

Scrutiny of papers today • Withdrawal last date March 30 Battle of Gogois: Topon files 38 candidates in fray for 1st phase of polls papers to take on Gaurav Chief Minister confident of winning Jorhat LS seat

GUWAHATI, March 27: Alto-gether 38 candidates, including Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and senior Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi, have filed their nominations for the first phase polls scheduled on April 19 in Assam.

On the last day of filing of nominations on Wednesday, 26 people filed their papers and they include sitting BJP MP Topon Gogoi in Jorhat, Rajya Sabha MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa in Kaziranga and MLA Ranjit Dutta in Sonitpur.

The constituencies going to the polls in the first phase are Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur and Kaziranga.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma accompanied Gogoi and Tasa during their nomination filing at Jorhat and Golaghat .

Topon Gogoi's opponent in the

gress candidate Roselina Tirkey constituency is the Lok Sabha Deputy leader of the opposition who filed her nominations on Tuesday Gaurav Gogoi who filed his nomi-

nation on Tuesday. Kaziranga, the erstwhile Kalia-In Kaziranga, Tasa's fight will bor constituency which was re-

be against former MLA and Connamed during the delimitation

exercise in the state, has the high est number of 12 candidates with nine filing their nominations on the last day.

In Sonitpur, BJP MLA and former minister Ranjit Dutta also filed his nomination and was accompanied by state party president Bhabesh Kalita and AGP's Rajya Sabha MP Birendra Prasad Baishya.

Dutta's main rival will be Congress candidate Prem Lal Ganju who was the first to file his papers for the first phase of polls.

Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Rishiraj Kaundilya, Voters Party International's (VPI) Kameshwar Swargiary, Bodo Peoples' Front's (BPF) Raju Deuri, Bahujan Maha Party's Md Alam Ali, Gana Sangram Parishad's Rinku Roy and independent Mahendra Orang also filed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 27: Bharatiya Janata Party's Topon Gogoi on Wednesday filed his nomination papers for the Lok Sabha elections amidst a show of robust support from prominent leaders.

Accompanied by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, minister Keshab Mahanta, and Union minister Rameshwar Teli, Gogoi presented his candidacy papers to Jorhat district collector Pulak Mahanta, who serves as the returning officer for the 14th Jorhat parliamentary constituency.

The Jorhat Lok Sabha constituency encompasses ten Assembly constituencies spanning Jorhat, Sivasagar, Charaideo, and Majuli island districts, representing a diverse demographic.

Besides Gogoi, Kamakhya Prasad Tasa and Ranjit Dutta also filed their nominations for the Lok Sabha elections. Earlier in the day, the chief minister addressed a mammoth election rally at the Jorhat Stadium, drawing

a significant turnout of enthusiastic supporters, particularly women and youths Expressing gratitude for the overwhelming response,

Eastern Ladakh situation

Sarma exuded confidence in retaining the seat with a



substantial victory margin.

He urged voters to rally behind the BJP candidate, emphasising the need to fortify Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for a third consecutive term to sustain the trajectory of development initiated in 2014. Sarma also underscored the importance of electing a representative who would augment the Prime Minister's endeavours rather than resort to adversarial politics within the Parliament. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HTBRIEFS **BSF** Frontier

SHILLONG: Ram Prasad Meena, additional director general (HR), BSF, New Delhi, reviewed the current security scenario and discussed various operational and administrative aspects of Border management on his 2-day visit from March 26 and 27 to BSF Frontier Meghalaya. On Tuesday, ADG was welcomed by IG BSF Meghalaya Sh. Harbax Singh Dhillon and other senior officers followed by a "Guard of Honour" at Officers' Institute, Shillong. Further, IG BSF Meghalaya briefed the ADG about the current security scenario along the Indo-Bangladesh International border of the Meghalaya Frontier. ADG also paid a visit to DP Wahlang, chief secretary, Government of Meghalaya, and Dr. L R Bishnoi, IPS, DGP Meghalaya. The ADG visit concluded today after addressing officers and Jawans during a Prahari Sammelan at Ftr HQ Umpling, Shillong and visiting the under-construction composite Hospital building at Mawpat,

Joyram Engleng

sparks controversy KOKRAJHAR, March 27: A viral traditional towel with a heap of \mathbf{R}

United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) member sleeping with currency notes has triggered a controversy in Assam ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. The opposition grabbed the op-

portunity and slammed the BJP-led alliance, of which UPPL is a part in Assam, saying the ruling block is "wallowing in the quagmire of corruption"

In the image, the authenticity of which PTI could not independently verify, Benjamin Basumatary, identified in the photograph as a Village Council Development Committee (VCDC) member of UPPL, is seen

Suspended UPPL member's money photo Our preparedness levels of very high order: Gen Pande

picture purportedly of a suspended 500 denomination notes. "The photo that has gone viral is five year old. It has been made viral due to political conspiracy. We will find out who has done this. I don't know who has done this," he told reporters when asked about the picture.

Basumatary claimed that some people had blackmailed him then also after he was clicked in that pose. "Five years ago, I had taken a loan of \gtrless 3 lakh for some work from my sister. That particular night, some of us were having a party and

my partner clicked the photo with the money I had borrowed in a fun moment," he added. The UPPL sought to distance itself from the sleeping on a bed wearing only a image, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

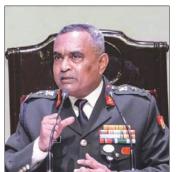
ED summons TMC MP Mahua Moitra,

bizman Darshan Hiranandani in FEMA case

NEW DELHI, March 27: In the backdrop of the nearly four-year border row with China in eastern Ladakh, Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Wednesday said the Indian Army's preparedness levels are of a "very high order" and the force is keeping a "very close watch" on developments across the border.

In response to questions asked during a panel discussion at Times Now Summit here, General Pande also said he believed that it was "only through talks" that one can find resolution of the balance issues that are currently at hand.

The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong Lake area



The ties between the two countries nose-dived significantly following the clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

"We are prepared in every manner. Our levels of operational readiness, operational preparedness is of a very high order. In terms of our deployments along the entire length of 3,488 km (LAC) of our borders, I would say is both robust as well as balance. We have also ensured that we have adequate reserves in terms of dealing with contingencies... We have our response mechanism firmly in place," General Pande said. He was asked how well is the Indian Army prepared in the backdrop of the eastern Ladakh border standoff. "We have talks at two levels. One is at the military level, at the level of our corps commanders,

11 candidates file nominations for Manipur LS seats IMPHAL, March 27: A total of

nine candidates filed their nomination papers on Wednesday, the last day of filing nominations for the two Parliamentary seats of Manipur. Including the two who had earlier filed their nomination papers, a total of 11 candidates filed their nomina-

tion papers to contest the upcoming two-phase polls. Of the total 11 candidates who

filed their nomination papers, seven are for the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency and the remaining four for the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency.

candidates filed their nomination papers on Wednesday to the returning officer (RO) at Imphal West DC office Lamphelpat. They are Ma-



Shillong.

BOKAJAN: Joyram Engleng, former chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and present candidate of Congress from 6- Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency campaigned in Bokajan LA in Karbi Anglong. He campaigned in 24 Deopani Member of Autonomous Constituency. He held meetings and meet supporters in Siloniian, Santipur and in Deopani Mandal Congress Committee office where he was welcomed and felicitated. Congress MP Candidate Engleng claimed that the Lok Sabha election will be won by Congress with a large margin. Article 244 (A) of the Constitution of India under which Autonomous State will be implemented as promised by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

NEW DELHI, March 27: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has issued fresh summons to TMC leader Mahua Moitra and Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani for questioning in a Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) contravention case on March 28, official sources said on Wednesday. The 49-year-old Trinamool Con-

gress leader was called for question-

of the notice

ing twice earlier by the central agency but she did not depose citing

official work and sought deferment Moitra and Hiranandani have been asked to appear for questioning at the ED office here on Thurs-

day, the sources said. Hiranandani was also summoned by the agency in a separate FEMA case against his Mumbai-based realty group. Earlier, his father Niranjan Hiranandani had deposed before



In the current case, the sources said, an advocate allegedly linked to

Moitra was examined by the ED on Wednesday at its office here. Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha in December for

"unethical conduct", has been renominated by her party from West Bengal's Krishnanagar seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. The Central Bureau of Investigation

These changes bring about closer

contact of the bats with horses and

(CBI) had raided her premises in connection with the cash-for-query case on Saturday, days after anticorruption ombudsman Lokpal directed the federal agency to investigate the allegations levelled against her by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey.

Dubey, a Lok Sabha member, has alleged that Moitra asked questions in the House in exchange for cash and gifts from Hiranandani to mount an attack on industrialist Gautam Adani and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, among others.

Transactions linked to a non-resident external (NRE) account are under the ED's scanner, apart from a few other foreign remittances and fund transfers, the sources said. Moitra has denied any wrongdoing and claims that she is being targeted as she raised questions about deals of the Adani Group. (PTI)



A close-up shot of fresh leaves on a banyan tree trunk in Guwahati on Wednesday. UB Photos

'As of July 2016, 53 disease incidents involving over 70 horses have been reported' Pandemic prevention should centre on conserving nature, biodiversity: Study

NEW DELHI, March 27: Pandemic prevention plans should centre around conserving nature and biodiversity which would secure the food and shelter needs of animals. limiting contact and the transfer of pathogens to humans, researchers have advocated in a new study.

Pandemics, or zoonotic diseases, are considered to begin with a 'spillover' event, involving the transfer of disease-causing pathogens circulating among wild animals to humans, livestock or other animals in close proximity.

The international team of researchers has outlined its "evidence-based approach" in the study published in the journal Nature Communications and based it on case studies, including research on how horses and humans become infected with the fatal Hendra virus in Australia.

A "rare emerging zoonosis", Hendra virus infection causes severe, often fatal, disease in both in-



fected horses and humans. It was identified in the first recorded outversity said the results showed that break of 1994 in Brisbane that afthe Hendra virus was "most likely fected 21 stabled racehorses and to pass from bats to horses in places two humans. "As of July 2016, 53 where habitat destruction has left disease incidents involving over 70 bats without reliable natural food horses have been reported." accordsources", further worsened by cliing to the World Health Organizamate cycles causing abrupt food tion (WHO). shortages for the bats.

Referring to the previous studies, Alison Peel, a wildlife disease ecolpeople, and more stress, thereby increasing the viral load that the bats shed, Peel said.

The effect was, however, found to have reversed when adequate food was available in native forests. the wildlife disease ecologist said.

"This shows how we can prevent new spillovers if we protect where bats eat, protect where bats roost, and reduce land-use changes that increase contact with bats," Peel added.

The team, which included researchers from the Kerala Agricultural University and the Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru, also looked at a 2019 study describing the evidence of antibodies generated in humans and bats in northeast India in response to filoviruses, another family of animal viruses.

The results implying a local zoonotic spillover were published the journal PLos Neglected in Tropical Diseases. "The world is focused on how can we detect and then contain (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Seven arrested for attacking woman

HAFLONG, March 27: Seven people have been arrested for their alleged involvement in attacking a woman, suspecting her of trying to abduct a child, in Assam's Dima Hasao district, police said on Wednesday.

The woman was severely injured in the attack of the mob, which also assaulted three policemen who tried to rescue her. Of the seven arrested persons, four are women.

The incident took place in Lower Haflong on Tuesday when the woman handed over chocolates and ₹ 100 to a child, whose father accused her of trying to abduct the boy, superintendent of police Mayank Kumar said.

The boy's father allegedly incited bystanders and they attacked the woman. Some policemen rushed to the spot but the mob attacked them as well, injuring three law enforcers.

The woman, a resident of Nepal who was visiting her mother in Haflong, suffered grave injuries and was rushed to the Haflong Civil Hospital. One of the three injured policemen was shifted to the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital and is in critical condition. (PTI)

ENPO calls for 12-hour shutdown in Eastern Nagaland

HT Correspondent DIMAPUR, March 27: In view of the eastern Nagaland public meeting to be held at Tuensang headquarters on March 28, the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) has called for a 12-hour total shutdown in entire eastern Nagaland from Thursday 6 am

The district administration, police, paramilitary

forces, power department, public health engineering department, fire and emerservices, gency medical emergencies, media and delegates who will be coming to attend the meeting have been exempted

from the purview of

the shutdown. The meeting was called to discuss the government of India's delay in creation of Frontier Nagaland Territory before the announcement of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections with all the 20 legislators of eastern Nagaland, tribal bodies and others concerned and steps to be taken concerning the issue.

On March 5, the ENPO, along with other tribal bodies, had called "public emergency" all over eastern Nagaland comprising six districts of Mon, Tuensang, Longleng, Kiphire, Shamator and Noklak against the delay by the Centre to settle the offer for creation of Frontier Nagaland Territory.

At a meeting on March 19, they had also unanimously

resolved to go by their February 23, 2024, resolution not to participate in any central and state election against the delay and refrain from cast-WE DEMANI elections. ing votes in these

FRONTIER NAGA In the Incanton Chairing the Mon Development Board

meeting in his office on Wednesday, Mon deputy commissioner Aiit Kumar Verma directed all the heads of offices in the district to be wellprepared and effectively discharge their respective duties for the successful conduct of the forthcoming general election.

2 THE HILLS TIMES

BUSINESS

cent and midcap index went up by

0.01 per cent. Among the indices,

services jumped 1.01 per cent, cap-

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled

in the positive territory, while

Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong

ended lower. European markets

were trading on a mixed note. Wall

Street ended in negative territory

on Tuesday. Foreign Institutional

Global oil benchmark Brent

cent to 22,004.70. (PTI)

alty (0.93 per cent).

and teck were the laggards.

Sensex rises 526 pts, Nifty ends above 22,100 on buying in banking, auto shares

MUMBAI. March 27: Benchmark Sensex climbed 526 points while Nifty closed above the 22,100 level on Wednesday following buying in banking, auto and oil shares after positive macro data.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 526.01 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 72,996.31 with 18 of its stocks advancing and 12 closing lower. During the day, it jumped 668.43 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,138.73.

The broader Nifty of NSE rebounded by 118.95 points or 0.54 per cent to close at 22,123.65. As many as 22 Nifty shares gained while 27 declined and one closed unchanged.

Auto, banking and energy shares supported the recovery while FMCG and IT shares declined due to profit taking.

Among Sensex shares, Reliance Industries rose the most by 3.6 per cent, adding more than 312 points to the upside. Maruti, Bajaj Finance, Titan, Kotak Mahindra



Bank. HDFC Bank. IndusInd truncated week, investors are now Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were among the major gainers. Wipro, HCL Technologies, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

"Stock-specific actions and positive undercurrents due to a healthy economic growth forecast led the market towards a positive closure. smallcap gauge climbed 0.70 per However, due to the holiday-led

Investors (FIIs) turned net buyers focusing on US GDP data tomoron Tuesday, as they bought equirow and next week's RBI policy ties worth ₹ 10.13 crore, according announcement to gauge market dito exchange data. rection. "The mid- and small-cap space are outperforming as incrude declined 0.96 per cent to USD 85.42 a barrel. On Tuesday, vestors got bargaining opportunities, but volumes are low," said the BSE benchmark declined by Vinod Nair, Head of Research at 361.64 points or 0.50 per cent to Geojit Financial Services. settle at 72,470.30. The NSE Nifty In the broader market, the BSE dropped 92.05 points or 0.42 per

Audi expands retail presence in India

highlights essential features for CCTV storage solutions

Western digital

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 27: The landscape of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) applications is evolving rapidly, extending beyond traditional security use cases to encompass sectors like retail management and transportation. This shift emphasizes the importance of smart video solutions. With a wide range of cameras available, from basic options to those integrated with advanced artificial intelligence (AI), the Indian CCTV market is poised for significant growth, projected to reach USD 8.43 billion by 2028 (source).

Khalid Wani, Senior Director of Sales, India, at Western Digital, commented, "The WD Purple portfolio is tailored to meet the evolving needs of CCTV setups, offering high-capacity solutions like the WD Purple[®] Pro Smart Video HDD with up to 22TB*. Designed for 24/7 reliability, our WD Purple microSD cards offer robust endurance. The WD PurpleTM Pro drives, equipped with AllFrameTM AI technology, ensure seamless video playback and support deep learning analytics within the system.'

Axis Bank launches digital US dollar fixed deposits HT Bureau

marked a significant milestone with the inauguration of a new preowned car facility, Audi Approved: plus, in Guwahati. Strategically located at Balughat, Jayanagar Tripura Road, the opening of Audi Approved: plus in Guwahati underscores Audi India's commitment to enhancing its retail footprint, now boasting a total of 26 such pre-owned car facilities across India.

Balbir Singh Dhillon, Head of Audi India, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "Audi Approved: plus witnessed a remarkable growth of 62% in 2023. We are dedicated to expanding our retail business in response to the growing demand for luxury cars in the country and are confident of sustained growth this year. The inauguration of our twenty-sixth Audi Approved: plus facility underscores the demand and growth potential, reaffirming the strength of the brand. Over the next nine months, we plan to add four new pre-owned car showrooms, bringing the total count to thirty Audi Approved: plus facilities by the end of 2024

Prawaas 4.0

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 27: The



Audi Approved: plus assures customers of the highest quality pre-owned Audi vehicles. Each pre-owned vehicle showcased and sold at Audi Approved: plus showchanical, bodywork, interior, and part of the program, Audi India offers 24x7 Roadside Assistance and provides complete vehicle history

Bus and Car Operators Confeder- Minister, Prawaas 4.0 advocates School Bus Division, and MG

ation of India (BOCI) has officially for a greater emphasis on public Motor are expected to participate

before purchase. Additionally, customers can avail themselves of easy financing and insurance benefits through the program.

Pulak Goswami, Dealer Principal of Audi Guwahati, expressed pride in extending the partnership with Audi India through the inauguration of their second setup in Guwahati, the Audi Approved: facility. He stated, "This new facility is poised to redefine the standards of excellence in the pre-owned luxury car segment, offering unparalleled quality and service to our esteemed customers.'

Reliance Industries shares jump nearly 4 pc; mcap again reaches ₹ 20 lakh cr mark

NEW DELHI, March 27: Shares of Reliance Industries Limited were in heavy demand on Wednesday, rising nearly 4 per cent, with its market valuation again crossing the historic ₹ 20 lakh crore mark.

ital goods climbed 1 per cent, con-The bellwether stock jumped sumer durables (0.98 per cent), 3.60 per cent to settle at ₹ 2.987.85industrials (0.97 per cent) and reapiece on the BSE. During the day, it zoomed 4 per cent to ₹2,999.90. Commodities, IT, utilities, metal On the NSE, it climbed 3.48 per

cent to Rs 2,983.75 per share. The company's market capitalisation (mcap) jumped by ₹ 70,039.26 crore to reach ₹ 20,21,486.59 crore.

In volume terms, 4.71 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 81.63 lakh shares on the NSE during the day. Rally in the stock was instrumental in driving the markets higher. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 526.01 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 72,996.31. The NSE Nifty went up by 118.95 points or 0.54 per cent to 22,123.65. "The gains were led by industry heavyweight Reliance Industries and other energy stocks owing to a drop in crude oil prices," Avdhut Bagkar, Technical

and Derivatives Analyst at StoxBox, said. Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) on February 13 this year became the first Indian company to achieve a market capitalisation of ₹ 20 lakh crore. The company is the most valued domestic firm by market valuation followed by Tata Consultancy Services 13,88,441.09 crore), HDFC Bank (₹ 10,94,486.92 crore), ICICI Bank (7,61,126.88 crore) and Bharti Airtel (₹ 6,92,041.28 crore) in the top five order. So far this year, shares of Reliance Industries have jumped 15.59 per cent. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

38 candidates in fray

their nominations for the Sonitpur constituency on Wednesday. Altogether nine candidates have filed their papers in Sonitpur including independent Raju Bhandari on Tuesday. In Dibrugarh, three candidates have filed their papers with AAP candidate Manoj Dhanowar filing on the last day while Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of BJP and Lurinjyot Gogoi of Assam Jatiya Parishad as the unified opposition candidate had filed their nominations on Tuesday. In Lakhimpur, Congress candidate Uday Shankar Hazarika filed his nomination and he will battle it out with the sitting BJP MP Pradan Baruah who filed his papers on Tuesday. Altogether nine candidates have filed their nominations for the Lakhimpur constituency. The scrutiny will be held on March 28 and the last date of withdrawal of candidature is March 30. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one each from the state. (PTI)

Battle of Gogois: Topon

"We want an MP, who would strengthen the PM's hand for taking our country forward on the road to progress and prosperity, but not an MP who would always attack him in the Parliament," Sarma said.

Highlighting the transformative initiatives spearheaded by the Modi-led government, Sarma reiterated the Prime Minister's commitment to uplifting farmers, women, youths, and marginalised sections of society.

He also lauded Modi's affinity towards Assam and the northeastern region, citing numerous visits and gestures symbolising solidarity. Referring to Modi's recent visit to Kaziranga National Park, Sarma praised the Prime Minister's endorsement of conservation efforts, exemplified by his overnight stay and subsequent safari, which garnered widespread attention. Encouraging voters to propagate the message of BJP's vision for progress and prosperity, Sarma hailed the substantial strides witnessed under the BJP-led government's tenure, asserting that Jorhat parliamentary constituency would reap the benefits of this transformative agenda. Following the nomination filing, Sarma joined Topon Gogoi atop an open vehicle as they embarked on a procession through the city streets, symbolising solidarity and momentum towards the upcoming elections. In a parallel development, the Congress party and United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA)-backed candidate Gaurav Gogoi unveiled a poll campaign song at the Jorhat district Congress office. Gogoi had submitted his nomination papers a day earlier. It may be mentioned here that altogether five candidates (including BJP and Congress) have filed nomination papers for the Jorhat seat till Wednesday, the last date of filing nomination. The other three candidates are: Arun Chandra Handique of Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal, Rajkumar Duarah and Baba Kurmi, both Independents.

stating that Basumatary has been suspended and removed from the VCDC post. UPPL chief and Bodoland Terri-

torial Council chief executive member Pramod Boro claimed that the Harisingha Block Committee of the party had recommended disciplinary action against Basumatary on January 5 this year and accordingly, he was suspended on January 10 over the photograph. "Additionally, the BTC government suspended and removed him from the post of VCDC Chairman on 10th February 2024. I urge all media outlets and social media users to refrain from linking Basumatry with UPPL," he said in a post on X. Boro further said that Basumatary's actions are solely his own responsibility and the party is not accountable for any of his personal acts. Sharing the viral image, All India Congress Committee in a post on X said: "Benjamin is an active leader of UPPL party. UPPL is an important ally of BJP in Assam. This picture, which came amid elections, shows that BJP and its allies are wallowing in the quagmire of corruption." It further said that the BJP has selectively made alliances with those people "who can loot the country" like them. Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia of Congress in a post on X said: "Shocking and disgraceful! A viral photo depicts a #UPPL leader asleep with bundles of cash. This blatant display of corruption demands immediate action." He asked Assam chief minister to "prove the integrity of your numerous tied agencies" and conduct a thorough investigation into the case. Boro, on the other hand, criticised Saikia by terming his comments as "unfortunate" and said that he made the statement on a "fake news" instantly without verification.

"Being a LoP it's disgraceful that you have tried to defame the strong credentials and foundations of UPPL, which was formed with a lot of sacrifices in the interests of Bodoland," he said while sharing a clarification video of Basumatary. Raijor Dal chief and MLA Akhil Gogoi said, "This is BJP, this is an ally of BJP. This is what actually the motto of BJP signifies: 'NAA KHAOONGA, NAA KHANE DUNGA'." Reacting to Gogoi also, Boro said that a "malicious photo" of Basumatary has been widely spread by media and social media users associating it with UPPL, which is not related to the suspended member. "The photo was taken five years ago by Basumatary's friends while they were partying and he was blackmailed with this photo thereafter. The cash in the photo was of Benjamin Basumatary's sister," the BTC chief said. (PTI)

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gears up for its 4th edition

ing the vision of "Viksit Bharat" Tata Motors, Eberspaecher Sue-

outlined by the Honorable Prime trak, Ashok Leyland, Mahindra

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 27: Audi

GUWAHATI, March 27: Axis Bank, one of India's largest private sector banks, has unveiled the introduction of Digital US Dollar Fixed Deposits for Non-Resident Indian (NRI) customers at Axis Bank IBU- GIFT City. This initiative marks Axis Bank as the pioneer in offering a digital journey for GIFT City Deposits. NRI customers can now conveniently open US dollar Fixed Deposits at GIFT City through 'Open by Axis Bank,' the mobile banking application of Axis Bank. This innovation simplifies the process of booking US dollar Fixed Deposits for NRI customers, providing them with an end-to-end digital paperless solution and eliminating the need for physical documentation.

announced the highly anticipated transport utilization. Such a shift in the event, alongside numerous 4th Edition of Prawaas 4.0, India's leading Multimodal Transport Show. Scheduled to take place from August 29-31 at the Bangalore International Exhibition Centre (BIEC), this edition promises to be a pivotal event in shaping the future of passenger mobility in the country. Under the overarching theme of "Safe, Smart, and Sustainable Passenger Mobility," Prawaas 4.0 aims to bring together a diverse range of stakeholders from the multimodal transport sector. This includes manufacturers of buses and cars, fleet owners, as well as partners in metro and LEVs from all 36 States and Union Territories of India.

Recognizing the crucial role of efficient public transport in achievnot only addresses road congestion but also aligns with sustainability goals. The Karnataka State Bus Owners Association, alongside other prominent associations including the Karnataka State Tourism Private Transport Owners Association and the Karnataka State Travel Operators Association, are proudly hosting Prawaas 4.0.Prawaas 4.0 marks a significant step towards multimodal transport, leading the charge in shaping the future of mobility. The conference will feature insightful dialogues, an exhibition showcasing cutting-edge trends and innovations, and a prestigious awards ceremony recognizing exceptional contributions within the industry. Key industry players such as

other corporates. Ramalinga Reddy, Minister for Transport and Muzrai, Government of Karnataka, emphasized the importance of government support in enhancing the quality of life and fostering industry growth. He highlighted initiatives aimed at boosting accessibility and tourism development, demonstrating a commitment to the success of the event. Prasanna Patwardhan, President of BOCI, stressed the need for adaptability and collaboration in addressing the evolving demands of public transport. He underscored the urgency of bridging the gap between private and public transit and reforming taxes to incentivize bus usage, emphasizing the collective commitment towards a brighter future.

level, where we have the mechanism, WMCC (Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs," he said, adding several rounds of WMCC talks have taken place post the event of mid-2020. The 28th meeting of WMCC was held on November 30, 2023. "It is my belief that only through talks you will find resolution of the balance issues that are currently at hand. While these talks are progressing, we are also focusing on capability development along our northern borders, of which technology infusion, modernisation are important," the Army chief said. General Pande said the Army is also focusing on infrastructure development and 'I believe, we are moving in the right direction".

"Our preparedness levels are of a very high order and we are keeping a very close watch on developments and what is happening across the border," he added. Asked to quantify the threat perception from China, General Pande said from time to time "we keep reviewing threats". So, threat during the winter months may be slightly different from what it may be during the summer months, he added. "Just as our western adversary, with respect to our northern adversary, I would only say, our preparedness level is of a very high order," the Army chief asserted.

On the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, he underlined the Army formations deployed in the UT, both in hinterland and along the LoC in counter-infiltration grid.

"There are attempts at infiltration, which are continuing both in the Valley region as to the south of the Pir Panjal region. But we have a very robust and effective counter-infiltration grid which has proven successful," he said. On criticism surrounding the Agnipath scheme, General Pande said it was a "transformational" change or reform that 'we undertook in the past so many years".

The feedback received from the units is "extremely encouraging, extremely positive", General Pande said, adding cynicism as to what will happen to the Agniveers after four years is "misplaced". On role of the women in the army, he said, "Close to 128 women officers are now donning the rank of a colonel and they are now commanding officers". The general was also asked about the Indian Army's role in controlling the Manipur situation.

"On the night of May 3-4, I think it was our pro-active deployment, induction of additional forces there that we were able to control the violence levels to a very large extent. Be it the Assam Rifles or the army units deployed there, I would say they have given an excellent account of themselves," General Pande said. In terms of preventing collateral damage to non-military or civilian population, in terms of ensuring their own protection, "I would believe they have done an excellent job", he said. On the challenges there, General Pande said one is the aspect of weapons which are still available at large. There is still fairly a large number of weapons that is still available and that is a 'cause of concern", he added.

Also, the issue of activities happening across the Indo-Myanmar border and with these kinds of weapons available that remains a challenge, the Army chief said. The situation in Manipur transcends the law and order situation or of land domain, General Pande said. "We will have to come up with a very comprehensive and a detailed framework to be able to find an answer to the ongoing issues there. We have a large ex-servicemen community. So, we have asked them to engage with people. Our units are helping internally displaced people in various relief camps," he said. General Pande in his opening remarks said that he saw the Indian Army as "a key contributor and a stakeholder" in the nation's rise. "I believe the nation's security and progress are inextricably linked. While the economic progress is the fountainhead of growth, it is the military strength that lends it the capability to be able to address ongoing as well as future security challenges. The army's commitment to India's growth story is absolutely unwavering," he said. (PTI)

Pandemic prevention should

a novel pathogen once it is circulating in humans, rather than how can we prevent that pathogen from entering the human population in the first place," said Raina Plowright, a professor in the Department of Public and Ecosystem Health at Cornell University and the study's first author. "For communities who come in contact with animals, it is important to ensure people have the protection that they need to avoid pathogen exposure," Plowright added. The authors of the study also emphasised the need for an international agency or panel to assess and generate data on "pandemic prevention, preparedness and response", along with collecting "metrics on intactness of landscapes, ecological integrity and biodiversity". (PTI)

11 candidates file nominations

Thounaojam of Republican Party of India - Athawale (RPI - A), Thounaojam Basanta Kumar Singh of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Dr. Angomcha Bimol Akoijam of Indian National Congress(INC), Moirangthem Totomshana Nongshaba of Rashtriya Janhit Sangharsh Party (RJSP), Ngasepam Nilakanta Singh of Universal Family Party (UFP) and Haorungbam Sarat Singh - Independent candidate.

Rajkumar Somendro Singh alias Kaiku of Manipur People's Party (MPP) had already filed his nomination paper on Monday. For the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency, three candidates filed their nomination papers, to take the total number of candidates to four. The three candidates who filed their nomination papers on Wednesday are Alfred Kanngam S Arthur of INC, Alyson Abonmai and S Kho John. The last two filed their nomination papers as independent candidates

Kachui Timothy Zimik of NPF had already filed his nomination paper from the constituency on Monday. (NNN)

NEW DELHI, March 27: Fair trade watchdog CCI is conducting enquiries against some fintech entities to check whether their ways of leveraging technologies are impacting competition, its chief Ravneet Kaur said and asserted that the regulator is taking necessary action to ORMA ensure a competitive digital market. With a slew of amended regulations, key rulings against anti-competitive practices in the digital market and advocacy efforts, the CCI is strengthening its efforts to curb unfair business In an interview to PTI, Competition Commis-

sion of India (CCI) Chairperson Ravneet Kaur said there is an increased sensitisation among entities about the competition law and stressed the focus is on "striking the right balance between regulation and freedom". According to her, the regulator is focused on

big tech companies as well as various other sectors, including fintech and online intermediary service providers.

wavs.

"The CCI is conducting enquiries into some entities in the fintech sector. We are looking into how technology is being leveraged by fintech players and whether they are impacting competition (in the market). The enquiries are going on," Kaur said.

Without divulging specific details, she also said the regulator is looking into some cases in the film industry, especially those related to film distributors.

By addressing potential market distortions and promoting healthy competition, Kaur said



Competition Comm conducting enquiries against

some fintech entities: Chairperson Ravneet Kaur

that the CCI anticipates a positive impact on the economy, leading to enhanced consumer choice, innovation, and overall economic growth. "It is about striking the right balance between regulation and freedom, ensuring that the market remains contestable and operates fairly for all stakeholders," she noted.

Emphasising that the watchdog is expediting cases related to the digital market, Kaur said that companies are increasingly aware of the importance of adhering to competition laws, which will ensure a more transparent and fairer digital marketplace.

'While legal challenges are part of the regulatory landscape, the focus remains on creating an environment where competition thrives. It is a continuous process, and we are committed to monitoring, assessing, and taking necessary action to ensure a competitive digital market," she added

The Digital Market Data Unit (DMDU) has also started functioning at the CCI.

"There has been a lot of change and companies are realising that they cannot get away by indulging in anti-competitive practices. We are not only looking at enforcement actions but also advocacy efforts, and overall, there has been a positive impact," Kaur said in response to a query about the impact on the market following the CCI's major rulings against Google.

The CCI, which has the mandate to ensure fair competition in the marketplace, has passed various rulings against Google, including those related to Android system and Play Store pricing policy.

On March 15, the watchdog ordered a detailed probe against Google for alleged discriminatory practices with respect to its Play Store pricing policy after finding a prima facie violation of the competition law.

In August 2023, the corporate affairs ministry informed the Rajya Sabha that inquiries against various companies, including Amazon and Flipkart were pending before the CCI. "Inquiry against Amazon & Flipkart, BookMyShow, Zomato & Swiggy, WhatsApp & Facebook (Meta), Apple and Google (in matters other than those where orders under Section 27 of the Act have already been passed) is currently pending before the CCI," Minister of State for Corporate Affairs Rao Inderjit Singh had said in a written reply to the Upper House. (PTI)

REGION

the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat. Dhanowar, who belongs to the tea

community, is the son of eighttime Congress MLA from Digboi, late Rameswar Dhanowar. Addressing reporters after sub-

mitting his nomination. Dhanowar

asserted, "Our primary battle is

against the misgovernance and

corruption perpetuated by the BJP.

Our political agenda centers

around development. Our leader

Arvind Kejriwal has instilled in us

the courage to stand against cor-

ruption. Despite his current incar-

ceration, his inspiration has

emboldened us. The substantial

influx of individuals joining the

Aam Aadmi Party signifies a

promising shift for Assam in the

days ahead. I firmly believe that

the seeds of political transforma-

tion will sprout from Dibrugarh.'

tion to serving the people of Di-

brugarh with honesty and

commitment, stating, "I am here

Dhanowar reiterated his dedica-

Himanta expresses confidence in BJP's victory, Lurinjyoti Gogoi also files nomination Sarba files nomination from **Dibrugarh amidst massive rally**

HT Correspondent DIBRUGARH, March 27: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal filed his nomination for the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency on Tuesday. Sonowal, accompanied by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union minister of state for Petroleum and Natural Gas Rameswar Teli, and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) president Atul

Bora, filed his nomination before returning officer Bikram Kairi. Ahead of the filing of nomination, a huge rally was organised at the Old Government High School playground, where Sonowal addressed his party supporters who had turned up in huge numbers.

From there, Sonowal, in an open vehicle, took out a colourful procession through the streets of Dibrugarh up to the District Commissioner's Office, with thousands of supporters who danced and sang as they accompanied Sonowal, covering the 3-km distance. Chants of 'BJP Zindabad', 'Narendra Modi Zindabad', and 'Sarbananda Sonowal Zindabad' filled the atmosphere, reflecting a festive spirit in the air.

Speaking to reporters, Sonowal said, "This election marks an op-



portunity to continue the commendable initiatives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It's about driving Assam further along the to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's path of development and propelling India towards greater progress

Accompanying Sonowal, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma ex-

Woman brutally assaulted in Haflong

Mob attack leaves victim critical, raises concerns

Dibrugarh, Sarbananda Sonowal is expected to secure victory with a margin ranging from 2.5 to 3 lakh votes. Similarly, in Jorhat, we are expecting a margin of victory of 3 lakh votes. The unwavering support of the people stands firmly behind the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.3

Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi also filed his nomination for the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat on Tuesday. He was also accompanied by hundreds of supporters as he took out a procession to the District Commissioner's Office, where he filed his nomination before the returning officer.

Lurinjyoti Gogoi is facing a triangular fight in the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat with BJP stalwart and minister Sarbananda Union Sonowal and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s Manoj Dhanowar. The Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat will go to polls on April 9 in the first phase of the election.

Earlier in the day, on Tuesday, the chief minister accompanied the BJP candidate and incumbent MP of Lakhimpur Lok Sabha seat Pradan Baruah as he filed his nomination for the Lakhimpur seat.

Woman killed by

wild elephant

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 27: In the wee

hours, a woman identified as

Ramoriti Harijan (59) of Lingding

Bihenru village was killed by a

wild elephant at Chekso-Anglong

under Baithalangso Police Station

in West Karbi Anglong. An ele-

phant from Chekso-Anglong hills,

Dongkamukam Forest Range, ven-

tured into a nearby village and en-

tered the house of Rajbolom

Harijan, killing his wife Ramoriti

Harijan on the spot. Police person-

nel from the Baithalangso Police

<u>HT Bureau</u>



HT Correspondent DIBRUGARH, March 27: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate Manoj Dhanowar on Thursday filed his nomination for the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat, which goes to poll on April 19.

Accompanied by around 2,500 supporters waving party flags, Dhanowar took out a colourful procession from the Nirmali Gaon Playground to the District Commissioner's Office to file his nomination amid slogans of 'Aam

Kejriwal Zindabad', Dhanowar Zindabad

ficer Bikram Kairi.

The 48-year-old Dhanowar will face off against formidable BJP candidate and Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP)'s Lurinjyoti Gogoi in a triangular contest for

BJP condemns killing of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha secretary

<u>HT Bureau</u> **DIPHU, March 27:** The BJP, under the 6-Diphu (ST) parliamentary constituency, has strongly condemned the unfortunate killing of Rowel Ronghang, son of Bilison Ronghang of Sunaram Terang village, Kakojan, under Dolamara Police Station on March 24 by unidentified miscreants in Karbi Anglong district.

The deceased Ronghang was secretary of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha of Kakojan polling booth. The party prayed for the eternal peace of the departed and expressed grief with the bereaved family. The party urged the concerned authority to nab the culprits involved in the killing and demanded an immediate probe into the incident.

In another press statement, the BJP said the party is pleased to accept and are now residing in India. It's imporand welcome Opposition workers who have joined BJP in the presence tant to note that no part of Karbi Anglong of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) chief executive member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang; MP Horen Sing Bey; BJP-East Karbi Anglong District Committee president Roland Killing; BJP candidate from 6-Diphu (ST) parliamentary constituency and executive member KAAC, Amarsing Tisso, and other dignitaries. The joining program was held at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, BJP-EKADC office here.

535 workers of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as of March 24, 282 Opposition workers on March 25, and 20 Opposition workers from the APHLC have joined the BJP. Congress workers joining the BJP were led by Budheswar Urang of Borjan MAC constituency; Martin Rongphar from Dhansiri Member of Autonomous Constituency, and Gulapi Kram- Anglong who participated in the obsersapi of West Karbi Anglong.

Aadmi Party Zindabad', 'Arvind 'Manoj

AAP's Manoj Dhanowar files

nomination for Dibrugarh LS seat

AAP in-charge of north-east states Rajesh Sharma was present when Dhanowar submitted his nomination papers to returning of-

to champion the rights of the ordinary citizens and usher in positive governance reforms. The Aam Aadmi Party advocates transparency and accountability, principles which I am proud to uphold in this election.'

Banga Sena advocates for 'Independent Bangabhumi' on 42nd Rising Day

HT Correspondent HOWRAGHAT, March 27: Banga

Sena announced that an 'Independent Bangabhumi' will be established by carving out six districts of Bangladesh. This statement was made by leaders of Banga Sena on its 42nd Rising Day, which took place on Monday at Uttar Borbil in Karbi Anglong. The event was attended by leaders of the Banga Sena who came from Kolkata, West Bengal. Banga Sena was founded by Bengali-speaking people who fled Bangladesh due to persecution in Assam or any part of India is included in the proposed Bangabhumi.

Leaders of Banga Sena from Kolkata include president Gunadhar Das, organising secretary Animesh Sikdar, spokesperson Bimal Maji, commanders Ranjit Rai and Narayan Das, East Karbi Anglong District Committee secretary Nakul Das, publicity secretary Anup Das, along with people from all over Karbi vation of Banga Sena's Rising Day.

Tezpur Sahitya Sabha pays tribute to literary icons on 'Sahitya Divas'

dra Kumar Agarawala, and Bezbarua was a pioneer



<u>HT Bureau</u>

GUWAHATI, March 27: A horrifying incident unfolded in Lower Haflong Bazar area during the celebration of the Holi festival, as a lone woman was brutally assaulted by a mob on suspicion of child abduction. The victim, identified as Kamala Dulal, faces a critical condition in the hospital after the relentless beating she endured. According to family members, Kamala Dulal, who had come from Nepal to visit her aunt in Haflong, innocently offered candy and

terpreted, leading to a vicious assault by members of the community who suspected her of luring

the child Shockingly, bystanders failed to intervene to stop the violence or verify the situation, allowing the brutal attack to continue unchecked. When the Haflong Police attempted to rescue Dulal, the mob turned violent, injuring two police personnel, including a subinspector, and damaging police vehicles. In response to the incident, law enforcement swiftly arrested

authorities, the incident has left the community reeling and raised concerns about the lack of awareness and empathy in society.

pressed confidence, stating, "We

are poised to secure a resounding

victory in the election, contributing

consecutive third term. We antici-

pate victory in 11 out of 14 con-

stituencies without a doubt. Our

efforts extend to clinching wins in

Nagaon and Karimganj as well. In

Addressing the media, the sister of the injured woman vehemently condemned the barbaric assault and urged for appropriate punishment for the perpetrators. She emphasised the need to prevent such heinous acts from recurring in society. The incident has sparked fear and unrest in the peace-loving hilly district of Dima Hasao, particu-

District superintendent of police Mayank Kumar addressed the press, promising transparency regarding the investigation and

dents in the future. As Haflong grapples with the afmunity leaders must work together to promote tolerance and prevent

Station have taken the deceased body for official procedures. larly in greater Haflong. **BJP's Amarsing** Tisso to file measures to prevent similar incinomination

termath of this tragic event, it DIPHU, March 27: The BJP candidate for the 6-Diphu (ST) parliaserves as a stark reminder of the importance of compassion and unmentary constituency, Amarsing Tisso, will file his nomination on derstanding in the midst of cultural April 2, 2024. On that day, a procelebrations. Authorities and com-

drinks to a child in the Lower Haf- seven individuals involved in the long market area. However, this attack and filed charges against simple act of kindness was misin-

them. Despite the prompt action by

Gaurav Gogoi files nomination papers for Jorhat Lok Sabha seat

HT Correspondent JORHAT, March 27: The Congress candidate Gaurav Gogoi on Tuesday filed his nomination papers at the Jorhat District Commissioner's Office for the Jorhat Lok Sabha constituency here.

Gaurav Gogoi, accompanied by leader of the Opposition in the state assembly Debabrata Saikia, Titabar MLA Bhaskar Jyoti Baruah, and an advocate, submitted his papers to Jorhat DC Pulak Mahanta, who is the returning officer for the 14 Jorhat HPC comprising 10 assembly constituencies spread over Jorhat, Sivasagar, Charaideo, and Majuli island districts.

The sitting Kaliabar MP Gaurav Gogoi, accompanied by Akhil Gogoi, Rakibul Hussain, Rekibuddin Ahmed, Debabrata Saikia, Bhaskar Jyoti Baruah, along with thousands of party workers, supporters, and top Congress and alliance party leaders, took out a padayatra across the main thoroughfares of the town.

The Congress party workers along with those of the alliance parties, which included a large number of women and youths, held flags of their respective parties and shouted slogans 'Gaurav Gogoi zindabad'.

After filing his nomination papers, Gaurav Gogoi told media-persons that the massive response from Congress party workers, supporters, along with those of the alliance partners, well-wishers, and general people towards him across the entire Jorhat parliamentary constituency, has clearly indicated that winds of change were blowing to wrest the seat from BJP this time. Earlier, before filing his nomination, Gaurav Gogoi visited the Buri Goxani Dewal (Temple), Gurudwara Ramgariah Sabha, Tarajan Masjid, and Borbheta Baptist Church here and offered prayers and sought blessings. On Monday, he moved across the Jorhat assembly constituency continuing his campaign which he began on March 15 from Titabar.

Burning state issues to be central poll plank for Congress, UOFA: APCC president

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 27: Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Bhupen Kumar Borah stated that Congress and the United Opposition Forum, Assam (UOFA) would be fighting the parliamentary elections in the state by highlighting the burning problems of the state. Addressing newspersons at a hotel here on Tuesday, Borah, accompanied by leader and deputy leader of the Opposition in state assembly - Debabrata Saikia and Rakibul Hussain, and Raijor Dal leader and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi, said that the Congress and the Opposition partners were presenting the burning issues plaguing the state before the voters as the platform to fight the Lok Sabha elections. Borah termed Gaurav Gogoi as the 'Voice of the North East Region' and an emerging leader of the country, stating that Gaurav had done very well by raising issues of the region and also issues of national importance. Borah, while acknowledging the overwhelming response to Gaurav across Jorhat LS seat by the Congress rank and file and the general people, mentioned that it was sending a positive message.

such senseless acts of violence from tarnishing the fabric of society.

nomination, with more than 10,000 workers and supporters expected to participate.

cession will be taken out by the

BJP in Diphu on the way to file the

General and police observers arrive in Sonitpur

HT Correspondent TEZPUR, March 27: Following the directives of the Election Commission of India, MR Ravi Kumar, IAS, the general observer for general elections to the Lok Sabha for the 11-Sonitpur parliamentary constituency, covering constituencies 65-Dhekiajuli, 66-Barchalla, 67-Tezpur, 68-69-Naduar, Rangapara, 70-Biswanath, 71-Behali, 72-Gohpur, and 73-Bihpuria, has arrived in Sonitpur district on Tuesday. The general observer has been accommodated at the Nameri room of the Circuit House in Tezpur. The contact number and email id of the observer are 9148374888 and observercell-

tezpur2024@gmail.com, respectively. Meanwhile, N Shashi Kumar, IPS, the police observer for general elections to the Lok Sabha for the 11-Sonitpur parliamentary constituency, covering constituencies 65-Dhekiajuli, 66-Barchalla, 67-Tezpur, 68-69-Naduar, Rangapara, 70-Biswanath, 71-Behali, 72-Gohpur, and 73-Bihpuria, has also arrived in Sonitpur district on Tuesday. The police observer has been accommodated at the USHA room of the Circuit House in Tezpur. The contact number and email id of the observer are 9108720379 and observercelltezpur2024@gmail.com, respectively.

HT Correspondent TEZPUR, March 27: Alongside other parts of the region, Tezpur Sahitya Sabha observed 'Sahitya Divas' in front of the bust of Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbarua near the State Bank of India, Main Branch here on Tuesday, commemorating Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbarua's unparalleled contribution towards Assamese language and literature. In connection with the day, Tezpur Sahitya Sabha organised a program to pay rich tribute to the doyens of Assamese language and literature, Sahityarathi Bezbarua and Sahityacharjya Mitradev Mahanta, on their 86th and 41st death anniversaries respectively.

The tribute-paying program, conducted by former secretary of Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Pankaj Barua, commenced with the lighting of a ceremonial lamp by MLA Tezpur Prithiraj Rabha and president of Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Ramesh Chandra Kalita. Paying rich tribute to Sahityarathi, Dr Bhupen Saikia, president, Sonitpur Zila Sahitya Sabha, in his insightful lecture, said that the most talked-about name in modern Assamese literature is Lakshminath Bezbarua, as he was one of the great Assamese literary icons who contributed significantly to the Assamese people, enriching the Assamese language. Remembering Bezbarua's tremendous contribution towards building the Assamese nation and Assamese literature, he further added that Bezbarua's literary career began in the pages of 'Jonaki' edited by Chan-

in the struggle to build and protect our language and nation.

Literary pensioner Ramchandra Chutia, addressing the gathering, discussed the obstacles faced by Assamese language and literature today. He urged everyone to come forward and dedicate their thoughts and sincere service to protect our language, literature, and nation following the ideology and ways shown to us by literary icons like Bezbaroa. Taking part in the program, MLA Tezpur Prithiraj Rabha paid tribute to the literary doyens by reciting and singing Bezbarua's poem and song. President of Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Ramesh Chandra Kalita also spoke on the occasion.

District commissioner, Sonitpur Deba Kumar Mishra, and superintendent of police, Sonitpur IPS Barun Purkayastha, attended the event and paid floral tribute to the literary doyens. Tezpur Sahitya Sabha secretary and vice president Dwijen Nath and Nabin Chandra Lahkar, noted singer Ajit Das, president, Sonitpur Journalists Union Sanjib Hajarika, Sahitya Sabha member Bhupen Katoky, Tarun Lahkar, Dul Goswami, Bhupen Sarma, Manimala Saikia, Anju Dutta Bora, Hareswar Goswami, former student leader Nip Bora, secretary of Tezpur branch Asam Natya Sanmilan Jintu Borthakur, Sanjay Krishna Gohain Barua, and many others graced the occasion.

Consultation advocates habitat restoration for human-elephant coexistence

<u>HT Bureau</u>

GUWAHATI, March 27: A consultation hosted by the biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, in collaboration with the Tinsukia Press Club, focused on 'biodiversity conservation and human-wildlife coexistence'. Held in the premises of the press club, the consultation unanimously agreed that resolving the raging problem of human-elephant conflict (HEC) in eastern Assam areas lies in restoring habitats and migration corridors.

While appreciating the mass awareness drive on human-elephant coexistence, the formation of an early warning network called Rapid Response Units (RRU) in HEC-affected areas, and initiatives for installing solar fences undertaken by Aaranyak in certain areas of eastern Assam districts like Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Majuli, Sivasagar, and Jorhat, the consultation acknowledged that while these temporary measures would help mitigate HEC, the ultimate solution could be achieved only through habitat restoration for elephants and establishing migration



The research-based biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, in collaboration with the British Asian Trust and with

-

support from the Darwin Initiative, cohosted the interaction with the media at the Tinsukia Press Club. The objective was to enlighten the media about Aaranyak's on-

going community-driven efforts for HEC mitigation through coexistence.

Aaranyak's wildlife biologist Rubul Tanti delivered a detailed presentation on Aaranyak's initiatives for HEC mitigation, highlighting the success achieved so far and outlining the roadmap for the future.

Aaranyak's publicity secretary Bijay Sankar Bora emphasised the role of media as a catalyst in Aaranyak's efforts for achieving coexistence in HEC hotspots, underscoring the media's importance in advocating for biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration issues at this crucial juncture for the animal kingdom.

Aaranyak's senior official Zakir Islam Bora provided an overview of the organisation's structure, operations, and missions during his presentation, shedding light on the 34-year-old organisation.

Earlier, Aaranyak official Rimpee Moran set the tone for the interaction by explaining the broad objective of the program, with support from another Aaranyak staff member Ejaj Ahmed, who played a key role in conducting the program.

4

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Glory is fleeting, but obscurity is forever. - Napoleon Bonaparte

Debate over Kejriwal's arrest

n the realm of politics, the arrest of a prominent figure often sends ripples far beyond national borders, revealing underlying tensions and perspectives on sovereignty and democracy. The recent detention of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has ignited such a debate, drawing attention not only within India but also from international quarters. Amidst accusations of foreign interference, the arrest of Kejriwal has become a focal point for discussions on India's internal affairs and its democratic processes. The Modi government's response to expressions of concern from the United States and Germany underscores the sensitivity surrounding the issue. While the Ministry of External Affairs has vehemently defended India's sovereignty and legal processes, critics argue that such reactions risk overshadowing legitimate calls for judicial transparency and fairness. The involvement of foreign diplomatic missions has added layers of complexity to the situation. The summoning of officials from both the United States and Germany reflects India's firm stance against what it perceives as unwarranted meddling. However, it also highlights the delicate balance between asserting national autonomy and upholding international norms of democracy and human rights.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration finds itself in a precarious position as it navigates this diplomatic quagmire. While attempting to assert its authority and deflect foreign scrutiny, it must also contend with growing domestic pressure and international expectations of democratic accountability. The scrutiny of India's judiciary and political processes by Western democracies underscores the interconnectedness of global politics and the enduring relevance of democratic values. Kejriwal's arrest has unleashed a wave of political turmoil within India, with the AAP leader defiantly ruling from within the confines of an Enforcement Directorate lock-up. His actions have resonated with a segment of the population disillusioned with traditional political establishments, evoking comparisons to revolutionary figures like Che Guevara. The BJP's discomfort with Kejriwal's unorthodox governance style is palpable, as calls for his dismissal grow louder. As Kejriwal's appeal for bail unfolds in the Delhi High Court, the implications for both national and local politics remain significant. The outcome of this legal battle could reverberate across Delhi's political landscape, potentially influencing voter sentiment in the upcoming general elections. The BJP's dominance in the region faces a critical test, as it grapples with the challenge posed by an emboldened AAP leadership.

Ultimately, the debate surrounding Kejriwal's arrest transcends individual personalities and partisan interests. It speaks to broader questions of democratic governance, judicial independence, and the role of international actors in shaping domestic politics. As India asserts its sovereignty in the face of external scrutiny, it must also uphold its commitment to democratic principles and ensure a fair and transparent legal process for all its citizens. In this era of interconnectedness, the actions of one nation inevitably reverberate across the global stage. The arrest of Arvind Kejriwal serves as a poignant reminder of the complex interplay between national sovereignty and international accountability in an increasingly interconnected world. As India grapples with its democratic identity, the eyes of the world remain fixed on its evolving political landscape, poised to scrutinize every twist and turn in this unfolding saga. In the midst of escalating tensions, the role of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration is pivotal. Balancing domestic pressures with international expectations requires astute diplomacy and strategic decision-making.

Bhutan's diplomatic

The arrests of Arvind Kejriwal: A blow to democracy or a crackdown on corruption?

he apprehension of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has sparked widespread inquiry and contemplation among the populace, casting doubt on the trajectory of the nation. While the ruling party and its adherents have unsurprisingly applauded the action, it has ignited discussions about the diminishing fabric of democracy within our nation.

The timing of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, amid allegations surrounding the Delhi liquor policy scam, has been a focal point for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), numerous opposition factions, and a considerable segment of the public. Initiated in November 2021 to modernize alcohol sales in the city, the policy faced scrutiny less than a year later when Delhi's Chief Secretary, under the jurisdiction of the Lieutenant Governor (LG) rather than the Chief Minister, flagged policy violations in July 2022. Upon the LG's recommendation, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was called in to conduct an inquiry, resulting in a report alleging fi-

nancial losses exceeding Rs580 crore to the exchequer. Furthermore, it's noteworthy that Kalvakuntla Kavitha.

daughter of former Telangana



Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and serving as MLC from Minister Hemant Soren was apprehended by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on January 31, 2024. Anticipating such action, Soren preemptively resigned,

passing the timing of Kejriwal and



as a blow to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP has already faced setbacks, including a Supreme Court ruling against the bond scheme and revelations of being the primary beneficiary of bond contributions. Moreover, connections have been drawn between ED raids on specific entities and their subsequent bond purchases.

The crucial question arises: is there sufficient evidence to implicate Kejriwal in the scam? The government asserts ample evidence exists to do so. Yet, if

DEGREE OF THOUGHT the baton to Cham-By: Dipak Kurmi pai Soren. Cen-

tral agencies, including the ED, sending him summons for CBI, and IT department, have nearly two years? Additionally, been actively pursuing leaders it's worth noting that the ED is from various opposition parties tasked with investigating money like the DMK and the Trinamool laundering offenses and foreign Congress. This concerted effort exchange law violations. Howposes a significant challenge to ever, as of now, no evidence has the BJP's ambitious goals for the upcoming general elections. The timing of the AAP chief's

arrest on Thursday is rumored to serve as a distraction from the

the government's actions. The electoral bonds controversy. With the State Bank of India dis-Center has allocated significant resources to pursue action against individuals, all of whom happen to be its political opponents. However, little effort has been made to hold accountable figures such as Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a BJP Lok Sabha MP accused of sexual harassment by several award-winning wrestlers. Similarly, no action has been

taken against Ramesh Bidhuri, another BJP Lok Sabha MP, who made communal slurs against then Bahujan Samaj Party MP Danish Ali during a parliamentary session. There's also been no indication of any repercussions for Pratap Simha, a BJP MP, who provided passes to two individuals responsible for releasing colored gas canisters in Parliament while it was in session

The partiality exhibited by central agencies in selectively pursuing actions against perceived offenders is increasingly viewed as a tactic to stifle dissent and silence voices of opposition against government misdeeds. Such a strategy not only undermines democratic principles but also threatens the fabric of our democracy. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)

surfaced to implicate Kejriwal on these fronts, particularly concerning the liquor policy. What becomes increasingly apparent is the bias evident in

this is indeed the

case, why did

the ED delay

unenviable position

By: R.K. Sinha

argely because of its own follies, Pakistan has put itself in a position which is not enviable. Not only has it been facing attacks from enemies but also friends, Muslim countries. Two of them, Iran and Afghanistan, have come out in the open against it. The first such country was Iran. What is worse, it is also facing attack from forces within the country. In short, it is facing all sorts of problems. Of the two, Afghanistan has

clashed with Pakistan at the border as well. To be fair to Afghanistan, it was Pakistan which had made the attack first. It was on Monday last. In response, the Afghanistan had fired on Pakistani posts along the border.

In such a situation, anything can happen. It can lead to bigger clashes, worse of all, war. Folfaced three full-scale wars - in 1948, 1965 and 1971.

It has been defeated in all. Still, it intruded into Kargil in 1999. There too it had suffered badly. The problem with Pakistan is that it does not learn a lesson from the past. After India, it is having a fight Iran and Afghanistan.

The country has a bad relationship with another neighbour, Bangladesh, as well. It was a part of Pakistan before war in 1971. Both are sworn enemies. The relationship became bad to worse after Bangladesh hanged Qasim Ali, alleged mastermind of 1971 massacres and leader of Jamaat-e-Islam.

Bangladesh has made it clear that it will not tolerate interference by Pakistan in its internal matters. To understand the current situation between the two countries, one has to dig up his-

A K Fazal-ur-Haq, the popular

tory.



Nizamabad, was apprehended on March 15, 2024, linked to the liquor scam. Affiliated with the Bharat Rashtra Samithi party, Kavitha has denounced her arrest as unlawful, citing it as a glaring instance of power mis-Opposition figures assert that

Kavitha's arrests is aimed at significantly impeding their respective parties' campaigns for the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. This argument gains traction, as it's evident that Keiriwal's ability to campaign, if not entirely compromised, would be severely limited from incarceration, whereas his presence on the campaign trail could have wielded substantial influ-

ence if he were free.



By: Prabhat Patnaik

he other day the chief executive officer of NITI Aayog made a fantastic claim, that the poverty ratio in India had fallen below 5 per cent according to the 2022-23 consumption expenditure survey data. His claim was based on the fact that the per capita consumption expenditures of only 5 per cent of the population in 2022-23 fell below the poverty lines for that year for rural and urban India, arrived at by updating, on the basis of consumer price indices, the poverty-lines suggested for 2011-12 by a committee headed by Suresh Tendulkar.

Now, the Tendulkar committee had not based its 2011-12 poverty lines on any objective criteria, such as minimum calorie intake, or the price of a minimum necessary basket of goods; it had simply made some arbitrary decisions regarding what these lines should be. Besides, the con-

ployment today is higher than before the pandemic. The claim that the poverty ratio has come down compared to 2011-12, whence it would follow that it has come down even more sharply compared to 2017-18, precisely in a period when the economy was racked by a pandemic, defies credibility. Of course it would be argued that calorie intake cannot be an indicator of poverty. But this argument is based on a misunderstanding. The point is not that calorie intake alone should count for estimating poverty; the point is that whenever there is an increase in real income, it necessarily also shows itself in terms of an increase in calorie intake. In other words, the proposition that there could be a reduction in calorie intake even when a person becomes better off, at levels of intake that one finds in countries like ours, is wholly untenable; if it occurs then that must be treated

pied the 111th position among the 125 countries for whom the GHI is calculated. The government of India has objected to the index stating that it is a flawed measure. But no matter whether one agrees with the variables that are included in the hunger index and the weights given to these variables, a country that witnesses a significant increase in the per capita real income even for the bottom deciles of the population, which alone can explain the claimed sharp decline in poverty, should certainly be seeing an improvement in its position in the nunger index.But that is not all.

On most of the variables included in the computation of the hunger index, namely population undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting, and child mortality, the situation in 2023 was distinctly worse than in 2008; the only exception was in undernourishment where it was roughly the as a worsening of real income. same but distinctly worse than in 2000. True, those who prepare the hunger index warn that scores across time should not be compared, strictly speaking, because of changes in data source; nonetheless, the fact that there has been a worsening in all indicators that go into the hunger index compared to 2008 or 2000 (for undernourishment) clearly suggests that the claimed improvement in the real incomes of the bottom deciles of the population (which alone would explain the sharp decline in poverty) has no basis. The third bit of indirect evidence comes from the so-called "zero food children", that is children between 6 and 23 months who have not had any food other than breast milk in the previous 24 hours. "Zero food" of course gives the impression that such children have had no food at all which is incorrect; what it actually means is that they have had no supplementary food apart from breast milk in the previous 24 hours. And there were6.7 million such children in India in 2023. The fact that this is a deprivation is undeniable; and even though the reason may not always have to do with the absence of purchasing power with the familv, it certainly is linked to parents having to work long hours for their livelihood, which is just another manifestation of poverty. The percentage of such children within the total number of children in the relevant age-group comes to 19.3 per cent in India, the third highest among all the countries of the world, after Guinea (21.8 per cent) and Mali (20.5 per cent). This again suggests that the claimed increase in real income in bottom deciles which is supposed to have banished poverty from the land is completely unfounded. No matter what spin the government gives on poverty the world knows that India is a desperately poor country. A recent UN report has found that as much as 74 per cent of India's population cannot afford the minimum nutritious diet that is prescribed by the FAO for South Asia: this is a shocking fact. (**IPA Service**)

balancing act in a changing world

hutan, nestled between the regional giants of India and China, faces a nuanced diplomatic challenge as it navigates between divergent interests and evolving geopolitical landscapes. Since the 1949 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with India. Bhutan has strategically positioned itself as a buffer against Chinese expansionism, a role both Bhutan and India have carefully nurtured. India, recognizing Bhutan's significance in safeguarding its northeastern borders, has reciprocated by addressing Bhutan's security concerns and fostering economic integration.

However, China's overtures towards Bhutan, characterized by a mix of incentives and coercion, signify Beijing's ambition

sway Bhutan away from India's influence Despite these attempts, Bhutan re

mains steadfast in its allegiance to India, driven by concerns over territorial integrity and historical ties.

Internally, Bhutan's alignment with India intensified following China's annexation of Tibet and territorial aggression in the late 1950s. This allegiance, reinforced by mutual concerns over Beijing's assertiveness and the preservation of territorial integrity, underscores Bhutan's strategic partnership with India.

Yet, Bhutan's foreign policy faces new challenges amidst global changes. The transition to democracy, the rise of social media, and economic aspirations among Bhutanese youth complicate the traditional narrative. While Bhutan's leaders prioritize territorial integrity and sovereignty, the younger generation exhibits a more global outlook, with reduced apprehension towards China and a desire for economic opportunities beyond

India As Bhutan grapples with these internal and external dynamics. its foreign policy reflects a delicate balancing act. The ongoing territorial disputes with China, spanning 24 rounds of negotiations, highlight Bhutan's defensive posture. However, China's increasing assertiveness, including violations of agreements and economic incentives viewed with suspicion, test Bhutan's resolve.

Amidst these challenges, Bhutan's cooperation with India remains crucial. While maintaining close military and strategic ties, Bhutan refrains from explicit alignment, abiding by the concept of common security. Yet, internal pressures to promote economic growth and re-



diversifying foreign relations beyond India.

India, in turn, must navigate Bhutan's strategic silence and diversify economic engagements to sustain bilateral relations. As Bhutan seeks to address territorial disputes and accelerate economic growth, India's response will shape the future trajectory of Bhutan's foreign policy.

In conclusion, Bhutan's diplomatic balancing act reflects the complex interplay of historical alliances, evolving geopolitical landscapes, and internal aspirations. As Bhutan strives to safesovereignty, foster guard regional stability, and pursue economic growth, the delicate dance between India and China holds significant implications for the region's geopolitical dynamics. (The author can be reached at shashankadas0007@gmail.com)

sumer price indices being used for updating these Tendulkar poverty lines have serious underestimation biases as they do not take adequate account of the privatisation of essential services like education and healthcare.

Moreover the consumption expenditure survey for 2022-23, has been conducted on different lines from all earlier surveys, because of which its results are not comparable with earlier results, and its biases are not vet fully known because the complete data have not been released. The 5 per cent mentioned by the NITI Aayog therefore has little sanctity. What is more, it flies in the face of amass of other information that we have about the economy, because of which the conclusion is inescapable that this figure is being pushed by the government for propaganda purposes before the elections. Let us see what this other information is.

The findings of the 2017-18 consumption expenditure survey were utterly abysmal, so abysmal that they were withdrawn by the government. But from whatever was leaked out, it could be calculated that the proportion of persons in urban India who could not access 2100 calories per person

per day, the original Planning Commission benchmark for urban poverty, was as high as 60 per cent, which was higher than 57 per cent for 1993-94 though lower than 65 per cent for 2011-12; for rural India however the proportion that could not access 2200 calories per person per day, the corresponding benchmark, was well over 80 per cent, compared to 58 per cent in 1993-94 and 68 per cent in 2011-12. Taking the two together, clearly the true poverty ratio in 2017-18 was significantly higher than in 2011-12 given the much higher weight of rural India in the total. (These figures are from Utsa Patnaik's forthcoming book). Poverty in short had increased significantly between 2011-12 and 2017-18. After 2017-18 we have had a pandemic, and a lockdown induced by it, from which the economy is

just recovering, though unem-

supports this proposition that there is a clear positive relationship between per capita income and per capita cereal consumption (which also means per capita calorie intake).

And empirical evidence fully

Since there are no data on incomes whatsoever, and since consumption expenditure data which are available can be meaningfully compared across time only by using some price index, but all such indices are unreliable, taking calorie intake as a proxy for real income and comparing such intake over time makes perfect sense. And if we do so then until 2017-18 the poverty ratio in the country had increased, and after that we simply do not know. If the government makes available the calorie intake information contained in the consumption survey for 2022-23, which it has not yet done, then we shall know for sure what has been happening to poverty.Until then however we can only fall back on stray indirect evidence and virtually all such evidence points not just to the existence of substantial poverty in the country but even to an increase rather than a decrease in the poverty ratio.

The first such indirect evidence is from the National Family Health Survey. The NFHS-5, covering 2019-21 shows that the incidence of anaemia among women in the age-group 15-49 has increased compared to NFHS-4 that covered 2015-16, with 57 percent being anaemic on the later date compared to 53 per cent earlier. The number of states where more than half the women were anaemic was 25 in 2019-21 compared to 21 in 2015-16.It is often argued that the incidence of anaemia among Indian women is overstated because the same criteria which are used in the west are also applied in India, which is incorrect. But this argument, even if one accepts it for a particular point of time, does not apply to comparisons over time; the worsening in this respect over time therefore is quite indubitable.

The second bit of indirect evidence comes from the global hunger index. In 2023 India occu-

lowing the Pakistani attacks, the Taliban had warned Pakistan of serious consequences.

Simultaneously, it had told the newly formed government in Pakistan that "irresponsible actions" would jeopardize the relations between the two neighbouring countries.

Allegations and counter-allegations have been made by the two with regard to the recent terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Pakistan alleges that the attacks were carried out from Afghan soil. The Taliban has denied, calling it propaganda.

As far as Iran is concerned, it had attacked the hideouts of terrorists in Pakistan on January, 16. Iran had carried out attacks targeting the bases of terrorist group, Jaish Al-Adl, in Pakistan. Iran's state media was quoted as saying that missiles and drones were used in the attack. Iran had targeted two bases of

Balochi terrorist group Jaish-al-Adl in Pakistan with missiles. Iran had also fired mortars on Pakistan's western border eight years ago.

The two countries have 900 kilometers long border. On the other hand there is 2400-kmlong international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has been named as Durand Line.

In fact, relations between Pakistan and Afghanista started deteriorating after Pakistan started sending back Afghans from its country last year. Hundreds of Afghans are returning to their country every day from Pakistan

Many Afghans say that they have been in Pakistan for decades. Several Afghanistanis have also acquired citizenship of Pakistan. Despite all this they

are facing harassment. The big question here is, why are the Islamic countries angry with Pakistan which calls itself the "leader of the Islamic world?" The simple answer is that it is in Pakistan's DNA. It is in its nature to fight with neighbours. India has also faced troubles because of it. It has

Muslim League leader, known as Shere-e-Bengal, proposed a separate nation at the Muslim League conference at Minto Park (now Jinnah Park) in Lahore on March 23, 1940. There was a large participation of representatives of United Bengal at that conference.

All of them were demanding a separate nation for the Muslims of India. After seven years, Pakistan was formed in 1947 to disintegrate after about 25 years. What was East Pakistan at one time has come to be known as Bangladesh the two which were once part of one country, have now become thirsty for each other's blood.

I have been myself an eyewitness to the massacre in Bangaladesh. I was working as a war correspondent in India and had this assignment for about one and a half years at that time. Those responsible for massacre in Bangladesh are being punished by the court on the basis of evidences.

Pakistan has a different view. has a contempt for Bangladeshis and nothing more, nothing less. They are being shown in poor light in Pakistani serials and dramas. Pakistan society makes fun of Bangladeshi Muslims.

However, it claims to stand for Muslims all over the world. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has also been complaining against Pakistan. Her main complaint is that instead of blaming itself Pakistan has often blamed Bangladesh for 1971 war and action against the perpetrators of the crime.

Presently, there is an outcry in Pakistan over rising prices, especially because of Ramadan. The army and greedy persons have ruined Pakistan. It has itself to blame for most of the unsavoury developments.

The main reason is it has got the priorities wrong. Instead of education it is spending more on defence. The result is there for everyone to see. (The writer is a senior editor, columnist and former MP)



icy, prompting considerations of

MISCELLANEOUS

THE HILLS TIMES 5

Access to water is a crisis for the powerless

changing climate.

education.

per day.

district - a Muslim-domi-

nated area – received less

than five litres of water

per person per day, falling

significantly short of the

UN-mandated minimum

litres of water per person

Erratic rainfall and neg-

ligence of the state Water

Supply and Sewerage

Board both produced this

failure. This water is often

Where state supply of

water is erratic, lower-

caste villagers are forced

saline and unfit to drink.

By: Prakash Kashwan

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

lmost 100 years ago around 3,000 people from the Dalit community dared to drink from a public water tank in Mahad, Maharashtra, that was forbidden to them.

The Mahad Satyagraha referred to as India's first civil rights movement - was led by noted lawyer. social reformer, and Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar who then took on the 'upper' caste people of the area who claimed the tank was private property. The ensuing legal battle lasted a decade. Dr Ambedkar won the case.

The fight for access to water resources, however, continues today across India.

The right to safe drinking water is recognised as a fundamental human right. In India, it is customary to greet a guest or passerby with a glass of water, though the way water is offered depends on your caste.

importantly, More though, how water is allocated and distributed comes down to a question of policy and governance, where it tends to follow the contours of sociallydetermined inequalities.

A 2018 NITI Aayog report states that India ranks 120 of 122 countries in the Global Water Quality Index. India has the largest reported groundwater usage in the world.

Social inequities in India and other parts of South Asia directly impact access to water, how it is allocated, distributed and consumed

Climate change, along with oppressive and dis-

supply in an already ex-ploitative relationship. criminatory social practices, makes a bad situation worse

Marginalised groups are also becomes a determidisproportionately nant of communities' relaaffected by lack of attention tionships with water. to the social dimensions of water policy, its use and water poverty in India. The responsibility of allocation that often perpetuate practices of unmeeting families' water touchability needs in rural India falls and gender-based discriminasquarely on them, exacer-

tion. Who owns land and resources becomes critical to who can access water. This question is determined along lines of caste, class and gender inequalities

Community movements working towards equitable access to water have been stymied by a lack of support by gram panchayats (village-level governance institutions) or by private investments which benefit wealthier farming communities with bigger landholdings

North Gujarat, a semiarid region in western that relies on India groundwater use, faces water scarcity due to the proliferation of tubewells. Groundwater access be-

comes the preserve of the upper castes through the building of tubewells on private land, a form of access based on casteist social structures that limit land ownership among the lower castes

This socio-economic to depend on tubewells status determines access to owned by 'upper' castes water and who uses more or walk great distances to of the groundwater comaccess public water supmons

About 71% of Dalit set-Tubewells have resulted in the drying out of shaltlements in villages have low wells, giving rise to no access to public water "water lords" who domisupplies. Discriminatory consumption of water practices in Guwater. This, in turn, forces jarat's villages disproporpoor farmers to rely furtionately

precarity and vulnerability Alongside caste, gender to sexual abuse by 'upper caste men

This becomes more alarming because ground-Women are the face of water levels in South Asia are heavily impacted by salinity in coastal areas. Gujarat has the longest coastline in India and water from wells is already undrinkable like bated by dropping water levels and the perils of a some villages in Jafrabad district where women are Women are responsible forced to walk miles to acfor collecting, storing, and cess safe drinking water. managing the water needs Climate change inflicts of households for cooking, disproportionate burdens bathing, washing, leaving on marginalised groups.

them with little time to Discriminatory practices participate in the labour in access to water continue force. It also prevents through concerns of caste young girls from pursuing pollution – a belief among the upper castes that their A 2019 study found that 'purity' will be defiled if villages affected by water they come into contact scarcity in Gujarat's Bhuj with lower-caste people.

Efforts to decentralise water governance in Gujarat continue to meet resistance from 'upper' caste people for whom equity of access disrupts their monopoly over irriwater requirement of 20 gation and agricultural uses. Maintaining control of water access gives upper castes an advantage over lower-caste people.

Such injustices remain marginal considerations for intervention by NGOs and state governments. The problem of access to public resources based on social difference thus needs to be addressed urgently by policy-makers. Governments have

failed to acknowledge social discrimination in the provision of basic amenities to marginalised communities which will grow increasingly vulnerable as climate change intensifies long-standing social dis-

to them.

jecting them to extreme source use. Improving public accountability in governance requires an understanding of the effects of the numerous disadvantages faced by marginalised communi-

> With India's summer approaching and water stress becoming a reality, poor and marginalised women bear the brunt of heat stress in the collection of water, a fact unrecognised by policymakers and insufficiently addressed in India's Heat Action Plans.

Water scarcity and water insecurity are created through socio-economic and political inequalities. Socially just climate adaptation for water management can go hand-in-hand with an acknowledgement of the social power vested in local elites.

Generating institutional change from both above and below requires addressing the various barriers that prevent achieving human rights for the most vulnerable communities. It also demands political mobilisation towards overcoming social barriers in the same vein as the Mahad Satyagraha of 1927.

Giving everyone a say in decision-making and removing unequal administrative measures that prevent fair access to water — such as making tubewells a public good with parameters of equal access — can be pursued. Legal provisions towards supporting water equality need to be made enforceable. Otherwise the idea of water justice remains a mere tokenism.

Why Bangkok was a hotbed of Indian revolutionaries during the First World War By: Ajay Kamalakaran

Tine months after Britain entered the First World War, its vast intelligence network received inputs of the possibility of mass mutinies by Indian servicemen. According to these intercepts, Germany and the Ghadar Party had hatched an insidious plot whereby armed revolutionaries would enter India from Siam (now Thailand) and encourage Indian army personnel to revolt and seize power from the colonial authorities

Several members of the Ghadar Party had already arrived in Siam. British intelligence was warned. The next step in their plan was to sneak into Burma, which was then a province of British India.

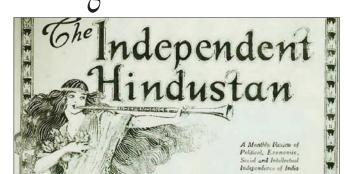
Alarmed by these reports, the British conducted a casteand ethnicity-wise headcount of non-European personnel in the Burma Military Police. It turned out the force had a total of 15,864 Indian officers and soldiers armed with Martini-Henry rifles. Of these, 3,942 were Sikhs, 2,644 were Punjabi Muslims and 1,212 were so-called Hindustani Muhammedans.

> The military authorities probed if there was any discontent among these groups, considered by them to be the most likely to mutiny. The answer was ambivalent.

"No one can foretell with certainty the feelings and actions of Indians of the martial classes serving far away from their homes at the present time," Charles Cleveland, director of criminal intelligence, wrote in a note to the Burma Government in June 1915. "The great majority of the Sikhs in the Far East, not in the army, have been very badly corrupted by the doctrines of the Ghadar Party; and the sporadic instances we have seen of similar corruption among He also noted that "natural products can have

Sikhs of the Indian Army in India are certainly not conducive to over confidence."

Cleveland felt this "corrupsonal choice — if people like the sound of the tion" had reached the Indian word 'natural' as a euphemism for 'gentle' or Muslim personnel in the 5th 'safe' and want to pay for the product, that is up Light Infantry in Singapore as well. He sounded a word of "Poison ivy is all-natural," said Dr. Goldstein, caution. "One can easily under-"but you would not rub it all over your skin." She stand the joy and confidence also explained that all-natural products can still with which our enemies' agents have "serious environmental impacts." Imporin Siam would work at a scheme for raising trouble in Burma," he said, adding that while there was no cause for mmediate anxietv in Burma.



services as well as the police. In 1915, the Commissioner of the Siamese Police was a Briton by the name of EW Trotter, who had previously served as an inspector in Burma

The British authorities in India told Trotter to keep an eye on the activities of "disaffected Indians" in Siam and gave him a grant of 500 ticals (about Rs 580) for the job. They were, however, still not sure of the extent of danger that the Ghadar revolutionaries in Bangkok posed to the colonial

regime in India. To get clarity, David Petrie, a policeman who lived in India for 26 years and would later go on to become the director-general of the spy agency MI5, was sent to Bangkok. In 1915, it took 14 days to reach the Thai capital from Calcutta by steamer as the ship would go via Singapore and halt in the

city for three days. 'According to my idea, Mr Petrie's mission is to pick up information as to the Indian situation in the F.M.S. [Federated Malay States], Siam and Dutch Indies, which the Government of India is frequently called on to diagnose and advice upon; to see the local British officials and help them in any way possible with Indian information; and in particular to see what can be done about the request made by our Minister at Bangkok for a secret agent to

keep him informed of local Indian plots," Cleveland wrote in a note. Petrie was also told to approach the Singapore authorities and ask them to temporarily detain the Ghadar

members who were to be deported from Bangkok. The British wanted to question the revolutionaries within their territorial jurisdiction before repatriating them to Calcutta.

Bangkok operations A tough task awaited the British in Bangkok.

"The establishment of hadat

Bangkok plot to launch a revolution from Burma were Darisi Chenchaiah and Sukumar Chatterji. The duo had met as students at the University of Berkeley in the US, where both of them were members of the Nalanda Club. Cleveland had information

about both revolutionaries and wanted Trotter to keep an eye on their movements. He wrote in a note that Chatterjee was "given to boasting of his connection with revolutionary conspiracy in India" during his time as a student in Berkeley. About Chenchaiah, he wrote, "Used to practise rifle shooting in the hills behind Berkeley with other student members of the party."

From Cleveland's notes it is obvious that the British were monitoring the activities of Chenchaiah for over a year. "Attended the dinner given at 1936. Bonita Avenue, Berkeley, on 16th January 1914, under the auspices of the Yugantar Ashram in honour of Ram Chand Peshawari taking over the editorial responsibilities of the Ghadar newspaper, and also at the meeting convened by the Hindustan Association on 21st February 1914 at which Tarak Nath Das gave a seditious lecture entitled 'The Regeneration of India," he wrote

Apart from Chenchaiah and Chatterji, another important Ghadar leader who arrived from the US was Jodh Singh. Living under the alias Hassan Zade and by cutting his hair, he was able to prevent the British from gathering any credible information about him. They could not even know he was a Sikh.

Three other men from China joined the revolutionaries in Siam with the backing of German businessmen in Shanghai - Shib Dayal, Balwant Singh and Thakur Singh.

After being briefed by David Petrie, Commissioner Trotter began to put immense pressure on the Bangkok police. In Au gust 1915, five of the leading Indian revolutionaries were arrested One of them went by the name of SD Kapoor but the British believed it was Dyal. The others were Thakur Singh, Zade, Chenchaiah and Chatter-"I venture to think that our officials at Bangkok have done a most excellent piece of work in procuring the arrest of these dangerous revolutionaries, and probably the Foreign Department will say something to this effect in answering their telegrams," Cleveland wrote in a note. "We shall be very glad to receive all these arrested Indians under custody from Siam via Singapore." The men were tried and sentenced in India. Not much is known about most of them after they served their sentence. The government website commemorating 75 years of Indian independence makes a brief mention of Chenchaiah: it says he spent eight out of his 36 years in public life in prison and that he was a well-known writer. After these arrests, the British Legation in Siam asked the local authorities to intercept issues of the Ghadar newspaper that found its way to Bangkok via other Asian ports. British agents continued to try and dismantle the Ghadar network in other parts of Siam, such as in Chiang Mai, relying on intelligence that German factories and businesses were continuing to provide financial and logistical assistance to Indian revolutionaries. Once Siam entered the First World War in September 1917 on the side of the Allied powers, the finances for Indian revolutionaries in the country dried up, while the Germans living there were interned and deported to India. Diaspora groups, however, continued to support the Indian freedom struggle in many other ways until India attained independence in 1947. (Courtesy:

tantly, according to Dr. Phillips, natural ingredients, especially in high quantities, can trigger

10. Wounds need air to heal

affect ther on them for water lower-caste women, subparities in wealth and re- (Courtesy: The Wire)

Medical myths: All about skin who do not, this is not due to cleanliness. He also ditional benefit over cheaper, refined products."

adds an interesting note about a rather modern

phone' acne, where people get acne spots on the

side of their face that presses against their mobile

phones. It is thought to be related to a combina-

"In the past year, there has been a rise in 'cell

By: Tim Newman

nate

ur skin plays multiple roles. For instance, it helps keep our insides inside and blocks the path of pathogens. It also helps us stay warm when it is cold and cool down when it is hot. Importantly, the skin provides a home for sensory neurons, which let us sense the world around us.

Despite the wide range of physiological functions this organ plays, it is arguably most famous for being the largest organ of the body, although some scientists disagree. The skin is also our most visible organ. And because it is so visible, skin has also become the target organ for a wide range of products, many of which promise clearer, healthier, more youthful skin.

tion of short-wavelength visible light from smartphones, sweat, dust, heat, friction, and bacteria on the surface of the phones. Flares may be prevented by regularly cleaning phone screens." 5. Chocolate causes acne

dermatological condition:

Simply put, Prof. Williams writes that this is "another myth." For the reasons outlined above, this has no basis in fact.

6. All sun exposure is bad for the skin allergies and irritate the skin. "All sun exposure causes some degree of pho-

1. Expensive skin cream can keep your skin 'young' forever

The skin cream industry is huge. For instance, in the United States in 2020, "prestige skin care" sales totaled \$1.1 billion from April to June. And that marked an 18% drop from 2019 sales.

However, despite their lucrative popularity and regardless of cost, no skin creams can protect skin against aging indefinitely. "This is a marketing ploy and is certainly not true," said Dr. Phillips. As Prof. Williams explained to Medical News

Today, "Simple moisturizers can achieve quite a lot. Creams containing topical retinoids can improve photoaging effects." He dryly notes, however, that he is "not aware of any cream that keeps skin young forever."

Dr. Goldstein informed us that "90% of skin aging is from photodamage. So all of the creams that state they can prevent wrinkles and aging are missing the mark." In agreement, Dr. Phillips wrote: "The most important intervention in slowing down the process is using a sunscreen with broadband UV cover." Notably, he also notes that "these needn't be expensive."

2. Drinking water keeps your skin hydrated

This is a half-truth. According to Prof. Williams, drinking water only keeps your skin hydrated "in the sense that water keeps the body hydrated and skin is the largest organ of the body.'

It is only at certain, rare times when this might be the case. "There is no evidence that drinking water directly impacts your skin unless in extremes, such as heat stroke or severe dehydration," said Dr. Goldstein.

3. Antibacterial soap is best for the skin

This is a myth. The skin's natural microbiome is vital for maintaining healthy skin. "Using antibacterial soaps can upset that natural balance," explained Prof. Williams. "They can also be harsher on the skin than pH neutral soaps."

"Removing both the good and bad bacteria on a regular basis is not always the best idea," added Dr. Goldstein. "unless you are in a situation where this is important, for instance, if you work in healthcare, food handling, or of course, during a pandemic.'

4. Having a dirty face causes acne

In Prof. Williams's professional opinion, this is "nonsense." Unless, he explained, the dirt "is contamination with oily substances such as hair pomade, oily make-up, or occupational oil exposure."

"Acne is caused by a complex interaction of hormones and the skin, not dirt. People will use scrubs, toners, and many products to clean their faces to address or prevent acne, but often this can just result in irritation. The pores are plugged by keratin, a protein produced by the skin cells, not dirt." – Dr. Goldstein

Diving into the details, Dr. Phillips told MNT that, although the skin's microbiome may differ in people who have acne compared with those

todamage," explained Prof. Williams, "but some sun exposure is essential for boosting vitamin D synthesis," especially for people in regions that are further from the equator and those with darker skin who receive lower sun exposure.

Similarly, Dr. Philips told MNT that "The sun is a major source of vitamin D, which is important for bone health and may play a role in the immune system. We also know that UV exposure from the sun has anti-inflammatory properties that can be beneficial in some skin conditions. such as psoriasis, eczema, and pruritus.'

However, he also explained that "[t]hese benefits must be counterbalanced against the risk of skin cancer, which we know in white populations is directly related to UV exposure." He recommends using high-factor sunscreen, wearing appropriate clothing, and staying in the shade between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. on sunny days.

As someone who focuses on skin cancer surgery, Dr. Goldstein took a firmer line:

"There is a skin cancer epidemic with at least five million new cancers treated each year in the U.S. The majority of these cancers are due to sun exposure.

Although vitamin D is essential, she explained that we can also derive it from foods and supplements,"1 in 5 Americans will get skin cancer, and melanoma is set to be the most common cancer among men, and only second to breast cancer in women by 2040."

7. A spray tan protects against UV rays

A spray tan will not protect against sun damage unless it contains added UV protectants. "Just spraying color onto the skin does not protect against UV rays," said Prof. Williams.

Dr. Phillips reiterates the message: "They do not provide any protection against UV radiation and should not be used as an alternative to sunscreen.

8. Vitamin E helps get rid of scars

Over the years, many scientists have investigated whether vitamin E reduces the appearance of scars, but our experts were unanimous in their responses. To date, Prof Williams says, the evidence is "unconvincing."

Dr. Goldstein agreed that "current data do not support the use of vitamin E to help get rid of scars.

Dr. Phillips goes one step further, writing that 'in some instances, it can be detrimental."

However, as an alternative approach, he told us that "silicone gel products have been consistently shown to prevent scar overgrowth and improve the appearance of mature scars.

9. 'Natural' products are better for the skin Products that are marketed as "natural" are popular among consumers. However, the term "natural" says nothing about a product's effectiveness or safety.

"Arsenic is natural after all," Prof. Williams reminded us. "Many natural products, such as moisturizers, are very expensive and have no ad-

This is a long-standing and pervasive myth. but, as Prof. Williams explained succinctly, it is "not true — wounds heal better with a clean, moist environment."

just as many side effects as well-tested medical

products — they may not be as effective, and they

may suffer from stability issues. But it is a per-

In agreement, Dr. Goldstein said, "Research has shown that cells migrate better to initiate and continue healing in a moist environment in the early stages of healing in particular. Keeping a wound covered with Aquaphor or similar ointment and a bandage is ideal [if there is no infection]."

She also noted that, toward the end of the healing process, once new connective tissue and microscopic blood vessels have formed, air can aid the healing process.

11. Exfoliating daily is essential for healthy skin

Skin exfoliation is the process of removing dead cells from the surface of the skin. This can be achieved by using an exfoliation tool, a granular surface, or chemicals.

Although popular, exfoliation is not essential. As Prof. Williams explained to MNT, "the skin feels smoother after exfoliating, but repeated exfoliation is damaging the natural skin barrier."

12. Black salve is a safe treatment for skin cancer

Over recent years, so-called black salve, a derivative of the bloodroot plant, has entered the marketplace. Unscrupulous companies market it as a way to treat skin cancer. In reality, black salve can be dangerous.

Prof. Williams told us that "sanguinarine — the active ingredient in black salve - can cause severe tissue necrosis and may not kill all skin cancer cells. Always see a dermatologist to get suspected skin cancer diagnosed properly first and discuss treatment options if then confirmed." He also sent us a link to a recent article discussing black salve. The authors explain that "[c]linical data concerning the efficacy of bloodroot primarily come from case studies with unfavorable outcomes involving patients who self-treated with bloodroot-containing black salves."

Dr. Goldstein mirrors these findings, explaining that "I have seen sad outcomes of people trying this treatment." She also reiterated that black alve damages healthy tissue without effectively curing cancer.

Dr. Phillips confirms the negative consequences of black salve: "The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has listed black salve as a fake cancer cure, and it should be avoided!"

Although we have only scratched the surface of skin myths, we hope that this goes some way in redressing the balance between myths and truth in dermatology.

Because the cosmetics industry is a veritable behemoth, trained dermatologists struggle to match their penetration into the public psyche. This, unfortunately, makes skin-based myths difficult to shake. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

the British Minister in Siam needed to take action against Indian revolutionaries there.

Siam, and its capital in particular, were seen as a trouble spot for the British, whose main worry at the time was the war in Europe.

"I had some talk today with Brigadier General Haughton who has just returned from Singapore," Alfred Hamilton Grant, a civil servant, wrote in a note to Cleveland. "He says that, from information which he received in Singapore, he has reason to believe that Bangkok is a hotbed of Indian sedition, and is fast becoming the headquarters of the revolutionary movement in the Far East.

Another concern for the British was that members of the Ghadar Party, which was formed by Indians in the United States in 1913, would smuggle in arms from the porous Siam-Burma border and recruit civilians for a revolution.

The authorities in Burma received intelligence that 500 Sikhs from the US and the Far East had set up a camp near Raheng in the Thai province of Tak. "Attempts are being made at passing pamphlets of a very seditious nature into Burma and at Myawadi one parcel has been seized," the general commanding officer of the Burma Division wrote in a note to the chief of staff in Shimla.

Ghadar threat

When the First World War broke out, Siam, which hosted a sizable community of expatriates from Britain, France, Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, chose to stay neutral. At the same time. though, both King Rama VI, who studied law and history at Oxford, and Foreign Minister Devawongse Varoprakar were positively disposed towards the British.

It was not hard to see the goodwill between the nations. British officers were helping modernise the Siamese civil

branches in Siam was divided into three geographical sections," Azharudin Mohamed Dali wrote in a 2002 paper titled The Ghadar Movement in Southeast Asia, 1914-'18. The movement's main centres were Chiang Mai in the north, Phuket in the south and Bangkok, "which acted as the

focal point." Azharudin wrote. In 1915, Bangkok was an ideal place for an Indian revolutionary. There were no restrictions to enter or live in Siam, and because of this policy, members of several Indian communities had set up shop in the country.

In this melting pot, an Indian revolutionary coming in from the US could easily blend into his community, making it difficult for British officers to track him despite the control they ex-

ercised over the local police. "Bangkok began receiving large numbers of Ghadarwallah," Azharudin wrote. "For example, in August 1915, 12 revolutionaries arrived from America; some of them were labelled 'most dangerous to the Indian Government,' They were starting to organise a force of between 600 to 700 Indians and hoped to recruit

many more in Siam for the purpose of creating a rebellion in India.' Indian businessmen in

Bangkok were more than happy to help the revolutionaries in whatever way they could. The British knew this too.

"The Bangkok branch provided all the necessary information to the Ghadarwallah who arrived in Siam," Azharudin wrote. "Indar Singh provided food, Nihal Singh provided accommodation, and Gopal Das and Surti were responsible for the transportation of provisions to a jungle plantation near Muang Sang on the Siam-Burma frontier, where the Ghaddarwallah were to have established themselves before continuing their jour-

Main leaders

The two main leaders of the

Scroll.in)

WORLD

6 THE HILLS TIMES

'Heroes' scrambled to stop traffic before Baltimore bridge collapsed; construction crew feared dead

BALTIMORE, March 27: It was the middle of the night when a dispatcher's 12-second warning crackled over the radio: A massive cargo ship had lost its steering capabilities and was heading toward the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Within about 90 seconds, police officers responded that they had managed to stop vehicle traffic over the Baltimore bridge in both directions. One said he was about to drive onto the bridge to alert a construction crew.

But it was too late. Powerless and laden with huge containers, the vessel smashed into a support pillar.

"The whole bridge just fell

down," a frantic officer said. "Start. start whoever, everybody ... the whole bridge just collapsed."

When the shipping vessel Dali slammed into the pillar around 1:30 a.m. Tuesday, it caused a long span of the bridge, a key cog in the region's transportation infrastructure, to crumple into the Patapsco River. The loss of the bridge is expected to snarl commuter traffic and disrupt a vital shipping port.

At least eight people went into the water. Two survived but the other six, part of a construction crew that had been filling potholes on the bridge, were missing and A search for presumed dead. their bodies was to resume on

Wednesday morning. Among the missing were people from Guatemala, Honduras and

Mexico, according to diplomats from those countries. The Honduran man was identified as Maynor Yassir Suazo Sandova. Federal and state officials said the crash appeared to be an accident. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating, and

ship traffic entering and leaving the Port of Baltimore was suspended indefinitely.Capt. Michael Burns Jr. of the Maritime Center for Responsible Energy said bringing a ship into or out of ports in restricted waters with limited room to maneuver is "one of the most technically challenging and demanding things water after davbreak

that we do. "So there really is few things that are scarier than a loss of power in restricted waters," he said. And when a ship loses propulsion and steering, "then it's really at the mercy of the wind and the current."

Video showed the ship moving at what Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said was about 9 mph (15 kph) toward the 1.6-mile (2.6-kilometre) bridge. Traffic was still moving across the span, and some vehicles appeared to escape with only seconds to spare. The crash caused the span to break and fall into the water within seconds, and jagged remnants were left jutting up from the

Police said there is no evidence

that anyone went into the water other than the workers, though they had not discounted the possibility.

A senior executive at the company that employed the crew, Brawner Builders, said they were working in the middle of the bridge when it fell.

"This was so completely unforeseen," said Jeffrey Pritzker, the company's executive vice president. "We don't know what else to say. We take such great pride in safety, and we have cones and signs and lights and barriers and flaggers.

Jesus Campos, who has worked

on the bridge for Brawner Builders and knows members of the crew, said he was told they were on a break and some were sitting in their trucks

"I know that a month ago, I was there, and I know what it feels like when the trailers pass," Campos said. "Imagine knowing that is falling. It is so hard. One would not know what to do."

Father Ako Walker, a Catholic priest at Sacred Heart of Jesus, said outside a vigil that he spent time with the families of the missing workers as they waited for news of their loved ones. "You can see the pain etched on

their faces," Walker said.

Rescuers pulled two people out of the water. One person was treated at a hospital and discharged hours later. The crash happened long before the busy morning commute on the bridge, which was used by 12 million vehicles last year. From 1960 to 2015, there were 35 major bridge collapses worldwide due to ship or barge collisions, according to the World Association for Waterborne Transport Infrastructure.

Tuesday's collapse is sure to create a logistical headache along the East Coast for months, if not longer, shutting down shipping traffic at the Port of Baltimore, a major hub. (AP)

der, and would not deprive hetero-

"For this law, we would like to

them

return rights to the

(LGBTQ+ group).

We are not giving

These are the

fundamental

rights that this

group of peo-

ple...has lost,'

Lawmakers,

however, did not

approve inclusion of

he said.

the word "parent" in ad-

dition to "father and mother"

in the law, which activists said

would limit the rights of some

LGBTQ+ couples to form a family

and raise children. Thailand has a

reputation for acceptance and in-

clusivity but has struggled for

decades to pass a marriage equality

law. The new government led by

Pheu Thai, which took office last

year, has made marriage equality

one of its main goals. (AP)

rights.

sexual couples of any rights.

Nearly 240 Hezbollah fighters and about 40 civilians have died in Lebanon 7 Lebanese and an Israeli killed in an exchange of fire along the Lebanon-Israel border

HEBBARIYE, March 27: An Israeli airstrike on a paramedics center linked to a Lebanese Sunni Muslim group in south Lebanon killed seven of its members early on Wednesday and triggered a rocket attack from Lebanon that killed one person in northern Israel, officials said.

The strike on the village of Hebbariye came after a day of airstrikes and rocket attacks between Israel's military and Lebanon's Hezbollah group along the Lebanon-Israel border, raising concerns of further escalation along the frontier that has been active for the past five months of the Israel-Hamas war.

The airstrike after midnight on Tuesday hit an office of the Islamic Emergency and Relief Corps, according to the Lebanese



Ambulance Association. It was one of the deadliest single attacks since violence erupted along the border.

The paramedics association listed the names of seven volunteers who were killed in the strike. It said the strike was "a flagrant violation of humanitarian work." Hebbariye resident Ali Noured-

dine told The Associated Press that the seven dead were pulled out from the rubble before sunrise Wednesday The Israeli military said it

struck a military building in Hebbariye and killed a member of Lebanon's Sunni Muslim al-Jamaa al-Islamiya, or the Islamic Group, and several other mili-

tants. It said the man was involved in attacks against Israel. Hours later, Hezbollah said it

retaliated against the airstrike by firing dozens of rockets Wednesday morning on the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona and a military base there.

Rescue services in Israel said that a 25 year-old man was killed when a direct hit sparked a fire in an industrial park in Kiryat Shmona. Footage from the scene showed thick black smoke pouring out of a building.

Another person was lightly injured. Around 30 rockets were launched from Lebanon toward northern Israel, according to the Israeli military.

Nada Khleif was in her small bakery in Hebbariyeh when the strike heavily damaged her busi-

"Exchanged views on enhancing

(people-to-people) linkages.

ness and a nearby apartment, where two of her relatives were unharmed.

"The bakery was my only means of living. It is gone now, she said.

Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group began launching rockets toward Israel one day after Hamasled militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7.

The near-daily violence has mostly been confined to the area along the Lebanon-Israel border, and international mediators are scrambling to prevent an all-out war between Hezbollah and Israel.

The fighting has killed nine civilians and 11 soldiers in Israel. Nearly 240 Hezbollah fighters and about 40 civilians have died in Lebanon. (AP)

Dutch leader visiting Beijing for talks on Ukraine, Gaza and restrictions on high-tech exports

BEIJING, March 27: Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is meeting with Chinese leaders on Wednesday for talks that are expected to include the wars in Ukraine and Gaza and Dutch restrictions on the export of semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China

The Netherlands imposed export licensing requirements in 2023 on the sale of machinery that can make advanced processor chips. The move came after the United States blocked Chinese access to advanced chips and the equipment to make them, citing security concerns, and urged its allies to

to legalise same-sex marriage Asia, after Taiwan and Nepal. BANGKOK, March 27: Lawmakers in Thailand's lower house Danuphorn Punnakanta, of Parliament overwhelmingly apspokesperson of the governing proved a marriage equality bill on Pheu Thai party and president of a Wednesday that would make the committee overseeing the marriage equality bill, said in Parliament that country the first in Southeast Asia to legalise equal rights for marriage the amendment is for "everyone in partners of any gender. Thailand" regardless of their gen-

Lawmakers in Thailand

overwhelmingly approve a bill

The bill passed its final reading with the approval of 400 of the 415 members of the House of Repre-

sentatives who were in attendance, with 10 voting against it, abstaining two and three not voting. bill The

> amends the Civil and Commercial Code to the change words "men and women" and "husband and wife" to "individuals" and "marriage partners.

It would open up access to full legal, financial and medical rights for LGBTQ+ couples.

The bill now goes to the Senate, which rarely rejects any legislation that passes the lower house, and then to the king for royal endorsement. This would make Thailand the first country in Southeast Asia to pass such a law and the third in

France and Brazil presidents meet, announce a USD 1.1 bn investment plan for the Amazon

SAO PAULO, March 27: The Brazilian and the French presidents have announced a plan to invest 1 billion euros (USD 1.1 billion) in the Amazon, including parts of the rainforest in neighbouring French Guiana.

The two countries' governments said in a joint statement the money will be spread over the next four years to protect the rainforest. It will be a collaboration of state-run Brazilian banks and France's investment agency. Private resources will also be welcomed, Brazil and France said.

Ukrainian navy says a 3rd of Russian warships in the Black Sea have been destroyed or disabled

KYIV, March 27: Ukraine has sunk or disabled a third of all Russian warships in the Black Sea in just over two years of war, the navy spokesman said Tuesday, a heavy blow to Moscow's military capability.

Ukraine's Navy spokesman Dmytro Pletenchuk told The Associated Press that the latest strike on Saturday night hit the Russian amphibious landing ship Kostiantyn Olshansky that was resting in dock in Sevastopol in Russia-occupied Crimea. The ship was part of the Ukrainian navy before Russia captured it while annexing the Black Sea peninsula in 2014.

Pletenchuk has previously announced that two other landing ships of the same type, Azov and Yamal, also were damaged in Saturday's strike along with the Ivan Khurs intelligence ship. He told the AP that the weekend attack, which was launched with Ukraine-built Neptune missiles, also hit Sevastopol port facilities and an oil depot.

Russian authorities reported a massive Ukrainian attack on Sevastopol over the weekend but didn't acknowledge any

Jaishankar calls on Malaysian Prime Minister, praises his vision for stronger bilateral ties

hankar said in a post on X.

ternal Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday called on Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and appreciated his vision for stronger bilateral ties, asserting that it would help craft a more "ambitious agenda" for the India-Malaysia relationship.

the third and last leg of his three-nation tour to Singapore, the Philippines and Malaysia.

@anwaribrahim of Malaysia. Conveyed the warm greetings of PM

KUALA LUMPUR, March 27: Ex-

collaboration in political, economic, defence, digital, startups, consular and p2p Shared perspectives on the region, Indo-Pacific, West Asia and Ukraine," he said.

Jaishankar is in Kuala Lumpur on Jaishankar said that he looks forward to further strengthening engagements as the two countries near the completion of a decade of Enhanced Strategic "Honour to call on Prime Minister Partnership

The ministers also discussed the ex-

damage to the fleet.

Pletenchuk said that with the latest attack, a third of all warships that Russian had in the Black Sea before the war have been destroyed or disabled. At the same time, he acknowledged that just two of about a dozen of Russian missile carrying warships have been sunk and pledged that Ukraine will continue the strikes.

"Our ultimate goal is complete absence of military ships of the so-called Russian Federation in the Azov and Black Sea regions," Pletenchuk told the AP. Successful Ukrainian drone and missile strikes have provided a major morale boost for Kyiv at a time when its undermanned and under-gunned forces are facing Russian attacks along the more than 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line.

Challenging Russia's naval superiority also has helped create more favorable conditions for Ukrainian grain exports and other shipments from the country's Black Sea ports.

Moscow officials have kept mum on most of Ukrainian claims, but previous navy losses have been confirmed by Russian military bloggers and media who have harshly criticized the military brass for its slow and sloppy response to the threat

Earlier this month, Russian media reported that the navy chief. Adm. Nikolai Yevmenov, had been fired and replaced with Adm. Alexander Moisevey, the commander of Russia's Northern Fleet. The Kremlin hasn't yet announced the reshuffle, but last week Moiseyev was presented as the new acting navy chief during a ceremony at a Russian naval base. (AP)

Jaishankar said in a post on X. Praising the Malaysian prime minister's vision for a stronger bi-

@narendramodi

lateral relation ship, he said, "His vision for stronger India-Malaysia ties, both in traditional and new-age

areas, will help us craft a more ambitious agenda for the relationship.

"Benefitted from his guidance and insights on regional developments," he added. Earlier, Jaishankar met his Malaysian counterpart Mohamad bin Haii Hasan. The two foreign ministers held a "productive and frank discussion, including exchanging views on the multifaceted dimensions of Malaysia-India bilateral affairs as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest," the Malaysian Min-

istry of Foreign Affairs said in an official statement. "Delighted to meet FM @tokmatn9 to begin my visit to Malaysia," Jaismission Meeting of Malaysia and India on a mutuagreeable ally date. This was the

change of high-

level visits and the

nvening of the

first meeting between Jaishankar and Hasan since the latter took office in December 2023, the statement said.

Jaishankar is also scheduled to meet Minister of Digital Gobind Singh Deo, the foreign ministry here said.

His visit aims to strengthen cooperation between India and Malaysia and enhance understanding of shared challenges and opportunities, it said.

Malaysia and India share a longstanding and substantive relationship bound by robust economic partnerships and close people-to-people ties.

In 2023, India was Malaysia's 12th largest global trading partner, with total trade amounting to RM 77.76 billion (USD 16.53 billion), the statement said. (PTI)

follow suit. Rutte and Trade Minister 7th Joint Com-Geoffrey van Leeuwen were to meet with China's top leader Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang, a Dutch government release said.

> Dutch company ASML is the world's only producer of machines that use extreme ultraviolet lithography to make advanced semiconductors. In 2023, China became ASML's secondlargest market, accounting for 29 per cent of its revenue as Chinese companies bought up equipment before the licensing requirement took effect.

Beijing has repeatedly accused the US of trying to hold back China's economic development by restricting access to technology. In response, Xi has launched a campaign to develop home-grown chips and other high-tech products.

"China always opposes the US overstretching the concept of national security and making various excuses to coerce other countries into imposing a technological blockade against China," Foreign Ministry spokesper-

French President Emmanuel Macron and his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva are meeting this week to revive the relationship between the countries after years of frictions with former President Jair Bolsonaro. deepen cooperation to protect the rainforest and boost trade.

Macron started his three-day visit to Brazil in the Amazon city of Belem, where he met his long-time ally Lula. The French president then took a boat to the Combu island to meet with Indigenous leaders.

Both Macron and Lula saw a protest by Greenpeace Brazil with banners that read "No oil in the Amazon." Brazil's government has contemplated allowing the tapping of oil in a region close to the Para state, where Belem lies. Lula said during a speech that Macron's visit is part of a global effort to beef up rainforest protections.

We want to convince those who have already deforested that they need to contribute in an important way to countries that still have their forests to keep them standing," Lula said in a speech next to the French president.

Macron's office prior said to the trip that a potential European trade deal with the South American bloc Mercosur won't be on the agenda.

The French president is an opponent of such an agreement as long as South American producers don't respect the same environment and health standards as Europeans, after farmers raised concerns during protests across France and Europe

The French president decorated Indigenous leader Raoni Metuktire with the prestigious Legion of Honor medal for efforts at conserving the rainfor-

"You were in Europe and I promised to come here to your forest and be with your people in this forest that is coveted," Macron told the Indigenous leader, according to French radio RFI. "President Lula and I have a common son Wang Wenbin said in January. (AP) cause for one of our friends in this land that belongs to you." (AP)

Taiwan commissions 2 new navy ships as safeguards against rising threat from China

TAIPEI, March 27: Taiwan has commissioned two new navy ships as a safeguard against the rising threat from China, which has been ratcheting up its naval and air force missions around the island that it claims as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

The pair of Tuo Chiang class corvettes completes the first order of six of the domestically produced catamarans with stealth capabilities. The ships are relatively small, capable of carrying just 41 sailors and officers, but are fast and highly maneuverable and carry a range of missiles and deck guns aimed at countering larger Chinese vessels and rocketry.

Outgoing President Tsai Ing-wen oversaw the commissioning on Tuesday at the northern port of Suao, emphasizing her push to revitalize Taiwan's defense industries, alongside extensive arms purchases and support from key



ally the United States. Tsai has also fast-tracked the production of trainer iets and the island's first homebuilt submarines. sometimes pushing budgets for such purchases through the legislature against resistance from representatives of the opposition Nationalist Party, which favors eventual unification with China. Ma Ying-jeou, the last president

from the Nationalists, also known as the KMT, is reportedly planning signs of losing steam.

a visit to China next month that could include a meeting with Communist Party leader Xi Jinping.

Taiwan was colonized by China in the 1600s but later taken over by Japan, before reverting to the Republic of China at the end of World War II. The sides then split again amid the Chinese Civil War in 1949. Xi has been building his military with an eye to consolidating China's territorial claims

throughout the Pacific, the South China Sea and along the contested high-mountain border with India. China boasts the world's largest

standing military and biggest navy with three aircraft carriers but has not fought in a major conflict since its brief 1979 invasion of Vietnam. Since then, its military budget has ballooned to the world's second largest behind the U.S., alongside a huge expansion of its economy, which is now showing

Most recently, frictions between patrol vessels from the sides near Taiwan-controlled islands just off the Chinese coast have renewed concerns about a conflict that could draw in the U.S., which is legally bound to ensure Taiwan can defend

itself and considers all threats to the island as matters of "grave concern. While vastly outgunned, Tai-

wan's military has been bolstered by new weaponry and an extension of the universal period of national service for men from four months to one year. Its air force, navy and missile corps also respond to neardaily incursions by Chinese ships and planes.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry says it is on alert for a Chinese sneak attack, possibly targeting Tsai or Vice President William Lai, who will take over the top office in May. Both are despised as separatists by Beijing. (AP)

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LONDON, March 27: The British

Museum went to court on Tuesday against a former curator alleged to have stolen hundreds of artifacts from its collections and offered them for sale online.

The museum is suing Peter Higgs, who was fired in July 2023 after more than 1,800 items were discovered to be missing. Lawyers for the museum say Higgs "abused his position of trust" to steal ancient gems, gold jewelry and other pieces from storerooms over the course of a decade.

High Court judge Heather Williams ordered Higgs to list or return any items in his possession within four weeks. She also ordered the disclosure of his eBay and Pay-Pal records. The museum says it has recovered 356 of the missing items so far, and hopes to get more back.

"The items that have been stolen from the museum are of cultural and historical significance," museum lawyer Daniel Burgess said in writ-

ten legal arguments.

Burgess said the defendant tried to "cover his tracks" by using fake names, creating false documents, manipulating the museum's records and selling artifacts at less than their

British Museum is suing a former curator it

says stole 1,800 items and tried to sell them

Higgs, who worked in the museum's Greece and Rome depart-

ment for more than decades. allegations the and intends to dispute the museum's

claim. He did not attend Tuesday's hearing due to poor lawyers said.

A separate police investigation into the case is ongoing, and Higgs has not been charged with a crime. Museum director Hartwig Fischer

resigned after the loss of the items

was revealed in August, apologizing for failing to take seriously enough a warning from an art historian that artifacts from its collection were being sold on eBay.

Chairman of trustees George Osborne has acknowledged that the reputation of the 265-year-old institution has been damaged by the



They come to see a collection that ranges from Egyptian mummies and ancient Greek statues to Viking hoards, scrolls bearing 12th-century Chinese poetry and masks created by the Indigenous peoples of Canada. (AP)



NORTHEAST

months of Sisodia's arrest if the

government had information on

INDIA bloc, the BJP is sure about

its imminent defeat in Delhi as

well as Punjab. Now they want to

"We protest against the arrest

just before the elections. Standing

by our allegation on corruption and

against failed investigation, we

still protest against Kejriwal's ar-

rest because it is oppressing the op-

eled several 'personal corruption'

charges against PM Modi. accus-

ing him of abusing and utilising the

entire system of power and extort-

ing money to suppress democracy

and oppress his opponents to stay

He alleged that Modi was per-

sonally involved in corruption

such as electoral bonds, PM Care

Raising the issues of price rise

The Congress leader also lev-

torture Kejriwal," he said.

position," Antony said.

in power.

Fund etc.

"After the AAP joined the

corruption charges against him.

BJP, Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), Tipra Motha leaders extend their support to Deb during filing of nomination **BJP's Biplab Kumar Deb files** nomination from Tripura West LS seat

AGARTALA, March 27: Former Tripura chief minister and BJP leader Biplab Kumar Deb on Wednesday filed nomination papers as a party candidate from the Tripura West Lok Sabha seat.

Accompanied by chief minister Manik Saha and Haryana CM Nayab Saini, Deb submitted his nomination to the returning officer.

Former Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma were also present on the occasion

BJP nominee Dipak Majumder also submitted his nomination papers for the byelection to the Ramnagar assembly constituency.

Both BJP candidates filed their papers on the last date for filing nomination.

The nomination papers will be scrutinised on Thursday, and the last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 30.

Elections to the Tripura West Lok Sabha seat and by-poll to the Ramnagar assembly constituency will be held on April 19.



"It is a historic day for Tripura as three parties- BJP. Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) and Tipra Motha came together. They joined a rally organised to alliance after witnessing the mega rally."

mark the submission of nomination papers for the ensuing elections. I know many people will be scared of taking on the BJP-led

While addressing the rally, the Tripura chief minister also said the party is "100 per cent sure of winning two Lok Sabha seats in Tripura and one assembly constituency with a huge margin".

"Under the leadership of Manik Saha, the BJP will win both Lok Sabha constituencies and gift two seats to Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Saini said.

He urged people to make sure that the BJP can cross the 400-seat mark in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Debbarma, who joined the rally along with his leaders and supporters, asserted that the Prime Minister's victory in the parliamentary elections is "inevitable".

"I am not a BJP leader, but I am sure Modi ji is returning (to power). Besides, Biplab Kumar Deb and Kriti Singh Debbarma, who is contesting from Tripura East Lok Sabha seat on a BJP ticket will also emerge victorious in the elections. I appeal to the people to take the right path for the development of the state," he added. (PTI)



BJP govt torturing Oppn leaders for fear of losing power: Cong

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 27: All India Congress Committee (AICC) national spokesperson and media coordinatior for Northeast, Mathew Antony has accused the BJP government at the Centre of arresting and torturing the opposition leaders for fear of losing power after

the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday. Antony said that after former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren was forced to resign from his post with ED arrest, Delhi chief minister Arvind

Kejriwal had been arrested. He said it was the Congress that first raised the corruption allegation against Kejriwal in 2022.

"We still stand by that allegation and want a fair investigation." he

said Antony, however, said the Congress is against Kejriwal's arrest ust after the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections and the AAP's decision to join the INDIA bloc.

Pointing out that former Delhi and Manipur, Antony appealed to deputy chief minister Monish Sisothe people of Nagaland whether dia was arrested on February 26, they wanted the same government 2023, he asked why the ED or CBI at the Centre who wanted the tribal did not arrest Kejriwal within

people to fight with each other.





Congress, BJP nominees file nominations in Manipur

Heroin worth ₹43.4 lakh seized, 1 arrested in Mizoram

AIZWAL, March 27: Heroin worth ₹ 43.4 lakh has been seized and one person arrested in Mizoram's Champhai district, Assam Rifles said in a statement.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of Assam Rifles and Mizoram Excise and Narcotics Department conducted a raid on Zote village close to the India-Myanmar border and seized 62 gm of heroin on March 25.

One person was also arrested in connection with the seizure, it said.

The seized heroin and the accused person have been handed over to the excise and narcotics department for further legal proceedings, the statement added. (PTI)

IMPHAL, March 27: One BJP nominee and two Congress candidates on Wednesday filed their nominations to contest the two Lok Sabha seats of Manipur.

State education minister Thounaojam Basantakumar Singh contesting for Inner Manipur constituency submitted his nomination papers to the deputy commissioner of Imphal West district.

The BJP had dropped sitting party MP from the same constituency, RK Ranjan who is also the serving Union minister of state for external affairs and education from the fray.

Sources said that the name of the candidate for the Inner Lok Sabha seat was finalized after a series of meetings between a team of central observers of the party and state party leaders.

Congress candidates Angomcha Bimol Akoijam, a Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) professor, and ex-MLA Alfred Kanngam Arthur also filed their nominations for Inner and Outer Manipur constituencies respectively.

4 file nominations

of former Union minister Thounaojam Chaoba Singh, was accompanied by chief minister N Biren Singh and state BJP presi-

Thounaojam, an ex-IPS officer and the son



DIMAPUR, March 27: Ruling National Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) candidate Chumben Murry and Congress candidate Supongmeren Jamir and his substitute candidate Nagavito have filed their nomination papers to contest the April 19 election for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland at the returning officer's office in Kohima.

Altogether four candidates have iled their nomina

chief minister Yan-



ple's Movement (ZPM) fielded Richard Vanlalhmangaiha, while the main opposition Mizo National Front nominated its Rajya Sabha MP member K Vanlalvena.

Congress fielded retired former home secretary Lalbiakzama, BJP nominated its state president Vanlalhmuaka and the People's Con-(RDA), Ricky AJ Syngkon from ference fielded Rita Malsawmi. the Voice of the People Party Former BJP leader Lalhriatrenga (VPP) and independent Prof Chhangte is also contesting as an Lakhon Kma. independent.

in Meghalaya SHILLONG. March 27: Four candidates including sitting Congress MP, Vincent H Pala have

filed their nomination papers from the Shillong parliamentary seat for the upcoming elections to the 18th Lok Sabha to be held on April 19. The other candidates include Robertjune Kharjahrin from the

ional Democratic Alliance

Earlier, NPP candidate and cab-

inet minister Ampareen Lyngdoh

and independent candidate Peter

Shallam have filed their nomina-

tions during the third day of filing

dent A Sharda Devi. Speaking to the media the BJP nominee said, "Our party will win with a thumping majority and Narendra Modi will lead the country for the third time.

Urging all to support him, Thounaojam said, "The issues of the state will be solved with help from the Centre."

In the Outer Manipur seat, the saffron party has extended its support to ally Naga People's Front nominee Kachui Timothy Zimik, a retired Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer. Zimik had already filed his nominations for

the constituency. The nomination papers will be scrutinised on

Thursday. Elections will be held in two phases. Inner Manipur and parts of Outer Manipur will go to polls on April 19. Voting in the rest of Outer Manipur will be held on April 26. (PTI)

He is pitted against Congress nominee Angomcha Bimol Akoijam in the Inner Manipur

AIZWAL, March 27: Six candidates have filed nominations for the lone Lok Sabha constituency in Mizoram, election officials said.

Polling for the constituency would take place in the first phase on April 19, and the process for filing nominations closed on Wednesday, they said.

The state's ruling Zoram Peo-

Two file nominations in Manipur

6 candidates in fray for

Mizoram's lone Lok Sabha seat

IMPHAL, March 27: Two candidates have filed their nomination papers from the two Lok Sabha seats in Manipur where polling will be held during the first and second phases of the elections.

The candidates, Kachui Timothy Zimik and Rajkumar Somendro Singh alias Kaiku filed their nominations on Monday 25.

Zimik, a resident of Sanakeithel village of Ukhrul district, filed his nomination as Naga People's Front (NPF) candidate for contesting the elections from Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency at the office of the returning officer (RO) of the constituency at Thoubal DC office.

Raikumar Somendro Singh alias Kaiku, a resident of Thangmeiband Maisnam Leikai of Imphal West district filed his nomination paper to the RO of Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency as a nominee of Manipur People's Party (MPP).

Till date, only these two candidates have filed their nomination papers for the two Lok Sabha seats from Manipur. The last date for making nominations for both the seats was Wednesday.

Even as only two days left until the last date of filing nomination papers, the ruling BJP is yet to announce the party's nominee from the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency even though the party sources said that it will field a candidate.

A party source said that the name of the party nominee is likely to be announced late this evening.

More than 8.60 lakh people are eligible to vote in the state. Among them are 4.41 lakh women voters and 36,214 first-time voters, officials said. There are 1,276 polling stations across the state, they said. Around 1,500 personnel of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) along with 3,000 state police personnel will be deployed for

of nominations. Altogether six candidates will contest from the Shillong parliamentary constituency after the BJP has decided to extend full support to the NPP. the polls, they added. (PTI)

The last date of filing of nomination was Wednesday. Scrutiny of nominations will be

held on Thursday and the last date of withdrawal of candidatures will be on March 30. (NNN)



thungo Patton, adviser Hekani Jakhalu Kense and other leaders accompanied the NDPP candidate to file his nomination papers while the Congress candidate and his substitute candidate were accompanied by party workers during the nomination filing process.

Scrutiny of the submitted papers will take place on Thursday followed by withdrawal of candidature by March 30.

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 27: Army personnel have recovered a huge cache of arms, ammunition, explosives and war-like stores at Kumbi in Bishnupur district and Maphou in Imphal East district of Manipur. Based on prior information, Bishnupur Police and Manipur Commandos launched a joint operation in Kumbi and recovered one .303, one 9mm carbine, one country-made pistol, four hand grenades and other war-like stores. In another instance, a search peration was conducted in Maphou in Imphal East district.

sites and theperiphery of villages along hill bases and abandoned structures, a substantial cache of arms and explosives was successfully unearthed including one improvised mortar, one Pompie mortar, two grenades and ammunition. These seizures underscore the

effectiveness of coordinated efforts by security forces in combating illicit activities and ensuring the safety and security of the region. The recovered items have been handed over to the Manipur police. The operation exhibits synergy and unwavering commit-During the meticulously executed ment of both the central and state search, which encompassed thorsecurity forces towards maintainough inspections of abandoned ing peace and stability in the state.

44 year old Sokela Tayang lone voter in Malogam, which is inhabited by few families

Polling officials to trek 39 km for lone voter in Arunachal village

ITANAGAR, March 27: On April 18, a team of polling officials will trek nearly 40 kilometres on foot through treacherous terrain to set up a voting booth in a remote corner of Arunachal Pradesh near the China border -- all for the sake of Malogam village's lone voter, a 44-year-old woman. Sokela Tayang.

"It is not always about numbers, but it is to ensure that every citizen gets his or her voice heard. Sokela Tayang's vote is a testament to our commitment to inclusivity and equality," said chief electoral officer Pawan Kumar Sain.

According to election officials, very few families reside in Malogam, and all but Tayang are registered voters in other polling booths. But she is not willing to shift to any other polling booth.

For Tayang to cast her vote, a polling team, including officials, security personnel and porters, will embark on the arduous journey through inhospitable hilly terrain amid unpredictable weather from Hayuliang, officials said.

The village is in the Hayuliang assembly seat and in the Arunachal East Lok Sabha constituency where the contest will be between Bosiram Siram of the Congress party



and Tapir Gao of the BJP.

In the last elections in 2019, Gao won the seat -- one of the two constituencies in Arunachal Pradesh --- garnering over 1.5 lakh votes. He defeated Lowangcha Wanglat of the Congress party who got 83,935 votes. "The journey from Hayuliang to Malogam

takes a full day on foot," Joint Chief Electoral Officer Liken Kovu told PTI. Everyone has the right to cast his or her

vote no matter how remote the location is, Koyu said.

The polling team might have to be in the booth from 7 am to 5 pm on the voting day as we don't know when Tayang would come to cast her vote," Koyu said.

Tayang doesn't live in the village and her connection to Malogam is tenuous as her daughter and son study in colleges elsewhere.

"I hardly stay in my village ... usually I come here for some work or during elections. I usually stay at Wakro in Lohit district, where I have farmlands," she said.

In the 2014 elections, the polling booth at Malogam had two voters. The other was Tayang's estranged husband Janelum Tayang, who, however, transferred his name to another booth in the constituency.

"We have been separated for the last 15 years. I don't know where he lives at present," she said.

Tayang said she would reach her home by April 18 evening to cast her vote on April 19, the first day of the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections. Assembly elections for the state will also be held simultaneously on April 19.

Of the total 2,226 polling stations in the state, 228 can be reached only by foot. Of these, 61 will require a two-day walk, while seven would need three-day trekking.

Nominations will be scrutinised on Thursday and the last date for withdrawal of nominations is March 30.

Counting of votes for assembly polls would be held on June 2, while votes polled for Lok Sabha would be counted on June 4. (PTI)

5202 / 21

The saffron party had already announced supporting the NPF candidate in the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency.

The Congress had already announced the names of the candidates for the two seats. Professor Angomcha Bimol Akoijam will be contesting the elections from Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency while Alfred Kangam Arthur from the Outer seat.

The elections to the two Lok Sabha seats in Manipur will go in two phases, on April 19 and 26. While the Inner seat is to go to poll on April 19, the polling in the Outer seat will be held twice -April 19 and April 26.

The voting in Churachandpur, Chandel and Kangpokpi districts of the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary Constituency will take place in the first phase along with the valley districts.

Of the six valley districts, Thoubal, Kakching and Jiribam districts are covered by the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency.

However, the voting in Jiribam district will take place in the second phase along with other hill districts of Pherzawl, Noney, Tamenglong, Senapati, Ukhrul, Kamjong and Tengnoupal districts.

While the last date of making nomination for candidates was Wednesday, the scrutiny will be held on Thursday and the last date of withdrawal of candidatures for both the phases is March 30. (NNN)

8 THE HILLS TIMES

NATION

Working to ensure money looted from poor in Bengal, attached by ED returned to them: PM

NEW DELHI/ KOLKATA, March 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Wednesday that he is working to ensure that nearly ₹ 3,000 crore "looted" from poor people in West Bengal and attached by the Enforcement Directorate is returned to them.

Modi made this assertion in a telephonic conversation with Amrita Roy, a member of erstwhile royalty and BJP candidate against TMC's Mahua Moitra in Krishnanagar Lok Sabha constituency, and claimed that power and not country is the priority of opposition parties.

'PM Modi told 'Rajmata' Amrita Roy that he is exploring legal options to ensure that the money looted from the poor goes back to them through whatever assets and money the ED has attached from the corrupt," a BJP leader said.

According to the details of the conversation shared by the party, the prime minister put the amount of money, which was paid by people in the state as bribe for getting jobs, at ₹ 3,000 crore

He told her to inform people about his stand and asserted that soon after coming back to power he will find a way, including making legal provisions if needed, to do so

Modi also took a swipe at the

NEW DELHI, March 27: The Aam

Aadmi Party's MP and lone Lok Sabha

member Sushil Kumar Rinku joined

the BJP on Wednesday along with party

MLA Sheetal Angural, dealing a blow

to the party already facing a crisis fol-

lowing the arrest of its leader and Delhi

Rinku, the MP from Jalandhar in

Punjab, and Angural, who was elected

to the state Assembly from Jalandhar

West, joined the BJP in the presence of

Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri and

its national general secretary Vinod

for the development of Punjab, espe-

cially Jalandhar, and accused the state's

AAP government of not helping him in

He said he was impressed by Prime

Minister Narendra Modi and Union

Home Minister Amit Shah and lauded

the Union government for its develop-

The MP said he was joining the BJP

chief minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Tawde.

development works.



chief minister Arvind Kejriwal following his arrest by the ED in a corruption case, saying those who made complaint against the AAP have now changed track to help it. He, though, did not name

anyone. "This shows that their priority is not country but power." he said, asserting that the BJP-led alliance is fighting for a corruption-free country for the bright future of the youth while all the corrupt have come together on

the other side to save each other. With Roy tracing her lineage to 18th century local king Krish-

nachandra Roy, Modi hit back at

AAP's lone Lok Sabha MP and Punjab

leader Sushil Kumar Rinku, MLA join BJP

those who have targeted the erstwhile royalty for its alleged support to the British after the BJP named her its candidate. She told Modi that her family is being called traitors and noted that Krishnachandra Roy worked

for people and joined hands with other kings to save "Sanatan Dharma".

He asked her to not take any pressure, saying that they (TMC) practice vote bank politics and will make all kinds of wild allegations. They do so to hide their sins, he said. On the one hand, they seek ev-

idence of Lord Ram's existence while on the other they cite incidents dating back to two and three centuries to defame others, he said.

"This is their double standards," Modi said, praising the king's legacy of social reforms and development and asking her to carry forward his legacy.

Expressing confidence of her win, he asked Roy to be ready with the agenda for the first 100 days for her constituency.

He also expressed confidence that West Bengal will vote for "Parivartan" (change) in the state.

The alleged corruption of the state's ruling Trinamool Congress leaders is one of the main planks of the BJP in the state, as it has highlighted the arrest of some of them, including former minister Partha Chatterjee, and recovery of large amounts of money and other assets from them to target its rivals.

"You have the challenge to save Bengal's heritage," he told her

She said people have expressed their confidence in the Modi government's work and told her that Moitra, the incumbent TMC MP from the constituency, will go to jail, drawing laughter from the prime minister. Moitra is facing probe in a cor-

ruption case for allegedly allowing a businessman to use her

BRS leader K Kavitha spends first

night at Tihar jail, served prison food

parliamentary log-in in return of bribe and other favours.

She has termed the businessman her friend and refuted the corruption charges, blaming the BJP for it.

Roy told Modi that people during her campaign have spoken about corruption and unkept promises of the state government. Later while speaking to re-

porters, Roy thanked the Prime Minister for his "encouragement". "It seems I now have a new josh (enthusiasm). His words were really very encouraging and inspiring. I will do my best to ensure the victory of the BJP from this seat," she said.

The TMC dubbed the phone calls by the Prime Minister to BJP's women's candidates as a 'well-scripted drama" ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

"It is nothing but drama on the part of the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. We would also like to hear similar telephonic conversations with the women in Manipur, and family members of the victims of Hathras in Uttar Pradesh," TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said.

The BJP had won 18 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state in 2019 in what was seen as a surge in its fortunes and it is looking to boost its tally this time round. (PTI)

PM Modi can keep trying to divert attention but youth unemployment defining issue in LS polls: Cong

NEW DELHI, March 27: The degree/diploma holders, which will Congress on Wednesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi can keep trying to "distort, distract, and divert", but youth unemployment is a defining issue for the country in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and it has a concrete plan to deal with it.

The opposition party claimed that the country is sitting on a "ticking bomb" of joblessness with the youth bearing the brunt of the Modi government's "apathy".

Citing the India Employment Report 2024 released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute of Human Development (IHD), Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge urged people to remember before voting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to provide 20 crore jobs in 10 years but "snatched more than 12 crore

jobs from the youth". "Our Youth is bearing the brunt of Modi government's pathetic apathy, as ever-rising Unemployment has destroyed their future. ILO & IHD Report conclusively says that the Unemployment problem is grim in India," he said.

"They are conservative, we are sitting on a 'ticking bomb' of joblessness!" Kharge said in a post on

"But the Modi government's Chief Economic Advisor protects the dear leader, by saying 'government can't solve all social. economic problems such as

unemployment'," he said. Kharge said the ILO report states that 83 per cent of jobless Indians are youths and only 17.5 per cent of the youth in rural areas are engaged in regular work.

"Share of people employed in industry and manufacturing has remained the same since 2012 at 26% of the total workforce. The percentage of youth involved in economic activities decreased from 42% in 2012 to 37% by 2022," he said, citing the report.

Therefore, compared to the Congress-led UPA government, fewer young people are involved in economic activities under the Modi dispensation due to an acute scarcity of obs, Kharge said.

Compared to 2012, youth unemployment has tripled under the Modi government, he claimed. "That is why the Congress has brought in 'Yuva Nyay'," he said.

Kharge listed the guarantees of the Congress under 'Yuva Nyay'. such as filling up nearly 30 lakh vacant central government posts. apprenticeship law

He also highlighted the right to

guarantee them apprenticeship with an assistance of ₹ 1 lakh per year.

"The Congress Party guarantees that we will put a full stop on paper leaks by bringing a new law and will also bring a new law for social security and working conditions in gig economy," he said.

"A Fund will be created with an amount of ₹ 5,000 Cr which will be distributed in all the districts of the country. Each district will get 10 Cr from the fund," he added.

"Before you vote, do remember ..! Modi ji promised 20 Crore Jobs in 10 Years, but snatched more than 12 crore jobs from the youth!" the Congress chief said.

In a statement, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the India Employment Report 2024 presents "some extremely concerning" facts on the country's labour market over the last 10 years of 'anvav kaal'.

Citing the report, he said there has been a "failure" to create sufficient employment.

"Each year, around 70-80 lakh youths are added to the labour force, but between 2012 and 2019, there was almost zero growth in employment - just 0.01%! In 2022, unemployment was very high among the urban youth (17.2%) as well as rural youth (10.6%)," he said.

The female unemployment rate in urban areas was extremely high at 21.6 per cent, Ramesh said.

"This report finds that the Modi government increased the percentage of low-paying informal-sector employment without social security, while formal employment decreased from 10.5% to 9.7% from 2019-22," the Congress leader said on X.

"For the first time in decades, under Modi's mismanagement, the absolute number of workers in agriculture is increasing," he said.

This goes against the very basic concept of economic modernisation, which every developed country has gone through, he added.

Nearly one in three youths with graduate degrees (29.1%) are unemployed, Ramesh said, citing the re-

He pointed out that just 20 per registered on the National Appren-

"Real wages of regular workers have declined between 2012 and 2022. Inflation has been uncontrolled and workers can now afford less than they could 10 years ago,' he claimed. (PTI)

ment initiatives. The parliamentarian had quit the Congress to join AAP last year to fight the bypoll to the Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat. He had been vocal in criticising the BJP in the Lok Sabha. Rinku was even suspended from the House for his unruly protests.

The BJP is likely to field him in the Lok Sabha polls as the party inducts a number of influential leaders of different parties in Punjab to emerge as a strong force in the state with 13 constituencies.

Three-term Congress MP Ravneet Singh Bittu from Punjab joined the BJP on Tuesday and asserted that people have made up their minds to elect Prime Minister Modi to power again. Bittu is the grandson of former Pun-

jab chief minister Beant Singh, a hero of the anti-terrorism campaign in the state who was assassinated in a terror attack while still in office. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, March 27: Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha arrested in connection with the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case spent her first night in Tihar jail and was served prison food, official sources said on Wednesday.

According to the sources from Tihar jail, she spent her first night in a cell shared by two other female inmates in jail number six, which is a dedicated women's prison.

"She ate dal and rice, which was also served to other inmates on Tuesday night, and Wednesday morning, she had tea with snacks," a jail source said. Kavitha was taken to Tihar jail on Tuesday evening after a Delhi court sent her to judicial custody till April 9 on the ED's plea that if released, the "highly influential" arrestee was likely to influence witnesses and tamper with evidence.

"Following her medical examinations, she was directly sent to her cell. Her blood pressure was slightly low during the medical checkup but later it went back to normal," the source said. Kavitha was given a mattress, slippers, clothes, a bedsheet, and a blanket as per the jail

rules, the source said, adding she was also provided with her medicines.

An official said she did not demand anything

'specific", and she will be provided with things as per the court order and the jail rules. According to the court order, she is permitted to have home-cooked food, a mattress, slippers,

clothes, a bedsheet, a blanket, books, pen and paper, and medicines. The BRS leader is also allowed to wear jewellery. However, she was not wearing any jewellery when she came to the jail, the official said.

"The timings for tea, food and watching television will be the same for her as other inmates." another officer said, adding she can access the books in the Tihar jail library, which is open for all inmates.

The 46-year-old BRS leader was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case on March 15. She was in the custody of the federal probe agency for 10 days.

The officials said around 500 women inmates are lodged in jail number six in the Tihar prison complex. (PTI)

cent of the 1,25,000 establishments ticeship Promotion Scheme portal actually offer apprenticeships.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

dept remarks on Kejriwal's arrest

NEW DELHI, March 27: India on Wednesday summoned a senior US diplomat and lodged a strong protest against Washington's remarks on the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials summoned the acting deputy chief of Mission Gloria Berbena at its office in South Block here. The meeting lasted for more than 30 minutes.

Reports had it that a US state department official had said that Washington "encouraged a fair. transparent and timely legal process for chief minister Kejriwal".

The MEA later in a statement said, "We take strong objection to the remarks of the Spokesperson of the US State Department about certain legal proceedings in India".

"In diplomacy, states are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty



and internal affairs of others. This responsibility is even more so in case of fellow democracies. It could otherwise end up setting unhealthy precedents," the statement said. India's legal processes are based

on "an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes," the MEA said in the statement while underlining that "casting aspersions on that is unwarranted"

The development comes days after India on March 23 had summoned the German deputy chief of mission here and lodged a strong protest against that country's foreign ministry's remarks on the arrest of the Delhi chief minister.

India summons US diplomat over state My husband will reveal truth in Delhi

A German Foreign Ministry spokesperson had "taken note" of Kejriwal's arrest.

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

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam'.

The case pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in formulating and executing the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22 that was later scrapped. (PTI)

excise policy case: Sunita Kejriwal



NEW DELHI, March 27: Stressing that no money was found in multiple Enforcement Directorate raids, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita has said that her husband would do a "big expose" on the alleged excise policy scam in court on Thursday.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener was arrested by the ED on March 21 in an excise policylinked money laundering case and subsequently remanded to the agency's custody till March 28.

Sunita Kejriwal, in a digital briefing on Wednesday, said her husband will reveal the details of the alleged liquor scam in court on March 28 and also present evidence. She said that when she met the Delhi CM in the ED custody, Kejriwal told her that the central agency has conducted more than 250 raids in connection with the "so-called liquor scam" in the last two years but "not a single paisa" has been found in any of the raids so far. The ED raided Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and Satyendar Jain's places but no money was found. They raided our (CM residence) place and found just Rs 73,000, she said and asked where the money was from the "so-called liquor scam.

Former deputy chief minister Sisodia and AAP's Raiva Sabha MP Singh were arrested last year in relation to the Excise Policy case, while former minister Jain was arrested in a case related to money laundering.

"Arvind has said he will do a big expose on this before the court on March 28. He will reveal the truth of this socalled liquor scam and also present evidence," Sunita said. She said Arvind Kejriwal was a brave, patriotic and genuine person and his resolve was strong despite him being a diabetic.

"My husband issued directions to Water Minister Atishi from the ED custody. The Centre had issues with it. Do they want to ruin Delhi?" Sunita Kejriwal asked, adding that her husband was upset over the issue.

She appealed to the people to pray for the Delhi CM's health and success. (PTI)

Not a seasoned politician, contesting to complete my dream for Mathura: Hema Malini

VRINDAVAN (UP), March 27: People in Mathura will be voting for a combination of Narendra Modi and Hema Malini, says the actor-dancer who has stepped into the heat and dust of campaigning for a third successive term as Lok Sabha MP and doesn't consider herself a seasoned politician just yet. Describing herself as a Krishna devotee whose dream for her constituency, which includes Vrindavan, is still incomplete, she said she asked the BJP for a ticket so she could finish the work that remains pending.

"I am not a seasoned politician but being in this position I can do the things I want. I am a devotee of Lord Krishna and I would not have contested if it was not Mathura. I am here because Lord Krishna wants me to do some seva. I did not want to jump into politics but I think it is divine intervention," the 75-year-old told PTI in an exclusive interview.

Recalling how worried she was to see conditions in the area, Malini said she was grateful to the BJP for giving her a ticket for a third time.

"I have done a lot of work and I want to do much more work for what my dream is. If half of that is done. I will be very satisfied," said the veteran actor for whom the BJP made a rare exception and bypassed its unwritten rule of a cut-off age of 75 for a ticket.

Confident of victory in the Jat dominated seat, she is certain her status as a 'Jat bahu', courtesy her

marriage to fellow Bollywood star Dharmendra Deol, a Jat Sikh, will help as will the fact that Jat leader Jayant Chaudhary is now in the NDA fold.

"Looks like a one-sided election but still we have to work hard to get the maximum num-

ber of votes. I am a Jat bahu and all the Jats love me a lot. I am a Brahmin also," she said discussing her chances from the constituency where Lord Krishna is the constant sub-text. It is home to the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple and also where Lord Krishna is believed to have grown up. Discussing her showbiz

career, the veteran of films such as "Sholay", "Seeta aur Geeta" and "Khushboo" and one of India's most high profile celebrities, said, "I tell everyone that I am three in one - a film artiste, a dancer and a politician.'

"I am still performing everywhere and people love my shows. I am very dedicated to my classical dance that I continue. If there are any good roles in films, I will also do that. All three roles are close to my heart. I am thankful to god that I was given the opportunities at the right time." Mathura goes to the polls on April 26. She said people in Mathura would vote for a "combination of both" -- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and her. "Modiji has done a lot for the whole country which will get us votes. At the same time if you ask what I have done, you can go and see."

What further boosts her confidence is that all five Assembly segments under the Mathura Lok Sabha constituency - Chhata, Mant, Goverdhan, Mathura, and Baldev (all in Mathura district) - were won by the BJP in the 2022 Vidhan Sabha elections.

The farmers' issue, Malini added, has no resonance in Mathura and has been blown out of proportion.

"I don't think any farmers in Braj kshetra are unhappy. Whenever any farmer had any issue, I was

the first one to take it forward to the concerned ministry and get it solved. It's not a big issue though they have made it look like one. I am sure the government will solve it," she said.

The Ram temple, in her view, would be a big factor this election.

"Definitely Ram temple will be one of the issues as people go to vote but it is not the only thing

Modiji has done. He fulfilled his promise to build a beautiful temple and the whole country had participated with tears in eyes. That kind of a bhav I have never seen in our country ... '

"Krishna Janmabhoomi issue is sub judice so can't comment on that . But if Krishna wants, it will be done." she added

She has evolved as an MP with experience and now bigger issues are there in her radar.

"When I became the MP here, I tried to change things but it was not sufficient. There is still a lot to be done and the main thing is the mentality of people should be changed. People criticise me when I insist on cleanliness and many say that we want a local MP because they think that they should continue living the way they have been living for last many decades.

Malini said she did not know the job in the first five years but learnt gradually.

"Earlier the issues were like 'bijli, pani, sadak' only. In the second term, my focus was on some better and bigger work. So the railway station was revamped. I also brought a beautiful world class theatre here so renowned artistes across the world can come and perform here. There should be an amalgamation of bhakti and culture which was missing here. It took a lot of time but hopefully will be ready in next two- three months," she added.

Her last two elections were dubbed 'Brajwasi vs an outsider" contests. The outsider won hand-

somely both times.

In 2014, she won against then sitting MP, Jayant Chaudhary of the RLD, with a huge margin of 3,40,725 votes. And in 2019 2,93,471 votes against Kunwar Narendra Singh of the RLD.

"When I became the MP for the first time people were attracted towards me because I am a movie star. But the notion was that I would not visit the constituency frequently but I proved it wrong. I built a house here and I am living in Vrindavan and no longer an outsider," she said.

"Saline water is a big issue here and now Ganga water will come but it will take time. Flyovers, railway connectivity, beautification of Soordas sthal, cleaning of kunds in coordination with Brij Teerth Vikas Parishad are few important works I have initiated," she replied when asked about her work in the last decade

She blamed the Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi government for the pollution in Yamuna water.

"Cleaning of Yamuna is the one issue I am going to take enormous interest in and get it done this time though it is very difficult. Right from the first term I have been trying

"The main problem is that the dirty water is coming from Delhi, so what can we do? If the Delhi government cleans up the Yamuna when it leaves Delhi, there will not be many efforts needed to clean the river. Again, Kejriwal will be answerable for this," she added. (PTI)

NATION

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Rajnath to address

Army commanders'

conference NEW DELHI, March 27: Defence minister Rajnath Singh will address a conference of army commanders here

on April 2, during which the senior

military leadership will also assess the overall security situation, the defence

ministry said in a statement on

Wednesday. The Army Commanders' Conference, the first for the year 2024

will be organised in a hybrid mode.

The conference will be held in virtual

mode on March 28 and thereafter in

physical mode from April 1-2, the

brainstorm conceptual issues, review

and assess the overall security situa-

tion". It will lay down key priorities

facilitating important policy decisions,

to chart the course for future direction,

On March 28, the conference will

be chaired by Army Chief Gen Manoj

Pande with army commanders partic-

ipating in a virtual mode from their re-

spective Command Headquarters, it

said. The deliberation will be on a crit-

ical agenda impacting the field army

The conference will also feature

talks by distinguished subject matter

experts on the evolving geopolitical

landscape and ramifications for na-

On April 1, the Army's top leader-

ship will engage in intensive brain-

storming sessions. The sessions will

be aimed at enhancing operational ef-

fectiveness, the importance of foster-

ing a culture of innovation and

adaptability and investing in training

tional security, the officials said.

and veterans' welfare.

The conference, with its wide

atement said.

officials said

Mandaviya slams Kejriwal, questions non-implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme in Delhi

'Delhi government has been urged several times to sign the MoU to avail the available financial support under the scheme but it has not yet come forward'

NEW DELHI, March 27: Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday took a swipe at chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for voicing concern over delivery of healthcare services in the city, saying had he been worried he would have implemented the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme

Mandaviya also slammed Kejriwal for not implementing the Prime Minister Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM) which focuses on strengthening capacities of health institutions across the continuum of care at all levels.

The minister's remarks come a day after Kejriwal issued directions from ED custody on ensuring that medicines and tests are available to people at all government hospitals and mohalla clinics.

Under the PM-ABHIM scheme, Delhi was allocated ₹ 2406.77 crore for 1,139 Urban Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, 11 integrated public health labs, and nine critical care blocks.

"Delhi government has been urged several times to sign the MoU to avail the available financial support under the scheme but it has not yet come forward. If you are really worried about the health of the people of Delhi just come and sign this MoU and take ₹ $2,406.\overline{77}$ crore for the people of the city," Mandaviya said.

He said the Delhi government has not implemented the Ayush-

Indian Army's battalion group takes part in exercise 'Tiger Triumph'





man Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan due to the absence of hospitals Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) due equipped with this scheme in to which around 30 lakh people of Delhi, he noted.

the national capital are deprived of "Delhi hosts migrant population the benefits of the scheme which from across the country. They are provides health cover of ₹ 5 lakh generally the beneficiaries of AB per family per year for secondary PMJAY. To cater to the need of healthcare requirement of this mi-"A total of 6,54,041 families grant population, Govt. of India (approx. 30 lakhs individuals) of has empanelled 92 hospitals. Howthe UT of Delhi are eligible under ever, government of Delhi hospithe Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY. tals are not empanelled under the Had the UT been part of AB PMscheme.

"Thus, these beneficiaries are facing challenges in availing healthcare services under the scheme. Further, the Delhi government hospitals would have also benefited from the claim amount

reimbursed for providing services to the beneficiaries from other states," Mandaviya said.

The NHA has written to non-implementing states for at least onboarding their public hospitals for the benefit of beneficiaries from other states, he said.

Mandaviya further alleged that in the last 10 years there has been no increase in the number of hospital beds in Delhi. More than half Democratic Reforms (ADR). of the beds are in the four Central government hospitals- AIIMS, RML, Safadrjung and Lady Hardinge.

Also, medical colleges and seats are not being increased.

TB cases are increasing in the national capital and effective steps are not being taken to combat the disease. The city is also lagging behind in immunisation as compared to other UTs, he alleged.

Health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj had said on Tuesday that the latest directions from Keiriwal show that despite being in custody, he always thinks about the wellbeing of the people of Delhi. "Even though he is in custody,

he is worried about the health of the people of Delhi. He has received information that medicines and free diagnostic tests are not available at many mohalla clinics and hospitals. The chief minister is pained to know about it. He has issued a direction to me to address the issues. The health department will act immediately to address the issues," Bharadwaj had said. (PTI)

45 bills passed in Lok Sabha same day they were introduced: ADR report



NEW DELHI, March 27: A total of 222 bills were passed in the 17th tings Lok Sabha and 45 of these were cleared the same day they were introduced in the House, according to an analysis by the Association for

delves into engagement levels Some of these bills are The Apacross states and political parties. propriation (Vote on Account) Bill. MPs from Maharashtra were the The Appropriation Bill, The Jammu and Kashmir Appropriation (No.2) Bill, The Central Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023 25 questions each on average.

and The Election Laws (Amendout with five of its MPs raising an A report of the analysis, which average of 410 questions each. On was conducted by ADR and Nathe other hand, two Apna Dal tional Election Watch (NEW), was (Soneylal) raised only five questions each on average. released on Tuesday. It sheds light on the performance of the 17th Lok Telugu Desam Party (TDP) mem-

According to the report, 240 bills were introduced during the tenure of the 17th Lok Sabha and 222 of them tings on average.

The report also names 10 MPs who participated actively in parliamentary proceedings, posing the highest number of questions.

BJP's Balurghat MP Sukanta Majumdar, who asked 596 questions, topped the list.

On average, an MP asked 165 The majority of the questions requestions and attended 189 of the volved around health and family 273 sittings. MPs from Chhattisgarh had the highest average attendance, the report. (PTI)

state attending 216 of the 273 sit-Conversely, Arunachal Pradesh

scope, ensures the Indian Army rehad the lowest average attendance, mains progressive, forward-looking, with two of its MPs attending only adaptive and future-ready, it said. 127 sittings. The analysis further It serves as a "pivotal forum for apex leadership of the Indian Army to

most vocal, with 49 representatives asking 315 questions each on average. In contrast, Manipur MPs asked Among parties, the NCP stood

bers attended 229 of the 273 sittings on average. AAP members had the lowest attendance with only 57 sit-

welfare, agriculture and farmers welfare, and railways, according to

and development programmes to ensure readiness for future challenges. The brainstorming session will also encompass issues concerning the welfare of service personnel aimed at enhancing the quality of life for soldiers

and their families, they said. This will be followed by a meeting of the Investment Advisory Committee of the Army Group Insurance, chaired by the Army chief, and attended by several experts in the field of financial management

The committee will deliberate on various welfare measures and schemes for the financial security of serving soldiers, veterans and their families, they added.

The senior hierarchy of the Army will also be addressed by Chief of Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari, the statement said.

On April 2, the defence minister will deliver a keynote address at the conference. He will also interact with senior military leadership during the conference. The event will also be attended by the defence secretary and other senior officials from the Min-istry of Defence. (*PTI*)

with 11 representatives from the Given political will, aerospace power can be effectively used beyond enemy lines: IAF chief

ment) Bill, 2021.

were passed.

Sabha and its members.

introduced in the House.

Additionally, 11 bills were with-

drawn and six are pending. Only

sent. According to the data, 45 bills

were passed the same day they were

one bill received the President's as-

NEW DELHI, March 27: IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari on Wednesday said "Balakot-like operations" have shown that given political will, aerospace power can be effectively used beyond enemy lines. In his address at a seminar on "Aerospace Power in Future Conflicts" here, he also said that

as nations increasingly rely on space-based assets for building strategic advantage, "militarisation and weaponisation of space has become an inevitable reality". "Through the annals of human history, the skies have often been

regarded as realms of wonder and exploration, where dreams take flight and boundaries dissolve into the vast blue expanse," he

said

a domain "fraught with competition where contest for aerial superiority" has shaped the destiny of many nations and decided the outcome of many wars, the chief of the Indian Air Force (IAF) said.

"As we navigate these uncharted skies, air power being a key component of national power, would undoubtedly play a pivotal role and also serve as a symbol of national strength, a tool for peace and cooperation," he said. The IAF chief said, "We all need to acknowledge that wars of the future will be fought differently.

Future conflicts will be characterised by a blend of simultaneous application of kinetic and non-kinetic forces, high-levels of

domain operations, a high-degree of precision, enhanced lethality, a compressed sensor-to-shooter cycle, and of course, all under ina gathering at a seminar on aerotense media scrutiny, he said. space power of the future and the

The air chief marshal also said, "Balakot-like operations have shown that given the political will, aerospace power can be effectively carried out beyond enemy lines, in a no-war, nopeace scenario, under a nuclear overhang without escalating into a full-blown conflict."

The IAF struck a Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist training camp in Pakistan's Balakot area on February 26, 2019, in response to the February 14 Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed. The Pakistan Air ous military installations in Jammu and Kashmir. In April 2019, while addressing

impact of technology, the then

IAF chief Air Chief Marshal B S

Dhanoa had said that technology

was on India's side in the Balakot

air strikes, and had asserted that

the results would have been fur-

ther tilted in the country's favour

if the Rafale jets were inducted in

in his address on Wednesday said

space has also emerged as a "crit-

ical domain for conduct of mili-

seamless communication, naviga-

tion and surveillance capabilities

operations", wherein

Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari

NEW DELHI, March 27: A battalion group of the Indian Army, comprising more than 700 personnel, is taking part in the ongoing bilateral tri-service exercise --'Tiger Triumph-24' -- between India and the US, being held on the Eastern Seaboard, sources said on Wednesday.

The exercise from March 18-31 aims at developing interoperability for conducting Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations and refining SOPs to enable rapid and smooth coordination between the forces of the two countries.

The Indian Army's contingent, comprising one battalion group is taking part in the second edition of the tri-service exercise, along with the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force, sources in the defence establishment said.

The 14-day exercise is being conducted in two phases with a harbour phase at Visakhapatnam followed by a sea phase at Kakinada.

The primary focus of the exercise is to enhance interoperability, strengthen bilateral relations, and refine capabilities in HADR and sub-conventional operations.

"The exercise has witnessed the amphibious capabilities of the Indian Army in conventional and sub-conventional scenarios. The Indian Army is represented by an integrated battalion group in the exercise, with strength of over 700 army personnel, showcasing newly procured or inducted weapons and state-of-the-art technological infusions," a defence source said.

The Indian Army contingent is represented by components from infantry, mechanised infantry, Para (Special Forces), artillery, engineers and other supporting arms apart from assorted systems of multiple drones, anti-drone equipment, and ICVs (infantry combat vehicles), the sources said.

The harbour phase included communication checks to ensure seamless coordination between the participating forces.

"Personnel from both countries

exchanged visits to each other's ships, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. These interactions not only strengthened interpersonal bonds but also facilitated the exchange of best practices and operational techniques,' the source added.

and tertiary care hospitalisation.

JAY, it would have received ₹ 47

crore per year for scheme imple-

Those who come to work from

states outside the city are not able

to get the benefit of this scheme

mentation." Mandaviva said.

The sea phase which commenced on Tuesday, involves a "strategic move to a simulated island country", setting the stage for a series of complex operations. The first major operation will be a ship-to-shore move, demonstrating the precision and coordination required for amphibious operations, they said.

This includes troops to swiftly disembark and establish a secure perimeter, showcasing their professionalism and readiness for challenging environments, the sources in the defence establishment said. Establishing an internally dis-

placed persons (IDP) camp will be a key focus of the exercise, reflecting the commitment of both forces to humanitarian assistance. The camp setup involves logistical challenges and coordination efforts, highlighting the importance of efficient planning and execution in disaster relief operations, they said

"Sub-conventional operations and joint drills will be conducted to enhance the operational capabilities of both the forces in combating asymmetric threats. These exercises will include convoy operations, IED drills, cordon and search operations, and counter-ambush drills, demonstrating the readiness of the forces to tackle diverse challenges," the source added.

The exercise also includes subject matter expert exchanges, cross-board visits of Indian and US troops, and friendly sports matches to foster camaraderie among the troops

The joint training exercise with the US Defence Forces demonstrates interoperability, joint operational capabilities and intelligence sharing between both countries, the sources said. (PTI)

Yet, beneath this calmness lies battle space transparency, multi-

Woman stripped, paraded and beaten up in MP village; four females held

INDORE, March 27: Four women were arrested for allegedly beating up, stripping and parading a 30-year-old woman over a dispute at a village in Madhya Pradesh's Indore district, police said on Wednesday.

A video of the purported incident that occurred during the Holi celebrations also surfaced on social media. "On Monday, four women forcibly pulled the victim out of her house, beat her up and humiliated her by stripping her naked in public at Bachhora village of Gautampura police station area," Superintendent of Police (Rural) Sunil Mehta said. All four accused women were later arrested, he said. Mehta visited the village on Wednesday, and said peace prevails there now. But as the victim is disturbed due to her humiliation, she has gone to her parents' home, he said.

One of the accused suspected that the victim was instigating her mother-in-law against her. She also suspected that the victim had taken her mother-in-law to Mandsaur without informing her, the police official said. The victim and the accused women belong to the Scheduled Caste (SC) category, he added. According to him, some onlookers in the village shot the video of the humiliating act and circulated it. (PTI)

Force had retaliated the next day by unsuccessfully targeting vari-would enhance survivability of modern military forces. (*PTI*)

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My son would have been saved if PG owner installed 'anti-suicide' device: NEET aspirant's father

KOTA, March 27: The father of a NEET aspirant who hanged himself at his rented accommodation here has accused negligence on the part of the PG's owner and management for not installing an "antisuicide" device on the fan.

The body of 20-year-old Mohammad Urooj, a native of Uttar Pradesh's Kannauj, was handed over to his family on Wednesday morning after conducting a postmortem, Station House Office (Vigyan Nagar) Satish Chaudhary said. A case has been registered in the matter on the complaint of Urooj's father Sabir Khan, he said. adding that further probe is under-

way to ascertain the reason behind the student's extreme step. SHO Chaudhary on Tuesday said the ceiling fan in Urooj's room was not equipped with an anti-suicide device. Khan, while talking to reporters

outside the mortuary, said that he holds the PG owner and management responsible for his son's death.

He said that his son was good at studies and it was "negligence" of the PG owner and management that the fan in Urooj's room was not equipped with an anti-suicide device.

If they had installed the device

as per norms and guidelines, Urooj could have been saved, Khan said.

An anti-suicide device is a spring-like structure which is attached to the ceiling fans. When an object weighing more than 20 kilos is hung from the fan, the spring attached to it expands, making it impossible for someone to commit suicide by this method. Simultaneously, a siren goes off.

Urooj's father said that they spoke to him on Monday night and he did not appear to be distressed. SHO Chaudhary said appropriate action will be taken against the PG owner for non-compliance with the guidelines. (PTI)

Expert teams to assess 5 high-risk glacial lakes of Uttarakhand

DEHRADUN, March 27: The Uttarakhand government has formed two teams of experts to conduct a risk assessment and survey of five glacial lakes in the state that are highly vulnerable to "outburst floods", an official said. It has been proposed that the teams will start their work on these lakes in May-June this year, Secretary Disaster Management, Uttarakhand, Ranjit Sinha said.

Of the 188 glacial lakes in Himalayan states, 13 are located in Uttarakhand, he said and added that these have been categorised according to their vulnerability to the threat of "outburst flood".

Uttarakhand in February 2021 saw a glacial lake outburst in Chamoli district that washed away a small hydel project on the Rishiganga and caused flash floods, killing many people.

Glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) is a flood resulting from the sudden and rapid release of water from a glacial lake, often caused by the breaking of a moraine dam or ice dam.

The 13 glacial lakes of Uttarakhand have been categorised as 'A', 'B' and 'C', with 'A' being highly sensitive, said Sinha, who on Tuesday participated in an online meeting with the Disaster Management Division of the Union home ministry on glacial lakes.



Chief secretaries and officials of Himalayan states, including Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, also attended the meet.

Sinha said that five of the 13 glacial lakes

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in Uttarakhand fall in category 'A', four in category 'B' -- sensitive -- and four in category 'C' -- relatively less sensitive.

Out of the five highly sensitive lakes, four are in Pithoragarh district and one in Chamoli, and of the four sensitive lakes, two are in Pithoragarh and one each in Chamoli and Tehri, he said.

Two separate teams have been formed to conduct the risk assessment of the five highly vulnerable glacial lakes in the first phase. Sinha said and added that the risk assessment work of these lakes is proposed to begin in May-June this year.

The first team consisting of experts from the National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee; the Geological Survey of India, Lucknow; the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, Dehradun; the Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority; and the Uttarakhand Landslide Mitigation and Management Centre will assess the sensitivity of two glacial lakes.

The work of the first phase will entail satellite data study and data collection, bathymetry and area survey, Sinha said.

The second team headed by C-DAC, Pune, as the lead technical agency and consisting of the Dehradun-based Indian Institute of Remote Sensing; the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology; the Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority; and the Uttarakhand Landslide Mitigation and Management Centre will study and survey the other three glacial lakes falling in the 'A' category, he said. (PTI)

ENTERTAINMENT

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I AM BACK HOME: SUNIL GROVER ON 'THE GREAT INDIAN KAPIL SHOW'

MUMBAI, March 27: Actor-comic Sunil Grover on Tuesday said he is happy to reunite with industry colleague Kapil Sharma on The Great Indian Kapil Show, six years after the duo had a fallout on a flight from Melbourne, Australia to India.Grover, who previously worked with Sharma on TV shows Comedy Nights with Kapil and The Kapil Sharma Show, quipped their controversial fight was a 'publicity stunt' to land an upcoming Netflix show. "Six years ago, when we were coming from a flight, we knew Netflix was coming to India. So, we thought we needed to do something. So, it was a publicity stunt for this launch. "It has been a delight to be part of this show. This is one place where work doesn't feel like work. I am feeling blessed again. I am back home. We laugh all day and when we go to the stage we take that laughter there," Grover told reporters here. He was speaking at the trailer launch of The Great Indian Kapil Show. The event was also attended by Sharma and other cast members Kiku Sharda, Krushna Abhishek, Archana Puran Singh, and Rajiv Thakur. Sharma said the upcoming show was another 'feather in our cap'. "We are fortunate that we are bringing this show worldwide, thanks to Netflix. I am feeling good. You (the audience) have always loved this show ... We have been making everyone laugh for so many years now... I hope you continue to shower love on us," he said. Sharda said he thoroughly enjoys the process of brainstorming with the team. "We keep exploring new things... I am the happiest when we prep for a new episode. I had fun and I don't think I ever had this much fun discussing jokes, laughing throughout the day," he added. Abhishek said the cast decided to do something new this time. "In every episode, you will get to see a lot of variety of characters, especially played by me and Kiku bhai. We have done most of the episodes together. We are going to come in different avatars in the initial five-six episodes, something like this has never happened on television," he said. (PTI)

Story of 'Crew' wouldn't have changed even if there were three heroes in the lead: Rajesh A Krishnan

NEW DELHI, March 27: Would the story of "Crew" remain the same if it featured Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan and Aamir Khan leading the upcoming

heist comedy? "I don't think so," says director Rajesh A Krishnan, who views his protagonists Tabu, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Kriti Sanon at par with the Khan trio. After his 2020 directorial debut "Lootcase", Krishnan is coming up with "Crew", which follows three air hostesses working for a fictional airline called Kohinoor. With the carrier on the verge of bankruptcy, their future seems uncertain but then they find a dead passenger smuggling gold biscuits. The director, also an advertising professional, said un-

like film's producer Rhea Kapoor, he

isn't

"married to the idea of women-centric films".

"I made 'Lootcase' and the next one which I am making may or may not have a girl in the lead. For me, with all due respect, I look at them as my Shah Rukh, Salman and Aamir.

"If it were three men, would the story have changed? I don't think so. I won't get into who is Shah Rukh, Salman and Aamir out of the three of them. I'd be happy to let you speculate," Krishnan told PTI in an interview. Had the protagonists been male, the issues might have been slightly different, he added "But, to me, the response that these characters give to their adversity, if not better, it would have been at par with what the three men would have given. It's what the men would have done," he said Would films ever be free of brackets like "women cen-

tric" or "women oriented"? The filmmaker said there are many "optics" to such labels. "If somebody had come to me with a bad script of three women, it wouldn't have appealed to me. Some people use these tags to their advan tage, some

misuse

it. And

there are others who abuse it. I am not particularly a fan of tags like women centric, male centric," he added. Krishnan, also known for the popular web series "TVF Tripling", said tags have no bearing on pulling audiences to the theatres.

"I don't think people come to theatres because a certain film is women centric or not. I want a lot of women to come and watch 'Crew' because women bring families. "I also think many men will come to the theatre, unless they didn't like the trailer or the word of mouth. I don't think they say 'Oh, this is a women-centric film, I'll not watch it'." Getting Tabu, Kapoor Khan and Sanon to star in "Crew" was a "casting coup", he said. The film also stars Diljit Dosanjh and Kapil Sharma.

"You're working with very crafty actors... Rhea has single-handedly gone out there... I don't know what kind of demons she fought - time, resources, planning, getting dates of all these people together. I loved the cast and the actors were already looking forward to doing this film, but they were looking for a director.

"My stars aligned and they really liked me. I cannot tell you what all we have learnt from someone like Diljit being on set. Kapil is like a livewire. It was an unbelievable experience. I would gawk at the actors and forget to call for a cut sometimes," he recalled.

That "Crew" would have three different people from three different micro time zones was tattooed on the script, said Krishnan.

"All three of them Tabu, Bebo (Kareena) and Kriti are like a decade apart in terms of the characters they are playing. All three of them have different sets of problems in life."

It was, however, a massive challenge to make the audience forget about the combined star power of the three actors. "They come with some kind of baggage with the number of films each one of them has done. How do I make people forget that this is not Tabu, with whom you associate very intellectual, arthouse, auteurled films, albeit she has been constantly breaking the mould by doing commercial cinema like 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2', 'Drishyam 2'... We had to figure out what personality we are going to put into each of these characters," he said.

While the story, penned by Nidhi Mehra and Mehul Suri, comes from a real environment, the incidents have been manipulated to give the audience thrill and joy. The plotline and the red colour costume of the Kohinoor airline staff mirrors that of the real-life Kingfisher Airlines, which ran into continuous losses, high debts and finally shut down within seven years of commencing operation. Its chairman Vijay Mallya subsequently fled to London to allegedly hide from creditors. Krichnan said the story of "Crew" is a collective look

Krishnan said the story of "Crew" is a collective look at several commercial carriers in India. (PTI)

Will Smith, Martin Lawrence's 'Bad Boys: Ride or Die' Shreyas Talpade's psychological thriller 'Kartam Bhugtam' to

to debut in Indian cinemas in June

MUMBAI, March 27: Will Smith and Martin Lawrence's "Bad Boys: Ride or Die" will be released in Indian theatres on June 7, Sony Pictures Entertainment India has announced.

The studio debuted the first trailer of the much-awaited buddy cop movie on its social media handles on Tuesday evening. In India, the movie will be released in English, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu in 2D and IMAX formats, Sony Pictures Entertainment

India said in a press release. "Bad Boys: Ride or Die" is the fourth chapter of Smith and Lawrence's "Bad Boys" franchise.

It sees the two actors reprising their roles

of Detective Lieutenant Michael Eugene "Mike" Lowrey and Detective Lieutenant Marcus Miles Burnett.

Filmmaker duo Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah, who made the franchise's previous entry, 2020's "Bad Boys for Life", have also directed the fourth part.

"Bad Boys" started as a 1995 Michael Bay film about two Miami cops busting drug trafficking operations. Bay had also directed the 2003 sequel"Bad Boys 2".

"Bad Boys: Ride or Die" will also feature Vanessa Hudgens, Alexander Ludwig, Paola Nuñez, Eric Dane, Ioan Gruffudd, Jacob Scipio, Melanie Liburd, Tasha Smith ??with Tiffany Haddish and Joe Pantoliano. (PTI)

release on May 17

MUMBAI, March 27: Actor Shreyas Talpade's psychological thriller movie "Kartam Bhugtam" will make its debut in theatres on May 17, the makers announced on Wednesday.

Also starring Vijay Raaz, Madhoo and Aksha Pardasany, the movie is directed by Soham P Shah, known for movies "Kaal" and "Luck".

"Kartam Bhugtam", which translates to "what goes around, comes around", is described as a cinematic experience that will keep audiences on the edge of their seats, the makers said in a press note.

Juggling the ancient universal truths of astrology and karma, the movie explores how every action has certain consequences, echoing the age-old Hindi adage 'Jaise karoge, waise bharoge' (Just as you sow, so shall you reap), they added.

"For me, 'Kartam Bhugtam' embodies a universal truth - what goes around, comes around. The mystery lies in the unpredictability of when and how karma unfolds. When I heard the title, I was immediately drawn to the film, confident that its story would be as unique and compelling as its name," Talpade said.

The film, which will be released in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam languages, is produced by Gandhar Films & Studio Pvt. Ltd. (PTI)

VIN DIESEL SHARES NEW PIC WITH DEEPIKA PADUKONE, SAYS HE HAD PROMISED HER TO VISIT INDIA

MUMBAI, March 27: Hollywood star Vin Diesel has shared a throwback photo with his "XXX: Return of Xander Cage" co-star Deepika Padukone from his maiden trip to India back in 2017. Diesel had visited India to promote the American action thriller, which marked Padukone's Hollywood debut.

In his Instagram post on Tuesday, the Hollywood star shared the unseen photo with Padukone, which sees him helping the Indian actor with her coat, while the film's director DJ Caruso is sitting in an autorickshaw.

"When I think about the amount of directors that have wanted to work with me more than once I am always just humbled. This is a pic of when I went to India as I promised Deepika I would, with the director at the time, DJ Caruso," Diesel wrote.

The 56-year-old actor revealed that Caruso, whose film credits also include "Taking Lives", "Disturbia", "Eagle Eye" and "I Am Number Four", has sent him a script for a new film.

"While we are currently juggling the order of the productions, my oldest daughter read the script that DJ sent to me, thinking that it would fall into the 'Pacifier' bracket. She criedů I asked her why she cried, and she said because the story of a brother and sister rang true for her and it was emotional.

"If I could make the film work that my daughter cried reading, my question for you would be, who would play my sister... she suggested Jennifer Lawrence. What do you think?" he posted.

This is not the first time Diesed. has shared a photo with Padukone since the release of "XXX: Return of Xander Cage". Padukone had played the role of Serena Unger in the action movie.

In June 2023, Diesel had said he was looking forward to visiting India again.

He had posted a still of him and Padukone from the movie and called the "Pathaan" star one of his "favourite people to work with".

"Spirit lead me... @deepikapadukone was one of my favourite people to work with. She brought me to India and I loved it... looking forward to my return. All love, always," Diesel had said. (PTI)



SPORTS

THE HILLS TIMES

FOCUS ON COMEBACK MAN LAHIRI AS HERO INDIAN **OPEN BEGINS THIS WEEKEND**

His Olympic hopes hanging by a thread, star Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri's ambitious effort to make the Paris Games cut by ending a nine-year-long title drought will be a fascinating subplot as the prestigious Hero Indian Open tees off here on Thursday.

A two-time Olympian, Lahiri, who will return to the national championships, finds himself in a tight spot as his ranking plummeted to 401 after he switched to Saudi-backed LIV golf, which is not recognised by the Official World Golf Rankings (OWGR), jeopardising his Paris chances.

It will be a homecoming for the Indian, who won his last prove it to myself. I don't have

GURUGRAM, March 27: title at the same event way back in 2015 and is he hoping to regain the crown at the 57th edition of the tournament at the DLF Golf and Country Club

this week. "You know the weight of, I don't know how many dozens of seconds, I've had, lays heaviest on my shoulders. So I need to get that off my back. I want to win, I am desperate to win," said Lahiri.

"The driver is I have to prove to myself that I can win again. It's been a while and nobody feels that more than I do. So even though I've played 15, 16 years, I'm still as desperate to win this week as I was 10, 15 years ago, because I have to given country.

to prove it to anybody else. "I would love to go to Paris. So I need to focus on potentially eight rounds or 12 rounds that I have between now and Paris that will get me there. I will find those events on the Asian Tour, but it depends on a lot of variables. Olympics remains an unfinished business." Lahiri is currently the third players. Indian in the official rankings behind Shubhankar Sharma (202) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (240). The cut-off date for the men's competition of Olympic (48) Games is June 17.

Only 60 golfers each in the men's and women's categories make the field in Olympics with the top 15 world-ranked players making the cut with a (IGF).

limit of four players from a Countries with

players, who are not ranked in the top 15, will get a maximum of two eligible Among Indian golfers, Sharma and Bhullar (52) are inside the top-60 Games

rankings created by Intournament Almost a third of the players ternational Golf Federation

in the field have won on the DP

enough

points

ers

over

Lahiri to make it to Paris, he World at some point, which unwill have to accumulate derlines the level of competition that he will face this week. ranking before Among leading Indian play-June 17 to get ers, DP World Tour Rookie of the Year Sharma and Bhullar -inside top 60. The 36who are frontrunners to make the Paris Cut, will be favourites year-old will have to go deep into the tournament. It has been a while that an Into compete with dian has won the national a total of championship with SSP Chawrasia claiming back-to-144 playback titles at two different from courses -- the challenging 25 Delhi Golf Course in 2016 and countries as Gary Player Course at the DLF they vie for Golf and Country Club in honours at the USD 2.25 million 2017. Since then Matt Wallace

won the trophy with the tournament being cancelled for three years from 2020 to 2022 due to COVID-19.

Ryder Cup winner Rasmus Hojgaard, who will make his debut, will be one of the favourites this week, while the other top international stars include Yannik Paul, Rafa Cabrera Bello, former Ryder Cup star Nicolas Colsaerts, Matteo Manassero and Edoardo Molinari.

Among Indians, Manu Gandas, Shourya Binu, Rashid Khan, Aman Raj, Yuvraj Sandhu, S Chikkarangappa, Karandeep Kochhar and Veer Ahlawat will be some exciting (2018), Stephen Gallacher domestic players to watch out (2019) and Marcel Siem (2023) for during the week. (PTI)

Kolo Muani scores and assists as **France fails to** impress in 3-2 win over Chile

March 27: Looking to bounce back after a loss to Germany, France labored to a 3-2 win over Chile in a friendly game that produced only a few highlights on

Tuesday. France, one of the favorites at the European Championship this summer, looked deprived of a clear attacking plan, was often shaky in defense, and lacked pre-

cision and pace in the final third. The individual brilliance of Randal Kolo Muani, who scored a goal and delivered a superb assist for Olivier Giroud, was enough to make the difference after Youssouf Fofana leveled for the hosts. Marcelino Nunez had put Chile in front and Dario Osorio pulled one back for the visitors eight minutes from time.

We needed a reaction after the Germany match," Kolo Muani said. "We needed to inject a little more life into the game, which was lacking in those two matches. Even if we didn't do everything we needed to, we managed to win that game."

France coach Didier De- Guendouzi. Back in the southern schamps had made nine changes city of Marseille, where he

MARSEILLE (FRANCE), The Norwich midfielder fired a right-footed shot past France goalkeeper Mike Maignan. France was handed another blow soon after when Marseille right-back Jonathan Clauss, playing in front his home crowd, was forced off with an unspecified injury. Chile, which will feature at the Copa America this summer, played aggressively and circulated the ball well to boss the midfield early on.

Mbappe endured a bad night and it was against the run of the play that France leveled the scoring with a shot from Fofana that took a deflection and bounced in front of the Chile goalkeeper before crossing the line in the 19th minute. France developed a more fluid game afterward and created more chances.

It took the lead when Theo Hernandez delivered a perfect cross for Kolo Muani, who jumped higher than two defenders to head the ball home in the 26th. The hosts lost another player through injury before the interval, with Eduardo Camavinga making way for Matteo

Defending champ Medvedev, No. 1 seed Alcaraz advance to Miami Open quarterfinals

MIAMI GARDENS (FLORIDA), March 27: Defending Miami Open champion Daniil Medvedev won his 350th career match to move into the quarterfinals for a fourth straight year, beating Dominik Koepfer 7-6 (5), 6-0 on Tuesday. Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz also advanced with ease in a 6-3, 6-3 win over No. 23 seed Lorenzo Musetti.

Alcaraz, who beat Musetti in less than 90 minutes and looked comfortable as ever on the court, said he's "probably" playing his best tennis since last summer. That ankle injury from last month is no longer a concern, he said. "I don't know if this is the best game that I'm playing, but without a doubt it's the best feeling," the Wimble-don champion said. "I'm feeling great on the court. I'm moving great. ... I'm not thinking about the ankle anymore on the court." Alcaraz will face No. 11 seed Grigor Dimitrov on Thursday in the quarterfinals. Dimitrov beat No. 8 seed Hubert Hurkacz 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (3) after a tiebreaker in which Hurkacz was penalized for touching the net with his foot. Tied at 2-2 in the tiebreaker, the match referee said Hurkacz's foot touched the net as he charged forward on a tinue his run at back-to-back ti-



Hurkacz slammed his racquet in protest. No. 3 seed Medvedev, after a tight opening set, pulled away to win his ninth straight match in south Florida and convictory.

tiebreaker before rallying to take the set. He said he used that momentum to get out to a fast start and finish his milestone

same, but for sure, the feeling of winning, and during the match while you're winning, is different," he said. "The feelings are different, but the desire is the "I would say before the same and that's what keeps me

going." Medvedev goes for victory No. 351 on Wednesday against Nicolas Jarry, the No. 22 seed who ousted No. 7 seed Casper Ruud 7-6 (3), 6-3. Australian Open champion

Jannik Sinner, seeded No. 2, improved to 19-1 in matches this year with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over Christopher O'Connell to reach the quarterfinals.

In the middle of the match, commentators said a spectator had fainted in the 82 degree temperatures and play was stopped. Sinner came to the sideline and passed up drinks and towels to the person.

Also advancing was Tomas Machac, who reached the quarterfinals to face Sinner with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Matteo Arnaldi.

On the women's side, No. 4 seed Elena Rybakina outlasted No. 8 seed Maria Sakkari 7-5, 6-7 (4), 6-4 in a grueling match that lasted 2 hours and 48 minutes to earn a spot in the semifinals. Two-time Grand Slam champion Victoria Azarenka defeated Yulia Putintseva 7-6 (4), 1-6, 6-3 to also make the semifinals. It was the second time that Azarenka, 34, has made it to the semifinals this season after going that far just once in 2023. She has won the Miami Open three times. (AP)

throughout, should've won first leg too: Afghan coach Westwood

GUWAHATI, March 27: Chuffed after his rag-tag team shocked India in their own backyard in a World Cup qualifying match here, Afghanistan football coach Ashley Westwood asserted that the visiting side was "always the dominant" one and should have won even the first leg game which ended in a draw.

India went down 1-2 against the resolute Afghans on Tuesday night, marking an embarrassing day for the sport in the country. The home team's solitary goal came from a penalty conversion by veteran striker Sunil Chhetri.

"We remained confident even when we were trailing. To be honest, we also could have won the earlier match. We were always the dominant side in the match," Westwood said referring to the first leg clash in Abha, Saudi Arabia which ended in a goalless draw.

"It was unlucky at 0-0 in the last game. We could have won that if we took our chances. I was not under pressure at 1-0 at half-time because I knew we would score. I never felt pressured because I always believed in the boys and I am glad we got the result," he added.

Rahmat Akbari (71') and Sharif Mukhammad (88') scored for the Afghans last night, giving the side a victory that would be cherished for a long time.

Westwood said that being the coach of Afghanistan presents several logistical challenges as players are scattered across at

least 16 countries, who have to be brought together for training

in a very short span of time. The Afghans have been a disorganised bunch as most of their players compete and stay outside the country. A few of them are also regulars in the Indian Super League here.

They were recently locked in a bitter pay dispute with their football association that led to a strike by 18 players before the World Cup qualifiers, significantly weakening the team and limiting Westwood's options.

..it's a logistical nightmare and then we had to prepare to play against India, a very good side. They were ranked 102 a few months ago, 117 now and not sure where they will be after Westwood, who has that." coached Bengaluru FC in the past, said.

India coach Igor Stimac is drawing a lot of flak for the debacle here but he has refused to step down, insisting that he is continues to be on a mission till June. Westwood said the Croat is doing his best.

"I would never analyse what they have done...I won't disrespect because he has done a fantastic job in his five years. People may criticise him for this result, but he's a good coach and has proven that in his five-year reign and improved the Indian side," he said.

The Indian football team will play the final two matches of its second round World Cup qualifving campaign against Kuwait and Qatar in June. (PTI)

We were dominant Want to remain fit to play all three formats for Windies: Joseph

NEW DELHI, March 27: He is only 24, has endured a tough life growing up and is currently raising two toddlers with a young partner.

One can't possibly blame Shamar Joseph for wanting the best of both worlds -- "play all three formats for the West Indies" and also remain fit enough to ply his trade across the globe in franchise cricket. Joseph has logged woods in

the nondescript Guyanese village of Baracara, worked as a construction labourer at building sites before spending half a day as a security guard, a secure future for his family is all that he desires.

So, like a lot of West Indies players, who crisscross the globe playing IPL one day and Big Bash the next, Joseph too wants the best of both worlds. "Look I haven't made up my

mind (if preference given)," the pace sensation, who has come in as a replacement for England pacer Mark Wood in Lucknow Super Giants team, told PTI in an interview. The hero of West Indies' recent Test win in Australia, who played through pain with a broken toe, feels that in the next few years, it his fitness will de-

termine the workload he can take. "I will like to play around the world to enhance my skills but if there are other opportunities (T20 Leagues), I will make myself available," Joseph said, adding, "..and I have confidence in my fitness and that won't be a problem for me."

"Definitely my fitness will be important since I have a long career ahead of mine, I would definitely like to play all three formats for the West Indies whenever I am available. I will

definitely make that time for them," said the youngster. He has played only two T20

matches for Guyana Amazon Warriors in his short and eventful career so far but IPL will give him an opportunity to learn the tricks of the trade.

"It is a transformation from red ball to white ball cricket. There will be other (technical) changes and I get to learn from every opportunity that I get. I enjoyed playing Tests and now I will look to improve my white ball game.

"I am talking to all the experienced players, who are seniors and have played a certain amount of IPL, learning from them and enjoying being in the moment," said the soft-spoken fast bowler.

His senior Kemar Roach, who has played a few seasons of IPL previously, did give him an idea of what to expect in January but back then, he had gone unsold.

But after the Australia series, even legends like Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose have said good things about him. "Definitely, Kemar and I had a

to the team that was overwhelmed by the Germans and beaten 2-0 over the weekend, with Aurelien Tchouameni and Kylian Mbappe the only players to keep their starting spots.

But the reshuffling did not bring an immediate improvement. France had conceded after seven seconds against Germany. This time it took a bit longer for Chile to take the lead: six minutes. Mauricio Isla broke down the right flank and into the box then found Nunez with a back pass.

played one season and scored 18 goals for the club, Chile striker Alexis Sanchez was a threat up front, combining well with forward Eduardo Vargas, who hit the woodwork with a powerful header after the interval.

Kolo Muani was decisive again in the 72nd minute when he dribbled past Igor Lichnovsky on the right of the box, moved into the penalty area and managed to cross the ball backward for Giroud, who scored with his left foot. (AP)

Pakistan in negotiations with Luke Ronchi for head coach's job

LAHORE, March 27: The Pakistan Cricket Board has narrowed down its search for a new head coach to former Australia derstand the reservations of and New Zealand wicketkeeperbatter Luke Ronchi

A PCB source said on Wednesday that "extensive discussions" had taken place with the 42-vear-old Ronchi, who has also coached Pakistan Super League side Islamabad United. With no high-profile coach

showing interest in working for the PCB as most of them are already committed with different leagues or have reservations working in Pakistan cricket, the search has come down to

Ronchi," the source said. He said the contract with Ronchi should be finalised in the next few days before the home T20 series against New Zealand commences.

Ronchi, after taking retirement from professional cricket, has also worked with the New Zealand team as its batting consultant and coach.

The source added that the PCB team had contacted some well-known coaches but most of them were either already committed or reluctant to accept any assignment with the Pakistan board

"Given the history of the PCB in dealing with foreign and local coaches, obviously one can unsome foreign coaches," he said.

The source said that even Ronchi had not said yes as yet and had asked for an ironclad assurance that he would be given a proper time frame to work with the Pakistan team over a period of time no matter what the results are.

"He wants clear assurances that his performance will only be evaluated after a certain period of time, not after every series or event," the source said.

PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi had last week blamed the leakage of salary details and other aspects of a possible coaching contract with Shane Watson for the Australian to eventually back out of the discussion.

The PCB has already started its training camp at the Kakul army base in preparation for the T20 World Cup in June, starting with Pakistan's home series against New Zealand in April.

Ronchi is among those few players who have represented two countries in international cricket -- he appeared first for Australia and then for New Zealand. (PTI)



the financial windfall that comes with the IPL, Joseph has indeed

come a long way. "Life has been great so far. There has been all sorts of kind comments. It is my performance that brought me here. Happy to be here.

> However, he remains a country boy at heart.

"I am always aware where I came from. I still remain a country boy and nothing changes for me. Yes, I will go with the flow but being a superstar doesn't change anything for me and it has been the same life," Joseph said. Joseph is happy to have Justin Langer around, someone who has taken keen interest in his exploits since the tour of Australia. (PTI)

lot of conversations about IPL when we were in Australia. Ambrose, after the (Australia) Tests, also gave me some good advice. "Courtney Walsh, there have been words of encouragement from all these greats which will help me going forward," he added. Having seen extreme poverty in Baracara to enjoying

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'Impact Player' rule has allowed Dhoni to come in at No 8 even though it looks crazy: Hussey

CHENNAI, March 27: Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey said that the 'Impact Player' rule has lengthened their batting order, allowing former skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni to come in as late as number eight during this IPL.

The 'Impact Player' rule, introduced from 2023 edition, allows each franchise to name five substitutes, one of whom could come on as a substitute during the course of the match

Playing against Gujarat Titans here on Tuesday, CSK managed to post a match-winning total of 206 for six.

However, with seven batters coming out to bat, there were no signs of Dhoni coming in even as his fans got a bit impatient.

"It's definitely been a directive from head coach (Stephen) Fleming to keep pushing the game forward. The 'Impact Player' has lengthened the batting order, with MSD at number eight, which is crazy, and he is batting well (in the nets) at the moment," Hussey told reporters during the post-game media interaction.

"Because of this, the batters up the order can take the positive (attacking) route. They certainly have the backing from the coaches and the captain. Even if they get out doing so, it's fine, and they won't be criticised. We want to keep playing fast.'

cricket'

Among the performers for CSK was New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra, who continued his blazing



Explaining how he worked with Rachin during the pre-season, Hussey stated that it was all about allowing him to "play his best

"He's had a great start; it's awesome to watch. He's come here with great energy and wants to learn more and make a positive im-

there with a clear mind and a nice positive attitude," he stated. "He's enjoying his time and soaking up as much knowledge as

he can. He gets a bit (of energy) from the crowd as well, and once he hits a couple of shots, his confidence grows, and he feels that he can perform on this stage."

Hussey feels that his work is mainly to ensure that Rachin stays in a positive frame of mind to produce optimum results.

"There's not a lot to work on given the world-class player that he is. It's more about trying to get them to the best frame of mind and to go out there and play their best cricket. So, it's not about him im-

out there to enjoy and play his best cricket."

It was two in two for new CSK skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, replacing Dhoni, while Hussey termed him a 'cricket-savvy guy'

"Rutu is fantastic and very wellprepared. He, along with Fleming and MSD get together to talk tactics before the game," he reckoned.

"But, the way he changes the field, he has a clear mindset, and the message to the bowlers is also clear. He does have some good support around him, but he is a smart and cricket-savvy guy who understands the game well, and he's got a good team to work with as well.

One of the players being talked about for CSK was Sameer Rizvi, who struck ace GT spinner Rashid Khan for two sixes, and Hussey was all-praise for his natural hitting ability.

"He's got some natural hitting ability, especially against the spinners. He can hit a long way and is very clean. But it's still a big task for him to come out and hit arguably the best T20 bowler for a six off the first ball." he attested. Promoting a rookie ahead of

Dhoni was "masterstroke" according to Hussey. 'It was a masterstroke from the

think-tank as well, as we were expecting MSD to come out and play the last few balls. But, they realised Rizvi's got some natural power against spin, and he delivered. The crowd loved it too." (PTI)

Dhoni (bhai) advised me *to my natural game: Rizvi after his maiden* outing as CSK batter



CHENNAI, March 27: Chennai him and the (support) staff. I intend Super Kings batter Sameer Rizvi credited Mahendra Singh Dhoni fullest. for his brief but quick and impactful knock in his first IPL match, saying the talismanic former India skipper advised him to play his natural game when he went out to

bat against Gujarat Titans. Against GT here on Tuesday night, Rizvi played a cameo of sixball 14-run knock, which included two sixes against Rashid Khan.

"Bhaiya (Dhoni) told me to play how I generally play since it is all about the actual gameplay. He (Dhoni) said, 'There is nothing different. Skills remain the same, and it's all just about mindset. Never take any pressure or be nervous, and play as per the situation'," he said in a video on IPLT20.com.

Rizvi recalled the moment he was picked up by the franchise during the auction ahead of the season for a whopping ₹ 8.4 crore, as he felt that his dream of meeting Dhoni will eventually come true.

"When I was picked up during the auction by CSK, my greatest happiness was my dream to meet Bhaiya (MS Dhoni) would be fulfilled. We also had net sessions together and got to learn a lot from on Sunday. (PTI)

India's Sreejesh appointed as one of the co-chairs in **FIH Athletes Committee**

to learn more and perform to the Having played cricket for Uttar Pradesh, he has decent T20 numbers, scoring 309 runs in 10 in-

nings at a strike rate of 137.33. including two half-centuries. Speaking about his jersey number, the 20-year-old Meerut batter said, "My jersey number is seven,

which is currently worn by Bhaiya and I can't get it. So, I liked the number 1, and I took it.'

Rizvi also talked about the positive atmosphere in the CSK dressing room.

"Everyone loves each other in the team and backs everyone. The thought process of hitting the six in my first ball came out of my heart, and the team members also cheered for me with all their hearts," he said.

"Whenever I have a query in mind, I ask everyone in the team, be it in batting or fielding, about their mentality while going to bat. Learning these small things would benefit me in the long run," he concluded.

CSK beat GT by 63 runs on Tuesday and has two wins in as many games. They will next play Delhi Capitals in Visakhapatnam

Shubman Gill fined ₹ 12 lakh for slow over rate

CHENNAI, March 27: Gujarat Titans skipper Shubman Gill was on Wednesday fined ₹



"As it was his team's first offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over rate offences, Gill was fined ₹ 12 lakhs," an IPL statement said.

The Gill-led side suffered its first defeat in this edition of the

Chennaiyin FC's Bijay Chhetri signs for Latin American club Colon FC

CHENNAI, March 27: Indian career with Shillong Lajong in defender Bijay Chhetri has joined Uruguayan football club Colon FC on loan until the year-end, his Indian Super League (ISL) club Chennaiyin FC said on Wednes-

day Chhetri thus became the first Indian footballer to sign for a Latin American club.

Colon is based in Montevideo, while the club competes in Segunda División Professional second division) of the country, where it is currently placed third on the Group B league table.

"I feel so excited to get this opportunity for the new challenge in my professional career. I hope to put in good performances to enhance my game, repay the trust shown in me by Colon FC and to keep the Indian flag flying high," Bijay said in a release. "I am very well aware that if I do well, it can pave the way for future Indian players also to move abroad into these markets." The 22-year-old Bijay from Manipur began his footballing (PTI)

2016 and made his senior appearance with Indian Arrows in 2018. Since then, he has played for clubs like Chennai City, Real Kashmir and Sreenidi Deccan be-fore joining CFC this season, his maiden ISL club.

Wishing Bijay luck on his move to Colon, CFC co-owner Vita Dani said, "We are extremely proud to see Bijay make his way to one of the world's biggest football nations. Uruguay are forever etched in the game's history, with four stars on their chest as winners of two Olympic gold medals in 1924 and 1928, the first World Cup in 1930, and then repeating in Brazil in 1950.

"And, Colon Futbol Club are



tournament, going down to defending champions Chennai Super Kings by 63 runs here on Tuesday. Leading an IPL franchise for the first time, Gill's Gujarat Titans won their opening match against Mumbai Indians by six runs. (PTI)

part of that heritage; founded even before the first World Cup. I wish Bijay the very best, and we are all hoping for his success as he makes history as the first Indian player to secure a contract with a Latin American club.

Pandya will be booed louder in Mumbai but his temperament is impressive: Manoj Tiwary

MUMBAI, March 27: Former India cricketer Manoj Tiwary expects Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya to be booed a "bit louder" when the team plays its first home IPL game here on April 1 but he feels that the flamboyant all-rounder has the temperament to deal with it.

Pandya, who replaced Rohit Sharma as MI captain before the start of the season, was booed by fans in Ahmedabad when the side played against his former franchise Gujarat Titans on Sunday.

MI lost the match by six runs and will take on Rajasthan Royals in their first home game at the Wankhede Stadium here on Monday next week.

...you have to see how he gets welcomed here in Mumbai because I think he is going to get booed a bit louder here...Because as a fan, Mumbai fan or a Rohit Sharma fan, nobody expected that captaincy will be given to Hardik," Tiwary told PTI Videos in an interview

"And despite Rohit giving five trophies to Mumbai Indians, he has to lose the captaincy. I don't know what are the reasons but I think it has not gone down well with the fans. And that is the reaction which you see on the field," he explained.

Tiwary is, however, impressed with how Pandya has dealt with fan backlash.

...knowing him, whatever I have been observing of late



through television, that despite getting booed, he kept his calm, he kept his nerve, which is the sign of a good temperament," he said.

The 38-year-old, who is the sports minister of West Bengal, said Pandya will have to cut out the noise and focus on his per-

formance so that he is in good shape for the T20 World Cup starting June 1 in the Americas.

"I believe even if he was not booed, he has to perform well to get into the Indian team to play the World cup. Because it is important for all the players to perform well

and be fit as well to be available for selection.

> "And him being the number one all-rounder...obviously he has to be in form and to be in form he has to perform," he said. Tiwary competed for the Delhi franchise in the IPL and he is

keenly observing how his former team is handling Rishabh Pant's comeback from a life-threatening car accident in 2022.

He believes the big-hitter would be back to his devastating best very soon thanks to the unflinching support of the franchise.

"First of all, he's not going to be any burden. In fact, it's going to be more positive impact which he brings along with him because as a player, he's one of the most talented cricketers in India, in fact in the world cricket right now," he pointed out.

"Obviously in the first game, he did not look at his fluent best but that is obvious because it's not easy after coming back from injury...But the intent was good from him. With a few more matches, he will be back in his elements as a match-winner," Tiwary said.

Tiwary said the backing of coach Ricky Ponting and mentor Sourav Ganguly has been a key factor in aiding Pant's comeback.

"From last year itself, the coach of the team, Ricky Ponting, brought him into the dugout...if we all can recollect, two months ago, Sourav Ganguly said that he's going to be the captain.

'So when the mentor and the coach wants him in the team from very early, that means they are not thinking him as a burden. Even if he doesn't score runs, he is still their captain, he is their leader," he said. (PTI)

LAUSANNE, March 27: Indian team's star goalkeeper PR Sreejesh and defender Camila Caram from Chile women's side are the two players appointed as co-chairs of the International Hockey Federation's new FIH Athletes Committee.

The duo will be direct contributors to the 'Athletes First' approach enshrined in the FIH 'Empowerment and Engagement' strategy'. The FIH Athletes Committee serves as a consultative body and makes recommendations to the

FIH Executive Board, FIH Committees, Advisory Panels and other bodies.

The roles also cover seeking and providing feedback to the FIH on behalf of all athletes, whilst developing and promoting resources and initiatives to athletes such as health and welfare, anti-doping, social media, creating stars to attract new fans, career preparation and management.

The committee also plays a central role in liaising with the Athletes' Commission of the IOC and other sporting organisations to enable the sharing of information and research and ultimately developing the game of hockey. "Athletes have always been at

the centre of all sporting endeavours of the FIH. When FIH launched its new 'Empowerment and Engagement' strategy, the 'athletes first' approach was enshrined in its core, further showcasing our commitment towards the welfare and well-being of hockey players worldwide," FIH president Tayyab Ikram said in a release following the appointments.

"The Athletes Committee will play a crucial role in the execution of this vision and I welcome all our hockey athletes that have been appointed to the committee. I look forward to working closely with all of you to safeguard the present and

improve the future, as we bring the joy of hockey to everyone around the world."

Newly appointed co-chair Sreejesh said it is a big honour as well as a responsibility for him as an athlete.

"Being part of the athletic committee itself is a great honour for me. Getting in as the co-chair is an added responsibility. I'm looking forward to working with Camila, and all the athletic committee members for the betterment of hockey players around the globe," Sreejesh said.

Co-chair Camila added: "Very happy and honoured that my fellow colleagues voted me as Cochair I will work hard to be the voice of the athletes and have always the channels open for communication."

Besides Sreejesh and Camila, the other new members of the Athletes Committee approved by the FIH Executive Board are Matt Swann (Australia, Regular Member and Athletes Committee Representative in the Competitions Committee), Catherine Fabiano, Regular Member and Athletes Committee Representative in the Umpiring Committee), Jacqueline Mwangi (Kenya, Regular Member and Athletes Committee Representative in the Technical Officials Committee), Mohamed Mea (South Africa, Regular Member and Athletes Committee Representative in the Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee), Juliani Mohamad Din (Malaysia, Regular Member and Athletes Committee Representative in the Education Committee), Marlena Rybacha (Poland, Regular Member and Athletes Committee Representative in the Health and Safety Committee) and Cesar Garcia (Mexico, Regular Member and Athletes Committee Representative in the Rules Committee). (PTI)

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