

**6 WORLD**  
 ● Asif Ali Zardari sworn in as Pakistan's 14th President  
 ● Xi Jinping greets new Pak President Zardari

**8 NATION**  
 ● TMC releases candidate list for 42 LS seats, 7 MPs dropped  
 ● Poison of appeasement weakening with dvpt : PM

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**Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee** Means Guarantee to root out corruption

Over ₹ 32 lakh crore transferred directly to beneficiaries' accounts through DBT

Hamara Sankalp Viksit Bharat

## Centre aims to make 3 cr women 'lakhpati didi': PM

**RAIPUR, March 10:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said his government has resolved to make three crore women in the country 'lakhpati didi' and asserted that women's welfare is their priority.

The PM was speaking after virtually inaugurating the 'Mahtari Vandan' scheme in Chhattisgarh to provide monetary assistance to women.

"It is fortunate that today I got an opportunity to dedicate the Mahtari Vandan scheme aimed at empowering 'nari shakti'. Under the scheme, we had promised to give Rs 1,000 per month to more than 70 lakh women and today, the BJP government has fulfilled it," Modi said addressing the function

via video conference. The first installment of ₹ 655 crore was deposited into the bank accounts of beneficiaries (married women) under the scheme on Sunday, he said.

"I should have been among you today for this programme, but due to some other engagements I am in Uttar Pradesh. I am speaking from Kashi, the land of Baba Vishwanath, who is also showering his blessings on you," he said.

The PM said he offered prayers to Lord Vishwanath on Saturday night and prayed for the well being of the country's people.

"When mother and sisters are empowered, then the entire family gets empowered. Therefore, the priority of the double-engine government (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## 'Everyone has a right to protest, but if a political party disobeys court order, its registration may be cancelled'

# Political parties calling bandhs could lose registrations: CM

**GUWAHATI, March 10:** Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said political parties could lose their registrations if they called bandhs in violation of court orders.

He said any opposition to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) of 2019 should be taken to the Supreme Court and protesting on the streets would serve no purpose as the law had already been enacted.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme at Batadrava, Sarma said, "Everyone has a right to protest, but if a political party disobeys court order, its registration may be cancelled."

He maintained that while it is permissible for student organisations



political parties announcing intensified agitations if the CAA is implemented. The chief minister said those opposing the CAA should place their views before the Supreme Court as it is the only authority that can scrap the law now.

"If more intense agitation was to take place, it should have been done before the law was passed. Now it is only a matter of notifying the rules, which the government is bound to do. Even if some agitation happens now, it is my guarantee that no new person will join it," Sarma added.

Opposition political parties, students and other organisations have announced of intensified protests against the CAA, which seeks to provide Indian citizenship to Hin-

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### HT BRIEFS

#### Road Mishap

**RANGIA:** One person was killed and 10 others were injured in a road accident near Hajo in Kamrup district of Assam on Sunday, police said. According to a police officer, the accident took place early in the morning when a speeding pick-up van carrying fish collided head-on with a motorcycle at Borni. "The bike rider, identified as Fulbar Ali of Mukalmua, died on the spot. Besides, 10 other people were also injured in the accident. They are undergoing treatment at Gauhati Medical College and Hospital," he added. The police officer said further investigation is on.

#### IED explosion

**SHILLONG:** One person was injured when an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded in the Punjabi Lane area here, police said on Sunday. The blast took place at around 10.30 pm on Saturday, they said. "There was a blast near the syndicate bus stand, Punjabi Lane at around 10.30 pm. The blast was inside a small abandoned tin structure", East Khasi Hills District Superintendent of Police Rituraj Ravi told PTI. He said the damage was initially confined only to the tin structure and a few window panes nearby. Further report on the damages awaited. Preliminary investigation suggests the blast to be caused by an IED. Further investigation is under progress, the SP said. Punjabi Lane resident and secretary of the Harijan Panchayat Committee Gurjit Singh said the blast was deafening and it shook the buildings in the area.

## Two election commissioners likely to be appointed by March 15: Sources

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** Two election commissioners are likely to be appointed by March 15 to fill the vacancies created by the retirement of Anup Chandra Pandey and the surprise resignation of Arun Goel, sources said on Sunday.

Days before the poll panel is expected to announce the schedule for the Lok Sabha polls, Goel resigned on Friday morning. His resignation was accepted by President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday and the law Ministry issued a notification to announce it.

This leaves chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar as the sole member of the poll authority. Pandey had demitted office on

February 14 on attaining the age of 65 years.

A search committee under Law minister Arjun Ram Meghwal and comprising the home secretary and the department of personnel and training (DoPT) secretary will first prepare two separate panels of five names each for the two posts.

Later, a selection committee headed by the prime minister and comprising a Union minister and Leader of the Congress party in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will then name two persons for appointment as election commissioners. The election commissioners will be appointed by the President. Sources said (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## India, EFTA ink free trade agreement; USD 100 bn investment target in next 15 yrs

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA on Sunday signed a free trade agreement under which New Delhi has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion over the next 15 years to facilitate the creation of one million jobs.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. The agreement was signed after a gap of almost 16 years as negotiations, started in 2008, but were put on hold in November 2013. Talks resumed in October 2016, and after 21 rounds of negotiations were held before its conclusion.

For the first time in the history of



FTAs (free trade agreements), a legal commitment is being made to promoting target-oriented investment and the job creation.

Almost all the domestic industrial goods would get duty-free access in EFTA nations under the agreement, besides duty concessions on processed agricultural products. Switzerland, (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Rijiju upset over delay in supercomputer delivery by French firm

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** Earth sciences minister Kiren Rijiju is upset over the delay in the delivery of two supercomputers by a French firm to Indian weather forecasting institutes and hopes that the French government will step in to hasten the process.

The Earth Sciences Ministry had ordered two supercomputers worth USD 100 million from French firm Eviden, of the Atos Group, last year to better the computing capabilities of its institutions -- the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM).

"I am more upset because the target we set was December. The Union Cabinet had already approved purchasing the supercomputer. We have only four petaflop capacity. We want to install up to 18 petaflop capacity," Rijiju told PTI in a video interview.

He said the French company ran into some financial trouble and wanted the government to make payment to its subsidiary.

Rijiju said the delay has caused him lots of worry as the company has overshot the timeline. "But I think we will sort it out soon," he said, adding that the government wanted to be "very correct in our position legally".

"We are ready to release the money because we want the machine immediately. The only problem is the amount is not small. So if we pay now, if the company is bankrupt or something happens, who will bail out," the minister said. Rijiju said the government was taking some steps to speed up the delivery (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## AASU stage hunger strike against CAA

**DIPHU/DIBRUGARH, March 10:** The All Assam Students Union and 30 social organisations stage a 12-hour hunger strike on Sunday at Bakalia in Karbi Anglong demanding the repeal of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The hunger strike started at 9 am and was attended by assistant general secretary of AASU, Shorjun Hanse; AASU executive member, Arnab Jyoti Kakoti and president of AASU, Karbi Anglong District Committee, Dipjyoti Das.

The students union and the 30 other organisations also staged 12-hours hunger strike at old ASTC bus stand at Thanachariali in Dibrugarh. Ahead of Lok Sabha elections, the AASU and several other organisations have launched protest programme against CAA.

Union home minister Amit Shah had already hinted that they will implement CAA before Lok Sabha polls.

Leading the protest, AASU general secretary Shankarjyoti Baruah said, "The people of Assam will never accept the CAA. BJP came to power in Assam with the promise of securing the 'jati, mati, bheti' (race, land and base) of the indigenous people. But now they are trying to sell their own motherland for the sake of votebank politics. The betrayal by PM Narendra Modi,



home minister Amit Shah and Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal will not be neither forgotten nor forgiven by the people of Assam. If they forcefully implement the CAA, the people of Assam will give them a befitting reply to the BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls."

"The CAA is a threat to the indigenous identity of the Assamese. If the act is implemented then the Assamese people will become minority in their own state. Everybody was dissatisfied with the BJP government for supporting the act which (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Shah, Rajnath to visit Assam, will address public meetings

**GUWAHATI, March 10:** Union home minister Amit Shah and defence minister Rajnath Singh will visit Assam and will take part in party meetings, said state BJP president Bhabesh Kalita on Sunday.

He told reporters, "Shah is scheduled to come to the state on March 18. He will go to Batadrava in Nagaon district and will address a public meeting. The defence minister will go to Barpeta and Kokrajhar on March 14 on two party meetings."

BJP has already declared its candidates for 11 Lok Sabha seats in Assam. The rest of the seats in the state were given to two allies—Asom Gana Parishad and United People's Party Liberal.

Attending a joining ceremony of



leaders from other parties to the BJP on Sunday, Kalita said, "The United Opposition forum does not exist in Assam. The constituent parties of the forum like Trinamool Congress and Aam Aadmi Party have already announced to fight the polls alone. Meanwhile, the Congress has failed to declare its candidates."

The BJP leader has asserted that the saffron party is set to win at least 11 seats in Assam.

## 'Guwahati has been the 'gateway to the North East' since ages and this is a city steeped in history'

# Walk showcasing heritage of Guwahati to tourists, history enthusiasts

**GUWAHATI, March 10:** A motley group of people are often seen roaming the streets of Guwahati in the morning, led by a young man, as they stop at certain points, click photos and huddle for a chat.

Some of them are tourists passing the city and a few are locals waiting to explore, bound by an appreciation of the history surrounding the area as they come together for 'Guwahati Heritage Walk', a novel concept by history enthusiast Izaaz Ahmed.

"Guwahati has been the 'gateway to the North East' since ages and this is a city steeped in history, which has seldom been highlighted.

So, its my small endeavour to bring out the historical significance



of the areas through which we pass every day without giving a second thought," Ahmed told PTI.

Having started the walks in January, he has conducted three such tours so far and the response has been encouraging for the young entrepreneur.

"Historical walks are a new concept here. I have had seven-eight people in each of the three groups, ranging from tourists to locals to students. There are more enquiries and I have scheduled more for the coming weeks," he said.

Ahmed, who is a teaching faculty at a coaching centre here, added that he is also in talks with schools who have shown interest in arranging the walks for their students.

Sujata, who was here on work, was happy to get a glimpse of the historical parts of the city.

"I learnt about the walk on Twitter and immediately signed up. I found it very interesting and also could relate to many similarities from back home, especially

between my alma mater Fergusson College and first college here Cotton College (now university)," the Pune resident said.

For Dr Khafizulazam Ahmed, who is now settled in Denmark and is visiting family here, added, "I have always roamed around these areas and am aware of its significance to a large extent. But this tour still had a lot of new information for me."

The walk starts from the Northbrook Gate, often called the 'gateway to Assam', which was constructed in 1874 to welcome then viceroy Lord Northbrook to this province. It comprises 11 points of historical significance within a radius of about 2 km. Two temples (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

## Demand for private jets, helicopters likely to rise up to 40 pc during LS polls

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** As political parties prepare to fight it out in the Lok Sabha polls, the demand for chartered planes and helicopters is expected to jump by up to 40 per cent compared to the previous general elections, according to industry experts.

Helicopters are anticipated to be more in demand compared to fixed-wing aircraft as choppers will help in providing accessibility to rural and remote areas in a shorter time.

"There will be an exponential demand for private jets and the demand is expected to outstrip the availability of chartered planes and helicopters. There is a limited supply of chartered planes and helicopters," Club One Air CEO Rajan Mehra told PTI.

With increased demand, some

players will be taking chartered planes and helicopters on lease during the general elections for which the dates are expected to be announced in the coming days.

Chartered plane and helicopter services are charged on an hourly basis. The industry experts opined that the prices can vary between ₹4.5 lakh to ₹ 5.25 lakh per hour for a chartered plane. For a helicopter, the hourly charge will be around ₹ 1.5 lakh.

Business Aircraft Operators Association (BAOA) Managing Director Captain R K Bali told PTI that during the Lok Sabha polls, the demand for private chartered planes and helicopters is expected to increase by 30 to 40 per cent compared to the previous elections. Official data showed that there were 112 (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

# India-EFTA trade agreement symbolises shared commitment to fair, equitable trade: PM Modi

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the signing of the trade agreement between India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA is a "watershed moment" as it symbolises shared commitment to open, fair and equitable trade.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

The Prime Minister said India will extend all possible support to these countries and facilitate industry and businesses, not only to achieve the committed targets but also to go beyond them.

In the agreement, the EFTA bloc has committed to invest USD 100 billion in India over the next 15 years. "The Tenth of March 2024 marks a new turn and a watershed moment in the bilateral relationship between India and EFTA countries," Modi said.

He said the global leadership of the four nations in innovation, R&D across diverse areas such as digital trade, banking and financial services, transport and logistics, in-



dustrial machinery, biotechnology, pharma, chemicals, food processing, and clean energy, will open new doors of collaboration.

"Heartiest Congratulations and best wishes to the negotiators and signatories involved in the signing of India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)," Modi said in a written message.

The Prime Minister's statement was read by Commerce and Indus-

try Minister Piyush Goyal here in the presence of ministers and officials of EFTA countries.

"In the last 10 years, India's economy has taken a quantum leap, moving from being the world's eleventh largest economy to the fifth largest. Our next goal is to make India's economy in the world," the Prime Minister said.

The "well-balanced" trade deal reflects the respective developmental aspirations of both sides, he

added. "On the most pioneering free trade agreements ever concluded between our countries, TEPA emphasises our steadfast commitment to shared prosperity and our drive to cultivate a stronger, more inclusive partnership," he said.

Despite structural diversities in many aspects, the Prime Minister said, the economies of the two sides possess complementarities that promise to be a win-win situation for all nations.

"With the opening up of enormous trading and investment opportunities, we have reached a new level of trust and ambition...The trade agreement symbolises our shared commitment to open, fair, equitable trade as well as generating growth and employment for the youth," he said.

India-EFTA two-way trade was USD 18.65 billion in 2022-23 compared to USD 27.23 billion in 2021-22. The trade deficit was USD 14.8 billion in the last fiscal.

Switzerland is the largest trading partner of India, followed by Norway in the bloc. (PTI)

## India not to tailor policy for Tesla EV maker as also other global players welcome in India: Goyal

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** India will not tailor its policies to suit US EV maker Tesla, and its laws and tariff rules will be formulated to attract all-electric vehicle manufacturers from across the world to set up a base in the world's fastest-growing economy, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

Tesla has been seeking an initial tariff concession that would allow it to offset 70 per cent customs duty for cars priced less than USD 40,000, and 100 per cent for cars of higher value.

In an interview with PTI, Goyal said the government recognises the need for a vibrant EV ecosystem as greater use of battery-run vehicles will cut carbon emissions as well as the staggering oil import bill.

But for this, it will not tailor policies that suit any one company and would rather frame ones that will encourage all-electric vehicle manufacturers from across the world to set up shop in India, he said.

"We are working on several initiatives where we are having inter-ministerial (consultations) and a dialogue with the stakeholders, with potential investors from across the world from Europe, from the United States, from the Far East, from Japan, from Korea," he said.

Tesla made the concession demand a precondition to build a plant in India. High tariffs on motor vehicles, meant to boost local production, have been a lingering issue for foreign carmakers too.

"Government does not tailor policy for any one individual company or its interests. Everybody is free to make their demands. But that does not mean that the government will necessarily take a decision (based on) what you demand," he said.

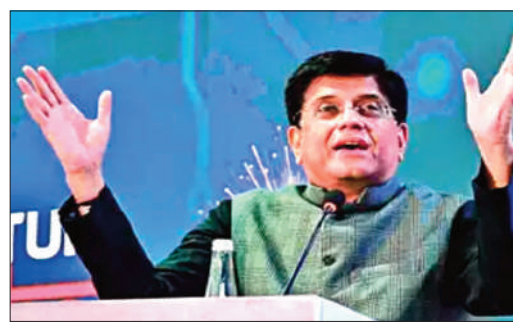
Goyal was replying to a question about whether the government is looking at giving any concessions to Tesla for setting up a manufacturing facility in India.

The Indian factory, as and when it happens, would be Tesla's sixth vehicle plant. At present, cars imported as completely built units (CBUs) attract customs duty ranging from 60 per cent to 100 per cent, depending on engine size and cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value less or above USD 40,000.

The world's largest electric car producer Tesla Inc's chief Elon Musk met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June last year in New York. Musk, after meeting the Prime Minister, said he plans to visit India in 2024.

"We recognise that India must have a vibrant electric mobility ecosystem. We recognise that it has multifarious benefits to grow towards electric mobility. Not only will it help us in our fight against climate change, it will also improve the environment and lower pollution levels, particularly in cities, which largely suffer because of the ICE (internal combustion engine) or the petrol-diesel fumes that are thrown out," Goyal said.

"So, it has so many multifarious benefits which will impact not only the country's environment but will also impact the country's economy, it will add to our economic output. It will save foreign exchange, reduce our trade deficits, help us in our fight against inflation, thereby helping us in reducing interest rates," he added. The minister emphasised that the sector can



be a powerful medium to make the country macro-economically even stronger.

"So it'll be a project (that we) will be continuously looking to encourage all-electric vehicle manufacturers across the world.

"And we are working on several initiatives where we are having a dialogue, inter-ministerial, with the stakeholders, with potential investors from across the world from Europe, from the United States, from the Far East, from Japan, from Korea. So we have significant engagements going on across the world," the minister said.

India, the world's third-largest energy consumer, is pitching as an alternate destination for investment for US companies to capitalise on the growing chill between Beijing and Washington.

To attract EV players, the government has rolled out production-linked incentive schemes for advanced chemistry cell manufacturing and component making.

In November last year, Goyal visited the manufacturing facility of Tesla in Fremont, California. The company sourced goods worth about USD 1 billion in 2022. The government has rolled out production-linked incentives (PLI) schemes (PLI) for advanced chemistry cell (ACC) battery storage with an outlay of ₹ 18,100 crore and ₹ 26,058 crore PLI scheme for auto, auto-components and drone industries.

The UK, which is negotiating a free trade agreement with India, is also seeking customs duty concessions on exports of electric vehicles under the proposed agreement.

The fast-growing EV market in India is catching the eyes of global players. The UK is also looking at phasing out ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicles by 2035, and the British auto market is export-driven.

According to experts, the UK's major export destination for vehicles is Europe, and they are looking to diversify their exports.

India's electric vehicles market is expected to grow to one crore units in annual sales by 2030 and create five crore direct and indirect jobs, according to the Economic Survey 2022-23.

As per industry estimates, the total EV sales in India stood at around 10 lakh units in 2022.

In India, Tata Motors is the leading player in passenger electric vehicles. The company's current EV portfolio comprises Nexon EV range, Tiago EV and Tigor EV. (PTI)

investors and fund managers is part of the continuous risk management and disclosure process, which is already being carried out through channels like the risk-o-meter and fact sheets.

"From March, they will provide additional information on small and mid-cap funds," he said.

The arrangement of additional disclosures on small and mid-cap funds comes at a time when there have been sharp inflows in these funds as the market hits fresh highs.

The market regulator had reviewed data with respect to stress testing of some of the schemes, and based on their outcome, a need was felt that investors should be aware of certain additional risks involved in investing in such schemes, the officials said.

The net assets under management in small-cap and mid-cap funds were ₹ 2,49,079 crore and ₹ 2,94,490 crore, respectively, in February 2024 as compared to ₹ 1,31,586 crore and ₹ 1,83,246 crore in the year-ago month. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Centre aims to make 3 cr

(of BJP at the Centre and in the state) is the welfare of mothers and sisters," he said. "Today, families are getting puca houses and that too in the name of women," the prime minister said. Through the Ujjwala scheme, women have been getting cooking gas cylinders at cheaper rates. More than 50 per cent of the Jan Dhan accounts are in the name of women. More than 65 per cent of Mudra loans were taken by women, he said.

"In the last ten years, our government has changed the lives of more than 10 crore women through self-help groups," Modi said.

"The efforts of our government have resulted in making more than one crore women 'lakhpati didi'. We have now resolved that we will fulfill the target of making three crore sisters of the country lakhpati didi," he added.

The government is also working on the 'Namo Drone Didi Yojna', under which drones as well training as drone pilot training will be provided, he added.

The scheme by the Centre aims to provide drones to 15,000 select women self-help groups to provide rental services to farmers for agricultural purposes.

PM Modi said the BJP has given a guarantee of happiness and prosperity and the Chhattisgarh government led by chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai has started working on it, he said. "We had given guarantees that we will construct 18 lakh puca houses. The Sai-led government started work on it on the very second day of the government's formation," Modi said.

Paddy farmers were given a guarantee that they will be paid the outstanding bonus for two years (against procurement of the produce). The Chhattisgarh government transferred Rs 3,716 crore into the accounts of farmers on the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, he said.

"We had given a guarantee that we will purchase paddy at Rs 3,100 per quintal which was fulfilled and a record was created by purchasing 145 metric tons of paddy from farmers. The difference amount (over the minimum support price) against paddy procurement will be paid to the farmers soon," PM Modi said.

Development works will be increased in the coming five years in the state, he added.

Chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai and his cabinet colleagues were present at the function held at the Science College ground here.

Under the 'Mahtari Vandan' scheme, Rs 655 crore was transferred into the bank accounts of 70.12 lakh beneficiaries. Each beneficiary will get Rs 1,000 per month under the scheme, as per the state government. (PTI)

## Political parties calling bandhs

"democratic mass movement" across the state if the CAA was not repealed. The state had witnessed massive protests after the Rajya Sabha passed the CAA on December 11, 2019, with agitators engaging in pitched battles with security forces, forcing the administration to impose curfew in several towns and cities.

Union home minister Amit Shah had earlier said CAA rules would be notified and implemented before the Lok Sabha polls. (PTI)

## Two election commissioners

the selection committee could meet either on March 13 or 14 depending on the convenience of the members and the appointments are likely to be made by March 15. Before a new law on the appointment of CEC and ECs came into force recently, the election commissioners were appointed by the President on the government's recommendation and as per custom, the senior-most was appointed as CEC. Clause 2 of Article 324 of the Constitution states that the Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, if any, as the President may from time to time fix.

Responding to questions on reasons behind Goel's resignation, the sources said he might have resigned due to personal reasons. They also rejected suggestions that there were differences between Goel and Kumar, saying records of internal communication, minutes and decisions show there was no dissent recorded by Goel.

Goel, who tendered resignation on Friday morning, did not attend the crucial meeting between the EC and top home ministry and railway officials to firm up deployment and movement of central forces across India for poll duty. Goel was a 1985-batch IAS officer of the Punjab cadre. He had joined the Election Commission in November 2022. His tenure was till December 5, 2027, and he would have become chief election commissioner (CEC) after incumbent Rajiv Kumar retired in February next year.

Ashok Lavasa had resigned as election commissioner in August 2020. He had given dissent notes on various model code violations decisions taken by the EC in the last Lok Sabha polls. Originally, the commission had only a CEC. It currently consists of the CEC and two election commissioners.

Two additional commissioners were first appointed on October 16, 1989, but they had a very short tenure till January 1, 1990. Later, on October 1, 1993, two additional election commissioners were appointed. The concept of a multi-member EC has been in operation since then, with decision made by a majority vote. (PTI)

## India, EFTA ink free trade

the major trading partner of India in the bloc, already removed duties from January this year on almost all industrial goods. On the other hand, India is offering 82.7 per cent of its tariff lines or product categories, which covers 95.3 per cent of EFTA exports of which more than 80 per cent of imports is gold. On gold, India has not touched the effective customs duty (which is 15 per cent) but has reduced the bound rate by one per cent to 39 per cent.

Bound and applied rates are used in international trade parlance. While bound tariffs or duties refer to the ceiling, the applied tariff is the duty, which is currently in place.

India will also provide duty concessions on certain PLI (production-linked incentive) sectors like pharma, medical devices and processed food. Sensitivities related to these sectors have been kept in mind while extending offers.

Sectors such as dairy, soya, coal and sensitive agricultural products are kept on the exclusion list, which means there would not be any duty concessions on these goods.

In the services sector, the commerce ministry said, India has offered 105 sub-sectors to the EFTA like accounting, business services, computer services, distribution and health. On the other hand, the country has secured commitments in 128 sub-sectors from Switzerland, 114 from Norway, 107 from Liechtenstein, and 110 from Iceland. Segments where India services will get a boost include legal, audio-visual, R&D, computer, accounting, and auditing. TEPA (trade and economic partnership agreement) would stimulate our services exports in sectors of our key strength/interest such as IT services, business services, personal, cultural, sporting and recreational services, other education services, and audio-visual services.

Further commitments related to Intellectual Property Rights in TEPA are at the TRIPS (trade-related aspects of IPRs) level. The IPR chapter with Switzerland, which has high standards for IPR, shows our robust IPR regime.

India's interests in generic medicines and concerns related to the evergreening of patents have been fully addressed, it added. It also said that the agreement will empower Indian exporters access to specialised inputs and create a conducive trade and investment environment.

This would boost exports of Indian-made goods as well as provide opportunities for the services sector to access more markets. TEPA would also provide an opportunity to integrate into EU markets. Over 40 per cent of Switzerland's global services exports are to the EU (European Union). (PTI)

## AASU stage hunger

is a death kneel for the people of Assam. We strongly oppose the CAA because it is against the secular fabric of the constitution and its violates the Assam Accord," Baruah said. Many in Assam are against the CAA as it seeks to offer Indian citizenship to the non-Muslim "persecuted" migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, till 2014.

## Rijiju upset over delay

of the supercomputer but did not elaborate. "But I hope the French government will also intervene because we have a good understanding and a very good relationship with the French government. "Since it is a high-cost equipment, we want to ensure that the transaction happens duly and properly," he said.

"From outside, everything's ready. It is only the problem with the main company. They want us to pay their subsidiary. We will pay only to a company whom we have entered an MoU with," Rijiju said.

The supercomputing systems, based on Eviden's BullSequana XH2000, will have a combined power capacity of up to 21.3 petaflops.

The NCMRWF supercomputer will have an 8.3-petaflop computing capacity for weather and climate modelling to support advanced numerical weather prediction (NWP) research. This platform will bring together 2,100 CPU nodes with AMD EPYC 7643 processors, 18 GPU nodes using NVIDIA A100 Tensor Core GPUs, the NVIDIA Quantum InfiniBand networking platform, and high-performance memory provided by Micron.

The NCMRWF supercomputer will also have 2PB all flash and 20PB disk-based DDN EXAScaler ES400NVX2 parallel filesystem storage.

The supercomputer at the Pune-based IITM will provide 13 petaflops of computing power for atmosphere and climate research.

It will integrate 3,000 CPU nodes using AMD EPYC 7643 processors and 26 GPU nodes through NVIDIA A100 Tensor Core GPUs. The system will benefit from the NVIDIA Quantum InfiniBand networking platform with In-Network Computing, 3PB all flash and 29PB disk-based DDN EXAScaler ES400NVX2 storage and Micron high-technology memory. The existing computing facility at NCMRWF is 2.8 petaflops and at IITM is 4 petaflops, respectively. (PTI)

## Walk showcasing heritage

and a church, sight of the famous 'Battle of Saraighat' in which Ahoms handed down a decisive defeat to the mighty Mughals, the North East region's oldest college, a prominent public hall that has been witness to many historical events and an archaeological site are among the locations covered.

Ahmed said he has plans to expand to other places of historical prominence in the state and conduct guided tours for tourists and anyone interested in knowing more about the place.

While historical walks have been conducted in the past too in Guwahati as well as different parts, a concerted, sustained effort is being perhaps made for the first time to showcase the relevance of the city since the ancient ages. (PTI)

## Demand for private jets,

Non-Scheduled Operators (NSOPs) at the end of December 2023. Generally, NSOPs are entities that do not have a particular fixed schedule and fly when there is a requirement. Since the demand will be high, players are expected to take planes on lease for chartered operations, especially helicopters, Bali said and added that there are around 111-112 NSOPs and out of them, 40-50 per cent operate single aircraft.

He said that NSOPs are estimated to have around 450 planes, including choppers. These operators have aircraft and helicopters, with seating capacities varying from 3 to 37. The planes include Falcon 2000, Bombardier Global 5000, Twin Otter DHC-6-300, Hawker Beechcraft, Gulfstream G-200 and Cessna Citation 560XL, as per the data available with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). Most of the aircraft and helicopters have seating capacities of less than 10, the data showed. (PTI)

## Stress disclosures on small, mid-cap funds by AMCs from March: Officials

**KOLKATA, March 10:** In a bid to maintain stability, instil investors' confidence and enhance transparency, market regulator SEBI and AMFI, a body representing the mutual fund industry, have directed fund houses to provide additional disclosures for small and mid-cap funds from this month, officials said.

The additional disclosure parameters for mutual fund managers include valuation, volatility, investor concentration and the percentage holding in small and mid-cap stocks, along with disclosures on stress testing results. "SEBI who-lifetime member Amarjeet Singh said at an event organised by Indian Chamber of Commerce.

The stress test results are expected to reveal the time it may take for Asset Management Companies (AMCs) to liquidate securi-



ties equivalent to 25 per cent and 50 per cent of the Assets Under Management (AUM) of the schemes on a pro-rata basis. A format has been developed in consultation with AMFI, Singh said.

"The risk management framework is communicated to the Asset Management Companies (AMCs) for disclosure to investors through various channels such as the risk-o-meter, fact sheets, and additional disclosures, particularly for mid-cap and small-cap funds," AMFI

Chief Executive Venkat Nagewar Chalasani said.

These disclosures cover aspects like liquidity, valuation and concentration, providing investors with crucial information to make informed decisions.

These detailed disclosures will be available on the websites of AMC and the regulator.

Chalasani termed such measures as an ongoing process to instil investor's confidence.

The interaction between in-

# Integrated initiative aims at sustainable agriculture, natural resource management, and rural development

## NABARD launches first watershed project in Hojai

HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, March 10:** As part of Natural Resources Management, NABARD has been supporting the implementation of various projects like Integrated Watershed Development with Climate Proofing Interventions (IWDCPIs), Integrated Tribal Development Programmes (ITDPs), UPNRM & Climate Change Projects, etc., across the country. As part of this initiative, NABARD Assam RO has successfully launched the Full Implementation Phase (FIP) of its first watershed project in Assam. The watershed project is scheduled to be implemented at Derapathara village under the Lumding Development Block in Hojai district.

The project was inaugurated last Saturday jointly by MLA Sibru Misra, district commissioner Hojai Lachit Kr Das, and the general manager cum officer-in-charge of NABARD Assam RO, Nabin Kr Roy.

During the event organised at the Durga Mandir ground in Derapathara, over 500 beneficiary participants attended. Present at the event were NABARD officer Sankar Das, DDM Hojai Rajendar Perna, DAO Hojai Ranjith Mishra Bhagawati, DD Health Dr Ranju Rajkhowa, Fishery in-charge Bhabani Nath, soil conservation officer Lakhya-yoti Bora, bankers from AGVB, SBI, PNB, and



representatives from the Project Facilitating Agency (PFA) i.e., Gramya Unnayan Santha and Village Watershed Committee (VWC) members.

While addressing the occasion, Nabin Kr Roy, GM/OIC of NABARD Assam RO, informed the participants that under the FIP, NABARD would

be extending a grant assistance of Rs 2.30 crore for the creation of 485 major and minor structures like check dams, percolation tanks, water harvesting structures, control bunds, earthen bunds, farm ponds, staggered contour trenches, etc., in the fields of 332 identified beneficiaries of Derapathara 1-4 villages. In addition to undertaking measures pertaining to area and drainage line treatments, NABARD would also support climate proofing interventions like installation of remote sensing automated wireless weather stations, soil moisture sensors, solar pumps, micro and drip irrigation systems, etc. The project also envisages livelihood and women development training on activities like vermicomposting, agarbatti and candle making, sanitary pad making, livestock rearing, tailoring and embroidery, handloom design development, etc. He also shared that based on the level of implementation of the project components, the equivalent grant support would be directly credited into the bank accounts of the PFA and VWC.

In his inaugural speech, Sibru Misra, MLA Lumding LAC, asserted that Lumding in Karbi language means 'scarcity of water' and congratulated NABARD for sanctioning the watershed project for restoration of natural resources and for the development of resource-poor farming families of the constituency. He also emphasised the

priorities of the Government of India and the Government of Assam for the overall development of the farmers, women artisans residing in far-flung remote interiors of the state, adding that the development of a country or a state can happen only with the development of rural areas.

Lachit Kr Das, DC, Hojai, also spoke on the occasion and expressed his sincere gratitude to NABARD Assam RO as well as DDM, NABARD for sanctioning and successfully implementing various projects in the district for the development and betterment of the villages, farmers, rural artisans, women entrepreneurs, etc.

AGM, NABARD, Sankar Das, and DDM, Hojai, Rajendar Perna addressed the gathering and said that the successful implementation of the project would achieve major objectives like soil and water conservation, promotion of sustainable and climate-resilient farming practices, promotion of various off-farm interventions, human resources development and social capital formation, enhancement in agriculture production, productivity, livelihoods, and income of farmers from this region. The participants were also guided by DAO, Ranjith Mishra Bhagawati, DD, Health Dr Ranju Rajkhowa, Fishery in-charge Bhabani Nath, soil conservation officer, secretary-GUS Mukut Deka, etc., as stated in a press note here.

## Over 80% of 'Batadroba Prakalpa' works completed: CM Himanta



HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, March 10:** Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited Batadroba than on Sunday morning and inspected the ongoing construction works of 'Batadroba Prakalpa'.

During interactions with local media persons, CM Sarma asserted that over 80 percent of the ongoing construction works of the project were completed. He anticipated that it would be open for visitors or pil-

grims just before the completion of the third year of his government.

Referring to the CAA, CM Sarma also stated that the act was passed by both houses in parliament and the ongoing agitation against the implementation of CAA would achieve nothing, as the agitation against the act should have been intensified earlier. Therefore, any form of stir will be ineffective now, the chief minister added.

Pointing out the anti-CAA move initiated by the opposition alliance parties, he mentioned that if political leaders stage protests, complaints against them will be submitted to the Election Commission of India, and their respective registrations will be forfeited or canceled.

Like the PM, I too have assured that no one will come and I will not allow anyone to come in, CM Sarma emphasised. He mentioned that the Supreme Court withdrew the IMDT Act, and it was not withdrawn through agitations. Hence, we will accept the verdict of the Supreme Court regarding CAA as it is under trial in the top court, the chief minister added.

## Nehru Yuva Kendra conducts 'Women's Empowerment Race'

HT Correspondent

**MORIGAON, March 10:** To encourage and empower women, Morigaon Nehru Yuva Kendra, under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, organised a Women's Empowerment Race on Saturday, coinciding with International Women's Day. The event was organised by Prakritipremi Manch Assam in collaboration with Tarani Kalbari LP School ground under Bhurbandha Development Block, Manikanchan

Yoga Sports Association in collaboration with Jagi Higher Secondary School ground in Mayang Development, Nataraj Dance Academy in collaboration with Jajari Anant Primary School ground in Dalanghat Development, Nurul Amin Ground in Moirabari, Dhingariati Amarjyoti Club of Lahariati Development, and Taj Mahal Mahila Mandal of Kapili Development.

The event saw participation from over fifty women and youth

from each development sector, and more than five hundred women from across Morigaon district. Following the Women's Empowerment Race, the first, second, and third place winners were awarded t-shirts, caps, wristbands, and coffee cups with the My Bharat logo.

The event was graced by the presence of Morigaon Nehru Yuva Kendra district youth officer Bikash Chandra Pradhan, accountant, and program officer Dhananjay Talukdar.

## Awareness campaign promotes cashew cultivation expansion in state



HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 10:** An awareness campaign on the expansion of cashew cultivation was successfully conducted by AAU-Zonal Research Station, Diphu in collaboration with ICAR-Directorate Cashew Research, Puttur, Kamataka at Langsoliet and Bokolia on Saturday and Sunday. The program aimed to popularise cashew cultivation and encourage area expansion, given the crop's suitability for the region's climatic conditions.

Key participants in the program included Dr Kansam Dayamoy Singha, chief scientist, Dr Manha Bathari, scientist, and Hummili Terangpi, scientist, from AAU-Zonal Research Station Diphu. Additionally, scientists from ICAR-Directorate of Cashew Research Puttur, Karnataka, namely

Dr Siddanna Savadi, Dr Manjesh GN, and Dr Veena GL, delivered lectures covering various aspects of cashew cultivation, from cultivation techniques to marketing strategies.

The emphasis was placed on suitable cashew varieties for the region, production techniques, processing methods, and overall management practices. Three varieties, namely Ullal-3, Ullal-4, and Vengul-7, were recommended for cultivation in the region, with planting suggested for the month of June.

Given that the region is considered a rain shadow area, cashew cultivation is particularly suitable due to the crop's ability to thrive in such conditions with minimal irrigation. Additionally, cashew is known for its resilience and can grow in various climatic condi-

tions, making it an attractive option for farmers seeking additional income with minimal effort.

The program also aimed to encourage youth and female farmers to adopt scientific cashew cultivation practices, emphasising the crop's profitability. Furthermore, it was highlighted that their contribution could help minimise the current deficit of cashew production in India, which stands at 3 lakh metric tonnes.

During the two-day program, a total of 120 farmers were trained, and each farmer was provided with five farm implements to encourage the adoption of scientific cultivation practices. Additionally, leaflets on 'scientific cultivation of cashew' were distributed to farmers to further support their knowledge and practices in cashew cultivation.

## Obituary

**K**ushal Bora Bhagawati, a noted educationist, journalist, and litterateur from Yamunamukh in Hojai district, passed away on the last Saturday due to old age ailments. He was 93 years old. He is survived by his wife, two sons, and a host of relatives.

Born in 1931 at Yamunamukh Nagaonian Paam village, he completed his bachelor's degree from Nowgong College and began his career as an assistant teacher at Yamunamukh HS School. Additionally, Bora served as a local correspondent for the Assamese daily 'Dainik Asom' from the Yamunamukh area in 1960. He also earned rare acclaim for his masterpiece book 'Sut Jatir Prachinata', a researched work on the history of the 'Sut' community. He was associated with Assamese newspapers as well as monthly magazines like Agradoot, Prantik, Aloke, Kal Purush, Satsori, and the Indian army newsletter Sainik Samachar. Moreover, he wrote over 6000 limericks and over 4500 sonnets throughout his life. His demise was mourned by various local organisations and dignitaries of Yamunamukh, who prayed for his eternal peace in heaven.



## Shivratri celebrations enthrall devotees

HT Correspondent

**DEMOW, March 10:** The Shivratri Puja was organised at Demow Raichai Sarbajanin Shiva Mandir from March 8 for three days. Various programs were organised during the three days of the event, including the plantation of saplings, Shiva Puja, Shiva Gita Path, lighting of earthen lamps in the Mandir premises, and Naam Kirtan, along with other activities. On Sunday, which marked the last day of the event, various programs were organised, and during the night, a Bhaona was staged.

## Five day spiritual event

HT Correspondent

**DEMOW, March 10:** An 'Abirata Bhagawat Path' will be organised at Madhupur Bor Naam Ghar (Demow) from March 22, 2024, for five days. On March 26, which will be the last day of the program, a Bhaona will be staged in the evening. The organisers have invited the people to be present at the program.

## 'Artisans towards Fashion' showcases fusion of tradition & trend

HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, March 10:** Pratikshya, a leading NGO in partnership with the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicraft), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, organised a specific program - 'Artisans towards Fashion', a unique and vibrant showcase blending India's rich cultural heritage with contemporary fashion at Hotel Vivanta.

The event was inaugurated by Diptanshu Halder, regional director, in charge of the North East Region of the Development Commissioner of Handicraft.

Attending the program as the chief guest, he emphasised the importance of sustainable practices in the handicraft sector and the role of such events in empowering artisans economically. He praised the initiative for highlighting the artisans' incredible talents and contributing to their economic well-being.

The fashion show was attended by distinguished guests like Vijay Prakash, NSIC zonal manager; Subhashish Hazarika, manager at NE-HHDC; Dr Rajat Kr Paul, director of the Coconut Development Board; Dhananjay Talukdar, Nehru Yuva Kendra; and Ganeshan, chief manager (Commercial) at NHDC, who showcased the collaborative spirit across various sectors to uplift India's handicraft heritage.

During the event, artisans as well as key figures in the handicraft sector were felicitated by the organisers. Mantu Das was conferred with the 'Ship Guru Award' while Dharanidhar Kalita was awarded the National Merit Certificate. Nazia Hassan Choudhury, secretary of Pratikshya, and Tayabur Rahman, advisor of Pratikshya, presented the awards, celebrating the recipients' contributions to the industry.

Pratikshya NGO extended its gratitude to all involved, especially the Ministry of Textiles and the Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicraft), for their support. The successful event highlighted the critical role of collaborative efforts in preserving and promoting Indian handicrafts' rich heritage, as stated in a press release.

## AIUDF chief lambasts Congress over Dhubri candidature speculations

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 10:** All India United Democratic Front chief Badrudin Ajmal has launched a sharp attack on Congress over the candidature of Rockybul Hussain in the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat. Although the Congress party has not declared its candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, speculations are rife that the grand old party may give a ticket to Rockybul Hussain to challenge Ajmal in the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat.

Hussain, a former minister in the Tarun Gogoi cabinet, is believed to be a strong contender against Ajmal in Dhubri. The AIUDF leader told the press, "I have been in politics for the

last 20 years. For three years, I served as an MLA, and I have been representing the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat since 2009. Rockybul Hussain hardly comes to Dhubri for a few hours. He never spends a night there."

Ajmal also argued that the AIUDF is set to perform well in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

"We will definitely win three seats. The Congress party will become zero in Assam this time," he said. Notably, the Congress has not announced candidates for the Lok Sabha. The Assam Cong president Bhupen Borah said, "The Congress high command will announce candidates on March 11."

## Runaway handed over to Child Helpline

HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, March 10:** A 13-year-old girl was found by people at Nimatighat (Ferry Ghat) on the outskirts here on Sunday when she was reportedly about to board a ferry to Majuli island. She intended to go to her aunt's house in Lakhimpur due to alleged ill-treatment and torture by her stepmother. According to sources, as people spotted the minor at the Ghat alone, they inquired about the matter and were told by the girl that she wanted to go to her aunt's place in Lakhimpur via Majuli as she could no longer bear the alleged mistreatment and torture from her stepmother.

## Minister Singhal unveils bronze statue of Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala

HT Correspondent

**TEZPUR, March 10:** Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs and Irrigation, as well as MLA of Dhekiajuli LAC, Ashok Singhal, unveiled a full-length bronze statue of Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, crafted by the prominent sculptor and artist Biren Singha, on Sunday. The statue was erected in front of 'Poki', the ancestral home of the cultural icon Jyotiprasad, which is now known as 'Jyoti Bharat', the cultural development office under the Department of State Cultural Affairs. Additionally, the minister inaugu-

rated the main gate (arch) crafted by artist Mrigen Kalita.

As part of Jyoti Bharati (POKI)'s developmental activity with a budget of ₹ 13 crore, the statue and its new main gate were formally inaugurated by the minister at an august event.

Unveiling the statue of the cultural legend and the gate, minister Ashok Singhal paid rich tribute to Rupkonwar, stating that the day would always remain memorable for him as he got the privilege to unveil the statue of such a great and unmatched legendary figure of Assamese cul-

ture. He emphasised that 'Poki' is not only the symbol of the center of language, culture, and history of Assam but also the source of dignity and identity of the people of Assam. In his speech, he remembered the immense contributions made by Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala towards building the Assamese nation and culture.

Earlier in his welcome speech, district commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra stated that the state government's Department of Cultural Affairs has initiated to preserve POKI and its property in

a scientific way. Among others, a host of dignitaries from different fields including local MLA Prithviraj Rava, former minister and MLA of Behali Ranjit Dutta, vice chairman of AMTRON Ritubaran Sarmah, noted academician Dr Bhubaneswar Saharia, Mahendra Nath Keot, artist Durgamoyee Borah, Assam-BJP Mahila Marcha president Swarna Bania, and Sonitpur BJP Mahila Marcha president Dipamani Saikia were present at the auspicious event. The event was conducted by the executive president of Sonitpur Press Club, Pankaj Baruah.

## AFFIDAVIT

I, RINKU SEAL, C/o- Shyanmlal Shill, aged about 51 years, by religion Hindu, resident of House No. 11, Bye [Lane 3, Near Das Petrol Pump, Kalapahar Pahartoli, Binovanagar, Guwahati-781018, in the District of Kamrup (M), Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare on oath as follows :

- That I am a citizen of India by birth and a resident of the aforesaid
- That my actual and correct name is RINKU SEAL which is recorded in my Aadhaar Card Bearing No.783972120121 and some other relevant documents but inadvertently in my Permanent Residential Certificate (PRC) Vide SI. No. 298 dated 28-08-1993 my name has been written as KANIKA SHILL.
- That I do hereby declare and affirm that RINKU SEAL and KANIKA SHILL as one and the same person having single identity i.e., myself.
- That this affidavit shall be used as a piece of documentary evidence to prove the facts stated above and it will be submitted before the concerned authority or authorities as and when required.



Silchar Divisional Office "Jeevan Prakash" Meherpur, Silchar, Assam, 788015 Email: os.silchar@licindia.com

## NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender for SITC of soundless / noiseless Diesel Generator set (D.G. Set) in Acoustic enclosure on monthly hire basis including fuel at 3 (three) units under Silchar Divisional Office, as follows :-

SL. NO.	BRANCH	BO CODE	CAPACITY
1	Hailong BO	49C	15KVA
2	Hailakandi BO	49A	25KVA
3	Agartala BO-II	49E	25KVA

Sealed Tenders are invited for each location separately, on hiring basis from experienced Firms / Agencies under **Two Bid, Technical Bid (T.B) & Financial Bid (F.B) system** for "SITC of silent type DG Set of 15/25 KVA capacity (as specified branch wise in the above list) with Kirloskar / Cummins / Eicher / Ashok Leyland / Mahindra / approved equivalent engine on hire basis. The tenders will be issued from 12/03/2024 to 01/04/2024 and the last date of receipt of offer will be 02/04/2024 upto 15:00 Hrs. The Technical Bid (T.B) shall be opened on the next working day i.e. 03/04/2024 (at 11:30 Hrs For Branch serial no 1 to 3) For further details visit our Corporation's website [www.licindia.in/Tenders](http://www.licindia.in/Tenders). Any subsequent change in stipulated dates or Terms & Conditions of the notice for hiring of generator will be published on our website only. Interested parties are requested to keep track of our website for any corrigendum or change.

The Life Insurance Corporation reserves the right to accept or cancel any tender without assigning any reasons thereof.

## Important Points to be noted.

Separate Tender (Technical Bid, Financial Bid, EMD etc) is to be submitted for each branch clearly mentioning the name of the Branch Office (BO) for which the Tender is submitted.

Place : Silchar Date : 12/03/2024

Sr. Divisional Manager



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

The best place to find God is in a garden. You can dig for him there. -George Bernard Shaw

## BJP's seat-sharing woes

As the BJP navigates the delicate task of seat-sharing with former NDA allies, including estranged partners, it faces a litmus test of its internal cohesion. While PM Narendra Modi's strong leadership has often overshadowed internal dissent, cracks are emerging, exposing underlying fault lines within the party. The recent upheaval within the BJP's state units, particularly in Odisha, underscores the challenge of forging alliances with parties that have been vocally critical of the ruling regime. Odisha BJP Chief Manmohan Samal's rejection of a potential alliance with the BJD highlights the disconnect between the central leadership's directives and grassroots sentiments. Forcing such alliances risks alienating the party's rank and file, undermining its electoral credibility. Moreover, the BJP's ambitious target of 370 seats in the Lok Sabha, including an expectation of 35 seats from NDA allies, appears increasingly untenable. Many former allies, once influential in their respective regions, have either distanced themselves or been sidelined due to disagreements with the central leadership. The BJP's overtures to these estranged partners may be driven by the emergence of formidable opponents like the resurgent INDI-Alliance. The recent setback in alliance talks with the BJD and TDP-JSP in Andhra Pradesh further illustrates the challenges faced by the BJP in securing cohesive partnerships. Differences over seat-sharing persist, reflecting broader discontent within the NDA. In Maharashtra and Bihar, contentious negotiations have stalled progress, casting doubt on the unity of the alliance.

Central to these issues is the authoritarian style of leadership exhibited by the Modi-Shah duo, which has increasingly rankled party members. The centralization of power in ticket distribution and seat-sharing decisions has alienated grassroots leaders, leading to murmurs of revolt and discontent. The recent departure of several prominent leaders following the denial of party tickets underscores the brewing discontent within the BJP. The BJP's efforts to realign with former allies, such as the SAD in Punjab, are further complicated by ongoing socio-political movements, such as the farmers' agitation. The reluctance of allies to rejoin the NDA amidst contentious issues reflects the delicate balance of power within the coalition.

The BJP's struggles with seat-sharing underscore the challenges of maintaining coalition unity amidst diverging interests and discontent within the party. While the BJP has managed to forge alliances with smaller parties, it faces an uphill battle in securing the support of larger regional players. The authoritarian tendencies of the central leadership risk exacerbating internal dissent and alienating potential allies. As the party navigates the complexities of coalition politics, it must heed the voices of its grassroots leaders and adopt a more inclusive approach to alliance-building. Only then can the BJP hope to realize its electoral ambitions and secure a stable coalition government. To conclude, though the BJP has been able to forge an alliance or a "re-alliance" with several parties both in the North and South, its allies cannot get even half of the 35 seats PM Narendra Modi expects from them, unless there are more allies. So far, the BJP has found several small political parties, including in the North-east and South India. Political parties with grassroots clout have either parted ways or remain out of reach. Revolts and infighting have also impacted. The Modi-Shah authoritarianism is reaping what it sowed. The BJP may not even retain the '303' it got in 2019, forget Modi's '370' brag. Their "bold ticket distribution" exercise, and big brotherly attitude in seat-sharing with allies have their fatal faultlines

# Why global tax on super-rich is imperative for reducing inequality in society?

Brazil, as the president of G-20 has taken the move to place a proposal for the imposition of a global tax on super-rich in order to bring down the level of inequality between the rich and the poor in the current phase of the global economy. Brazil's finance minister told a G20 meeting in Sao Paulo on Thursday that countries should implement a global tax on the super-rich in an effort to tackle rampant tax evasion.

Speaking to a meeting of finance ministers, Fernando Haddad said that tax evasion could be resolved through international cooperation so that "these few individuals make their contribution to our societies and to the planet's sustainable development." He informed Brazil is pushing for a declaration on international taxation by G-20 members by July this year. India was the president of G-20 last year and Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a big show of his presidential tenure to impress the Indians on the eve of the general elections scheduled for April/May 2024.

However, on the issues of global tax on super rich, India did not make any move though, proposals were discussed for averting tax evasion by the high profile multinational companies including the giant tech companies of the USA. Brazilian President Lula has been taking a number of major initiatives in the interests of the developing nations and the underprivileged and the global tax on super rich is one of them. Brazil is determined to pursue this proposal at the coming G-20 meetings later this year.

The issue is a crucial one for the rich members of the G-20 and it will not be a smooth affair for Brazil to push that. Haddad in fact admitted that there would be a lot of debate about the proposal since not every member feels the same

way about the problem that was brought to the Sao Paulo meeting by Brazil. Brazilian finance minister underlined that Brazil would play its role as the G-20 president to focus the issues which were not earlier discussed by the G-20 members.

According to a 2023 study by advocacy group Tax Justice Network, countries around the world could lose up to \$4.8 trillion (£3.8 trillion) in tax revenue over the next decade due to tax havens.

These tax havens are patronized by the global companies as also the rich many of them belonging to India. A report earlier this year by the EU Tax Observatory found that billionaires worldwide have effective tax rates equivalent of between 0 per cent and 0.5 per cent of their wealth. What is shocking is that during pandemic years, while the poor and others suffered and died, the profits of the big companies as also the worth of the rich individuals went up. In fact inequality widened more in pandemic years.

For India, the imposition of a special tax on super rich is overdue as all the recent report including the latest OXFAM report released in January this year show that inequality has been steadily going. In pandemic and post pandemic years, the poor people without assured social security are having pathetic living conditions whereas the incomes of upper middle class and rich have been on the rise. The widening of inequality has special impact in India because the common citizens are not protected through social security measures like many other countries of West and Latin America and other developing nations.

According to OXFAM report, India is facing ris-



ing industrial concentration in just five hands, and is enriching billionaires, private equity funds, and crown capitalists

driving unprecedented levels of inequalities and poverty among people. Dalits are facing high and unaffordable out-of-pocket fees in the private healthcare sector, financial exclusion in the private healthcare sector, and overt discrimination in both.

Globally, since 2020, the richest five men have doubled their fortunes, but during the same period almost five billion people globally have become poorer. Hardship and hunger are daily reality, and at the current rate, it will take 230 years to end poverty, but we could have the world's first trillionaire in just 10 years.

"A new era of monopoly: The supercharging of Corporate Power", Oxfam report says that we are living through an era of monopoly power that enables corporations to control markets, set the terms of exchange, and profit without fear of losing business. Far from being an abstract phenomenon, this impacts us in many ways: influencing the wages we are paid, the foods we eat and can afford, and the medicines we can access. Far from being accidental, this power has been handed to monopolies by our governments.

In sector after sector, the report says, increased market concentration can be seen everywhere. Globally,

over two decades, 60 pharmaceutical companies merged into just 10 giant, global 'Big Pharma' firms between 1995 and 2015. Two international companies now own more than 40% of the global seed market. 'Big Tech' firms dominate markets: three-quarters of global online advertising spending pays Meta, Alphabet and Amazon; and more than 90% of global online search is done via Google. Agriculture has seen consolidation within Africa. India faces 'rising industrial concentration', especially by the top five firms.

As the report points out, Corporate power fuels inequality in four ways: Rewarding the wealthy, not the workers; Dodging taxes; Privatizing public services; and Driving climate breakdown. Corporations drive inequality by forcing wages down and direct profits to the ultra-wealthy. Oxfam analysis finds that 791 million workers have seen their wages fail globally to keep up with inflation and as a result each worker lost wages of nearly a month (25 days) in the last two years. Further, corporations have used their influence to oppose labour laws and policies that could benefit workers, such as minimum wage increases. They supported reforms that undermine workers' rights, and also political restrictions on unionization.

Corporations and their wealthy owners also undertake sustained and highly effective war on taxation, resulting in cut in

taxes. Aggressive tax planning, abuse of tax havens, and incentives also result in tax rates that are much lower, often closer to zero. It has deprived governments around the world, but especially in the Global South, of trillions of US dollars in revenue that could be used to reduce inequality and end poverty.

Privatising public services has affected the people. Basic services are being treated as asset classes and public money is used to guarantee corporate returns rather than human rights. Private equity firms are snapping up everything from water systems to healthcare providers and nursing homes, amid a litany of concerns about poor and even tragic outcomes.

Privatization can drive and reinforce inequalities in vital public services, entrenching gaps between rich and poor, excluding and impoverishing those who cannot pay while those who can pay are able to access good healthcare and education. Privatization can also drive inequalities on the basis of gender, race, and caste. For example, Oxfam found that Dalits in India face high and unaffordable out-of-pocket fees in the private healthcare sector; financial exclusion in the private education sector; and overt discrimination in both.

In India, where the private healthcare sector is now worth US\$236 billion and rising rapidly, the World Bank's private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), has directly invested over half a billion dollars in some of the country's largest corporate hospital chains owned by some of its richest billionaires. Yet in June 2023, Oxfam found that the IFC has not published a single evaluation of its health projects in India since these started over 25 years ago. Indian health regulators have upheld multiple complaints,

including cases of hospitals overcharging, rigging prices and refusing to treat patients living in poverty for free, despite this being a condition of receiving government land for free. Furthermore, of the 144 hospitals funded, only one is located in a rural area.

For years, Oxfam has raised alarm about widening and extreme inequality. As India entered 2024, the very real danger is that these extraordinary extremes are becoming the new normal. Corporate and monopoly power is an unrelenting inequality-generating machine, the report says, adding that we are living through what appears to be the start of a decade of division: in just three years, we have experienced a global pandemic, war, a cost-of-living crisis and climate breakdown. Each crisis has widened the gulf – not so much between the rich and people living in poverty, but between an oligarchic few and the vast majority.

Brazil has taken the findings of the Oxfam report seriously, the same is with South Africa which has extended support to the views expressed by the Brazilian finance minister. India is facing general elections in April/May this year. Te new government is expected to be formed after May and the final budget is expected to be placed to new Parliament in July this year. The same month Brazil is expected to be ready with its declaration on global tax. Irrespective of which combination forms the next government, Indian government has to give serious consideration to the imposition of a special tax on super rich on the lines of the proposed declaration. Enough resources can be mobilized through this process. That is necessary to generate lakhs of jobs in the economy which witnessed jobless growth strategy for the last ten years. (IPA Service)

## Big world leaders are failing to protect peace and security in the globe



By: Dr Arun Mitra

There was lot of complacency after the end of cold war as several people felt that now we shall enter an era of lasting peace and a world free of nuclear weapons. But this did not happen. The United States and its allies, many of them erstwhile colonial masters, have constantly been putting efforts for a unipolar world. With their designs they have pushed several parts of the world in different continents into armed conflicts.

However this is being challenged by several countries who are taking stand on various issues including disarmament, abolition of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. This is apparent from passage of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 7th July 2017 despite tremendous pressure by the nuclear weapons possessing countries. Several countries after the initiative by the south Africa have contested Israeli genocide in Gaza despite US backing Israel.

The developing countries have also raised their voice for changes in multilateral trade agreements, strategy for economic growth based on justice and equality, peaceful coexistence with the neighbours without third party interventions etc. But there is a constant pressure from the big powers to checkmate all these efforts. As a result we are finding tension in parts of Asia, Africa and also Europe.

This is threatening global peace and endangering the use of nuclear weapons. Blatant intervention by the NATO backed by the USA for its expansionist designs led to the war between Russia and Ukraine. This has led to internal and external displacement of over 10 million people and death of large number of civilians and combatants. As a result of Israeli aggression on women and children in Gaza with explicit support of the US and allies, situation in the Middle East is like that of holocaust perpetrated by Nazis.

These situations require statesmen at the helm of affairs who have vision and influence and desire to salvage these. Unfortunately that is lacking. The west, particularly the United States of America, is obsessed with power and to sell arms around the world to make profit at the cost of human lives.

Gone are the days of Marshal Tito, Gamal Abdel

Nasser and Jawaharlal Nehru, who had the vision to form a non-aligned movement (NAM) that would work outside any military block. During that period the world produced several luminaries who resisted barbaric colonialism and apartheid. It would be most appropriate to mention the name of Nelson Mandela. Rajiv Gandhi put forth an action plan for nuclear disarmament. It was during that period that democracy in different countries flourished.

Things are different now. Unfortunately several of the present day leaders have delusional ideas. Zelensky for example is happy with claps to greet him in European parliaments without realising their designs. No wonder US & NATO are directly interfering in the affairs in Ukraine and not letting the war to end. The death of Navalny in prison has raised questions over the credibility of Putin. The Chinese leader Xi Jinping wants to rule till the end of his life. We can see North Korea's Kim Jong Un happy with clapping by the parliamentarians. Bolsonaro of Brazil and Trump in the US too fall in that category. Erdogan is out to suppress democratic ethos of Turkish society. Several countries which have theocratic regimes are in similar situations.

Such leaders are narcissistic, authoritarian, ruthless, undemocratic, obscurantist and megalomaniac. With their delusional behaviour they are unstable, unreliable, do not hesitate in telling lies repeatedly and can be a threat to the society. To stick to power they are ready to spread hatred, bigotry, obscurantism and glory of the past without evidence. This are delusional megalomaniac behaviour can be very dangerous. We have seen this in Hitler, Mussolini, Pol Pot and now in Netanyahu.

It is dismaying that in our country we have moved from the days of Nehru to the present day leadership at the helms of affairs who very well fit in that category. Our Prime Minister is always obsessed with building his image and continuously portraying himself with the help of corporate controlled media.

That he always tries to demonise Nehru, only shows his own worth. He cleverly uses Gandhi's name even though his bandwagon is always abusive of Gandhi and eulogises his murderers. But he never utters a single word on this.

That he has not faced the media even once in the last ten years raises scepticism about his capability. Therefore he believes only in one way discourse. Several of his henchmen have already labelled him as God sent 'Avtaar'. He is not ashamed to say himself that he has been sent by god. No wonder the BJP chief Nadda called him god of gods. Such people always feel insecure and are afraid of even their own news and dears.

In such conditions, the only hope is people's power with vision to save the world from marching towards neo-colonial era. Civil society around the world has a great responsibility to come forward to change the mind-set of the polity. True, the truth shall prevail, but we cannot afford the harm being done. (IPA Service)

## Unemployment declined to 3.1 per cent in 2023 in government data

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Union government led by PM Narendra Modi has come out with "Key Employment Unemployment Indicators" for 2023 just on the eve of Lok Sabha election 2024, to present a rosy picture on "declining unemployment" since 2021 in India. Media headlines declared unemployment rate declined to the lowest to 3.1 per cent, a figure that one cannot reconcile with, since it gives a partial picture of the reality on the ground. The document also gives a figure of unemployment in the country in 2023 at 5 per cent, but could not make it in the headlines of the media.

Why? Only Gatekeepers of News may answer the real reason, though suspected by common people as partisan approach to show Modi government performing well on the employment front, just when the elections are round the corner when the BJP and PM Narendra Modi have been seeking for their third term, while the opposition has been alleging Modi for not fulfilling his promise of providing 2 crore jobs every year. Unemployment rate rose to 6.1 per cent in 2017-18, which was 45 years high, which is as on March 5, 2024 even higher at 7.7 per cent as per Centre of Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data.

The differences in unemployment data are thus irreconcilable. Union government has said that private data are not reliable, but the government data are themselves not accepted as reliable by majority of national and international institutions who have called for reliable data in the past. The present key indicators released by the government are derived from two Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) – first the 3rd PLFS panel for July 2021 – June 2023, and the second 4th PLFS panel for July 2023 – June 2025. The data for first two quarters of 2023 are taken from the 3rd PLFS panel report, and the data for last two quarters are derived from 4th panel, the report of which would be published in 2025.

The government publishes PLFS annual reports for the period commencing from July and ending in June next year. The latest PLFS for 2022-23 was published few months ago. Annual reports include data for both rural and urban areas. However, for urban areas PLFS quarterly data are published, and no quarterly data are published for rural areas. This arrangement has always been a suspect, and probing fingers are raised on the reliability of the data.

In the 9-page key indicators, the govern-

ment has derived its estimates on the basis of the data collected during first visit of the Survey. Sample size was very small, which includes 6,958 villages and 5,726 urban blocks, where 55,651 and 45,779 households were surveyed. Data for certain areas are also lacking where surveys could not be held. The urgency of deriving data from a future publication for July 2023 – June 2025 can't be explained other than in the context of the election eve. If otherwise, why Modi government does not provide quarterly rural employment-unemployment data and delay it for one year, while quarterly data for urban areas are published after a delay of over one month? India has never been able to know realtime data of employment-unemployment.

Government has provided only key indicators for 2023, and the full report will be available on in future. Perhaps the annual PLFS report for July-2023 to June 2024 would come around August 2024, only then we will be able to see deep into the present released indicators to know if these are actually reliable.

CMIE data shows that unemployment rate in India in 2020 was 8 per cent, which registered a little decline to 5.98 per cent in 2021, only to increase again to 7.33 per cent in 2022, and 8.003 per cent in 2023. It shows that unemployment rate in 2013 was only 5.42 per cent, just before Narendra Modi became Prime Minister of India in 2014.

As against private CMIE data, the government Labour bureau data shows unemployment rate in 2013-14 was 4.9 per cent, which increased to 6.1 per cent in 2017-18. In 2018-19 it was 5.8 per cent, 4.8 per cent in 2019-20, 4.2 per cent in 2020-21, 4.1 per cent in 2021-22, and 3.2 per cent in 2022-23. The latest released indicators suggest further decline in unemployment rate to 3.1 per cent in 2023. These unemployment rates were estimated by adding the principal activity status (ps) and subsidiary economic activity status (ss), with reference period of last 365 days preceding the date of survey, which is in brief called usual sta-

tus. It is very difficult for a common man, because the government also released data on Current Weekly Status (CWS) with a reference period of last 7 days preceding the date of survey. As per CWS basis unemployment rates are much higher at 5 per cent in 2023, 5.7 per cent in 2022, and 7.3 per cent in 2021, the key indicators reveal.

The differences in the three set of data are clearly irreconcilable, which is indicative of a situation that actual unemployment rate on the ground might be much higher than the government usual statistics data says, which is the lowest presenting a rosy picture of the India's crisis ridden job market.

Even if we take the latest key indicators provided by the government, the situation seems to be grimmer on CWS basis, which shows the urban unemployment rate at 6.7 per cent in 2023, and the rural unemployment rate at 4.3 per cent. Worker Population Ratio (WPR) (percentage of employed persons in population) was 53.4 per cent with 56.2 per cent in rural areas and 47 per cent in urban areas. Rural areas are known for very low wages and many in agriculture are actually in unemployment in disguise. Similar is the case with

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (percentage of person in labour force) which was 56.2 per cent, in urban areas 50.3 per cent and in rural areas 58.8 per cent. As for the Gender equality is concerned, women are worst sufferers. Women above 25 years and above graduation were only 1.5 per cent in the rural areas and 7 per cent in urban areas. Employment rate among them was just 2.9 per cent in 2023. Ratio of female workers working as legislators and senior officials and managers were just 14.4 per cent, with 15.4 per cent in rural and 13.8 per cent in urban areas. Ratio of female to men working as professionals and technical workers were 49.4 per cent, with 53.2 per cent in rural and 46.9 per cent in urban areas. It just exposes the false government claim of empowerment of women. (IPA Service)



## Revenge bedtime procrastination: A plight of our times?

By: Maria Cohut

It is late at night. Your day's work - day job duties, homework for your course, house chores - is all done.

You glance at the clock: it is past midnight already. You are all ready for bed and so tired that you could almost pass out. However, instead of closing your eyes and drifting off to sleep, something else happens. You start reading a book, watching an episode of your favourite show, or adding one more row to that knitting project.

Before you know it, one more page has become five more chapters, you have binge-watched an entire season of that show, or all but finished your knitting project.

By this time, however, it is 3.00 a.m., and you know you have to wake up at 6.00 a.m. You are very tired, and you know you will be sleep-deprived, but you could not help yourself. Why?

If this scenario seems familiar, it is because many people around the world have been increasingly engaging in this form of behaviour. This phenomenon has become so widespread that it has earned the moniker: revenge bedtime procrastination.

What is revenge bedtime procrastination, why does it happen, and who does it affect? Are there ways to modify this behaviour to avoid sleep deprivation? In this Special Feature, we investigate.

**What is it, and why does it happen?**

The concept of bedtime procrastination first came up in a study paper by Dr. Floor Kroese - a behavioural scientist from Utrecht University in the Netherlands - and colleagues, which appeared in *Frontiers in Psychology* in 2014.

Dr. Kroese and her collaborators described bedtime procrastination as the act of "going to bed later than intended while no external circumstances are accountable for doing so" - that is, choosing to delay bedtime without a practical reason for this delay.

One study that appeared in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* in 2020 focused on adolescents, the most obvious bedtime procrastinators.

This study found that many adolescents put off sleep to watch videos, listen to music, or send text messages. However, the reasons behind this purposeful delay remained unclear, and the study did not address this phenomenon's occurrence in adults.

Besides, why should bedtime procrastination be an act of revenge? Who or what are bedtime procrastinators taking revenge on?

"Blurring boundaries between work and domestic lives" *Medical News Today* spoke to Sara Makin, M.S.Ed., NCC, LPC, founder and CEO of online counseling practice Makin Wellness, and Lee Chambers, M.Sc, M.B.Ps.S., an environmental psychologist and well-being consultant, to find out more about the possible reasons that might drive people to procrastinate on sleep.

Makin told us that "[r]evenge sleep procrastination is still a new concept, so there are still debates regarding the psychology of this." "There may be a connection between heightened daytime stress and bedtime procrastination," she noted.

A study from the Netherlands that appeared in *Frontiers in Psychology* in 2018 aimed to answer the question as to why people may delay their bedtime on purpose, even when they are tired.

The study authors found that the more a person had to "resist desires" during the rest of their day, the more likely they would be a bedtime procrastinator. This means that the less enjoyable things a person could do during the day, the likelier it was that they would try to reclaim that time at night and engage in the more pleasurable activities they had not been able to do during the day.

"One of the significant causes of revenge sleep procrastination is where our current working culture intersects with our personal and leisure time expectations in our p.m. bookend," Chambers told MNT.

It all comes down to trying to reclaim that much-needed "me time," he explained: "The desire to gain a level of personal freedom drives a desire to stay awake beyond a time that will provide an optimal level of sleep."

"Factors that contribute [to bedtime procrastination] are working hours, often elevated to 12 hours and beyond, workplace expectations to be available outside of hours, and overtime to be worked. Modern working patterns and technologies are blurring boundaries between work and domestic lives, giving rise to a feeling of living at work. Peer pressure to achieve, self-learn, have valuable hobbies, and practice well-being can all drive behavior that eats into a sleep schedule." - Lee Chambers

The "revenge" aspect of bedtime procrastination comes almost as an act of rebellion against ever-increasing demands at work and at home, which leave many of us little time or energy to invest in leisure activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic and en-

suing local and national restrictions have made matters worse by blurring the boundaries between home and office, blocking parents' and caregivers' access to daycare, schools, and their support networks, and forcing students to study from home.

**Who is likely to procrastinate on sleep?**

While anyone can engage in bedtime sleep procrastination, some people may be more likely than others to delay going to bed.

According to Makin, "[i]t appears that women and students are most [likely]" to engage in bedtime procrastination.

This is also the conclusion reached by the authors of a 2019 study in a Polish population. The study indicates that "the chance of severe bedtime procrastination is more than twice as high for females than for males."

Moreover, they write that "[d]ifferences between the sexes in delaying sleep already appear in schoolchildren." Although this study does not explain why women may be more likely to go to bed late, it is possible to make some inferences based on other available information.

An American Psychological Association survey from 2010, for example, noted that women are more likely than men to report that they experience significant stress.

The data revealed that "[w]omen are more likely to report physical and emotional symptoms of stress than men," including headaches, feeling that they were about to cry, or having an upset stomach.

This may come as no surprise given women's demonstrable time poverty - the amount of unpaid work they engage in, often as primary caretakers of children and older family members.

When it comes to bedtime procrastination, though, Chambers also notes that there appears to be an age gap, with younger Millennials and Generation Z-ers being more likely to engage in this behavior.

"In my professional experience, this [behavior] presents most often in late Millennials and Gen Z's in high-pressure positions with ambitious goals and career objectives," Chambers told MNT.

Why? He explained that "[t]heir behaviors are, in a way, a rebellion against the organizational cultures they are trying to navigate, and they are often aware of just how pivotal sleep is to health and performance."

**The effects on health**  
Many studies have shown that lack of sufficient, good quality (uninterrupted) sleep is crucial for maintaining both physical and mental health.

Researchers have tied sleep not just to our ability to focus on work and being productive but also to mood regulation, weight gain, cardiovascular health, and inflammation, among others. "Sleep deprivation, reduced decision-making capacities, and challenges with [cognitive performance] are all potential negative effects of sleep procrastination," Makin told MNT.

We asked her if bedtime procrastination could have any positive effects: "The only positive with revenge sleep procrastination is that there's a false appearance that you have more control over your life. This is very reinforcing and will entice you to continue this behavior, even though the risks outweigh the rewards. There is no genuine positive effect to reducing the quality and time of your sleep. Consistent and good quality sleep is the foundation of sound physical and mental health." - Sara Makin

It can be difficult to dislodge the feeling of regaining freedom and control over one's life, even when a person knows that the sleep deprivation that tends to follow bedtime procrastination can feed a vicious cycle of exhaustion and lack of productivity.

"With the awareness of the importance of sleep often present in those who procrastinate, the solutions often lie in setting boundaries around working patterns, considering flexibility in work, and creating psychological separation between work and home environments," Chambers told MNT.

"Honoring our ultradian rhythmicity by taking regular breaks to disconnect from tasks improves our ability to disconnect when we finish working, making it easier to fall asleep at a reasonable time," he advised.

Chambers also noted the importance of having a digital curfew, a time at which we consciously put our digital devices aside: "I often suggest that clients find ways to actively rest during the day, and commit to a digital sunset in the evening, at a minimum removing workplace devices to a designated spot." This is important because screen time - particularly before bed - has links with less and poorer quality sleep.

**Tips for better sleep**  
To get some more in-depth advice on what people can do to stop bedtime procrastination and have better-quality sleep; MNT spoke to therapist, hypnotherapist, and life coach Karl Rollison. Like Chambers, Rollison strongly advised that people must avoid screen time before bed at all costs.

"[D]itch the tech an hour before bed. How can we seriously expect our brain to relax when we are bombarding it with information, videos, and bright images? Pick up a good, old-fashioned book instead and never allow your technology to infect your precious sleeping zone," Rollison said.

He explained: "Another reason for switching off all screens at bedtime (including the TV) is to restrict the amount of light we are receiving. The darker the sleeping environment, the more efficiently we produce the sleep hormone melatonin. A great way of doing this is via heavy-duty black-out blinds. However, these are expensive, so I would recommend investing in a quality, molded eye mask." He also suggested having a hot shower or bath before bedtime to leave the day's stress behind.

"[H]ave a hot bath or shower an hour before bed - when we fall asleep, our body temperature drops, so when we artificially raise it then allow it to drop, we fall asleep," Rollison told MNT.

One review of sleep studies published in 2019 also emphasizes the effectiveness of hot baths in preparing people for sleep. According to the review authors, it is preferable to bathe just 1 or 2 hours before bedtime for best results.

Journaling can also help. A study from 2017 found that expressive writing - jotting down the thoughts, feelings, and experiences that stood out throughout the day - effectively reduces both mental and physical symptoms of anxiety.

Rollison concurred. "If you still can't get to sleep because of an active mind, then get up and write down all your worries and anxieties," he said.

"I call this downloading. You are effectively giving your thoughts physical form and organizing them - tidying up the mess in the attic, so to speak. It sounds simple, but it works, and it's surprising how many people have never done it," he added.

**How to cope with sleep deprivation**  
Nevertheless, sometimes sleep refuses to come despite our best efforts and intentions, resulting in the inevitable tiredness the following day.

Should that happen, Rollison said that "the number one thing is to accept it and not fight it."

"Acknowledge that it won't last forever and try not to stress about it. Like any problem in life, it needs to be managed. This means factoring in more time to complete tasks, appointments, and engagements." - Karl Rollison

He also gave a potentially surprising piece of advice for those who find it hard to recover after a night of insufficient sleep.

"No one wants to hear this, but, in my opinion, the best mechanism for effectively coping with sleep deprivation is exercise," he told MNT.

"This doesn't mean signing up to a gym but [...] just hitting the streets. Not just running or jogging but simply going for regular walks. The important thing is getting outside," Rollison explained. "[T]here is definitely a primordial relationship between the great outdoors and sleep. The people that I've helped deal with insomnia over the years are the ones that have taken this advice," Rollison told us.

**Top tips and tricks for sleep hygiene**  
Finally, ensuring good quality sleep is a process that takes into consideration many factors. MNT asked Rollison - who is also the author of *Sleep Ninja*, a self-help book for those who have a troubled relationship with sleep - for his top tips on ensuring better sleep quality in the long run.

"Protect your sleep environment and associate it (and your bed) with the joys of sleep. It's a simple and effective idea: if you're wide awake, get up and (move) away from your sleep zone," he suggested. Another tip is to "[m]ake your sleep environment as cold and airy as possible." Rollison explained that "The worse sleep humans experience is during high-heat, low air levels."

His other tips were to:

- have a regular wake-up time and bedtime
- snack on nuts, seeds, and pulses, which are sources of the amino acid tryptophan, which helps produce melatonin
- take vitamin D and magnesium supplements, which may help induce sleep
- stay hydrated
- only drink caffeinated beverages in the morning

Ultimately, for those who struggle to go to sleep because they feel there was not enough time in the day to engage both in chores and in leisure activities, the answer may be to learn to compartmentalize their worries as much as possible. As therapist Lee Chambers told MNT: "[W]e all need time to mentally detach and distance ourselves from working and do something meaningful. Finding a healthy way to create that space while still being kind to ourselves is the key to finding harmony that doesn't put us at risk of burnout, chronic stress, and reduced health." (Courtesy: MNT)

## Five consume dry ice in Gurugram Cafe, manager held: Can the substance be deadly?

By: Garima Sadhwani

Three out of the five people who were hospitalised after accidentally consuming dry ice in a Gurugram cafe on Saturday, 2 March, have been discharged from Sector 90's Aarvy Hospital.

A purported video making the rounds on social media showed the five customers vomiting blood allegedly inside the cafe. Gurugram police said the manager of the cafe has been arrested in connection with the case. According to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, dry ice is "commonly used as a cooling agent for food products like ice cream, frozen desserts etc."

However, an October 2019 FSSAI notification adds, "If not handled properly it may endanger human health, as it sublimates into large quantities of carbon dioxide gas which could pose a danger of breathlessness (hypercapnia)." FIT reached out to doctors to understand why dry ice can be fatal and what it can do to our body. But first, here's a lowdown of what happened in Gurugram.

**What happened?**

In the First Information Report accessed by FIT, the complainant Ankit Kumar said that on Saturday, he and five others - Neha Sabarwal, Manik Goenka, Pritika Rustagi, Deepak Arora, and Himani - were having dinner at Gurugram Sector 90's Laforestta Cafe at around

9:30 pm.

After dinner, they were offered a "mouth freshener" by a waiting staffer, which they all (barring Ankit) consumed. They immediately felt a burning sensation in their mouth and started vomiting blood.

Despite their condition deteriorating, Ankit alleged in the FIR that "no staff member from the restaurant helped them."

When Ankit forcibly asked what they had given to his friends, the waiter showed a packet which Ankit then seized. He added that he called the police helpline number and took the others to Aarvy Hospital in Sector 90. Ankit alleged:

"I showed the doctor that packet and he said we had been given dry ice, which can also be deadly. He said that they were experiencing chemical burns poisoning." What the police said: Gurugram police officials said that a complaint had been registered under Section 328 (causing hurt by means of poison) and 120-B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code.

The manager of the cafe, 30-year-old Gagandeep Singh, a resident of Delhi's



9:30 pm.

Kirti Nagar, was arrested by Gurugram police on Monday. He will be produced in court on Tuesday, officials said.

Kherki Daula Station House Officer Manoj Kumar, speaking to FIT on 5 March, said:

"Three out of the five people have been discharged from the hospital. The two patients who were critical have reported some improvement in their health condition. They should also be discharged by today or tomorrow. Further investigation is underway." The Quint reached out to the cafe, but received no response. This story will be updated as and when we do.

**What is dry ice? What happens when you consume it?**

According to Dr Saibal Chakravorty, Senior Consultant, Internal Medicine, Metro Hospital Noida, "Dry ice is the solidified form of carbon dioxide. Once it gets inside our body, carbon dioxide is released in high amounts. It is an extremely cold substance, which is also used as a coolant in restaurants and eateries."

Dr Ashutosh Shukla, Medical Advisor and Senior Di-

rector, Internal Medicine, Max Hospital, Gurugram, concurs, saying: "When dry ice evaporates and the CO2 levels suddenly increase, it can lead to CO2 Narcosis, basically meaning that the carbon dioxide levels in your blood have shot up to harmful levels."

What reaction does dry ice cause on your body? Both the doctors that FIT spoke to said that any interaction with dry ice can cause:

- Burns
- Erosion of skin at the point of contact
- Ulcers in your mouth and stomach
- Frostbite (since dry ice is a coolant)
- Vomiting
- Throwing up blood
- Breathlessness

"It can also lead to more severe consequences like ulcers in the food pipe and the stomach, severe drop in blood pressure, fainting, etc." - Dr Ashutosh Shukla

But consuming dry ice can also be fatal. How is it treated? Dr Chakravorty says that if dry ice is consumed in a small amount and has only led to smaller injuries, localised treatment plans are brought in place.

But if someone has consumed a large amount of dry ice, Dr Shukla says that the first step should be to stop exposure immediately. "In such cases, give the patient some cooling agent or antacid for immediate relief. You will also need to stabilise the person's vitals." - Dr Ashutosh Shukla. (Courtesy: The Quint)

## Adenomyosis on the rise among Indian women - Advanced non-surgical procedures to treat the condition

By: Dr. Pradeep Muley

Adenomyosis, a condition characterized by the abnormal growth of endometrial tissue within the muscular walls of the uterus, has become an increasingly prevalent concern among Indian women in recent years. Pertaining to the same, it crucial to shed light on this rising trend, exploring its causes, associated issues, and the innovative non-surgical approach of Uterine Artery Embolization (UAE) in treating adenomyosis.

**Causes & associated ailments**  
Adenomyosis poses unique challenges to women's health, impacting their overall well-being and reproductive capabilities. The exact cause of adenomyosis remains unclear, but hormonal imbalances, inflammation, and genetic factors are believed to contribute to its development. The condition often presents with symptoms such as heavy menstrual bleeding, severe pelvic pain, and discomfort during intercourse. These symptoms not only affect a woman's quality of life but can also lead to long-term complications if left untreated. Traditionally, the management of adenomyosis has involved hormonal therapies, pain medications, and, in severe cases, surgical interventions like hysterectomy.

However, with advancements in medical technology, non-surgical alternatives have emerged as effective options for addressing adenomyosis, with Uterine Artery Embolization standing

out as a promising solution.

**Advanced non-Surgical procedure - Uterine Artery Embolization**

Uterine Artery Embolization is a minimally invasive procedure that involves blocking the blood vessels supplying the uterus with tiny particles. This process restricts blood flow to the abnormal tissue, causing it to shrink and alleviating symptoms associated with adenomyosis. Unlike conventional surgical approaches, UAE preserves the uterus, offering women an option to retain their reproductive capabilities.

One of the key advantages of Uterine Artery Embolization is its minimal invasiveness, reducing the need for major surgery and the associated risks. Patients typically experience a quicker recovery with shorter hospital stays compared to traditional surgical interventions. Moreover, UAE offers a fertility-preserving alternative, making it an attractive option for women who wish to conceive in the future.

**UAE vs. Conventional treatment**

Compared to other conservative treatments such as hormonal therapies, Uterine Artery Embolization directly addresses the abnormal tissue growth within the uterine walls. Hormonal treatments may provide temporary relief, but they often come with side effects and may not be suitable for all women, especially those seeking fertility preservation. UAE, on the other hand, offers a targeted approach with lasting results.

Furthermore, Uterine Artery Em-

bolization has proven effective in managing adenomyosis-related symptoms, including heavy menstrual bleeding and pelvic pain. Studies have shown that the majority of women who undergo UAE experience significant improvement in their quality of life, with a reduction in pain and an enhancement in overall well-being.

It is crucial to highlight that Uterine Artery Embolization is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Patient selection is key, and a thorough evaluation by a qualified healthcare professional is essential to determine the suitability of UAE for an individual case. The procedure is generally well-tolerated, but like any medical intervention, it carries potential risks and complications that should be discussed with the treating physician. The rising incidences of adenomyosis among Indian women underscore the importance of exploring advanced and effective treatment options.

Uterine Artery Embolization emerges as a game-changer in managing adenomyosis, offering a non-surgical alternative with minimal invasiveness, shorter recovery times, and fertility preservation. As we continue to advance in the field of women's health, it is imperative that both healthcare providers and patients are informed about innovative solutions like UAE that can significantly improve the lives of those affected by adenomyosis. (The author is a Consultant - Interventional Radiology, Fortis Hospital Vasant Kunj, New Delhi)

## PTSD reduces cerebellum volume: New study offers targeted treatment approach

By: Preetha Banerjee

People who have Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can have considerable reductions in both grey and white matter volume in their cerebellum, a new study identified. This may impact their cognitive abilities as well as emotional responses, among other things, the researchers said.

The study analysed data from a vast cohort of 4,215 adults, including 1,642 individuals diagnosed with PTSD and 2,573 healthy controls from 40 different locations. The report published in *Nature's Molecular Psychiatry* journal is significant because it focuses on the cerebellum, a brain region traditionally associated with motor control, but now increasingly recognised for its role in higher cognitive and emotional functions. Utilising advanced deep-learning techniques for cerebellar parcellation, the researchers assessed the volumes of the entire cerebellum and its 28 subregions. Their findings showed that PTSD is linked with considerable reductions in both grey and white matter volumes in the cerebellum. "PTSD is incredibly burdensome at both the individual and societal level, causing profound distress, functional impairment, and staggering treatment costs," the authors of the study highlighted. The findings have multiple implications. First, it challenges the traditional understanding of PTSD as solely a disorder of the brain's emotion-processing centres. The cerebellum's involvement suggests a more complex brain network disruption in PTSD, one that includes regions responsible for integrating cognitive and emotional responses.

This is in addition to the impact on a person's vestibulo-motor functions like the movement of eyes, head and balance

of the body that are known to be controlled by the cerebellum. The detailed analysis showed that individuals with PTSD had smaller total cerebellum volumes, with marked reductions in lobule VIII and crus II of the posterior lobe, lobules VI and VIII in the vermis, lobule X in the flocculonodular lobe and the corpus medullare.

The study also showed that cerebellar volume changes correlate with the intensity of the PTSD experience, offering a potential biomarker for assessing the condition's severity. This research helps in understanding the pathophysiology of PTSD. By pinpointing specific cerebellar regions affected by the disorder, it paves the way for developing targeted therapeutic strategies that address these brain changes.

Traditional treatments for PTSD primarily focus on psychological and pharmacological approaches targeting the brain's emotion and memory centres. The involvement of the cerebellum may lead to innovative treatments that offer a more holistic approach to managing the condition.

However, the researchers acknowledged that while their findings are significant, they represent a piece of a larger puzzle. PTSD is a complex disorder with a myriad of contributing factors, including genetic predisposition, environmental triggers and individual psychological makeup. The study underscores the need for further research to understand how these factors interact with the observed cerebellar volume changes. For instance, the impact of exposure to trauma that doesn't lead to PTSD must be studied further, the researchers noted. "The small sample of trauma-naïve subjects precluded us from assessing whether there are cerebellar volume differences related to trauma exposure (not just PTSD), and future work to examine this question will be valuable." (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Zardari secured 411 electoral votes in Parliament and all four provincial assemblies with the backing of allied parties

## Asif Ali Zardari sworn in as Pak's 14<sup>th</sup> Prez

ISLAMABAD, March 10: Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday took oath as Pakistan's 14th President, a day after the veteran politician was overwhelmingly elected as the next head of state.

Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa administered the oath to the 68-year-old Zardari at Aiwan-e-Sadr, the Presidential Palace.

Zardari will replace Dr Arif Alvi, who stayed in office for five more months despite completing his five-year term in September 2023.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, all three service chiefs, senior officials and diplomats.

Zardari, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) co-chairman, the joint candidate of the ruling alliance, was elected as the country's president for the second time on Saturday after he defeated PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) candidate Mahmood Khan Achakzai by a huge margin.



He secured 411 electoral votes in Parliament and all four provincial assemblies with the backing of allied parties — mainly Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P).

His rival, Achakzai bagged 181 votes as he was only able to secure the majority of votes in the PTI-backed SIC-dominated Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

This is the second time Zardari

has won the presidency. He earlier served as the 11th president of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013 and has been a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan since August 2018.

Born in 1955, Zardari was brought up and educated in Karachi. He was married to Pakistan's former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter, Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated in December 2007. (PTI)

## Xi Jinping greets new Pak President Zardari; says close China-Pakistan ties 'choice of history'

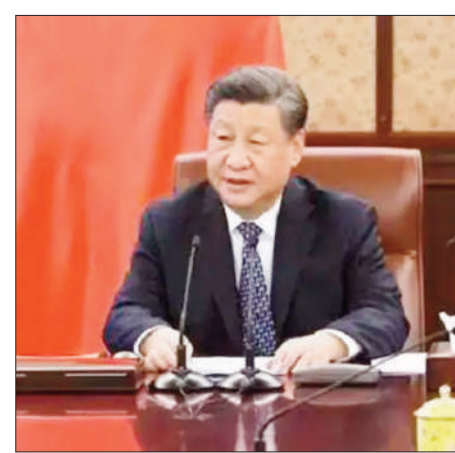
BEIJING, March 10: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on his election as the Pakistan President, saying that the "iron-clad" friendship between the two countries is a "choice of history" and the strategic significance of their ties has become more prominent considering the current changes in the world.

Zardari, the husband of late Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto was overwhelmingly elected as the 14th President of Pakistan on Saturday, becoming the only civilian president of the country for a second time.

Zardari, the co-chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party, was the joint candidate of the ruling alliance of the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

In his message to Zardari, Xi said "China and Pakistan are good neighbours, good friends, good partners and good brothers, adding that the two countries' iron-clad friendship is a choice of history and a precious treasure of the two peoples."

Xi said that "the two countries have in recent years maintained close high-level exchanges, supported each other on issues concerning their respective core interests and major concerns, achieved fruitful results in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and maintained a high level of development of bilateral relations," state-run Xinhua news agency re-



ported.

India has objected to China over the USD 60 billion CPEC connecting China's Xinjiang with Gwadar port in Balochistan as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Xi in his message said that as the world is confronted with accelerated changes unseen in a century, the strategic significance of China-Pakistan relations has become more prominent.

Xi said he highly regards the development of China-Pakistan relations, and is ready to work

with President Zardari to carry forward the traditional friendship between China and Pakistan, advance practical cooperation in various fields, push for greater development of China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, accelerate the building of an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, to better benefit the two peoples. Earlier, Xi greeted Shehbaz Sharif on being elected as Pakistan's Prime Minister.

The return of Shehbaz and his brother Nawaz Sharif as well as Zardari at the helm of Pakistan's politics and government amid chaos and severe economic crisis in Pakistan is viewed with a sense of relief here as all three of them over their years in power in the past few decades maintained close ties with Chinese leaders and furthered the strategic ties with Beijing viewed widely as a strategic alliance against India.

China had an uneasy relationship with former prime minister Imran Khan's government which was blamed for the slow pace of USD 60 billion CPEC.

China has been providing forex loans and rollover of its debt periodically to bail out Pakistan which is facing a severe economic crisis.

Recent reports from Islamabad said China has agreed to roll over a USD two billion loan due to be paid in March. (PTI)

## Gunmen kidnap 300 students in northwest Nigeria

KURIGA, March 10: Rashidat Hamza is in despair. All but one of her six children are among the nearly 300 students abducted from their school in Nigeria's northwest, riddled with Islamic extremists and armed gangs.

It has been more than two days after her children — ages 7 to 18 — went to school in the remote town of Kuriga in Kaduna state only to be kidnapped by gunmen. She was still in shock Saturday.

Authorities said at least 100 children aged 12 or younger were among the abductees in the state known for violent killings, lawlessness and dangerous roads where people get regularly snatched.

"We don't know what to do, but we believe in God," Hamza told The Associated Press during a visit to the town.

The mass kidnapping in Kuriga was the third in northern Nigeria since last week; a group of gunmen abducted 15 children from a school in another northwestern state, Sokoto, before dawn Saturday, and a few days earlier 200 people, mostly women and children displaced by conflict, were kidnapped in north-eastern Borno State.

The kidnappings are a stark re-

minder of the security crisis plaguing Africa's most populous country.

No group claimed responsibility for any of the recent abductions. But Islamic extremists waging an insurgency in the northeast are suspected of carrying out the kidnapping in Borno. Locals blame the school abductions on herders who are in conflict with the settled communities.

It's not the first time for a student kidnapping in Nigeria to shock the world. In 2014, Islamic extremists abducted more than 200 schoolgirls from Borno's Chibok, sparking the global #BringBackOurGirls social media campaign. A decade later, at least 1,400 Nigerian students have so far been abducted from their schools in similar circumstances. Some are still held captive, including nearly 100 of the Chibok girls.

Recalling Thursday's kidnapping, Nura Ahmad, a teacher, told the AP that students were just settling into their classrooms at the government primary and secondary school when gunmen "came in dozens, riding on bikes and shooting sporadically."

The LEA Primary and Secondary School, one of the few educational facilities in this area, sits by the road just at the entrance of the town, tucked in the middle of forests and

savannah. Even with its decaying roof and wrecked walls, it gave parents hope for a better future for their children.

"They surrounded the school and blocked all passages... and roads" to prevent help from coming before kidnapping the children in less than five minutes, Ahmad said.

Fourteen-year-old Abdullahi Usman braved gunshots to escape the captors.

"Those who refused to move fast were either forced on the motorcycles or threatened by gunshots fired into the air," Abdullahi said. "The bandits were shouting: Go! Go! Go!" he said.

Nigerian police and soldiers headed into the forests Friday to search for the missing children, but combing the wooded expanses of northwestern Nigeria could take weeks, observers said.

"Since this happened, my brain has been muddled," said Shehu Lawal, the father of a 13-year-old boy who is among those abducted.

"My child didn't even eat breakfast before leaving. His mother fainted (upon hearing the news)," he said.

Some villagers like Lawan Yaro, whose five grandchildren are among

the abducted, say their hopes are already fading.

People are used to the region's insecurity, "but it has never been in this manner," he said.

"We are crying, looking for help from the government and God, but it is the gunmen that will decide to bring the children back," Yaro said. "God will help us."

But schools are not the only targets.

More than 3,500 people have been abducted across Nigeria in the last year, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. Some were even kidnapped from their homes in the capital of Abuja. Last year, President Bola Tinubu took office after he successfully campaigned on the promise to tighten security and stop the kidnappings.

Experts say it is easy to smuggle in arms, used in kidnappings, over Nigeria's poorly policed borders. More than half of its 1,500-kilometer (932-mile) border with Niger, for instance, stretches across the northwest. Though mostly covered in woodland savannah, the region also has vast ungoverned and unoccupied forests where organized gangs hide and keep their kidnap victims. (AP)

## Nepal PM 'Prachanda' to seek third vote of confidence by March 13

KATHMANDU, March 10: Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' is planning to seek a vote of confidence in Parliament by March 13, days after he forged a new alliance with the CPN-UML.

The third round of vote of confidence comes after Prachanda, a former guerilla leader, dumped the Nepali Congress and forged a new alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) — the second-biggest party — led by former premier KP Sharma Oli on Monday.

According to constitutional provisions, prime ministers have to take a vote of confidence after any ally withdraws support.

Prime Minister Prachanda informally discussed the matter within his close circle in the party on Saturday and the parliamentary party meeting of the CPN-Maoist Centre decided to issue a whip to all of its lawmakers to be present compulsorily in the Lower House during the voting on March 13, according to the party's secretary Ganesh Shah.

A formal decision to this effect will be taken during Sunday's Office Bearers' meeting of the party, he said.

The lower House of Parliament — House of Representatives — has been summoned for a session on March 13.

According to Nepalese media, the new coalition has enough seats in the 275-member Parliament.

After the change in power equation and withdrawal of support to the government by the Nepali Congress, the largest party in the Lower House, it

has become mandatory for Prachanda to seek a vote of confidence within 30 days to prove his majority.

This will be the third vote of confidence since Prachanda became Prime Minister one and a half years ago.

The election for the post of the Chairman of the upper House of Parliament has been scheduled for March 12, according to The Kathmandu Post newspaper.

Prachanda became the prime minister for the third term with the support of the Nepali Congress on December 25, 2022. His party is the third-largest group in the House of Representatives.

After breaking the alliance with the Nepali Congress — the largest party in the House of Representatives — Prachanda joined hands with Oli, who was regarded as Prachanda's top critic.

Last year, Prachanda faced a floor test after the CPN-UML withdrew its support to the Prachanda-led government following a rift over backing the main opposition party's candidate for the presidential poll.

The CPN-UML secured 78 seats, followed by the Maoist Centre, which got 32 seats.

The RSP, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Janata Samajwadi Party and CPN-Unified Socialist won 20, 14, 12 and 10 seats respectively.

In the 2017 election, Prachanda and Oli merged their parties and secured a comfortable majority. Oli became the prime minister, but their partnership ended halfway following differences between them. (PTI)

## At least 19 dead and 7 missing as landslide and flash floods hit Indonesia's Sumatra island



PADANG (INDONESIA) March 10: Torrential rains have triggered flash floods and a landslide on Indonesia's Sumatra island, killing at least 19 people and leaving seven others missing, officials said Sunday.

Tons of mud, rocks and uprooted trees rolled down a mountain late Friday, reaching a river that burst its banks and tore through mountainous villages in Pesisir Selatan district of West Sumatra province, said Doni Yusrizal, who heads the local disaster management agency.

Rescuers by Saturday pulled out seven bodies in the worst-hit village of Koto XI Tarusan, and re-

covered three others in two neighboring villages, Yusrizal said.

Rescuers retrieved six bodies in Pesisir Selatan and three more in the neighboring district of Padang Pariaman, bringing the death toll to 19, the National Disaster Management Agency said on Sunday.

The agency in a statement said at least two villagers were injured by the flash flood and rescuers are searching for seven people who are reportedly still missing.

It said more than 80,000 people had fled to temporary government shelters after the flood and landslide buried 14 houses, while 20,000 houses were flooded up to the roof in nine districts and cities in West Sumatra province.

"Relief efforts for the dead and missing were hampered by power outages, blocked roads covered in thick mud and debris," Yusrizal said.

Heavy rains cause frequent landslides and flash floods in Indonesia, where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near floodplains. (AP)

## Biden says he regrets using term 'illegal' to describe suspected killer of Laken Riley



ATLANTA, March 10: US President Joe Biden said Saturday that he regrets using the term "illegal" during his State of the Union address to describe the suspected killer of Georgia nursing student Laken Riley.

Facing frustration from some in his party for the use of the term to describe people who arrived or are living in the US illegally, Biden expressed remorse, saying he didn't want to demean any group, and sought to differentiate himself from former President Donald Trump.

In an interview with MSNBC's Jonathan Capehart on Saturday, Biden said, "I shouldn't have used

illegal, it's undocumented." The term was once common but is far less so today, particularly among Democrats who more fully embraced immigrant rights' issues during Trump's presidency.

The moment occurred Thursday night during an exchange in which Biden pressed Republicans in his address to pass a bipartisan border security deal that fell apart after Trump opposed it. US Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a stalwart Trump ally, then shouted at the president to say the name of Laken Riley, the Georgia woman killed last month, adding she was killed

"by an illegal." Biden responded immediately, before appearing to ask how many people are being killed by "legals." The death of Riley, a nursing student, has become a rallying cry for Republicans, a tragedy that they say encompasses the Biden administration's handling of the U.S.-Mexico border amid a record surge of immigrants entering the country. An immigrant from Venezuela who entered the U.S. illegally has been arrested and charged with murder.

Speaking to Capehart, Biden said, "Look, when I spoke about the difference between Trump and me, one of the things I talked about in the border was his, the way he talks about vermin, the way he talks about these people polluting the blood. I talked about what I'm not going to do. What I won't do. I'm not going to treat any, any, any of these people with disrespect."

It appeared to be a shift from a day earlier, when Biden had hesitated when asked by reporters if he regretted using the term, saying, "well I probably," before pausing and saying "I don't" and appearing to start saying the word "regret." (AP)

"By an illegal, that's right," Biden responded immediately, before appearing to ask how many people are being killed by "legals."

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## Omar Ayub of Imran Khan's party named leader of opposition in Pakistan's National Assembly



ISLAMABAD, March 10: Jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's PTI and the Sunni Ittehad Council have jointly nominated his party leader Omar Ayub Khan as the leader of the opposition in Pakistan's National Assembly.

The PTI-SIC formalised the nomination by submitting his documents to the office of National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Saturday, the Dawn newspaper said on Sunday.

Incidentally, Omar Ayub Khan was also the joint candidate who lost to Imran Khan's rival Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party's Shehbaz Sharif in the prime ministerial election last week.

About 90 candidates of Khan's

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) joined the SIC after winning in the February 8 general elections as independent candidates to secure reserved seats.

The nomination papers were submitted by Malik Amir Dogar in the presence of SIC supreme Sahibzada Hamid Raza, and members of the national assembly (MNAs) Ali Mohammad Khan, Riaz Fatyana, Dr Nisar Ahmad Jatt and others, the newspaper said.

Achakzai was the PTI-SIC's candidate against Pakistan People's Party (PPP) candidate Asif Ali Zardari, who was on Saturday elected as the president. He took the oath on Sunday.

Responding to a question, Dr Jatt expressed the hope that Ayub would become the opposition leader in the NA through nomination, instead of election, on March 13 or 14.

The leader of the opposition enjoys the status of a federal minister. He gets a separate office, where usually opposition parties hold meetings.

The Public Accounts Committee is usually headed by the leader of the opposition. (PTI)

Daily number of aid trucks entering Gaza by land over the past five months has been far below the 500 that entered before the war because of Israeli restrictions and security issues

## US ship with equipment for building a pier is on its way to Gaza, part of a plan to ramp up aid

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), March 10: A US Army vessel carrying equipment for building a temporary pier in Gaza was on its way to the Mediterranean on Sunday, three days after U.S. President Joe Biden announced plans to ramp up aid deliveries by sea to the besieged enclave where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been going hungry.

The opening of the sea corridor, along with aidrops by the US, Jordan and others, showed increasing alarm over Gaza's humanitarian crisis and a new willingness to bypass Israeli control over land shipments.

Israel said it welcomed the sea deliveries and would inspect Gaza-bound cargo before it leaves a staging area in nearby Cyprus. The daily number of aid trucks entering Gaza by land over the past five months has been far below the 500 that entered before the war because of Israeli restrictions and security issues.

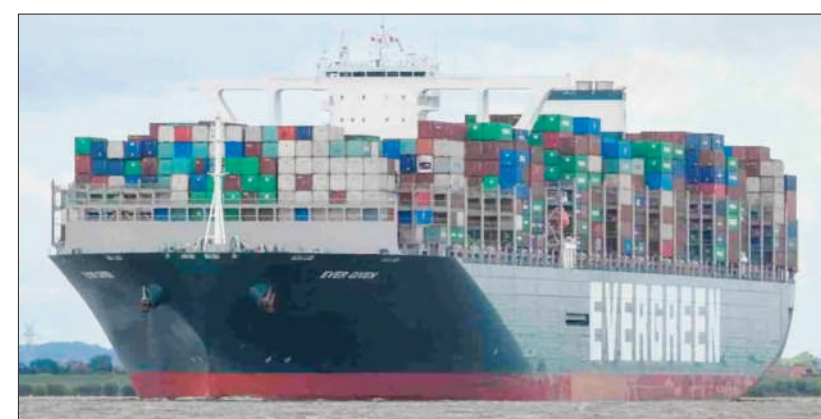
Meanwhile, Biden stepped up his public criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Biden said he believes Netanyahu is "hurting Israel more than helping Israel" in how he is approaching his war against Hamas in Gaza, now in its sixth month.

Speaking Saturday to MSNBC's Jonathan Capehart, the president expressed support for Israel's right to pursue Hamas after the militants' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, but said that Netanyahu "must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost as a consequence of the actions taken." He added that "you cannot have 30,000 more Palestinians dead."

In Gaza, Palestinian casualties continued to rise.

The Civil Defense Department said at least nine Palestinians, including children, were killed in an Israeli airstrike on a house in Gaza City late Saturday.

Footage shared by the civil defense showed first responders pulling out the



dead and injured trapped in the collapsed house. One rescuer was seen holding a dead infant, before placing the limp body on a sofa amid the wreckage.

Elsewhere, the bodies of 13 people, including women and children, were taken to the main hospital in the central town of

Deir al-Balah on Sunday, according to an Associated Press journalist. Relatives said the 13 were killed by Israeli artillery fire toward a large tent camp for displaced Palestinians in the coastal area east of the southern city of Khan Younis.

Israel rarely comments on specific in-

cidents during the war. It has held that Hamas is responsible for civilian casualties because the militant group operates from within civilian areas.

The Health Ministry in Gaza said Saturday that at least 30,960 Palestinians have been killed since the war began. It doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government, and its figures from previous wars have largely matched those of the U.N. and independent experts.

Meanwhile, U.S. efforts got under way to set up the temporary pier in Gaza for the sea deliveries. U.S. Central Command said a first U.S. Army vessel, the General Frank S. Besson, left a base in Virginia on Saturday and was on its way to the Eastern Mediterranean with equipment for pier construction.

United States officials said it likely

be weeks before the pier is operational.

The sea corridor is backed by the EU together with the United States, the United Arab Emirates and other countries. The European Commission has said that U.N. agencies and the Red Cross will also play a role.

A ship belonging to Spain's Open Arms aid group was expected to make a pilot voyage to test the corridor as early as this weekend. The ship has been waiting at Cyprus's port of Larnaca.

Open Arms founder Oscar Camps said the ship, which is pulling a barge with 200 tons of rice and flour, would take two to three days to arrive at an undisclosed location.

A member of the charity World Central Kitchen, which is also involved in the test run, said in a post on X that once the barge reaches Gaza, the aid would be off-loaded by a crane, be placed on trucks and driven to northern Gaza, which has been largely cut off from aid shipments. (PTI)

# Arunachal gets state data centre

Having own data centre will enable high-end data services, which will directly benefit the state government

ITANAGAR, March 10: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Sunday inaugurated the State Data Centre (SDC) at the civil secretariat, marking a significant step towards facilitating high-end data services for the government.

A data centre serves as a physical location housing computing machines and related hardware equipment, including servers, data storage drives, and network infrastructure, essential for IT systems.

This cutting-edge centre, powered by green hydrogen-based fuel cell technology, offers several advantages, including backup power supply during outages, data replication for disaster recovery, temperature-controlled environments to prolong equipment lifespan, and enhanced security measures to ensure compliance with data regula-



Officials said.

"Having a own data centre will enable high-end data services, which will directly benefit the state government for storing data application, websites, inter-departmen-

tal information exchange and e-file system," Khandu said after inaugurating the centre.

The chief minister added that as of now, the state government is spending a lot of money on develop-

ment of IT infrastructure which is being managed on cloud service basis, but with the introduction of the SDC in the state, the expenditure would be reduced to some extent. "SDC will directly reduce the dependency of the state on National Information Centre (NIC)," Khandu said and added that the SDC would provide efficient and faster implementation of various IT projects in the state. "As we have digitised most of the departments and offices for speedy delivery of services and transparency, we need a huge space for data storage. The IT and communications department has wonderfully built the state-of-the-art centralised data centre that will save us a significant amount of money," the chief minister added. (PTI)

# Meghalaya police announces ₹ 1 lakh reward for blast info

SHILLONG, March 10: The Meghalaya police have announced a ₹ 1 lakh reward to anyone giving credible information that leads to the arrest of any person involved in the March 9 IED bomb blast at Them Lew Mawlong.

On March 9, at around 10.30 pm, a crude improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated in an uninhabited and abandoned CGI sheet structure at Syndicate Bus Stand, Punjabi Lane, Mawlonghat.

In a statement, East Khasi Hills SP Rituraj Ravi said the modus operandi employed in this blast closely resembled the blasts that occurred in the past in the region for which the banned unlawful association Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) had claimed responsibility.

"However, till the time of issuing this press release no organization or outfit has claimed



responsibility for the blast," he said.

The informed that a suo-moto FIR is being registered at Sadar Police Station for further investigation into the matter under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Explosive Substances Act.

"East Khasi Hills police is fully committed to investigating this matter meticulously to apprehend those responsible and bring those involved to justice," he said while urging the cooperation from the general public in ensuring the success of these efforts.

The IED was placed inside a

metal container. The blast, suspected to have been caused by gelatin sticks, was confined to the CGI sheet structure while causing damages to the glass windows of the adjacent buildings.

One passerby who was later identified as Lakhan Singh sustained minor injuries in his leg due to splinters generated by the blast.

Further, the SP said the EKH police also announced a reward of Rs 1 lakh to anyone giving credible information that leads to the arrest of any person involved in this dastardly and gruesome act.

He assured that the identity of the informant will be kept fully confidential.

"The information can be conveyed to the Special Cell through call/text/whatsapp on phone number 9366790273 or through email on specialcell.ekh.mlp@gmail.com," he added. (NNN)

# Prof Ajailiu Niumai felicitated on International Women's Day at Delhi University

Niumai has published articles in reputed journals like *Economic & Political Weekly*, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* (Sage), *Sociological Bulletin* (Sage), *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* (Sage)



IMPHAL, March 10: Prof. Ajailiu Niumai from Tamei, Tamenglong district, Manipur, is among the few "outstanding and distinguished alumni of Miranda House, Delhi University", who were felicitated on March 8 on International Women's Day and the 76th Foundation Day of the college in New Delhi.

Other distinguished awardees included Prof. Kiran Datar (former VC of Delhi University & former Principal of Miranda House), Surya Rekha (Hindustani Light Classical singer), Rashmi Vajpeyi (Natarang Pratishthan), Dr. Ila Singh (Deputy Comptroller & Auditor General), Dr. Madhu Purnima Kishwar (founder editor of Manushi - India's first feminist journal), Dikshya Routray (Film Director, creative producer, & writer), Priti Agrawal (Indian Postal Service), Dr. Sujata Roy Abhijit (Philosophy Department, Delhi University), and many other distinguished women alumni.

Ajailiu Niumai is professor of sociology and former Head, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion & Inclusive Policy (CSSEIP), School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad (UoH) & Senior Research Associate, Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa (2023-25). She is the Assistant Director, Institute of Eminence (IoE), University of Hyderabad (2023-25). She has held several positions in her career of 24 years and has been associated with many universities in India and overseas. She is the Supervisory Panel Member of Ph.D Candidate at the Humanitarian Health Research Initiative, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, College of Health & Medicine, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia (2023 onwards). Her post-doctoral studies at the Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies, University of Iowa, USA in 2013-14 under UGC Raman Fellowship was a part of the INDO-US Knowledge Initiative. She is the First Fellow of CARTHA (NGO) in Iowa city, USA (2006). She is on the Board of Governors at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru, Executive Council Member of the Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh and Advisory Committee Member/Board of Studies Member in various Universities. She has served Sociological Associations at the Regional, National and International levels in various capacities. She is the Asia Regional Representative of RC-32 Women, Gender and Society of International Sociological Society

(2023-27). She is Member, Managing Committee of Indian Sociological Society (2020-2025) and former Convenor of RC-04 Migration & Diaspora Studies (2026-19) of Indian Sociological Society. She is the founder Secretary of North East India Sociological Association (2022 onwards).

She joined the Department of Sociology as Assistant Professor, UoH in 2000, and worked till 2009. She joined CSSEIP, UoH in 2009 and taught courses at Centre for Women's Studies as one of the pioneers and joint faculty, UoH (2007-2013). She completed her B.A (Honours) Sociology from Miranda House, Delhi University in 1995. She is the very first Liangmai Naga tribal woman to be awarded Ph.D degree in Sociology from JNU (2008) and the first tribal woman to be a Professor in the University of Hyderabad (2017). She is a noted sociologist who has been working on Gender, Indian Diaspora, North East India studies, NGOs and development.

Her ground-breaking research on human trafficking of the marginalised women and children in North East India and South India (with a special focus on combating trafficking, advocacy, influencing policy-makers, collaborating with NGOs, repatriation of the trafficked victims, including menstrual hygiene) has culminated in the introduction of an Elective Interdisciplinary Course (for M.A students) on "Human Trafficking in India" in UoH. She will launch an E-Learning Course of the same in 2024. Prof. Ajailiu had the privilege of hosting the First National Symposium on Anti-Human Trafficking at UoH, sponsored by Andhra Pradesh Mahila Commission (2020).

She has published articles in reputed journals like *Economic & Political Weekly*, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* (Sage), *Sociological Bulletin* (Sage), *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* (Sage), *The Eastern Anthropologist*, *International Anthropological Journal - Man in India* and the like. She is a Guest Editor of the Special Volume on Gender and Social Exclusion, *Journal of Social and Economic Development* (2024), Springer Nature. Her books (with Prof. Abha Chauhan) includes *Gender, Law and Social Transformation in India*, Springer Nature, Germany/Singapore (2022), and (with Abha Chauhan & Tattvamas Paltasingh) *Hundreds Years of Sociology in India: Evolving Issues and Emerging Trends* by Springer Nature, Germany/Singapore (2024). (NNN)

# LNKRM holds 1st Legislative Assembly cum Seminar on Inclusive Education

IMPHAL, March 10: The Liangmai Naga Katimai Ruangdi, Manipur (LNKRM), the apex student body of Liangmai tribe in Manipur, conducted the 1st Legislative Assembly cum Seminar on Inclusive Education: Past, Present and Future based on National Education Policy 2020 on March 8 and 9 at Aling (Khundong Khunkhaiba) village, Tamenglong district, Manipur, featuring an esteemed resource person, students and community leaders.

LNKR is dedicated to promoting education and community development.

The event was graced by Kengsung Newmai, Assistant Inspector of Schools, Deputy Inspector, Tamei.

Speaking at the seminar, Kengsung Newmai emphasized on the current education policies, various facilities and upgradation of education. He stressed on the role and responsibilities of the parents and teachers and to be aware of new policy being updated and make the students of this generation be competent with the rest of the country. He also shared that the village authority council, SMDC members and concerned school's department should be held accountable and maintain transparency in shaping the career of the students.

Mathiuchunbou Rimai, president of LNKRM, strongly expressed that education is the greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality that brings changes in the society. Rimai encouraged the students to focus more on the professional courses and discovered their talents. In this fast changing world in the era of computers and internet the parents should also know what their children are exactly doing, he also said. Many youths have become desperate since they are jobless with their mere certificate in this competitive world, he added. Therefore, the youth should also engage



more on the vocational courses and discover their strengths and weaknesses less they become misomer in the society, he advised.

Meanwhile, in the 1st LNKRM Legislative Assembly the student body strongly took a stern decision that they will not leave any stone unturned to uplift, upgrade and for the progress of the society.

Mathiuchunbou Rimai and his executive then inspected schools of Kundong Khunkhaiba and interacted with the school authorities and students. The LNKRM team then assured that the union will not leave them behind rather find a positive means to develop the infrastructure and administration of the schools.

The event was attended by about 1000 people, including 70 units under LNKRM and others. (NNN)

# Aaradhyaa Dhanuka made a record in Hula Hooping

GUWAHATI, March 10: Aaradhyaa Dhanuka created a record in Hula Hooping for the longest duration and registered her name in the Assam Book of Records.

In her age group, Aaradhyaa kept doing Hula Hooping twirls while dancing, using a Hula Hoop around her neck. Recently she completed 882 spins in 10 minutes and 2 seconds. Even without formal training, Aaradhyaa has performed exceptionally well with the highest and fastest performance in the presence of Assam Book of Records (ABR) officials. Appreciating Aaradhyaa's flexibility and quickness, she was granted approval for the state record. Aaradhyaa Dhanuka is the daughter of Guwahati's young entrepreneurs Ghanashyam-Swati Dhanuka and granddaughter of eminent social workers Ashok-Kusum Dhanuka studying in grade IV of Sanskriti The Gurukul. This achievement of Aaradhyaa at the tender age of 9 has made the name of the entire Marwari community proud across the state.

# International flight services soon from Agartala airport: Tripura CM

AGARTALA, March 10: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday said efforts are underway to launch international flight operations from the Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport at Agartala soon.

Saha said this while unveiling a 5-metre-tall bronze statue of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, considered the architect of modern Tripura, at the airport here.

"The Manikya dynasty has played a crucial role in the development of Tripura. Despite their significant contributions, proper recognition was not accorded to them in the past," the chief minister said.

Around ₹ 35 lakh was spent on making and installing the statue.

Since Narendra Modi became the prime minister in 2014 and the BJP-led government took charge in Tripura in 2018, the Maharajas of Tripura have been honoured and given due respect, he said.

After the BJP came to power, emphasis was laid on developing the Singerbhul Airport, which was later renamed MBB Airport, Saha said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi officially dedicated the airport in honour of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur in 2018, he said.

"In the 70s, none of us could have imagined that such a beautiful airport would be built in Tripura. This airport is now one of the most attractive airports in the North East," Saha said.



Currently, a total of 32 flights take off from the Agartala airport daily.

This level of connectivity was never anticipated, said Saha.

The chief minister said the state government has undertaken positive initiatives to commence international flight services from Agartala airport.

"Everything is being addressed, from immigration to security arrangements, to facilitate the prompt initiation of international flight services. International flight services are expected to be launched soon. Thanks to the Prime Minister, Tripura is making progress in air connectivity, road connectivity, and rail connectivity," he added. (PTI)

# 'If I have to be soldier': Book recounts Mizoram's tryst with insurgency in 1960s

As a brutal war rages, Indian Army Captain Samuel Rego, the son of a Baptist preacher, finds himself returning to the land he ran away from to interrogate one of the most feared MNF commanders in custody

NEW DELHI, March 10: Blending history and fiction, a new book "If I Have to Be a Soldier" thrusts readers into the heart of Mizoram's tryst with insurgency and struggle for independence in the 1960s.

Written by award-winning producer and director Nikhil J Alva and published by Harper Collins, the book is touted to be a gripping story of identity, survival, betrayal and, above all, love.

It is set in the backdrop of the Mizo insurgency, which started in 1966 with the aim to establish a sovereign nation state for the Mizo people.

The secessionist movement, led by Mizo National Front (MNF) and its leader Laldenga, came to an end in 1986, when it signed the Mizo Peace Accord with the government of India and created a separate state for the Mizos, called Mizoram.

"When I first read about the incredible causality between the once-in-fifty-year flowering of the bamboo in the Mizo Hills, the plague of rats, and the brutal twenty-year long insurgency that



followed, as a storyteller, I was hooked!

"I first wrote a movie screenplay based on the idea. Along the way I fell in love with the characters I had created, and decided that only a novel could do justice to them. It took four years. But I've enjoyed every minute of it!" said Alva about his debut book.

So, according to the book's plot, the year is 1966 and the MNF has launched an armed re-

bellion in their quest for an independent nation, and Delhi is pushing back with all its might.

As a brutal war rages, Indian Army Captain Samuel Rego, the son of a Baptist preacher, finds himself returning to the land he ran away from to interrogate one of the most feared MNF commanders in custody.

Except, the Mara tribesman everyone knows as 'Che' is Sena, Samuel's childhood friend.

"When confronted with a grave moral dilemma, the choice Captain Samuel makes causes him and Che to become fugitives. While being hunted across the rugged Mizo Hills, the two men must face events from their bitter past that scarred their friendship, even as they struggle to stay alive and redeem themselves," reads the description of the book.

According to the publishers, "If I Have to Be a Soldier", while drawing on the dark truths of one of India's most secretive wars, delves into the complexities of friendship, loyalty, and the devastating costs of war.

"A gripping tale set against the backdrop of a forgotten and turbulent period from India's history, it challenges us to confront the haunting choices made in the name of survival," said Rashmi Menon, executive editor at HarperCollins India, in a statement.

The book, priced at Rs 499, is currently available for purchase across online and offline stores. (PTI)

# Sikkim CM inaugurates new police station building in Gyalshing district

GANGTOK, March 10: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Sunday commended the police force for their unwavering dedication and commitment to maintaining law and order in the state.

Following the inauguration of a newly-constructed police station building in Gyalshing district, he expressed gratitude to the police force and emphasised the government's readiness to invest in infrastructure and resources to empower law enforcement agencies in upholding the rule of law.

"I must express gratitude to the police force for their unwavering dedication and commitment to maintaining law and order in Sikkim," he said.

Highlighting the significance of the new police station building, the chief minister said it represented a significant stride forward in the government's endeavours to enhance public safety and security across the state.

He called upon civil society and all stakeholders to collaborate in building a safer and more prosperous future for the people of Sikkim.

The newly constructed three-story police station, built at a cost of Rs 3 crore, boasts a total built-up area of 1806 sq-feet, enhancing the operational capacity of law enforcement in the region. (PTI)

# Caches of arms, ammunition recovered in strife-hit Manipur



IMPHAL, March 10: Huge caches of arms and ammunition were recovered as Manipur police continued its joint operations in vulnerable and fringe areas of violent affected districts to disarm the miscreants engaging in gun fights.

The caches of arms and ammunition were recovered during operations in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts on Saturday, the police said on Sunday.

A cache of arms and ammunition were recovered during an operation in Kangpokpi district. The cache included one 5.56mm US Made M-16 Assault Rifle, one 5.56mm M-16 Assault Rifle magazine, one 12-inch single bore barrel gun, one 36 HE hand grenade with detonator, 33 live cartridge of single bore, five cases of cartridges of single bore, six live rounds of 5.56mm, one combat pouch, one sling bag and one ammunition waist belt.

In another operation in Churachandpur, the police recovered eleven SBBL guns, one 9 mm pistol with magazine, three improvised heavy mortar (Pumpi) guns, four improvised heavy mortar (Pumpi) bombs and 17 rounds of 7.62 mm (sniper) ammunition, the police added.

The Manipur police along with the central security forces have been conducting search and area domination operations in the vulnerable and fringe areas of violent affected districts of the state, in their efforts to restore normalcy.

Another objective of the on-going operations was to recover arms and ammunition looted by mobs during the initial stage of the violence that had been unfolding in the state since May 3 last year.

A total of 5,668 arms along with ammunition were also looted during the initial stage of the violence, according to the police. (NNN)

# TMC releases candidate list for 42 LS seats, 7 MPs dropped

**KOLKATA, March 10:** The TMC on Sunday released its candidate roster for all 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal, ushering a major overhaul by dropping seven incumbent MPs and introducing numerous new faces, including former cricketer Yusuf Pathan.

The Trinamool Congress maintained a harmonious blend of experienced leaders and fresh talent, amid the alleged power tussle between the old guards and the next-gen leaders.

Film star-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha, who won the Asansol seat in a by-poll on a TMC ticket in 2022, has been re-nominated, while former MP Haji Nurul Islam replaces actor Nusrat Jahan in the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat, where the trouble-torn Sandeshkhali is situated.

While 16 of 23 sitting MPs were retained, the TMC opted not to renominate seven incumbents and notably excluded BJP defector Arjun Singh from Barrackpore, who joined the TMC two years ago. Among the new faces are 12 women candidates and 26 individuals, including sitting MPs and previous contenders.

Additionally, nine sitting MLAs, including two ministers from the West Bengal cabinet



Partha Bhowmick and Biplab Mitra, have been thrust into the Lok Sabha battle.

Addressing a massive rally at Brigade Parade Grounds in Kolkata, TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee explained, "I have fielded candidates, some people were dropped. Those who have not been renominated will be accommodated during the assembly polls."

Former cricketer Yusuf Pathan has been nominated from the Baharampur Lok Sabha seat, historically a stronghold of state Congress chief and five-term MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

Mahua Moitra, who was ex-

pelled from the Lok Sabha last year in cash for a query case, has been reaffirmed as the party's candidate for the Krishnanagar seat.

Kirti Azad, a former cricketer and party leader, has been nominated for the Bardhaman-Durgapur constituency, previously lost to the BJP in 2019.

Notably, among the nine MLAs nominated for the Lok Sabha polls, BJP defectors Biswajit Das and Mukutmani Adhikari will contest from Bongaon and Ranaghat, strongholds of the Matua community, which the TMC lost to the BJP in 2019.

The TMC has also struck a balance between experienced leaders

and new blood, with three-term MPs Sudip Bandopadhyay, Sougata Roy, Satabdi Roy, Kalyan Banerjee, and Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar being re-nominated from their respective seats of North Kolkata, Dum Dum, Birbhum, Serampore and Barasat.

The party has also introduced fresh faces like Saayoni Ghosh, Debangshu Bhattacharya, Gopal Lama, MLA June Maliah, Bapi Haldar, and actress Rachana Banerjee from the seats of Jadavpur, Tamluk, a stronghold of BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari, Darjeeling and Medinipur.

The TMC MPs of Kanthi and Tamluk, Sisir Adhikari and Dibyendu Adhikari, whose names did not feature in the candidate list, have been maintaining a distance from the party after their family member Suwendu Adhikari joined the saffron camp in December 2020.

Additionally, Sujata Mondal Khan has been fielded from the Bishnupur seat against her ex-husband and sitting BJP MP Saumitra Khan.

Former IPS officer Prasun Banerjee, who recently resigned, will contest from Malda North to reclaim the seat from the BJP. (PTI)

# Poison of appeasement weakening with dvpt: PM

**AZAMGARH (UP), March 10:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the "poison of appeasement" was weakening with Uttar Pradesh touching new heights of development, as he slammed nepotism in politics in a constituency often linked with the Mulayam-Akhilesh Yadav family.

Addressing a rally in Azamgarh, he slammed the Yadavs for treating Azamgarh as their bastion and alleged that this very "nepotism" led some people to take a dig at him that he does not have a family.

"In the last election, the family, which considered Azamgarh its bastion, was defeated by a youth like Dinesh (Dinesh Lal Yadav Nirahua MP of Azamgarh)," Modi said.

Late SP patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav won the Azamgarh parliamentary seat in 2014, and after him, his son Akhilesh Yadav won it in 2019.

The party, however, lost the seat to BJP's Dinesh Lal Yadav in the 2022 by-election, which was necessitated by Akhilesh's vacating the seat and deciding to contest the assembly poll from Karhal.

"Due to this 'parivaarvad,' (the opposition) people are so frustrated that they abuse Modi. They say that Modi doesn't have a family. They forget that the 140 crore population of the country is the family of Modi," the PM said, also responding to RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav, who in a rally on March 3 asked him why he did not have a family.

Lalu Yadav had made the remark while addressing an INDIA bloc rally in Patna and slammed Modi for accusing the opposition of indulging in dynastic politics.

"As UP is touching new heights of development the poison of appeasement is weakening," Modi said.

He said that Azamgarh, which was once considered backward, is a shining star today and is writing a new

chapter of development for the country.

"Today, the star of Azamgarh is shining. There was a time when there would be an event in Delhi and other states would join in. Today, the event is being held in Azamgarh and thousands of people from different parts of the country are connecting with Azamgarh," Modi said.

Before his speech, Modi inaugurated or laid the foundations of projects worth Rs 42,000 crore across the country, of which projects worth Rs 34,700 crore are in UP, with a major chunk of them involving the construction of airports and airport buildings.

The PM said one must not link these projects with elections and added that he sped up the development works to achieve the dream of a developed India by 2047.

"I am running with speed and moving the country with speed to fulfil the promise of developed India by 2047," he said.

He accused the previous opposition governments of not coming good on their promises and pulling the wool over the public's eyes by, at times, announcing schemes with no intention to start on them.

"Sometimes they had so much courage that they would announce new railways schemes while sitting in the Parliament believing no one would ask later."

"I have reviewed the announcements that were made 30-35 years ago. Sometimes they would lay a foundation stone before an election and then disappear," Modi said.

"Today the country is witnessing that Modi is a different kind of person," he added.

The PM said that the planning for urbanisation which is going on in the country should have been done 30 years ago, but it wasn't, and that he is working on making urbanisation an opportunity. (PTI)

## BJP, RSS have devious agenda of re-writing, destroying Constitution: Cong over BJP MPs remarks

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** The Congress on Sunday accused the BJP and the RSS of having a "hidden and devious" agenda of "re-writing and destroying" the Constitution while claiming that its MP Anantkumar Hegde has said the party needs 400 seats to "change the Indian Constitution".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed the BJP MP's reported remark was a public declaration of the "hidden intentions" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and their "Sangh Parivar".

Party chief Mallikarjun Kharge said the BJP MP's statement "yet again exposes Modi-RSS' devious agenda to impose dictatorship".

"The Modi Government, BJP and RSS secretly desire to impose a dictatorship, whereby they will impose their 'Manuvaadi mindset' on the people of India and snatch away the rights of SCs, STs and OBCs," he said in a post on X.

"There will be NO Elections,

or at the most, just sham elections. Independence of institutions shall be curtailed. Freedom of expression shall be bulldozed. The RSS and the BJP will destroy our secular fabric and unity in diversity," Kharge alleged and asserted that the Congress would not allow these "ulterior motives" of the "Sangh Parivar" to succeed.

He alleged that such repeated calls by the BJP-RSS, from time to time were a "direct assault" on the "unquestionable ethos of sovereignty, socialist, secular, democratic espoused by our Constitution makers".

"Justice, Equality, and Liberty are the strong pillars of the Constitution and any change in these principles would be an insult to the India envisioned by Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar and our revered founders," the Congress chief said.

"It is the solemn responsibility of every Indian to protect our democracy and the Constitution," he said on X using the hashtag "Samvidhan Bachao

BJP Hatao".

Rahul Gandhi alleged that the "ultimate goal of Narendra Modi and the BJP is to destroy Baba Saheb's Constitution."

"They hate justice, equality, civil rights and democracy. By dividing the society, enslaving the media, trammelling the right to freedom of expression and crippling independent institutions, they want to turn India's great democracy into a narrow dictatorship by conspiring to eliminate the opposition," he alleged in a post in Hindi on X.

The former Congress chief said they would not let these "conspiracies" with the dreams of the heroes of India's struggle for Independence succeed and would continue to fight for the democratic rights guaranteed by the Constitution till the last breath.

"Every soldier of the Constitution, especially Dalits, tribals, backward and minorities, wake up, raise your voice - INDIA is with you," he also said using the hashtag "Samvidhan Bachao

BJP Hatao".

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the BJP MP, a former Union Minister, and "Modi's favourite" Anantkumar Hegde has only revealed what was already known. "The goal of the BJP and RSS is to overturn Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution," he alleged.

"All the prime minister's rhetoric about crossing 400 seats is geared towards the goal of dismantling the Constitution -- the last protector of the rights of India's people, especially of Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, and religious minorities," he said.

"If we have to save Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution and preserve Indian democracy, we must vote the Modi Sarkar out," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Karnataka BJP MP Anant Kumar Hegde has reportedly said that the Indian constitution needs to be changed "to save our religion" and the only way BJP can do it is if the party can win over 400 Lok Sabha seats. (PTI)

## People from poor households, my star campaigners for polls: Jagan Mohan Reddy

**ADDANKI (ANDHRA PRADESH), March 10:** Close on the heels of the TDP, the Janasena and the BJP forging an alliance, YSRCP supremo and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy on Sunday said he doesn't have tie-ups with any party and is going to the polls alone with the support of 'star' campaigners from poor households.

Addressing a massive public meeting here - 'Siddham' (ready) - in the run-up to the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the state, the Chief Minister compared himself to Arjuna and the people to Sri Krishna from the epic 'Mahabharata' in the 'Kurukshetra' battle (polls) between justice and injustice.

"I don't have alliances with various parties, I am going to the polls alone and what I have is many star campaigners from poor households," Reddy said, addressing the meeting.

According to the CM, he does not have 10 star campaigners like TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu or a host of media houses to back him and propagate lies.

Referring to the BJP, Reddy alleged that a national party is in the pocket of Naidu and all of them are ready to attack the future of poor people in the southern state.

He ridiculed the opposition parties like the TDP, Janasena and BJP as outfits and said they were akin to commanders but having no armies. (PTI)

## Did Arun Goel resign as EC due to differences with CEC or Modi govt, ask Oppn

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** A day after Arun Goel resigned as election commissioner, the Congress and other opposition parties on Sunday asked whether he did so due to any differences with the chief election commissioner or the Narendra Modi government.

Taking potshots at the BJP, some opposition leaders also wondered if Goel resigned to contest the Lok Sabha polls on its ticket like former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay.

"The resignation of Arun Goel as Election Commissioner last evening raises three questions," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said.

"Did he actually resign over differences with the Chief Election Commissioner or with the Modi Government, which does the front-seat driving for all supposedly independent institutions? Or did he resign for personal reasons? Or did he, like the Calcutta High Court Judge a few days back, resign to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls on a BJP ticket," Ramesh said in a post on X.

The Congress leader said the Election Commission has for eight months now refused to meet with INDIA parties on the issue of the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) that is essential to prevent "electronic voting manipulation".

"Each passing day in Modi's India deals an added blow to democracy and democratic institutions," he alleged.

Asked about Goel's resignation, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said one has to wait to see what he does in the coming days.

"I was thinking that after the high court judge resigned and joined the BJP the next day and started abusing the TMC. It shows that the BJP has appointed people with such a mindset."

"Now the election commissioner has resigned, let us wait for some time to see what he does," he said. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut alleged the Election Commission has become an "extended branch of the BJP".

It is not the same Election Commission that it was during TN Seshan's time, which functioned as a watchdog over the elections and re-

mained impartial, he claimed.

"In the last 10 years, the Election Commission has been privatised. It has become a branch of the BJP," he alleged.

He said two people have gone and only one remains in the Election Commission.

"Like BJP's people have been appointed in high courts, Supreme Court, Governor's house, in the same manner, they would appoint two of their BJP people here too," Raut claimed.

Ramesh said, "It is possible that Arun Goel resigned to contest elections on a BJP ticket".

AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi demanded answers from Goel and the government over the resignation just ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

"It would be better if he (Arun Goel) himself or the government would tell the reason behind the resignation ahead of the Lok Sabha elections," he said.

TMC leader Saket Gokhla asked, "Why did Election Commissioner Arun Goel abruptly resign last night just after cutting short his trip to Bengal with the ECI?"

"What explains this sudden mystery days before the elections? This is a part of the 'chronology' of Modi's & BJP's dirty tricks to steal votes in Bengal," he alleged.

The "anti-Bengal outsider zamindars of the BJP are rattled" because Bengal has constantly rejected them, he claimed.

He said, "In the face of a certain defeat, they've tried everything including depriving Bengal of its rightful financial dues, sending 100s of companies of central forces to Bengal before the elections and influencing a sitting HC judge who resigned".

Gokhale alleged that the BJP "forced" Goel to "abruptly resign so that Modi and his one chosen minister get to appoint two out of three Election Commissioners days before Lok Sabha polls are announced".

Independent MP Kapil Sibal said it was a worrying development.

"Way cleared to: Pack the Commission with Yes men. This applies to all institutions that are the foundations of our Republic!" he said on X. (PTI)

## BJP Hisar MP Brijendra Singh quits party, joins Congress

**CHANDIGARH / NEW DELHI, March 10:** Ahead of the parliamentary elections, BJP MP from Hisar Brijendra Singh on Sunday resigned from the party's primary membership and the Lok Sabha due to "compelling political reasons" and joined the Congress.

In New Delhi, Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said Brijendra Singh's father and BJP leader Birender Singh is also likely to join the grand old party in the next few days.

Soon after announcing his resignation on X, Brijendra Singh reached Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's residence in the national capital and joined the opposition party.

Besides Maken, senior Congress leaders Mukul Wasnik and Deepak Babaria were present on the occasion.

In a post on X, Brijendra Singh said, "I have resigned

from the primary membership of BJP due to compelling political reasons. I extend gratitude to the party, National President Sh. J P Nadda, Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi, & Sh.Amit Shah for giving me the opportunity to serve as the Member of Parliament for Hisar."

"I have also resigned from the membership of Lok Sabha. I am grateful to the people of Hisar for giving me the opportunity to represent them and raise their demands as their MP. The commitment of public service, with which I entered politics after leaving the job of IAS, will continue," he said in another post.

Speaking to reporters after joining the Congress, the bureaucrat-turned-politician said he decided to resign from the BJP "on account of the unease that had been building up for a while due to certain political reasons".

"The unease was primarily

about ideological issues and I did not agree on several issues like farmers' issues, Agniveer issue and treatment of international women wrestlers," he said.

"The BJP-JJP alliance was also another major reason behind my unease in the BJP," he added. Brijendra Singh thanked the Congress leadership, including Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Sandhi, for welcoming him into the party fold. Congress sources said Brijendra Singh is set to be the party candidate from Hisar.

There was speculation that he may be replaced as Hisar MP and would not be fielded again from the constituency by the BJP as the JJP was demanding the seat.

Maken said the Congress is happy to announce that Brijendra Singh is joining the party.

His father and former Union minister Birender Singh is also

likely to join the Congress in the next few days, Maken said.

"Chaudhary Birender Singh has informed (us) that he would join the party at a public meeting," the Congress treasurer added.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Brijendra Singh had defeated JJP's Dushyant Chautala and Bhavya Bishnoi, who was then with the Congress, to win the Hisar Lok Sabha seat.

Brijendra Singh is the great-grandson of prominent Jat leader Sir Chhotu Ram.

In October last year, Birender Singh had served an ultimatum to the BJP, virtually threatening to quit if the party continued its alliance with the JJP, which he accused of indulging in rampant corruption, in Haryana.

The JJP had extended support to the BJP after the former fell short of the majority in the 2019 Haryana assembly polls. (PTI)

## Maoist camp busted in Odisha's Kandhamal, explosives recovered

**PHULBANI (ODISHA), March 10:** The Odisha Police busted a Maoist camp in Durgapanga reserve forest area in Kandhamal district and recovered a huge cache of grenades and other explosives, an official said on Sunday.

The camp was unearthed following an exchange of fire between a team of the Special Operations Group (SOG) and the Maoists during a combing operation in the forest along the Kandhamal-Rayagada border area, Kandhamal SP Subhendu Patra said.

There is no report of any injury, he said.

At least 15 armed Maoists fled from the spot, taking advantage of the dense forest, he said.

Seven hand grenades and other explosives were among the items recovered from the spot, the SP said.

The operation in the area has been intensified, Patra added (PTI)

# PM Modi, what he stands for, will be at centre of LS polls: Kapil Sibal

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be at the centre of the Lok Sabha polls and whether what he stands for is for the good of the people of the country would be the subject matter of the elections, Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal said on Sunday.

In a video interview with PTI, Sibal also said the opposition INDIA bloc needs to come out with a joint vision document which entails what key issues are there before the country which need to be addressed.

Asserting that no election is a done deal, Sibal quipped, "I don't know whether picture baki hai ki nahi lekin jo picture chal rahi hai woh desh ke liye theek nahi hai (I don't know whether or not there is more to the film but the one that is playing is not good for the country)."

Asked about the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) losing its way with JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar crossing over to the NDA and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee saying her party will go solo in the polls, Sibal said negotiations with Banerjee were still on and that was not an issue.

"As far as Nitish Kumar is concerned, the nature of politics in this country today allows for all this to happen, nobody trusts anybody else. It is unfortunate that the level of politics has reached its nadir as reflected by not just one individual but by the nature of politics in this country where people just cross over for reasons you and I know which need not be stated publicly," the Rajya Sabha MP said.

"As long as politics of this nature thrives in India, I don't think we have much hope for the delivery of essentials to those people who are at the bottom of the pyramid," he asserted.

Expressing confidence that the INDIA bloc has the wherewithal to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, Sibal said battles will be fought depending on the kind of candidates the opposition fields in particular constituencies and the narrative it would project.

Noting that seat sharing among opposition parties will be over soon, Sibal said they will have to get together to build a narrative with which they can persuade the people to vote for them in the course of this election.



That narrative has not yet started being built, he added.

Sibal asserted that the INDIA bloc needs a vision for the future which is different from what the BJP is relying on.

Asked if the opposition needs a joint vision document, Sibal said, "I think they need something like that. I think they are talking about a joint minimum programme. A joint minimum programme, according to me, is not enough."

"It is a minimum programme as far as what you will do. A broad vision of what the issues are before this country that needs to be addressed (is what is required)."

Sibal said the vision document need not have 50, 40 or 30 issues and just five major

issues that need to be looked at and are different from those the BJP tom-toms about, would be enough.

He noted that the real issues of this country include massive unemployment, lack of education, empowerment through education and health.

"Three things that empower an individual are education, health and values. The values that we see under the BJP, the kind of violence and hate that is being generated in society, are not things that will make this nation great," Sibal said.

He claimed that the real issues of the people are not being addressed.

"What is being addressed through the media is that as if we are already at the cusp of a Viksit Bharat, but the fact of the matter is that our per capita income, even among the BRICS countries, is the lowest," the former Congress leader said.

"Something should emerge that attracts people. Something that touches the people and you don't need big propaganda machinery for that. What you need is honesty and sincerity for that; talk about real issues that impact the lives of the people," Sibal said.

On how the Ram temple wave in north India can be countered, he asked why should it be countered as there is Lord Ram that resides in our hearts.

"What does Lord Ram tell us? To do the right thing. What are the values of Lord Ram? Ask the dispensation in power to embrace the values of Lord Ram. They (BJP) talk of Lord Ram and violate all the values Lord Ram stood for. That is what we need to tell the people," Sibal said.

Asked about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim that the BJP will get at least 370 seats and the NDA would cross the 400-mark, Sibal took a swipe, saying the PM probably has more information on this count than he has.

"I guess he knows what the machines will do. If he says so, if he says 370 or 400, he must be very certain or he must be knowing how the people will vote, how machines will count the vote and it will all come out as 400," he said, attacking the government.

People must think about what changes have happened in the last 10 years other than the gifts being given to buy their votes, he said.

Asked about some people suggesting that the 2024 polls is a done deal or whether he believes "picture abhi baki hai", Sibal said, "No election is a done deal. I don't know whether picture baki hai ki nahi lekin jo picture chal rahi hai woh desh ke liye theek nahi hai."

On being questioned as to what is the answer to Narendra Modi versus who, Sibal said, "I think in 2024, Narendra Modi will certainly be at the centre of the election. What Narendra Modi ji stands for will be at the centre of the election and whether what he stands for is for the good of the people of India and the future is the subject matter of this election in the months to come," he said.

Asked about the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Sibal said, "It is fine. If they (Congress) think it will galvanize the people, why not."

Sibal, who was a Union Minister during UPA I and II, quit the Congress in May 2022 and was elected to the Rajya Sabha as an Independent member with the Samajwadi Party's support. He had also floated a non-electoral platform "Insaaf" aimed at fighting injustice. (PTI)

# SC's responsibility to protect its dignity: Sibal on SBI plea on electoral bonds issue

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** Terming the SBI's reasons for seeking an extension in disclosing electoral bond details "puerile", Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal Sunday said it is the Supreme Court's responsibility to protect its dignity and that it "would not be easy" to accept the bank's plea when a Constitution bench has rendered a judgement.

Sibal, who led the argument for the petitioners in the Supreme Court case against the electoral bond scheme, said the State Bank of India (SBI) claiming that it would take several weeks to make the data public sounds like "somebody wants to protect somebody".

In a video interview with PTI, Sibal claimed it was clear that the SBI intended to protect the government. Otherwise, the bank would not have filed an application seeking an extension till June 30 in disclosing electoral bond details when elections are set to take place in April-May, he said.

The senior advocate's remarks assume significance as they come ahead of a hearing by a five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court on SBI's application seeking an extension to disclose the details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties before the scheme was scrapped last month.

The bench, headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, will also hear a separate plea which has



sought the initiation of contempt action against the bank for "wilfully and deliberately" disobeying the apex court's direction to submit details of the contributions made to political parties through electoral bonds to the Election Commission by March 6.

Sibal said the SBI knows that elections are in April-May and throughout the period after the election is announced, it would be a subject matter of public debate if the details of the electoral bonds are made public.

"They are seeking time and the reasons are obvious and I am sure that the court will see through them. It is puerile for the organisation (SBI) to say that we will have

to collate the material, collect the files and then we will have to find out who gave money to whom. This is the 21st century and our dear PM (Narendra Modi) talks about the digitalisation of everything," he said.

"The government in power does not want the names to be declared before the election is over. It is as simple as that," Sibal said.

Asked about the plea that has sought contempt action against the SBI, Sibal said these are matters on which contempt should be left to the courts.

"This impacts the dignity of the court. It is the court which is responsible for protecting its dignity. If the court is seen to be accepting

this specious explanation given by the SBI, which is ex-facie and something laughable, then it is for the court to decide how it will protect its orders," the senior advocate said.

"The fact that the SBI has filed an application itself is probably because it is hoping that the court would relent, but my understanding is that once a constitutional bench has rendered a judgement, it is not going to be easy for the court to say 'we'll accept what you say', but that is for the court to decide," Sibal said.

On whether the Supreme Court's verdict declaring the electoral bonds unconstitutional corrects the mixing of the level playing field, Sibal said it has still not been corrected.

However, he argued that the court could not have done anything about it at this stage.

"The fact of the matter is that the BJP has in that process enjoyed over ₹ 6,000 crore of white money, which is huge in the context of what they can do with those ₹ 6,000 crore in the course of an election. So obviously, it (electoral bond scheme) has resulted in a non-level playing field," Sibal said.

The whole scheme was conceived with a political motive for aggrandising the BJP and making them the richest party in the world, the Independent MP said.

## Modi inaugurates, lays foundation of development projects worth over ₹ 34,000 cr in UP

**AZAMGARH (UP), March 10:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of development projects worth more than ₹ 42,000 crore across the country.

Of these, projects worth ₹ 34,700 crore will come up in Uttar Pradesh, a majority of them involving the construction of airports or airport buildings.

The PM was accompanied by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and other BJP leaders as he visited the Mandari area of Azamgarh district where he launched the projects and also addressed a rally.

He inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of 15 airport projects across the country worth more than ₹ 9,800 crore.

The projects comprised 12 new terminal buildings, one each for Pune, Kolhapur, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Delhi, Lucknow, Aligarh, Azamgarh, Chitrakoot, Moradabad, Shrivasthi and Adampur airports.

The PM also laid the foundation stone of three new terminal buildings for Kadapa, Hubballi and Belagavi Airports.

The 12 new terminal buildings will have a combined capacity to serve 620 lakh passengers annually, while the three terminals, whose foundation stone was laid, once completed, will help those airports serve 95 lakh passengers per annum, according to PIB.

"These Terminal Buildings have state-of-the-art passenger amenities and are also equipped with various sustainability features like Double-Insulated Roofing System, Provision of Canopies for energy saving, LED Lighting etc.

"The designs of these Airports are influenced and derived from the common elements of heritage structures of that state and city, thus reflecting the local culture and highlighting the heritage of the region," read its statement. The PM also inaugurated Maharaja Suhel Dev State University, Azamgarh, constructed at a cost of 108 crore.

He inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of five major National Highway projects worth ₹ 11,500 cr.

More than 5,342 km of roads built in 59 UP districts under the PM Gram Sadak Yojna worth ₹ 3,700 cr were also inaugurated by him. The PM inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of 12 railway projects across UP worth ₹ 8,200 cr.

He also inaugurated three sewage projects built under Namami Ganga Yojna worth ₹ 1,114 cr in Prayagraj, Etawah, and Jaunpur districts of the state.

The prime minister is also slated to inaugurate the Light House Project (LHP) in Lucknow and Ranchi under which more than 2000 affordable flats have been built with modern infrastructure. (PTI)

## KSU stages protest against SFI at Kerala University Youth Festival venue

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 10:** The Kerala University Union Youth Festival 2024 on Sunday witnessed a protest by activists of the KSU, the students wing of the Congress party, who marched to the main venue of the festival alleging assault by SFI activists.

The protesters staged a sit-in at the senate hall, the main venue, alleging that the SFI activists had beaten up those belonging to the KSU who came to attend the art festival.

Police removed the protesting students amid sloganeering.

Meanwhile, SFI leaders denied the allegations.

Leader of the Opposition V D Sathesan, reacting to the incident alleged that "SFI criminals are attacking" KSU activists.

"The SFI goons are attacking the students from colleges which have



electorated the KSU. They (SFI) are attacking the students on the directions of the chief minister. KSU office-bearers are being attacked everywhere," Sathesan alleged.

Meanwhile, TV channels showed some participants raising allegations against the KSU activists saying the protest have delayed their programmes.

"They (KSU) can protest but we are waiting for hours after putting on makeup and dressing up for the competition. They should understand our emotions also," students were seen talking to the media.

The university youth festival has been marred by controversy after a case was registered against a judge and two trainers of Margamkali

competition, for their alleged involvement in bribery for manipulating the results.

Police had on Saturday registered a case and arrested Shaji, a judge of the competition and two trainers, Jomet and Sooraj over the allegations.

The university officials later suspended the Margamkali competition and said it will be held at a later date.

The festival was in news after the Kerala University Vice-Chancellor on March 4, barred the students' union from using the name 'Infifada' for the youth festival, citing its association with the Palestinian uprisings against Israel, and said the festival platform cannot be used to propagate any type of ideologies.

The festival began on March 7 and will conclude on March 11. (PTI)

## NDRF trains and deploys its first forest fire fighting teams

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** NDRF Director General Atul Karwal has said the force has trained and deployed the first contingent of its 150 responders who can undertake forest fire combat operations even as it has also sought the Union Home Ministry's permission to get them further skilled in the domain from a foreign country.

A parliamentary panel had in 2022 expressed its concern over forest fires not being officially a part of disasters tackled by the specialised national force.

"The forest fire fighting teams are trained now and we are equipping them. Three teams of 50 people each are now deployed with our first battalion based in Guwahati, 10th battalion located in Vijayawada and the battalion number 15 in Uttarakhand," Karwal told PTI during an interview.

"A fourth such team is under training currently and it will be designated as a reserve unit," he said.

Karwal said, "We are also coordinating and requesting the ministry of home affairs (MHA) to get them trained abroad, in countries which suffer from this disaster the most. We can learn from them how to tackle the forest fires effectively."

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) official said the force will undertake fire extinguishing operations, drawing the 'fire line' in the forest to contain the spiralling inferno and help in the rescue of the people, who are trapped in this disaster that can either be man-made or natural.

Forest fires, a parliamentary panel had said, is a growing threat globally now.

The incidents of forest fires not only damage the forest resources but also damage the biodiversity, cause climate change, adversely impact tribal livelihood and lead to severe distress among flora and

fauna of forests, the panel had said.

In view of the increase of these incidents in the country, it had said the forest fires should be "expeditiously" added to the list of disasters tackled by the NDRF.

"Due to the limited capacity of forest department to fight huge forest fires, it is high time that the same is tackled by a highly trained force on disasters," it had said.

The panel's recommendation came in the backdrop of the massive fire that erupted in the forests of Dzukou valley, Nagaland in 2021. Similar incidents were reported from Simlipal (Odisha) and Bandhavgarh (Madhya Pradesh) tiger reserves in the same year.

As per a forest survey of India report, forest fires are a regular phenomenon in our country often observed during summers and more than four lakh incidents of forest fire were reported in the country between November 2020 and June 2021.

54.40 per cent of forests in India are exposed to occasional fires, 7.49 per cent to moderately frequent fires and 2.40 per cent to high incidence levels while 35.71 per cent of India's forests have not yet been exposed to fires of any real significance, the report said.

Precious forest resources, including carbon locked in the biomass is lost due to forest fires every year, which adversely impact the flow of goods and services from forests, it said.

The Forest Survey of India (FSI) is an organisation under the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and its principal mandate is to conduct survey and assessment of forest resources in the country.

The NDRF was raised in 2006 as a federal contingency and disaster response force and at present it has a strength of more than 18,000 men and women rescuers deployed across the country as part of 16 battalions and 28 RRCs.

## Over 1 crore 'Ayushman Bharat' cards issued in 6 days in Bihar: Dy CM

**PATNA, March 10:** More than 1 crore health cards under the 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana' were issued in Bihar during a six-day special campaign from March 2, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary said.

The NDA government in the state has decided to provide "free medical treatment up to Rs 5 lakh every year to all ration card holders of the state under the Ayushman scheme," he said.

"Issuance of Ayushman Bharat cards to 1.03 crore families in just six days (till 11 am of March 8) is a big achievement of our government in the state," the deputy chief minister told PTI.

All ration card holders covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) get 5 kg of rice, and now, they will avail of free treatment up to Rs 5 lakh every year, Chaudhary said.

"At present, around 1.2 crore families in the state are availing of Ayushman Bharat benefits. Now, 1.03 crore families, who are beneficiaries under the NFS Act, have also been added," said Chaudhary, who holds the health department portfolio.

According to data compiled by the state health department, the maximum number of Ayushman Bharat cards at 5,99,609 were issued in Siwan district in the six-day campaign, followed by 5,44,018 in Muzaffarpur, 5,00,292 in Patna and 4,72,977 in Madhubani.

Districts where less than one lakh Ayushman Bharat cards were issued in the special campaign are Munger (99,984), Kishanganj (76,861), Sheikhpura (58,132) and Sheohar (47,288). (PTI)

## 18 per cent of India's population requires assistive care solutions, says former DGHS



**NEW DELHI, March 10:** Highlighting India's growing need for assistive technologies to cope with disabilities or chronic illnesses, experts at a recent event stressed the need for evidence-based research and collaboration to bridge the gap between these products and their end-users.

The experts at a session on 'Growing Need for Assistive Technologies' at the 8th National Health Writers and Influencers Convention, held at AIIMS, asserted that India has a huge and growing demand for assistive technologies (ATs) to help about 250 million people who need them to cope with disabilities, ageing or chronic illnesses.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr R K Srivastava, former director general of health services at the Union Health Ministry, said 18 per cent of India's population requires assistive care solutions such as spectacles, hearing aids, wheelchairs, communication aids and prosthetic limbs.

Dr Ashoo Grover, Scientist 'F' and Deputy Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research, said ICMR and other partners have identified some priority ATs for India and are working on developing and delivering them indigenously.

She said evidence-based implementation research is crucial for bridging the gap between innovative products and end-users. Grover also emphasised the need for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to ensure the effectiveness, affordability and accessibility of ATs.

Dr Srivastava added that these

solutions were vital for improving the quality of life and social inclusion of the elderly, long-term hospital patients and individuals with congenital or acquired disabilities.

He also highlighted the global scale of the issue, saying that in developed countries, up to 30 to 40 per cent of the population requires ATs, while in less-developed countries, it accounts for about 18 per cent.

Public health expert Dr Chandrakant S Pandav, former head of the Department of Community Medicine at AIIMS, shared his personal experiences of using a wheelchair and called for a change in societal attitudes towards individuals who rely on ATs. He said the di abled community in India faces a lack of societal acceptance and infrastructure, and urged people to view them as valued members of society.

Dr Srivastava also called upon journalists and influencers, highlighting their vital role as messengers in informing and influencing public opinion and policy decisions regarding assistive care solutions.

He stressed the need for a positive shift in society's attitude towards individuals using assistive technologies while emphasizing the critical importance of timely, affordable, and high-quality assistive products for all members of society.

The session concluded with a call for collaboration among various stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, manufacturers, healthcare providers and the media. (PTI)

## Cheetah Gamini gives birth to five cubs at MP's Kuno National Park; big cat count rises to 26

**BHOPAL, March 10:** Cheetah 'Gamini' on Sunday gave birth to five cubs in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district, taking the total number of the big cats in the country to 26, Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav said.

Taking to social media platform X, the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change said, "High Five, Kuno! Female cheetah Gamini, aged about 5 years, brought from Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, South Africa, has given birth to 5 cubs today."

The number of cheetah cubs born in India now stands at 13, the minister added. This is the fourth cheetah litter on Indian soil and the first litter of cheetahs brought from South Africa, Yadav informed.

In March last year, cheetah Jwala (Namibian name Siyaya) had given birth to four cubs but only one managed to survive. Jwala gave birth to her second litter of four cubs in January this year, which was followed

by cheetah Aasha delivering three cubs.

"Congratulations to all, especially the team of forest officers, vets, and field staff who have ensured a stress-free environment for cheetahs, which has led to successful mating and birth of the cubs. The total number of cheetahs, including cubs in Kuno National Park, is 26. Gamini's legacy leaps forward: Introducing her adorable cubs," the Union Minister stated.

Under the ambitious cheetah reintroduction project, eight Namibian cheetahs, comprising five females and three males, were released into enclosures at KNP on September 17 in 2022.

In February 2023, another 12 cheetahs were brought to the park from South Africa. Gamini is part of the group brought from South Africa.

Since March last year, 10 cheetahs, including three cubs born to Jwala, have died. (PTI)

## 'Rail roko' protest: Farmers squat on rail tracks in Punjab

**CHANDIGARH, March 10:** Farmers on Sunday squatted on railway tracks at many places in Punjab as part of a 'rail roko' protest called by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha to press the Centre to accept their demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP). Farmers raised slogans against the Centre for not accepting their demands.

Because of the disruption of train services, passengers will experience inconvenience. The protest will be held from 12 noon till 4 pm.

In Punjab, farmers had announced that they would sit on railway tracks at 52 locations in 22 districts, including Amritsar, Ludhiana, Tarn Taran, Hoshiarpur, Firozpur, Fazilka, Sangrur, Mansa, Moga and Bathinda.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher asked people to join the protest in large numbers. (PTI)

## Artists sketch, paint at Purana Quila to imagine 'Viksit Bharat' on canvas

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** From charcoal sketching to oil painting, a large number of artists gathered at the historic Purana Quila here on Sunday as part of a daylong camp to bring their vision of 'Viksit Bharat' on canvas.

On a sunny day, a portion of the verdant lawns of the heritage site was teeming with artistic activities since morning and the camp also drew in tourists, domestic and foreign.

The backdrop of the centuries-old fort has accentuated the feel of creativity as art and architecture have come together in one setting.

The National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) and Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA) have joined hands for the 'Viksit Bharat Ambassador Artist Workshop', with participation of both professional artists and fine arts students.

"One can see an ocean of artists sprawled on the lawns of the historic Purana Quila. Some are sketching, others painting with oil, acrylic or other medium, each one driven by the vision of 'Viksit



Bharat'," a senior official of the NGMA told PTI.

While artists have mostly come from Delhi and neighbouring cities in the National Capital Region, some have come from Chandigarh too.

Sanjeev Kishor Goutam, director general of the NGMA, went around the camp and interacted with artists and art students as they used the brush to conjure the

image of a 'Viksit Bharat' on their canvases.

The government has launched the 'Viksit Bharat' campaign seeking to make India a developed nation by 2047.

Besides, the historic setting of the event, a group of artists are performing in the background adding a festive layer to the art camp.

"Many foreign tourists coming

to Purana Quila since morning were moving around watching inquisitively at artworks being created," the senior official said.

"While an artist cannot be restricted to a time frame in imaging an art, the overarching theme will be Viksit Bharat by 2047," Goutam had earlier told reporters at NGMA while announcing the project.

The event will represent a collective journey towards progress and development, encapsulating the essence of the vision for a thriving and culturally rich India, Culture Ministry officials said.

These artists will be the 'Viksit Bharat ambassadors' as they will dream up the developed India as they wish to see it, officials said.

Besides, school students are also participating in it presenting a painting or other artwork online, they said.

Those interested artists who could not join at the camp venue have registered their presence virtually. A large screen put up at the venue showed many of them joining the event online. (PTI)

# KRYSTYNA PYSZKOVA FROM CZECH REPUBLIC CROWNED MISS WORLD 2024

## My days in India were colourful, says Miss World 2024 Krystyna Pyszkova



**MUMBAI, March 10:** Krystyna Pyszkova's Miss World campaign in India ended on a high note as she clinched the coveted crown and the Czech Republican model says she will remember

her time spent in the host country fondly. Pyszkova was named Miss World 2024 on Saturday at a grand event here, which saw Indian contestant Sini Shetty only making it to the top 8.

Miss Lebanon Yasmina Zaytoon emerged as the first runner-up. Click here to follow our WhatsApp channel. At the pageant, Pyszkova's 'Beauty With A Purpose' proj-

ect centered on "quality education for children" and the model said interacting with children in the slums of Dharavi inspired her. "All the days (I spent in India) were very colourful and

different. We visited many beautiful projects and places. For example, we (all contestants) visited the Dharavi Project' where we felt very inspired because we were able to interact with children who are trying to reach their dreams through music. It was incredible. I would be happy to see them again very soon, the Miss World 2024 told PTI here.

Pyszkova said she will carry "the spirit" of India back home with her.

"I can see that people here really try to reach their purpose. I believe purpose is the most important thing. We have to know our lives and I will take that home," she said.

The Miss World crown is a responsibility but she won't disappoint, added the volunteer-activist.

"I will work hard because I realise how much it means not only to me but to the whole organisation (Miss World Organization) to do well for us to be a good advocate for important causes," she said.

Outgoing Miss World Karolina Bielawska from Poland crowned Pyszkova at the star-studded finale here.

Pyszkova is the second Miss World from the Czech Republic after 2006 pageant winner Tatana Kucharova.

The 71st Miss World pageant, which witnessed participation of contestants from 112 countries, was held at the Jio World Convention Centre in BKC here.

India, which last hosted the event in 1996, has bagged the title six times with Reita Faria Powell (1966), Aishwarya Rai Bachchan (1994), Diana Hayden (1997), Yukta Mookhey (1999), Priyanka Chopra Jonas (2000), and Manushi Chhillar (2017) being named winners. (PTI)

## Sini Shetty from India out of Miss World 2024 race

**MUMBAI, March 10:** India's Sini Shetty is out of Miss World 2024 race. At the grand finale of the 71st edition of the pageant, being held in India after 28 years, Shetty was bested by Miss Lebanon who made it to the top 4 of the contest.

Shetty, the 22-year-old trained Bharatanatyam dancer who was born and raised in Mumbai, was crowned Miss India World in 2022.

A 12-member jury — consisting of Miss World 2017 winner Manushi Chhillar, actors Kriti Sanon, Pooja Hegde, Julia Morley, chairperson and CEO of the Miss World Organisation; film producer Sajid Nadi-

adwala, former cricketer Harbhajan Singh, and news personality Rajat Sharma, presided over the Miss World 2024 pageant.

Representatives from 112 countries participated at the event, which was held at the Jio World Convention Centre in BKC here. It was hosted by Karan Johar and Megan Young, winner of Miss World 2013 pageant. Chhillar was the most recent Indian to win the pageant. Earlier, Reita Faria Powell, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Diana Hayden, Yukta Mookhey and Priyanka Chopra Jonas won the competition.

The Miss World pageant returned to India after 28 years. The country last hosted the event in 1996 which saw Irene Skliva of Greece win the title. (PTI)



## Loved polarity of my character in 'The Regime': Matthias Schoenaerts

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** Actor Matthias Schoenaerts, who reunites with Kate Winslet in "The Regime" after working with the Oscar winner on the film "A Little Chaos", says he had a blast playing volatile soldier Herbert Zubak on the HBO show.

In the six-part political satire, the Belgian actor plays the right-hand man to Winslet's Chancellor Elena Vernham, a corrupt populist leader, who starts to depend on Schoenaerts' Zubak to expand her power even as her regime starts to unravel.

Schoenaerts said he was happy to be part of "The Regime", created and co-written by showrunner Will Tracy of "Succession" fame. "Everybody involved, they are people who really bring something to the table every day that is surprising... And on top of that, working with Kate... I've worked with her 10 years ago, and then working with her within this specific context, with these two wild characters, was a blast," the 46-year-old told PTI in an interview.

Schoenaerts, whose acting credits include "Bullhead", "Far From the Madding Crowd", "Red Sparrow" and "Rust and Bone", said the character of Zubak fluctuates between two extremes of the spectrum: from caring to unreliable.

"It's a coincidence that the show that everybody created truly resonates with the actual reality as well... What I loved about the character was the polarity because of the big stretch between these extremes. "It's a very big playground for an actor to work with and to dive into. Thanks to Will for writing such a rich symphony that eventually I could try to bring life to," he added.

Schoenaerts has worked in the British film industry, French cinema and Hollywood and enjoys popularity as a global star. The actor said he considers it a "blessing" to be able to reach out to people across languages and cultures.

"It's something to be truly grateful for. We're blessed. And I don't say that as false humility. We're truly blessed to be doing what we do in this day and age because there's so many people on the planet that are far less fortunate. "It makes us aware that we carry some type of responsibility and that we are in service to the people with what we do, with how we hold ourselves, how we communicate and the projects we choose," he said. "The Regime" is directed by Stephen Frears ("The Queen") and Jessica Hobbs ("The Crown"). It is streaming in India on JioCinema. (PTI)

## 'Shaitaan' earns ₹ 34.39 crore at box office



**MUMBAI, March 10:** Supernatural thriller "Shaitaan" has added ₹ 19.18 crore to its net box office collections (NBOC), taking up its total earnings to ₹ 34.39 crore, the makers said on Sunday. The film is directed by Vikas Bahl and stars Ajay Devgn, Jyotika, and R Mad-

havan. Presented by Jio Studios, Devgn Films and Panorama Studios, "Shaitaan" is produced by Devgn, Jyoti Deshpande, Kumar Mangat Pathak and Abhishek Pathak.

"Shaitaan's" roar gets louder as Jio Studios, Devgn Films & Panorama Studios' supernatural thriller jumped a healthy 26% on Saturday, earning a staggering ₹ 19.18 crore on Day 2. Fri - ₹ 15.21 crore, Sat - ₹ 19.18 crore and total - ₹ 34.39 crores NBOC (India)" the makers said in a press note.

Following an unprecedented surge in demand, midnight shows were added in Mumbai, they further said. "Shaitaan" is the Hindi remake of the 2023 Gujarati horror film "Vash", written and directed by Krishnadev Yagnik. (PTI)



## 'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya' defines me, song's new version came out great: Singer Raghav

**NEW DELHI, March 10:** When Raghav released the original version of "Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya" in 2004, the singer says the song was perfect for the time and he was a bit "scared" about recreating it for the newly released Shahid Kapoor and Kriti Sanon starrer.

But his fear dissipated when the track, which was part of his debut album "Storyteller", turned out well.

Raghav and composer Tanishk Bagchi collaborated on the new version of "Teri Baaton Mein..." with singer Asees Kaur.

"It was a little scary because in my mind the original was perfect for the time. The rhythm was hard, the vocals were beautiful and it just felt like a song that really defines me. "It was kind of like giving your baby away into someone else's hands to see if it's treated with respect. But the new version came out pretty great, it feels good," the singer, whose full name is Raghav Mathur, told PTI in an interview.

Born to Indian parents in Canada's Toronto, Raghav burst onto the independent music scene with songs such as "Angel Eyes", its Hindi version "Teri Baaton Mein...", "Can't Get Enough", and "Let's

Work It Out".

Compared to where it was in the 2000s, indie music is in a better place right now, he said, adding the pandemic has given power back in the hands of listeners instead of influential music labels.

"The mid 2009 to maybe a little bit before COVID, this is a market in India that now bears so much influence on what's happening in the music world but the film industry controls 99.9 per cent of it.

"There was almost just no avenue to have a stage the kind of I had at the beginning of my career. What's changed, particularly during COVID, is that even the historic sort of bigwigs of the industry had to succumb to the realisation (that fans can) do a million reels to "Teri Baaton Mein...", "Billie Jean" or "Laal Dupatta", they can do anything," the 42-year-old said.

One can try influencer campaigns but you can't fake something living in people's hearts and gradually grow into views, added Raghav.

The new version of "Teri Baaton Mein..." had "50 million views in three weeks" and the singer admits that it is a unique experience that comes from "being involved with a

film industry".

"There is a lot of effort that goes into that (views). I don't have access to those kinds of efforts and can't afford Shahid Kapoor in my video otherwise I would. But that's real music... "People have invested in me deeply for 20 years and now I feel it's paying dividends... I can make the music I want to and have a career again that's thriving," said the singer-songwriter currently in India for his "Teri Baaton Mein" tour.

Raghav has now released a new song titled "Choro", which is a tribute to one of his favourite movies "Misery" (1990), based on the novel by horror master Stephen King.

"All my songs are typically about unrequited love but "Choro" is definitely the opposite of that. It is actually me being a little weary of the person that seems to be in love with me.

"It pays homage to the movie 'Misery'... I grew up in the era of videos where like Michael Jackson was making short films. So, this one is without his budget (but) the same kind of vibe."

Recalling his childhood, Raghav said he grew up listening to diverse music genres: his mother played OP Nayyar and Dev

Anand songs, his elder sister was an Amitabh Bachchan fan so there were Kishore Kumar songs, and his father would bring Harry Belafonte tapes from his travels to Germany.

"Somewhere in the hallway of that home with all those different sounds is actually who I am as an artist. Reggae, vintage, historic Bollywood music, semi-classical indie music, R&B pop, etc. If you do an audit of who I am, that's very much the hallway in my home with all those sounds that kind of came together. So, that's me," said the artiste, a Michael Jackson and Stevie Wonder fan.

As someone who keeps switching between languages, the singer said his "next single will probably be a Hindi one".

"There's a lot of new music... This is the 20th anniversary of 'Storyteller', so I would like the second half of the year to celebrate what that album really meant to me and what it means to everybody.

"I don't think a lot of people get a second chance like this to make a first impression in a way. I want to release a lot of music this year, it's going to be a fun year," he added. (PTI)

*Australia need 202 runs and NZ 6 wickets in expected thrilling finish to 2<sup>nd</sup> test*

**CHRISTCHURCH, March 10:** Australia needed 202 runs and New Zealand six wickets to win the second cricket test in what should be a thrilling finish after both teams had highs and lows on the third day Sunday.

Rachin Ravindra made 82, Tom Latham 73 and Daryl Mitchell 58 before New Zealand was out for 372 in its second innings after trailing by 94 on the first. That left Australia needing 279 to win the match and complete a 2-0 sweep of the series. The target, if achieved, will be the 14th-highest successful fourth-innings run chase in test history.

At stumps, Australia was 77-4 with Mitch Marsh 27 not out and Travis Head 17. Head and Marsh batted through the last 10 overs of the day to save Australia from further loss.

Matt Henry and Ben Sears took two wickets each in the final session as New Zealand reduced Australia to 34-4 before it staged its late recovery.

New Zealand heads into the final day in a strong position to continue its streak of unbeaten test series at home. After the current pair, Australia has wicketkeeper Alex Carey to come, then captain Pat Cummins and the rest of the bowlers.

Australia had held a slight advantage at the end of the second day when New Zealand was 134-2 in its second innings, a lead of only 40. New Zealand increased its lead through an absorbing day Sunday, through a partnership of 123 between Ravindra and Mitchell and with the help of Scott Kugeleijn's 44 from 49 balls near the end. But just as New Zealand seemed to be gaining control and putting itself into a position to set Australia a much more demanding fourth-innings chase, wickets fell in clumps and Australia put itself back in the match. (AP)

## RANJI TROPHY FINAL Iyer, Rahane fail again but all-round Shardul snatches back initiative

**MUMBAI, March 10:** Seasoned duo Shreyas Iyer and Ajinkya Rahane's run drought continued but Shardul Thakur's all-rounder utility helped hosts Mumbai to claw their way back against a gutsy Vidarbha on the opening day of the Ranji Trophy final.

After scoring a counter-punching 75 off only 69 balls to give Mumbai's below-par first innings score of 224, some semblance of respectability, Thakur also dismissed veteran opener Dhruv Shorey (0) with an angular delivery which got him a favourable DRS result.

Vidarbha were 31/3 at stumps with another 193 runs in arrears in the first innings with Atharva Taide (21 not out) and night-watchman Aditya Thakare at the crease.

Playing the last first-class game of his career, medium pacer Dhawal Kulkarni bowled his customary late outswingers which had Aman Mokhadde (8) and Test triple centurion Karun Nair (0) nicking it to Hardik Tamore behind stumps.

Mumbai's top guns Rahane and Iyer were both dismissed for identical scores of 7 in a shocking collapse that saw the 41-time champions slipping from 81/0 to 111/6 on either side of the lunch break.

His achievement as a leader notwithstanding, Rahane's miserable run in the Ranji Trophy continued when the Mumbai skipper played one meekly to mid-on to be dismissed at a time when his team needed him to drop the anchor.

Around the same time last year, Rahane was a contender to earn his spot back in the national team but as things stand, irrespective of the outcome of this final it remains to be seen if Mumbai selectors would persist with the 35-year-old for the next season.



Out-of-favour and back in the grind to come back in the national reckoning again, Iyer once again failed to bail Mumbai out of trouble due to his poor technique.

During the morning session, Umesh Yadav (2/43 in 13.3 overs) was as wayward as one could be spraying the new ball all over and mostly drifting on the pads of openers Prithvi Shaw and Bhupen Lalwani.

But the pacer with 170 Test victims did get the prized scalp of Iyer to compound Mumbai's problems during post lunch session.

Expecting a short ball, Iyer remained rooted to the crease and in double mind as the ball bounced a tad more than he anticipated. With no footwork, Iyer went on a fishing expedition and the resultant catch was taken by Karun in the slips.

It all began when pacer Yash Thakur found an outside edge off opener Bhupen Lalwani's (37) bat to have Vidarbha skipper Ak-

shay Wadkar taking a superb one-handed grab diving to his right.

Lalwani had done well to put on an impressive 81-run stand for the opening wicket with the burly Prithvi Shaw (46), who too was a tad reckless in his dismissal.

With spin being introduced as early as in the ninth over, Shaw went for the sweep quite a few times but never really executed it well.

On one such occasion he missed connecting one from left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey (3/62) on the middle stump completely as the ball turned away to hit the off.

India U-19 star Musheer Khan (6) carried his World Cup form into knock-out rounds but on the day, an indiscrete flick-shot off an arm ball caught him plumb in front.

Having lost six wickets for a mere 40 runs, Mumbai also went through a phase in which no boundary was hit for as many as 18 overs.

But the complexion of the game changed drastically upon the arrival of Thakur in the middle, who hit a few fours to put the pressure back on Vidarbha and maintained the tone.

Thakur displayed adroit use of both hands and his feet to inch closer to what would have been his second consecutive ton, but kept running out of partners.

Thakur was the last batter dismissed, caught by the man at deep square leg after a superb 75 off just 69 balls with eight fours and three sixes.

The troika of Tanush Kotian (8), Tushar Deshpande (14) and Shams Mulani (13), which bailed Mumbai on numerous occasions with useful runs also fell cheaply.

Brief scores: Mumbai 224 in 64.3 overs (Prithvi Shaw 46, Bhupen Lalwani 37, Shardul Thakur 75; Umesh Yadav 2/43, Harsh Dubey 3/62, Yash Thakur 3/54) lead Vidarbha 31/3 in 13 overs (Atharva Taide 21\*; Shardul Thakur 1/14, Dhawal Kulkarni 2/9) by 193 runs. (PTI)

## Djokovic wins in return to Indian Wells after 5-year absence

**INDIAN WELLS, March 10:** Novak Djokovic made a winning return to the desert, beating Aleksandar Vukic 6-2, 5-7, 6-3 on Saturday in his first match at the BNP Paribas Open in five years.

The 24-time Grand Slam singles champion joined Rafael Nadal as the only players to win 400 matches in ATP Masters 1000 series events. The top-ranked Djokovic is a five-time champion at Indian Wells, tied with Roger Federer for most by a male, but hadn't played in the event since 2019.

Coco Gauff also won — barely — rallying just in time to avoid an early exit by edging Clara Burel 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (4).

The U.S. Open women's champion trailed 4-0 and then 5-2 in the third set of her match in the tournament, leaving her a game away from becoming the second American upset by Burel this year. The No. 47-ranked player from France beat

No. 5 Jessica Pegula in the second round of the Australian Open.

The third-seeded Gauff advanced to face Lucia Bronzetti in the third round. The Italian knocked off No. 32 Anhelina Kalinina 6-3, 6-4.

But Pegula was eliminated in the second round again Saturday, with Anna Blinkova of Russia beating her 6-2, 3-6, 6-3.

Naomi Osaka knocked out another seeded player, ousting No. 14 Liudmila Samsonova of Russia, 7-5, 6-3. The four-time Grand Slam champion who returned to competition this year

after giving birth won the 2018 BNP Paribas title. She will next face No. 24 Elise Mertens.

No. 27 Victoria Azarenka, who won the event twice, was upset by American Caroline Dolehide 7-5, 2-6, 6-3. Emma Raducanu, the 2021 U.S. Open women's champion, reached the third round when No. 30-seeded Dayana Yastremska had to retire after Raducanu had taken a 4-0 lead.

Djokovic avoided an upset by pulling away from the No. 69-ranked Vukic in the third set of his first match since falling to Jannik Sinner in the semifinals of the Australian Open.

Djokovic won Masters 1000 titles last year at Cincinnati and Paris, but couldn't play in the first two of the year in Indian Wells and Miami, still prevented at the time from traveling to the U.S. as a foreigner who was not vaccinated against COVID-19.

He won in the desert in 2008 and 2011, then three straight times from 2014-16. The 36-year-old from Serbia is 400-86 in ATP Masters 1000 events. Nadal, who withdrew just before the event, has 406 victories in the nine tournaments at the level below the Grand Slams.

No. 12 Taylor Fritz and No. 28 Cam Norrie, both past champions at Indian Wells, moved into the third round along with No. 13 Grigor Dimitrov. No. 14 Ugo Humbert and No. 21 Adrian Panatta both advanced, while Arthur Fils, another Frenchman, ousted No. 23 Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 6-3, 6-4. (AP)



*I do worry it's a backroom team made up of cheerleaders: Vaughan*

**DHARAMSALA, March 10:** Former skipper Michael Vaughan fears not all England players have fully adapted to the existing team culture and feels the backroom staff is "made up of cheerleaders".

Vaughan suggested England must carry out an honest review of their 1-4 mauling in India by taking a leaf out of Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola's book to breed an environment of ruthlessness.

India completed a magnificent series triumph with an innings and 64-run victory inside three days in the fifth and final Test here on Saturday.

"After a humbling series defeat in India, I strongly believe that a dose of honesty is the most important thing for this England team right now," Vaughan wrote in his column for Daily Telegraph.

Vaughan, who led the Test team from 2003-08, added, "I don't believe they need to rip everything up. They are better playing this way than they would be otherwise."

"I respect what they are trying to do, and get up early every day to watch them because they have me on the edge of my seat and I know something is going to happen. "The great frustration is that they have the talent to be really competitive all over the world but they have blown two big series and in this case it was because their batting failed miserably." Accusing the team management of going too soft on players, Vaughan said he understands that there is a pervading sense of positivity, fun and laughter in the camp but that may not always bring the desired results.

"Every interview you hear the same stuff, about excitement, opportunity and fun, that everyone is having the time of their life. "I have been around many of them in the last couple of years and their language can be inspiring. I admire some of it, but I can be a bit of an old cynic, and I worry that they are speaking a language that not all of them truly believe, which

is dangerous. "Certain players will believe it, but not everyone. We can't all think the same."

He added, "Victories are what keep the fun bus on the road, not endlessly talking about how much fun you are having."

"The truth is that this can't always be fun, because it's so hard. Positivity is good, and inspiring, but honesty is also required." Vaughan said those running the team must not shy away from taking tough calls and for that, they don't need to look beyond Guardiola.

"The team message is never to doubt anything, never admit they were wrong or they could have done things differently. Everything is very cosy. Everyone is mates: players, coaches, backroom staff. That does not breed an environment of ruthlessness. "I know I bang on about how brilliant Pep Guardiola is, but you don't hear about him being mates with Manchester City players. He's their boss and he doesn't always do what his players want him to."

"He makes ruthless decisions about selection and training regimes." Vaughan was least amused with the English players spending time in Abu Dhabi and playing golf in Bengaluru when there were long breaks between Tests.

"England's management give the players just about everything that they want, like a break in Abu Dhabi with no cricket kit and a golf trip to Bangalore in the middle of the tour."

"I am not one for old-school preparation, with three first-class matches at the start of a tour. Those days are gone, and it's not needed. But surely with two long breaks, you need to get some cricket into the outside of the team, so they are ready if required, and to keep those in the XI on their toes."

"It also might help players in the team find form. By doing nothing, you get yourself into a Catch 22." (PTI)

## Arsenal beat Brentford 2-1 to go top of Premier League overnight

**LONDON, March 10:** Arsenal moved to the top of the Premier League for at least a day after Kai Havertz's late goal secured a 2-1 win over Brentford on Saturday.

Havertz had been somewhat fortunate to avoid a second booking for a dive in the area earlier in the second half, a decision that proved crucial when he was on hand to head home a cross from Ben White in the 86th minute.

That extended Arsenal's Premier League winning streak to eight games in 2024 and atoned for a howler by goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale that had gifted Brentford an equalizer just before the halftime break.

It also lifted Mikel Arteta's

side above Liverpool and Manchester City into first place, one point ahead of Jurgen Klopp's side. Liverpool hosts Man City at Anfield on Sunday and a draw in that game would keep Arsenal top on goal difference.

"Massive win for us," Havertz said. "It wasn't nice, especially after conceding so close to the (halftime) whistle. We spoke to each other and wanted to turn it around."

Arsenal had been on a stellar scoring run, netting a combined 21 goals in its last four league games but couldn't quite replicate that attacking prowess against Brentford despite taking the lead when Declan Rice headed home another cross from White in

the 19th. Arsenal continued to dominate but Ramsdale's mistake in first-half injury time gave Brentford an equalizer out of nothing.

The goalkeeper, who was given a rare start because Arsenal's regular No. 1 David Raya is on loan from Brentford, dawdled on the ball and allowed Yoane Wissa to slide in and block his clearance so that the ball looped into the empty net.

Ramsdale made amends with two good saves in the second half, though. He was caught off his line in the 55th and nearly beaten by Ivan Toney from almost 40 yards but managed to swat the ball away while backtracking.

The goalkeeper showed his best side with a good one-handed save in the 71st to tip a header from Nathan Collins over the bar.

Arsenal then had another spell of heavy dominance and Rice hit the crossbar from long range in the 74th after being teed up by Odgaard following a corner.

The sustained pressure finally paid off when White picked out Havertz for the late winner that kept Arsenal's title charge on track.

"Obviously we had to dig in and earn the right to win it. But I'm really pleased with the performance," Arteta said. "If you want to be up there, you have to win these types of games."

Brentford has now gone five games without a win, with four losses in that span, and sits just five points above the relegation zone.

Manager Thomas Frank lamented the decision to let Havertz stay on the field. The German was booked in the first half and then threw himself to the ground in the area after a challenge by Collins midway through the second, but referee Rob Jones opted not to show a second yellow card for diving.

"I actually don't think Havertz should be on the pitch when he scored. It was a clear dive," Frank said. "Maybe it is difficult for the ref but the linesman should have seen it." (AP)

## I don't think Rohit has been superior as captain, his bowlers did the trick: Graeme Swann

**DHARAMSALA, March 10:** Former England spinner Graeme Swann doesn't believe Rohit Sharma's captaincy was better than Ben Stokes' in the five-match Test series. Rather, it was a lethal set of bowlers that "did the trick" for the India skipper.

While Stokes' leadership style has attracted all the attention prior to and during the series, Rohit's team emerged 4-1 winners in the end.

"I don't think he has been superior as a captain because his bowlers have done the trick for him. I think he's got more weapons at his armoury," Swann told PTI Videos in an exclusive chat after India inflicted an innings and 64-run defeat on England in the fifth and final Test here on Saturday.

"He's been good don't get me wrong, Rohit Sharma, but, I don't think if you pick this apart and say Stokes has captained badly, I think you are barking up the wrong tree there."

"Rohit Sharma's bowlers have really come to town for him, come to the party for him, in the last four Test matches, they didn't in the first one but they have done for the last four," Swann

noted. Far from blaming 'Bazball' for England's loss, Swann said Stokes and Co actually failed to play the brand of cricket that has brought them success in recent times.

Swann's observation is in stark contrast to the views expressed by few other former players who attributed the drubbing to the visitors' fixation with Bazball.

"I don't think we have seen Bazball in this trip whatsoever, we saw it for one innings of this Test series, that's when Ollie Pope got a 190, and that was the definition of bazball," he said.

"I think England, where they have fallen flat in this series is, they have not been brave enough. I don't think they have played what you guys in the media call Bazball."

"I think if they had, I think this series would have been closer if I am honest."

Bazball, which is derived from England Test coach Brendon McCullum's nickname Baz, fell flat as the tourists capitulated inside three days in the fifth Test, helping India secure their 17th straight Test series triumph on home soil.



On the match getting over in under three days, Swann said: "I would say it's a very good advertisement for Test cricket, because it was an exciting match."

"India were just too good for England in this game. It's always at the end of a series if it's already been won by one team, you worry that this will happen, the resistance will be completely blown away and it was in this

Test match. "So England will have to go home and shake themselves off wondering where it went so badly wrong. India are world class especially their bowling attack, and that was really shown again in this Test match."

As a former off-spinner himself, Swann applauded Ravichandran Ashwin's stupendous performance on his 100 Test

match. "You know what it's brilliant, to get a fifer on his hundredth Test match. I have not actually seen him, I was looking to go and congratulate him myself but I will have to do that at the hotel later."

"Bowling so well and making those early inroads, that was brilliant, possibly one of his best fifers in his 100 Test matches, so you have got to take your hat off to Ashwin," he observed.

On James Anderson becoming the first fast bowler to reach 700 wickets, Swann said: "He's a joke, Jimmy is an absolute joke, how he has kept going for all this amount of time."

"When I say it's a joke I mean that in a good way, he's been incredible, and to get 700 wickets, well you know it's almost nonsensical the achievement and I love him to bits."

"I was kind of hoping when he almost bounced Kuldeep out, almost hit his gloves and bobbled in the air, that would have been the dream for Jimmy, because he has not bowled a decent bouncer for 10 years, but he has now." (PTI)

# Test cricket is hard, you are going to need each other to succeed: Dravid to young players

## Australia's next generation pacers are waiting in the wings: Glenn McGrath

**DHARAMSALA, March 10:** Rahul Dravid underlined the importance of staying together and functioning as a unit to be triumphant in the tough world of Test cricket while delivering a motivational dressing room speech after India registered a memorable 4-1 series win over England.

After losing the opening Test in Hyderabad, the hosts bounced back in stunning fashion to win the next four matches to claim the series.

"Series like this have to be earned and this is tough. Test cricket is hard at times. It's hard in terms of your skill. It's hard physically, as you've seen, it's hard mentally," Dravid said in a video posted on BCCI.tv.

"But it's great satisfaction at the end of it. The satisfaction that you get winning a series like this coming from one behind to be able to win four. I think it's just phenomenal," he added.

As key players like Virat Kohli and Mohammed Shami and KL Rahul, who played only the opener, were unavailable, India

found heroes in some young names in the series. The home side handed debuts to five players -- Rajat Patidar, Dhruv Jurel, Devdutt Padikkal, Sarfaraz Khan and Akash Deep -- in the marquee series.

In fact, Jasprit Bumrah and Ravindra Jadeja too missed a Test each.

The Indian coach was a chuffed man after some of those young names emerged with flying colours from the series.

"For a lot of you young guys, especially coming into this group, you are going to need each other to succeed. Whether you're a batsman or bowler or whatever you are, your success is tied in with other people's success."

"All of you are invested in each other's success. And that's really important going forward. It's not about your success, but it's about how you can help other people succeed, which will also help you succeed," he said. The 51-year-old was delighted to see the players finding ways to turn the tide whenever they were put under pressure. "There were times in the series that we

were really challenged and pushed and we found a way to bounce back, which speaks to the skills that we have, the resilience that we have, the character that we have.

"On many occasions in this series the games could have gone either way. But we always found people in this dressing room who stepped up and turned the game our way. And that was fantastic."

Dravid also said the team also did well to maximise advantageous positions.

"So, you not only need to win the games when you have to fight back, which we did really well. But you have to also win the games when you're ahead and you don't let the opposition come back in any situation."

The former India captain praised the team for emerging winners from a long, gruelling series against a quality opposition.

"We talked about this at the start of the series as well. Irrespective of whether we win or lose this is going to teach us a lot -- a five Test match series. You're going to go through a lot of ups and downs. (PTI)



## We just get lost with this term bazball, fumes Nasser Hussain

**DHARAMSALA, March 10:** Miffed at England's 4-1 shellacking by India, former captain Nasser Hussain has advised the team's misfiring batters to work on individual performances and eschew their obsession with bazball.

Bazball, which is derived from England Test coach Brendon McCullum's nickname Baz, fell flat as the tourists capitulated in three days in the fifth and final Test here, helping India secure their 17th straight Test series triumph on home soil.

"We just get lost with this term Bazball. The team, the management does not like the term Bazball. They need to look at their own individual performances," Hussain, who led England in 45 Test matches from 1999 to 2003, wrote in his column for Sky Sports.

He added, "Look at the opposition. Like in anything in life, try and learn. Why did we collapse?"

"Why Crawley keeps getting starts and keeps getting out? Ben Duckett, got a brilliant 150, gave a charge when the ball was too new."

By his standards, skipper Ben Stokes had a forgettable series and that was not lost on Hussain.

"Ben Stokes had a poor series with the bat. Maybe because he is playing only with the bat. Just look at your own game and improve," said Hussain.

England rarely had the kind of collective batting performance that India enjoyed throughout the series, with their misfiring middle-order primarily to blame for the frequent collapses.

The former opener praised James Anderson who completed 700 Test wickets in his 187th match, calling it an unbelievable achievement and also lauded senior India spinner R Ashwin for crossing 100 Test matches and picking 500 wickets. (PTI)

## Bajrang Punia, Ravi Dahiya eliminated from Paris Olympics qualification race

**SONEPAT (Haryana), March 10:** Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya -- the Tokyo Games medallists -- were on Sunday eliminated from the race for the Paris Olympics qualification after losing their respective bouts in the selection trials for the national team.

Punia, who was a prominent face of protest against former WFI President Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, suffered a crushing 1-9 defeat in the men's freestyle 65kg semifinal against Rohit Kumar.

This was after he barely managed to win against Ravinder (3-3 on criteria) in the opening round.

If Ravinder had not conceded a caution point in the bout, Punia would have been eliminated in the opening bout itself. Punia had trained in Russia to prepare for the trials, which are being organised by the IOA ad-hoc panel.

Punia though won a case in the



Delhi High Court after contending that the suspended Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) had no authority to conduct trials.

He left the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centre here in a huff after being eliminated. The National Anti-Doping Agency

(NADA) officials tried to collect a sample for a dope test from Punia but he did not stay back even for the third-fourth place bout.

As fate would have it, it will be Sajeet Kalakal who will now strive to earn qualification in the 65kg for the Paris Games after

winning a spot in the Indian team.

Sujeet had lost a legal case against Punia when he had challenged his direct entry for the Hangzhou Asian Games. Sujeet beat Rohit by technical superiority in the final. Rohit will now represent India at the Asian Championships.

The winners at the trials will get the opportunity to compete at Asian and World Olympic Qualifiers to be held in Bishkek from April 19-21 and in Istanbul from May 9-12. The men's 57kg, being organised in Nordic format, was always a tough category since both Tokyo Games silver medallist Ravi Dahiya and star-in-making Aman Sehrawat were in contention.

Dahiya, who is making a comeback from an injury, lost the high-scoring opening bout 13-14 to Aman. Both of them train at Chhatarsal Stadium. (PTI)



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## Mera Bharat, Mera Parivar