work and hence, these ranges are not settled and stable. Something is changing here and the reasons attributed to these by experts are many, such as climate change, uncontrolled development and a breach of the load-bearing capacity of these regions," he had said.

The NDRF DG spoke about the 2013 flash floods in Uttarakhand, the February 2021 GLOF in the border town of Chamoli in the hill state and the incident of land subsidence in Joshimath and nearby areas as some of the disasters that occurred in the mountainous regions in the recent past.

"There is full possibility of such disasters occurring much more than before and in an aggravated manner and hence, the NDRF has to be prepared to meet these challenges," Karwal said in January 2023. (PTI)

PM unveils ambitious infrastructure projects in Bihar and Kolkata

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 6: Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked a significant milestone on Wednesday as he laid the foundation stone and inaugurated multiple infrastructure projects in Bihar, with a total investment of approximately ₹ 12,800 crore.

The projects encompassed various domains including rail, road, and petroleum and natural gas sectors, aiming to bolster connectivity and enhance transportation facilities in the region.

In a grand ceremony held in Bettiah, West Champaran district, Bihar, Prime Minister Modi dedicated several railway projects to the nation's development.

Among the notable inaugurations were the doubling of the 62 km rail line from Bapudham



Motihari to Piprahan and Narkatiaganj to Gaunaha Gauge Conversion.

Additionally, he laid the foundation stone for the doubling and electrification of the 96 km long Gorakhpur Cantt - Valmiki Nagar rail line and the redevelopment of Bettiah railway station.

Furthermore, two new train services between Narkatiaganj - Gaunaha and Raxaul - Joghani were flagged off by the Prime Minister.

Addressing the gathering, Prime Minister Modi emphasised the significance of these initiatives in boosting the 'Made in India' campaign and generating employment opportunities for citizens.

He highlighted the government's efforts in establishing modern rail engine manufacturing factories in Bihar, underscoring the commitment to indigenous manufacturing.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Modi made headlines by inaugurating the country's first underwater metro transportation tunnel in Kolkata.

The groundbreaking project, with an investment of ₹ 15,400 crores, aims to revolutionize urban transportation in the city. The Prime Minister embarked

on a symbolic ride on the Esplanade - Howrah Maidan metro route, traversing through the underwater tunnel, and interacted with workers and school children during his journey.

The unveiling of these ambitious infrastructure projects underscores the government's commitment to fostering economic growth, improving connectivity, and embracing cutting-edge technology to propel India into a new era of development.

With these monumental inaugurations, Prime Minister Modi has once again demonstrated his administration's unwavering dedication to transforming the nation's infrastructure landscape, promising a brighter future for all citizens.

Lucknow: Twin cylinder blast kills 5 of family

LUCKNOW, March 6: Five people of a family were killed and four others got injured when two LPG cylinders exploded in a house in the Hata Hazrat Sahab area here, police said on Wednesday.

The incident took place on Tuesday around 10.30 pm in the area under Kakori Police Station jurisdiction. The blast was preceded by a fire, which was said to have been caused by a short circuit.

It took three teams of fire brigade and help from locals to douse the fire.

Nine members of the family were rushed to the Trauma Centre of King George Medical University, where five of them died, police said.

The deceased were identified as Mushir, 50, his wife Husn Bano, 45, Raiya, 7, Uma, 4, and Hina, 2, they said. (PTI)

Govt joins with IISc to establish Int'l Centre of Excellence for Dams

NEW DELHI, March 6: In a significant move towards bolstering dam safety measures, the Central Water Commission (CWC) has forged a partnership with the prestigious Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore for establishing the International Centre of Excellence for Dams (ICED).

The collaboration, formalised through a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) on March 4, marks the establishment of the ICED under the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) Phase II and III, according to an official statement by the Jal Shakti Ministry.

The MoA, effective for ten

years or until the conclusion of DRIP Phase-II and III scheme, underscores a joint commitment to enhancing dam safety through specialised technical support, research, and innovation, it said.

ICED is poised to serve as a hub for investigations, modelling, and providing technical solutions to challenges encountered in dam safety, both domestically and internationally, the ministry said.

The Centre's mandate encompasses a broad spectrum of activities aimed at advancing dam safety practices.

Specifically, ICED will focus on areas such as advanced construction and reha-

ilitation materials, material testing for dams, and comprehensive multi-hazard risk assessment.

The ministry reserved the flexibility to incorporate emerging areas in dam safety through mutual agreement.

To facilitate the establishment and operation of ICED, the Jal Shakti Ministry will provide a grant of Rs. 118.05 crore.

This funding will support the procurement of essential equipment, the initiation of research activities, and the modernisation of infrastructure, including the establishment of new laboratories. (PTI)

Short term PM2.5 exposure caused a million premature deaths annually from 2000-19: Lancet study

NEW DELHI, March 6: Breathing in air having fine particulate matter (PM2.5) even for a few hours and up to a few days, resulted in more than a million premature deaths globally every year from 2000 to 2019, according to a new research.

It also found that Asia accounted for roughly 65 per cent of the global mortality, with Eastern Asia accounting for more than 50 per cent. Further, more than one in every five of the total global deaths were found to occur in urban areas.

Analysing mortality and PM2.5 pollution in over 13,000 cities and towns around the world, researchers, led by those at Monash University, Australia, also showed that China consistently ranked as the topmost country in the aspect of mortality burden attributed to PM2.5 exposure in 2000, 2010, and 2019.

South Asian countries were also found to rise in rankings over the entire 20-year study period, with Bangladesh moving from 11th in 2000 to 3rd in 2019, India moving from 15th to 8th, and Pakistan moving from 14th to 9th.

In 2019, New Delhi in India and Guangzhou and Beijing in China ranked highest among the top 20 cities with the highest proportion of urban deaths attributed to PM2.5 exposure, the researchers said in



their study.

The study, published in The Lancet Planetary Health journal, is important because it is the first to look at short-term exposure globally, rather than the long-term impacts of persistent exposure such as for people living in cities with high pollution levels, said lead researcher Yuming Guo, Head of the Monash Climate, Air Quality Research Unit.

To date, most studies have focused on the health impacts of living in cities where pollution levels are consistently high, ignoring the frequent "spikes" in pollution impacting smaller urban areas and occurring due to, for instance, landscape fires, dust, and other intermittent extreme air-pollution concentration events, the researchers said.

"But this is the first study to map the

global impacts of these short bursts of air pollution exposure," said Guo.

According to Guo, the short-term health effects of being exposed to air pollution have been well documented, "such as the megafires in Australia during the so-called Black Summer of 2019-20 which were estimated to have led to 429 smoke-related premature deaths and 3230 hospital admissions as a result of acute and persistent exposure to extremely high levels of bushfire-related air pollution." The researchers also found that the mortality burden was highest in crowded, highly polluted areas in eastern Asia, southern Asia, and western Africa.

As such, the authors added that because of the high population densities in urban areas together with high levels of air pollution, "understanding the mortality burden associated with short-term exposure to PM2.5 in such areas is crucial for mitigating the negative effects of air pollution on the urban population."

The study recommended that where health is most affected by acute air pollution, implementing targeted interventions - such as air-pollution warning systems and community evacuation plans - to avoid transient exposure to high PM2.5 concentrations could mitigate its acute health damages. (PTI)

Tarot reader on run after raping woman in Delhi arrested



NEW DELHI, March 6: A 35-year-old tarot card reader was arrested in Himachal Pradesh for allegedly raping a woman in Delhi last year, police said earlier on Tuesday.

They said the woman informed police on March 1 that Sidhant Joshi allegedly raped her on the false promise of marriage after she approached him to resolve a grievance with her friend.

She also claimed that Joshi clicked private photos and videos of her to threaten her. Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Rohit Meena said.

The officer said an FIR was registered and a team was formed to nab the accused.

"Based on surveillance of the mobile phone of the accused, the team started chasing him. Our team chased him in Uttar Pradesh from Uttarakhand to Punjab and he was finally apprehended from Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh," the DCP said.

"The accused confessed his crime and disclosed that he exploited the victim multiple times. An FIR under sections 376 (rape) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC has been registered and further investigation is under progress," he added. (PTI)

Skill devt programme held in Hojai



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, March 6: The Assam regional office of NABARD through DDM NABARD, Hojai in association with local NGO Hojai Unnayan Manch, organized a 15 day long skill development training programme on pearl culture and agarbati making activity among 60 selected SHG members from Kandulimari and Radhanagar villages under Jugijan Development Block in Hojai district.

The programme was conducted under the Livelihood and Enterprise Development Programme (LEDP). Following the successful completion of the training programme, a valediction as well as certificates distribution programme was organized at the Dakshin Jugijan High School near Rajbari in Hojai district on March 4.

Hojai district commissioner Lasit Kr Das, DDM, NABARD Rajendra Perna, district agriculture officer Ranjith Mishra Bhagawati, superintendent of DoH&T Rabul Saikia, secretary of the Hojai Unnayan Manch Sujay Dutta and bankers from various local banks participated in the programme. During the programme, district commissioner Lasit Kr Das officially launched 'NABAHUM' a new local brand of agarbati, especially manufactured by the trainees of LEDP.

While addressing the occasion,

Women Commission meeting held in Dima Hasao



HT Correspondent
HAFLONG, March 6: A meeting with members of the state level Women Commission was held in the conference hall of the circuit house in Haflong in Dima Hasao district on Wednesday.

District, sub-divisional and block level members of the Women Commission and other stake holders participated in the meeting during which various issues regarding women were discussed.

During the course of the meeting several issues on women pertaining to the district were made. Members of the commission assured that regular monitoring and awareness campaigns will be held throughout the district in order to make the women more aware about their rights social and economic values etc.

Members of the State Women Commission, Mamoni Bora and Nang Lucky Gogoi then visited various spots like One Stop point, Rani Gaidinlu Chatravas Boro Haflong and Haflong Sub-Jail, where they took stock of the female inmates and expressed their view on their well being. They also expressed their willingness to take up the problems faced by the women folk with chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The meeting was attended by Dima Hasao district commissioner Simanta Kumar Das, superintendent of Police, Dima Hasao Mayank Kumar and other officials.

5 Bodoland Digital Literacy and Counselling Centers to be set up across BTR

BTR Govt signs MoU with NTPC Salakati to augment digital literacy

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 6: In yet another milestone, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the government of Bodoland Territorial Region and National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC) Salakati to extend support in establishment of five Bodoland Digital Literacy and Counselling Centers across the Bodoland region.

The MoU signing ceremony took place at BTC Secretariat conference hall, Bodofa, Nwgrw in Kokrajhar on Tuesday and was presided over by Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of BTR amidst the presence of officials from the government of BTR and NTPC Salakati, Kokrajhar.

Speaking on the occasion, CEM Boro said, "The BTR government is now embarking on a journey of partnerships with notable civil society organisations (CSOs) and foundations to augment social development in the region."

In this regard, he lauded the commitment of the NTPC Salakati to extend support in establishment of five Bodoland Digital Literacy & Counselling Centers across the BTR districts and assured that these centers will greatly benefit the children, college going students, job-seekers, SHGs, farmers and budding entrepreneurs by providing them tailor-made and cutting-edge hands-on training.

Five fully-equipped Bodoland



Digital Literacy & Counselling Centers will be established in five places of BTR, which included Baksa Degree College at Baganpara, in Baksa; Kalaguru Bishnu Rabha Degree College at Orang in Udalguri, Bengtol College at Chirang; Zamduar College at Sorabil in Kokrajhar and Tamulpur College in Tamulpur. These projects seek to address, on a priority basis, the multi-dimensional digital and career-oriented skilling needs of school children and youth, job-seekers and farmers in the light of post-conflict revitalization programme of systems, institutions and communities in BTR. These centers intend to fill up the void of access and availability of digital skilling and hands-on

training needs. Attending the MoU signing ceremony, executive director of NTPC-Salakati, Karunakar Das expressed his happiness and delight that the collaborative efforts of BTR Government and NTPC Salakati have resulted in a meaningful partnership.

"I am sure that the joint-activities within the purview of the MoU will reap positive results for the people of BTR," he said.

"These centres are in addition to the establishment of Bodoland Knowledge Centers (across 420 VDCs of BTR), Bodoland Science Mission and the establishment of Bodoland Digital Libraries in schools.

The existing efforts of the BTR

government to transform the educational landscape of BTR, under the visionary leadership of Pramod Boro, are on a right footing to make the region a hub of educational excellence in the coming days," expressed the principal secretary of BTR government, Akash Deep, while speaking on the occasion.

The event was also attended by executive members of BTR, Reo Reoa Narzihary and Wilson Hansda, education secretary, Amar Jyoti Barman, director of education, JP Brahma, principals of the five colleges where the projects would be established, AGM-HR of NTPC, Ongkar Nath and representatives of the implementing agencies NEFT and AGRA.

Irate mob prevents former militants from establishing village

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, March 6: A few former militants of Karbi Anglong have been prevented from establishing a village along the Assam-Nagaland inter-state border by an irate mob.

These former cadres of various militant outfits of Karbi Anglong had reportedly tried to set up a village along the Assam-Nagaland border under Khatkhati Police Station in Karbi Anglong on March 4. As they were clearing the area a mob armed with machetes, rods and sharp weapons came from the side of Nagaland and engaged in a verbal spat with them.

Addressing the media at Lahorijan on Wednesday, these former militants said that they knew the land near the Nirmal Kumar Tea Estate in Lahorijan is disputed and involved Pele Kheje of Nagaland and Amphu Engtipi.

"Pele Kheje had sent in his men to stop us. We were not in any way encroaching on the property of Nirmal Kumar Tea Estate. We were only trying to set up a village on the land near the tea estate," said a former militant. "We reported the matter to the Khatkhati police, but instead of providing us with security they began badmouthing us. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council should look into it before the matter went out of hand," he further said.

The former cadres belonged to the Karbi Peoples Liberation Tigers (KPLT-R), KPLT (M), United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), United Peoples Liberation Army (UPLA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), All Assam National Liberation Army (AANLA) and People's Democratic Council of Karbi Longri (PDCK).

No challenge, no contest for BJP in Lok Sabha elections: Kamakhya Prasad Tasa

Citizens set to elect Modi as Prime Minister for 3rd consecutive term: Tasa

HT Correspondent
HOJAI, March 6: Under the dynamic and optimistic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there is 'no challenge, no contest' for Bharatiya Janta Party, said Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, the party's candidate for the Kaziranga Lok Sabha constituency on Wednesday.

Tasa said, "People have already seen how I.N.D.I.A alliance is segregated in groups and they don't have trust on each other. How will they compete with BJP? The people of the country have already decided to elect Modiji as the Prime Minister for the third

consecutive term," Tasa said. "Assam is continuously prospering under the able leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The Kaliabor Lok Sabha constituency (now Kaziranga Lok Sabha constituency) under the regime of Congress was completely ignored in terms of development, but the BJP is committed to work for the welfare and development of the people.

Tasa was warmly welcomed by Hojai district BJP after the candidate list had been announced by the BJP for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Tasa was accompanied by Ramkrishna Ghosh, local legislator, Anup Deb, BJP district president Arjun Mazumdar, former BJP district president and thousands of party workers to the Shri Laxminaryan Temple in Hojai. After that he reached the Jugal Kishore Kedia Bhawan, where he interacted with the party workers and encouraged them for the upcoming polls.

The newly formed Kaziranga Lok Sabha constituency comprises of Kaliabor, Barampur, Binnakandi, Hojai, Lumding, Golaghat, Dergaon, Bokakhat, Khumtai and Sarupathar.



Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika laying the foundation stone for the reconstruction of Titabor High School and Mejenga Tea Garden School under the Vikash Yatra at Jorhat on Wednesday. UB Photos



Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated Narayanpur Civil Hospital during the Vikash Yatra programme at Narayanpur on Wednesday. UB Photos

Tezpur University workshop on ADITYA L1 to explore Solar Mysteries

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, March 6: The department of physics of the Tezpur University organized a workshop on 'SUIT Science and Data Analysis' on Wednesday at the university campus in Tezpur on Wednesday.

The workshop was directed towards understanding the Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (SUIT) on board Aditya-L1 and to train scientists and students on using the capabilities of the payload. Aditya L1 is a scientific mission led by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to study the sun and its various aspects.

Noted scientist, Durgesh Tripathi, specializing in solar physics and A. N. Ramaprakash, specializing in astronomy instrumentation of the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune were present on the occasion.

Janmejy Sarkar, a PhD scholar of the department of physics of Tezpur University and a senior research fellow of IUCAA, Pune, who under the guidance of Tripathi and Ramaprakash had earlier developed IUCAA's Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope payload on-board Aditya-L1, were also present on the occasion.

Lauding the department of physics,



Shambhu Nath Singh, vice chancellor of the university said that the students are extremely fortunate that resource persons who are actually working in this Aditya mission will be sharing their valuable knowledge and experience in the workshop.

"I expect that this workshop related to the Aditya mission, will benefit the participants to a great extent and inspire them to follow in their footsteps," Singh said.

Speaking on the occasion, Tripathi said that solar physics is a dynamic field of study dedicated to unravelling the mysteries of the sun. The scientists have been trying to study fundamental processes

occurring within the sun, such as solar flares, coronal mass ejections, solar wind etc. These phenomena are important as they not only influence the sun's behavior, but also have profound effects on space weather, impacting communication systems, satellites etc.

Addressing the gathering, Ramaprakash said that the field of astrophysics is on the verge of the next golden age as technological advancements have made it possible to have more data in this field. He said that Mission Aditya and James Webb Space Telescope etc. are allowing scientists more opportunities for orbiting observations and gathering data than ever before.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (PHE) DIPHU URBAN WATER SUPPLY DIVISION, DIPHU

No. PHEE/DUWS/DIP/Mis-2/Part-1 /2023-24/372

Date 06/03/2024

AN APPEAL

In the interest of General Public and consumer of Diphu Town it is to be informed that normal Water Supply in some parts of Diphu Town has been interrupted due to heavy damage of 225 mm dia (9 inch) Siloni, Diphu Gravity main near NAYARA petrol pump in Diphu Manja Road. The normal Water Supply will be resumed after realigning of the damage portion of pipeline within 30 (Thirty) days of time.

The inconvenience thus caused to the public is regretted and the an gust public is cordially requested to bear with situation and co-operate with Department.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer (PHE)
Urban W/S Division, Diphu



GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICER KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT:::DIPHU

No.DSWO(KA)Esstt.SIU/135/2014-2022/805

Dated,Diphu the 4th March,2024

PRACTICAL TEST FOR THE POST OF GRADE-III

This is to inform all the candidates that those who have appeared for viva voce test on 22/02/24 at office of the District Social Welfare Officer for the post of Instructress and Skilled Helper are hereby directed to appear for practical test under different category of Grade-III as follows.

Sl. No	Name of Post	Roll No.	Date of Interview	Venue of Interview	Time
1.	Instructress	3,4,6,7	09/03/2024	O/o the District Social Welfare Officer, Diphu, Karbi Anglong.	10.30 AM.
2.	Skilled Helper	3,8,12,18			

No separate calling letter will be sent to the candidates.

Sd/-
District Social Welfare Officer
Karbi Anglong District,Diphu

Kidambi Srikanth stuns Chou Tien Chen, HS Prannoy loses in French Open opener



PARIS, March 6: India's Kidambi Srikanth progressed to the men's singles second round with a stunning win over Chinese Taipei's Chou Tien Chen but HS Prannoy fell short to make an early exit from French Open Super 750 badminton tournament, here on Wednesday.

The world No 24 Srikanth, who is racing against time to qualify for the Paris Olympics, outwitted 14th-ranked Chen 21-15, 20-22, 21-8 in a 66-minute opening round clash for his third

win over the Taiwanese shuttler in seven meetings.

In the next round, the 2021 world championships silver medallist Srikanth will fight it out against China's world No 17 Lu Guang Zu, who ended the campaign of India's HS Prannoy with a fine 21-17, 21-17 win at the adjacent court at the Arena Porte de la Chapelle here.

Srikanth was by far the better player as he roared back from 5-7 behind, winning 14 off the next 17 points to earn the bragging

rights.

However, Chen produced a rearguard in the second game and managed to keep his nose ahead in time to take the match to the decider after a gruelling battle of nerves.

After the change of sides, Srikanth was back in his element as from 7-5, the Indian pocketed nine straight points to leave Chen far behind. The Taiwanese managed three points before the Indian banged the door on his face with the remaining five points.

In the adjacent court, Prannoy seemed on the road to glory only to falter in the end as Guang Zu stole the show.

Prannoy moved to a 5-2 lead early in the opening game and though Guang Zu clawed back with three points, the Indian quickly changed gears to reestablish a three-point advantage at the break.

The duo engaged in some fierce rallies and Prannoy kept things tight for most part. The Chinese, however, kept snapping

at the Indian's heels keeping himself within two points, waiting for an opportunity.

It eventually arrived when Prannoy's backhand went to net as the Chinese clawed back at 16-16 before moving to a lead with Prannoy erring again.

Guang Zu then pocketed the opening game by unleashing a quick return on his rival's backhand.

Prannoy made an erratic start to the second game, falling 0-3 behind early. It was back to the grind for the Indian as he slowly drew parity at 6-6 with a few winners like the down-the-line smash on Guang Zu's forehand.

But he also missed the lines, going long and wide a few times as the Chinese again capitalised on his errors to grab a 11-7 advantage at interval.

A determined Prannoy once again levelled terms with four straight points, the last being a lethal net kill.

The rallies starting getting fierce as the duo produce some sensational saves displaying great reflexes, but Guang Zu was a tad sharper and alert as he soon lead 19-15 with Prannoy now struggling to get a grip on the fast-paced rallies.

The Indian did win three straight point to keep hopes alive, before the Chinese grabbed three match points with a smash on his forehand and sealed it with another precise return on forecourt. (PTI)

Nishant makes winning start at Oly Qualifier; Shiva, Ankushita lose



BUSTO ARSIZIO (ITALY), March 6: World Championships bronze medallist Nishant Dev gave India its first win at the 1st World Olympic Boxing Qualifier, defeating Britain's Lewis Richardson by a 3-1 split decision in the men's 71kg category here. Nishant was aggressive right from the word go against the 2022 Commonwealth Games bronze medallist, and won the first round of his bout 4-1 on Tuesday.

The 23-year-old Indian became even more dominant in the second round using his long reach and delivered some effective right hooks to comfortably win 5-0.

He put forward a controlled performance in the third round as well and avoided multiple attacks from his opponent while trying to protect his lead and ultimately won the round of 64 bout by a split decision.

Six-time Asian Championships medallist Shiva Thapa (63.5kg), suffered a first-round loss via RSC to reigning World Champion Ruslan Abdullaev of Uzbekistan. Living up to his reputation with his pinpoint punches, Abdullaev penetrated Thapa's defense multiple times which forced the Indian pugilist to go into defensive mode right from the start.

However, the defensive approach didn't last long as Abdul-

laev continued his onslaught, landing powerful punches. Thapa received two standing counts within the span of 20 seconds before the referee stopped the contest. Youth world champion Ankushita Boro was out-punched 2-3 by Sonvico Emilie of France in the women's 66kg as India's dismal run at the Olympic qualifiers continued.

Six of the nine Indian boxers have made first-round exits from the tournament so far.

National champion Sanjeet (92kg) will square off against Aibek Oralbay of Kazakhstan later on Wednesday.

The first World Olympic Qualifier is hosting over 590 boxers and will offer a total of 49 quotas, including 28 for men and 21 for women, for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Boxers who fail to earn quotas here will get a final chance to seal their passage to Paris during the second World Olympic Boxing Qualifier, scheduled to be held in Bangkok from May 23 to June 3. Between 45 and 51 boxers will qualify from the Bangkok meet.

Four Indians -- Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) -- have so far secured Paris quotas at the Asian Games last year.

India had nine boxers competing in the Tokyo Olympics. (PTI)

Women's National will be selection trial to pick new core probables: Hockey India

NEW DELHI, March 6: Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey on Wednesday said the women's national championship to be held from March 13 in Pune will double up as a selection trial to pick a new group of core probables.

The nationals will be held from March 13 to 23. The national women's hockey team has endured an underwhelming run in the past few months, the lowest point being its failure to qualify for this year's Paris Olympics.

"...we will have participation from 28

states and UTs, with members of the Indian team representing their respective states. Hockey India selectors will be closely watching the performances of all the players and based on their recommendation, a new core group will be selected," Tirkey said in a press release from Hockey India.

Tirkey said no player can take her "place for granted". The national team is without a national coach after Dutchwoman Janneke Schopman resigned from the post citing a hostile work envi-

ronment. "Everyone will need to perform to their best potential to make the cut. We need to now focus on making the qualification for the FIH Women's World Cup in 2026 and build towards the LA Olympics with optimism."

"There is plenty of talent in India, the National Championship is an important platform to identify new talent and we need to further strengthen the domestic structure to bring them to the core," he said.

Hockey India secretary general Bhola

Nath Singh revealed that a domestic league for women hockey players is also in the works.

"We are putting our minds together to introduce a few new tournaments in the domestic calendar, particularly for the development of women's hockey..."

"...we are also working on starting a domestic league for women that could further give opportunity for aspiring players to showcase their talent and make their way into the national program," he said. (PTI)

AIFF president serves legal notice to former legal head for 'corruption allegations'

NEW DELHI, March 6: All India Football Federation (AIFF) President Kalyan Chaubey has served a legal notice to the organisation's former principal legal advisor Nilanjan Bhattacharjee for making serious "corruption allegations" against him.

On Saturday, Bhattacharjee, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, claimed Chaubey worked out "corruption avenues" through non transparent tender process and preferential allotment of tender.

He had also alleged that Chaubey made attempts to "siphon off money from the federation's exchequer" and used AIFF fund for personal expenses.

Chaubey, who had earlier termed the allegations "baseless", said Bhattacharjee's actions were aimed at damaging his reputation. "The motive and agenda in tarnishing my image and reputation are visible and obvious. I have sent him a legal notice with respect to his defamation and attempts at character assassination, and will be pursuing this matter to its logical conclusion," Chaubey said in the letter addressed to all the state units and the executive committee members. "While I respond personally, it is also my duty to protect the reputation of the AIFF in the face of these attempts to weaken the institution through allegations made against me." Chaubey's letter assumes significance as the AIFF will be holding its Annual General Body Meeting (AGM) in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh on March 10.

Chaubey gave a point-by-point rebuttal to the allegations made by Bhattacharjee. Bhattacharjee, whose services were terminated

by the AIFF after he made the allegations, had alleged that "through coercion numerous tenders such as broadcasting of I-League (last season), IWL, Santosh Trophy were allotted in favour of one company which happens to be close to the incumbent president."

On this, Chaubey said "Bhattacharjee was part of the tender selection committee and not once did he raise query on the tender selection and award process."

He said the I-League production company was finalised after a joint technical evaluation between the AIFF and FSDL (the marketing partner of the AIFF).

"It would be pertinent to request a report from FSDL on the technical evaluation process and as to why (the broadcasting company) was chosen. We will put these documents to the AGM and clarify and explain any questions," Chaubey also termed Bhattacharjee's allegations that he used AIFF fund for his personal trips and hotel stays as "baseless" and "motivated".

"The President AIFF is entitled to travel by Business Class but almost every single time I have travelled by Economy class. The President AIFF is entitled to stay in suite rooms but almost every single time I have stayed in standard rooms. "The President AIFF is entitled to receive per diem INR 10,000/- during travel/meeting. Till date I have never claimed a single rupee." He also termed the allegations made earlier by some individuals that he used the official AIFF credit card to buy personal items as "ridiculous" and an attempt to show him in poor light. (PTI)

Will do everything in my power to earn points for Olympic qualification: Lahiri

NEW DELHI, March 6: Having played "well below his potential" in the last two Olympics, Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri said he will do everything in his power to qualify for the Paris Games and make a bid for a dream podium finish at the quadrennial showpiece.

Lahiri, who switched to LIV Golf from the USPGA in 2022 and shifted his base from Florida to Dubai, has been handicapped in his endeavour to secure a Paris berth because the new rival entity cannot grant world ranking points to qualify for the Olympics.

The 36-year-old will have to compete in the limited tourna-

ments available outside LIV Golf and hope to earn enough points and then keep his fingers crossed for a Paris berth.

"It's very important for me to represent my country. I have been at the Olympics a couple of times, both times I've played well below my potential and it's something that I would love to change," said Lahiri during an interaction facilitated by FanCode.

"To be able to do that, I need those world ranking points. Unfortunately, that is the only qualification system even though, in my opinion, that shouldn't be the case. "But because that is the way it is, I am actually trying to play as many tournaments as I can

outside of the LIV Golf schedule," said Lahiri.

The former world no. 33 had made the switch to the rival LIV Golf within months of his greatest achievement of finishing runners-up at the The Players Championship, an annual tournament on the PGA Tour, in 2022.

Lahiri said he will play a few tournaments in Asia, including the Indian Open later this month, to earn points and be in contention for Paris.

"I am playing in Macao next week. I played in Oman two weeks ago, I'm playing the Indian Open. Most likely, add one-two more tournaments in May before the (Olympic qualification) dead-

line of second week of June.

"So, I'm going to do everything in my power to give myself the opportunity to earn those points however it is possible," said the 2015 Indian Open winner, who will be seen at the DLF Golf & Country Club from March 28-31 after nearly five years bidding for his second national title.

"And that's (performance) all I can really control. I can't control the outcome, I can't control whether I do make it to the team but I can put in the effort and my commitment, which is 110 per cent."

After a phenomenal 2015, which saw him win twice on the European Tour, and the T5 finish

at the PGA Championship aiding his elevation to the PGA Tour, Anirban had a comparatively quiet year, until he finished runner-up at The Players Championship in 2022.

Lahiri would hope luck shines on him again as he begins the crucial phase of his Olympic qualification journey. He is currently ranked 350 in the world, while Shubhankar Sharma (201) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (229) are the front runners to make the cut for Paris.

At the Tokyo Games, Aditi Ashok was in contention for a medal until the 17th hole before falling short by a stroke to finish fourth. (PTI)

Looks like an absolute belter Stokes on Dharamsala pitch

DHARAMSALA, March 6: England captain Ben Stokes called the Dharamsala pitch an absolute belter and that is the main reason why he did not pick an extra pacer for the fifth and final Test against India starting here on Thursday.

Dharamsala is colder than usual for this time of the year keeping the pacers interested but considering no grass has been left on the surface, the England batters are licking their lips.

Bringing in Mark Wood for Ollie Robinson was the only change England made to their playing eleven.

"Before we even got here, we were probably thinking it was going to be a three seamer one spinner attack but then when we saw the wicket and then saw it again today, I think going with two seamers and two spinners is probably the right call," said Stokes in a pre-match press conference.

"We felt there would probably a bit more grass on the wicket

just because of where we are but overall the wicket looks an absolute belter. So playing two seamers and still having Bash (Shoaib Bashir) and Tom gives us a good mixture when you're a little bit unsure of what it will do as the Test goes on," he added.

India handed England their first series defeat in the 'Bazball' era heralded by Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum.

England would like to go back home with a 2-3 series result but Stokes was quick to admit that India played the key moments better than them after their comeback win in the series-opener.

"At 3-1, you think it's not been a success but I look at it with completely different angles to that and I think we've definitely progressed as a team even though we haven't got the results we wanted. You know, 3-2 sounds better than 3-1 or 4-1 and that's obviously what we're looking to do.

"It's not worked out that way in terms of results but we've got one



last push here which is great at the end of a long tour when you play five games. It's a great ground to do it at and a lot of Barmy Army are coming in to support us this week. So, very ex-

cited," he said.

Stokes also revealed that off-spinner Bashir and pacer Ollie Robinson, who has not been picked for the game, have upset stomachs.

"They both woke up with slightly upset stomachs and the day before the game you don't want to put anybody at risk so we've decided to keep them away from the team," said Stokes.

There was a lot of talk England's aggressive batting approach before the start of the series and the chatter continued through the first four Tests.

Following their maiden series defeat, Stokes was asked if Rohit Sharma outsmarted the entire England unit, Stokes was not amused.

"I will let you decide," said Stokes in a terse response and went on to add that he doesn't ask people to write about him.

At 41 years of age, James Anderson remains at the top of his game and is two wickets away from the 700-mark. Stokes can only doff his hat to Anderson.

"Jimmy coming up to 700 wickets, it's phenomenal to think about, especially as a seam bowler. Amazing career to date, and I can't see him stopping."

"Being 41, showing that hunger and desire to get better every single day is testament to his attitude and commitment to the game."

Stokes also added that India have been the better team on the skills front.

"The thing I look back on is when the game has been in the balance, India have been better than us in those moments on more than one occasion. In the first game we needed to bowl India out for 220 and were a lot better than them in that moment."

"The games after that, when the game has been on the line, their skill has been a lot better than ours, whether that be India with the bat or India with the ball...in the moments that have mattered, since the first game, India have been better," he added. (PTI)

India to press for 4-1, England too fancy themselves at 'home' in game of milestones

DHARAMSALA, March 6: India's premier off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin will be eyeing a memorable outing in his landmark 100th Test when the unassailable hosts face a fallen England in the finale of what has been a riveting five-match series, here on Thursday.

India maintained their envious record at home by sealing the series in Ranchi and now, they will be looking for another favourable result to extend their lead in World Test Championships standings.

The pitch and the cold weather, that is making the English feel at home, have been the two big talking points going into the game.

The maximum temperature is expected to hover around 10 degrees for the opening two days before rising over the weekend.

The pitch wore a flat look on the eve of the game but the moisture seeped underneath will keep the pacers interested in the early hours of play on all days.

Though traditionally, the venue favours fast bowlers, the role of spinners can't be discounted and they did play a big part in India's win over Australia in the one and only Test played here back in 2017.

In the recently held four Ranji Trophy games, the teams were able to score 300 plus on multiple occasions with the highest total of the season

being 482 posted by Baroda. Ashwin and Jonny Bairstow, both of whom will make their 100th Test appearance on Thursday, expressed contrasting views on the surface going the match. Bairstow found the pitch 'nice' while Ashwin said both teams will be entering unknown territory considering the cold weather.

India are, however, unlikely to tinker with their bowling combination of two pacers and three spinners.

Jasprit Bumrah will return to bolster the attack with Mohammed Siraj being the second pacer. Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav, who has been able to play only 11 Tests since making a successful debut back here in 2017, will share the duties in the spin department.

K L Rahul not regaining full fitness even for this game could provide another opportunity to the struggling Rajat Patidar, who has found bizarre ways to get out in his debut series, aggregating only 63 runs in six innings at number four.

The game could be his one last chance to keep a place in the squad.

Devdutt Padikkal, who is a top-order batter, is another option that the team management has in the middle-order.

Two-Test-old Sarfaraz Khan could not score big in Ranchi after a stellar debut in Rajkot and he will be desperate to make it big before the red ball season comes to a close.



The rest of the batters have also made their presence felt over the course of five games, especially Yashasvi Jaiswal, who is within touching distance of becoming the second Indian after the great Sunil Gavaskar to amass 700 runs in a series.

England have already lost the series, their first in the 'Bazball' era, but there

is still plenty to play for before they return home after a long tour.

Bairstow's 100th Test milestone will be celebrated through the week and by the looks of it, the England cricketers are enjoying this scenic town with the cold weather adding to their comfort.

The right-hander has been well

below par in the series and would be aiming to make his 100th Test outing an unforgettable one by regaining his lost form.

England fans have also arrived here in big numbers, giving the players another reason to come up with a special performance.

"I don't think that anyone is thinking

like that," Ben Stokes said on Tuesday when asked if players are already thinking about returning home.

"We feel every opportunity to play for England is special. That's just our mentality and our mindset, regardless of where you are, or how long you've been away. But that shouldn't take away from the fact that this place is pretty special," the skipper told the travelling British media.

England, who went with only one specialist pacer at the start of the series and had two of them featuring in the last game, will continue with the latter formula here too.

Veteran James Anderson will partner Mark Wood, who will replace Ollie Robinson.

Shoaib Bashir, who is nursing a sore spinning finger, and Tom Hartley, have come of age in their debut series and will be the two specialist spinners.

Squads:
India: Rohit Sharma (C), Jasprit Bumrah (VC), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (WK), KS Bharat (WK), Devdutt Padikkal, R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep. England XI: Ben Stokes (C), Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Foakes, Tom Hartley, Mark Wood, James Anderson, Shoaib Bashir. Match starts 9.30 am IST. (PTI)

WFI to allow only 'genuine' wrestlers to compete at trials

NEW DELHI, March 6: The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) would allow wrestlers from their original states to compete at the upcoming trials and one grappler will be allowed to participate in more than one category over two days of selection competition, starting March 10. In its circular issued on Tuesday, the WFI, wrote, "Wrestlers participated in Senior National Championship held at Jaipur will bring their WFI Licence Book, Birth Certificate, Adhar Card to verify the genuineness of their state." "Several wrestlers, who actually hailed from Haryana, represented states like Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim at the Nationals conducted by the ad-hoc committee in Jaipur. This is wrong and we will now allow this," a WFI source told PTI. (PTI)

No praise enough for Ashwin, rare to have players like him: Rohit



DHARAMSALA, March 6: No praise is enough for Ravichandran Ashwin, said captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday, lauding the off-spinner ahead of his 100th Test as a "rare" talent critical for the team's success.

The fifth and final Test against England, starting here on Thursday, is inconsequential to the final outcome of the series as India have already taken an unbeaten 3-1 lead. But it has become significant due to the 100-Test milestone set to be achieved by Ashwin and England batter Jonny Bairstow.

"(It's a) big achievement for any player to play 100 Tests. It is a big milestone. He has been a match winner for us. What he has done for us, no praise is enough," Rohit said on the eve of the match.

"His performances over the last five-seven years, every series he has contributed. It is rare to have players like him," he added.

"I want to congratulate him for his 100 test landmark, of course to get near it as the toss hasn't happened. It feels good to reap rewards of your hard work," the skipper said.

They have been national teammates for close to a decade and half but it was more than 20 years back when a then precocious Mumbai off-spinner Rohit was pitted against talented opener Ashwin in Vijay Merchant (U-16) and Cooch Behar Trophy (U-19).

"As a captain, I have seen him since U-19, U-17 days. He batted at that time, was an opener and then he started bowling. And I used to bowl

(off-spin) and then became a batsman, so it became up and down for us but it has been good for Indian cricket," Ashwin, the "cricket scientist", has evolved a lot in these 14 years, feels Rohit.

"As a cricketer, he (Ashwin) has evolved in his game and he has a lot of intelligence and if you get a player like this in the team then you don't have to think too much.

"If you give the ball to him, then he drives the game. How to bowl, what field to set and what to do, I am talking about the planning during the game."

The Indian skipper also spoke about how process-driven Ashwin is.

"What you see on the field is the result of a lot of off-field stuff and the work done on one's bowling. I have often seen him bowling with just one

stump before a match -- one hour 45 minutes before a game. Bowling at one stump a day before a Test. This is cricket's basics.

"I have seen him bowl regularly at one stump and this has been a process for him. And the biggest thing is that he is a big team player and we saw that in Rajkot Test, when it was a difficult situation for him, but he called and said 'I want to come back and do something for the team'.

"You see this rarely, and when you have players like this, then your head is held high."

Ashwin, who recently became only the second Indian after Anil Kumble to cross 500 wickets in the game's longest format, made his Test debut in 2011 and has enjoyed more highs than lows during a 13-year journey. (PTI)

Yashasvi Jaiswal breaks into top 10 in ICC rankings for Test batters

DUBAI, March 6: Young India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal on Wednesday broke into the top-10 of the ICC rankings for Test batters for the first time in his career on the back of his tremendous form in the ongoing home series against England.

Jaiswal, who made his Test debut in 2023, jumped two places to be at 10th spot with 727 rating points to his kitty.

In red-hot form with the bat against England, Jaiswal has already created history by joining an exclusive club of Indian batters to have scored 600 and more runs in a Test series. He is the lone left-handed batter to have achieved the feat. The 22-year-old is only the fifth Indian ever to have crossed the 600-run mark in a Test series with others being Sunil Gavaskar, Dilip Sardesai, Rahul Dravid and Virat Kohli.

With 655 runs in four Tests at 93.57 which includes two fifties and as many centuries -- both converted into double hundreds -- Jaiswal could well be targeting the legendary Sunil Gavaskar's record of most runs (774) for any Indian batter in a Test series.

Meanwhile, a fine knock of 131 in Rajkot in the third Test against England has propelled Rohit Sharma to the 11th spot with the Indian skipper moving up



two positions. Star batter Virat Kohli, who has missed the entire five-Test series against England, also moved up one spot to be at eighth.

Among the top three batters, Joe Root replaced Steve Smith at the second spot after the English batter scored a quality century in the fourth Test in Ranchi but the Australian's struggle persisting for big scores at the opening slot.

A loss in form with the bat for Mar-

cus Labuschagne meant the right-handed Australian batter slipped as many as five positions after twin failures in the Wellington Test against New Zealand.

Among bowlers, India's Ravindra Jadeja slipped one spot to be at seventh but Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon both moved up in the rankings to get to fourth and sixth respectively, following Australia's huge win by 172 runs over New Zealand. (PTI)

Mom said from hospital bed 'You should go back as Test match is on': Ashwin

DHARAMSALA, March 6: Lying in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a Chennai hospital, Chitra Ravichandran was slipping in and out of consciousness but she had just one query for her son Ravichandran Ashwin when she saw him by her bedside -- "Why did you come?"

Hours after becoming only the second Indian bowler after Anil Kumble to take 500 Test wickets, Ashwin rushed back to his home in Chennai during the third game against England in Rajkot after coming to know that his mother had been hospitalised following a blackout.

"When I landed and got to the hospital, my mom was slipping in and out of consciousness, and the first thing she asked me was, 'Why did you come?' The next time she was conscious, she said, 'I think you should go back because the Test match is happening,' Ashwin told 'ESPNCricinfo' on the eve of his 100th Test.

The off-spinner emotionally recalled how his parents Ravichandran and Chitra worked their "backsides off" to help



him realise their collective cricketing dream.

"The entire family is built on cricket and to facilitate my career. It hasn't been easy. It has been very hard on them. It's been a big roller-coaster for them - going through the emotions and ups and downs that I myself do," the 37-year-old said.

Ashwin, at times, did feel that the sport meant more to his family than

him. "I am in the second half of my thirties and my dad still watches a game like he would watch my first international game. It means a lot to them. Compared to what it means to them, it definitely means less to me.

"They have eliminated anything that comes in the way of my cricket. That has been the sole purpose of their lives ever since I can remember," he said.

Ashwin's father is an avid cricket-watcher and the former club cricketer is present even at the most nondescript grounds to watch TNCA first division league.

"It was as if I was living the dream my dad wanted to achieve. Imagine somebody wanted to become a cricketer (but doesn't). He gets married and has a son.

"And he wants to live the dream through his son, and he does everything from teaching me, to taking notes from my classmates, to taking me to private tuitions to make sure I play the maximum possible amount of cricket while still finishing my education. (PTI)



সমস্মৰণে জনমে
Government of Assam



জগৎৰ স্বাস্থ্য
National Health Mission, Assam

ENSURE 4 ANTE NATAL CARE (ANC) CHECK UPS FOR A POSITIVE PREGNANCY EXPERIENCE & OUTCOME

Take the necessary steps towards a healthy future of yourself and your baby with timely ANC check ups. Every pregnant women must undergo the four (4) essential ANC visits and make sure the same is recorded in their MCP card.

1st Visit:
Within 12 weeks
(as soon as pregnancy is suspected)

2nd Visit:
Between 14-26 weeks

3rd Visit:
Between 28-34 weeks

4th Visit:
Between 36 weeks and term



Health services during ANC

- Thorough History Taking
- Comprehensive General Examination
- Abdominal Examination
- Vital Laboratory Tests
- Appropriate Medications
- Personalized Micro-Birth Plan
- Supportive Counselling for Pregnant Women
- Tuberculosis Screening
- Generation of ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account)
- Identification, Special Care and Follow Up of High Risk of Pregnant Women (HRPWs)

Secure a healthy journey for you and your little one.
For more details contact your local ASHA or ANM

Call 104
for health related information

Call 108
for Ambulance service

NHM/D/2023-24/1992