

**6 WORLD**  
 ● Biden: Most of world leaders told him not to 'let Trump win' 2024 Presidential elections  
 ● US welcomes the new Palestinian govt following its repeated calls

**8 NATION**  
 ● Prez confers Bharat Ratna on ex-PMs NarasimhaRao, Charan Singh  
 ● PM to address poll rally in UP's Meerut today

# Top leader among 3 Congmen turn saffron 1<sup>st</sup> phase of polls: Sarba, Gaurav among 35 in fray

One Jorhat candidate withdraws nominations ● Kaziranga to witness 11-cornered contest

**GUWAHATI, March 30:** Three Congress leaders of Assam, including a state committee general secretary, resigned from the party on Saturday and joined the ruling BJP. Two of them were known to be close associates of the party candidate from Jorhat, Gaurav Gogoi, who is the deputy leader of opposition in the outgoing Lok Sabha, while the third was a top leader of the Charaideo district party unit.

Manash Borah, the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) general secretary, in his resignation letter to the party national president, said he was quitting to explore new opportunities.

"I believe it is time for me to explore new opportunities and avenues for welfare of the people and the state I represent," Borah, who was also a member of the All India Congress Committee, said.

APCC secretary Gaurav Somani, in his resignation to the

state party chief, said one of the primary reasons for his decision was "unsatisfactory leadership presently within the Assam Congress, which has regrettably failed to effectively address the pressing issues faced by the people of the state".

Leader of Charaideo district Congress committee Anuj Barkataky also quit the party and joined the BJP.

Borah and Barkataky are sons of former Congress ministers in the state, and along with Somani, were key leaders in Gogoi's campaign in the Jorhat constituency.

State BJP president Bhabesh Kalita, cabinet ministers Pijush Hazarika and Jayanta Mallabarua and other senior party leaders were present at the joining ceremony at the party headquarters here.

Speaking to reporters later, Borah said the leadership of Prime Minister (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI/JORHAT, March 30:** Altogether 35 candidates, including Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi, are left in the fray for the first phase polls in Assam on April 19, with the withdrawal of one person on Saturday.

A total of 38 candidates had filed their papers for the polls to the five constituencies - Kaziranga, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur. One person withdrew his nomination on the last day of withdrawal on Saturday while the nomination papers of two other candidates were rejected during scrutiny on Thursday.

In Jorhat, an independent Baba Kurmi withdrew his nomination, leaving four candidates in the fray including sitting BJP MP Topon Gogoi and Lok Sabha deputy leader of the opposition and Congress candidate Gaurav Gogoi.

Nomination papers of Republican Party of India's (Athawale) candidate Faisal Ahmed Majumdar (Kaziranga) and independent Mahendra Orang (Sonitpur) were rejected.

A district administration official informed



that following Kurmi's withdrawal of nomination, the number of candidates for the 14 Jorhat HPC remains four. They are: Gaurav Gogoi (Indian National Congress), Topon Kumar Gogoi (Bharatiya Janata Party), Arun Chandra Handique (Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal), and Raj Kumar Duarah (Independent). Besides this, in the presence of the general

observer for the Jorhat parliamentary constituency, the allotment of symbols was conducted at the returning officer's office today.

The symbols assigned are: a hand to INC candidate Gaurav Gogoi, a lotus flower to BJP candidate Topon Kumar Gogoi, a flute to Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal candidate Arun Chandra Handique, and a gas cylinder to Independent candidate Rajkumar Duarah.

Kaziranga, the erstwhile Kaliabor constituency which was renamed during the delimitation exercise in the state, has the highest number of 11 candidates, including BJP Rajya Sabha MP Kamakhyia Prasad Tasa and Congress contestant Roselina Tirkey.

In Dibrugarh, three candidates are in the fray including Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal of BJP, Assam Jatiya Parishad president Lurinjyoti Gogoi as the unified opposition candidate, and Aam Aadmi Party candidate Manoj Dhanowar.

Eight candidates are in the fray in Sonitpur. They include BJP MLA and former minister Ranjit Dutta, Congress candidate Prem Lal Ganju and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**HT BRIEFS**  
**Heroin seized**  
**GUWAHATI:** Assam Police on Friday seized 1/2kg of suspected heroin in Nagaon, said state chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. As per the Sarma, the seizure was made after the police intercepted a vehicle which was kept in 50 soap cases. "Based on reliable inputs, @nagaonpolice intercepted a vehicle and recovered 1/2kg of suspected heroin contained in 50 soap boxes. The consignment was coming from a border area and further investigation is underway," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X. Following the development, the chief minister congratulated the Assam police. "Good job @assampolice," he said.

**Postal ballot**  
**BOKAJAN:** A postal ballot facility has been opened in Bokajan LA for the officials who are engaged in the general election. In a press conference the Bokajan election officer, in charge, ADC Debahuti Borah said that those officials involved in election duty should approach Postal Ballot Cell and filed Form No. 12 and give their postal ballot. In Bokajan 108 (ST) LAC there a total of 203 polling stations; total voters 150200; Males- 75168; Females - 75032; Total EVM BU - 301; Control Unite - 299 and VVPAT - 313. The Strong Room is at Bokajan Higher Secondary School.

**Triangular contest**  
**KOHIMA:** Nagaland's lone Lok Sabha seat will witness a triangular contest as candidates of the Congress, NDPP and an independent are in the fray, an official said on Saturday. Congress nominee S Spongmeren Jamir, NDPP candidate Dr Chumben Murry and Independent Hayithung Tunge Lotha are contesting from the seat. With the last date of withdrawal of candidature coming to end on Saturday, none of the candidates withdrew their nominations, the official said.



White Geese swimming in a pond in Guwahati. HT photo

## Bharat Ratna awardees list shows Modi govt's commitment towards farmers: Shah

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday said conferment of Bharat Ratna on former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, agriculture scientist M S Swaminathan and two-time former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur showed Modi government's commitment towards farmers, downtrodden and backward people.

President Droupadi Murmu conferred Bharat Ratna on Rao, Singh, Swaminathan and Thakur posthumously at a ceremony held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Saturday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Shah and others attended the event. In a series of posts on 'X' in both Hindi and English, Shah said honouring the four leading figures of the country with the India's highest civilian award showed the Narendra Modi government's commitment towards farmers, downtrodden and backward people of the country.

"It is a landmark day as the visionary statesman PV



heartfelt gratitude to PM @narendramodi for the decision to honour the legendary leader with the highest civilian award," he said. The home minister said the president has honoured the great freedom fighter, former prime minister and farmer leader Chaudhary Charan Singh with Bharat Ratna, which is an honour for crores of farmers of the country. He said Singh struggled throughout his life for the establishment of democracy and social justice and did the historic work of establishing farmers (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## NIA charges 3 men in 2019 Assam fake currency case from Assam

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has charged three more accused in a 2019 case relating to seizure of fake Indian currency from Guwahati in Assam, an official statement issued on Saturday said.

The second supplementary charge sheet was filed on Thursday against Khairul Alom Khandakar, Sijal Haque and Sudip Biswas, taking the total number of accused listed in charge sheet in the case to seven, it said. The NIA had earlier filed a charge sheet against three accused in December 2019 and the first supplementary charge sheet against one more in May 2020.

Sudip had been identified as a key accused who had entered into a conspiracy with Saiful Islam (who subsequently turned approver and became a witness in the case) to print and circulate fake Indian currency notes for unlawful gains, said the statement issued by the NIA.

They had procured a colour printer and bond paper from the market, and printed counterfeit notes in the denominations of ₹ 50, ₹ 100, ₹ 200 and ₹ 500, it said. The case had come to light following the seizure of fakes notes with a face value of ₹ 1,84,000 from the possession of accused Matabe Ali, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## All communities supporting NDA alliance candidates in country: CM

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, March 30:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday said that People from diverse communities are coming forward to extend support to NDA alliance candidates across the country, including Assam, as NDA candidates are winning the majority of seats in the state.

He made these remarks while addressing a gathering of senior party workers from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the BDF complex in Udalguri district for the Darrang-Udalguri Lok Sabha constituency.

Sarma also highlighted the overwhelming support received by the NDA alliance candidate in the Darrang-Udalguri Lok Sabha constituency from various communities during the elections.

"Today, I received feedback from esteemed workers of Udalguri representing the NDA alliance. Witnessing immense enthusiasm among the public for the third term of Honorable Narendra Modi, it is evident that the Lotus symbol will be chosen by a significant majority of voters across the country. The public is thrilled about the third term of the respected Narendra Modi ji as Prime Minister of India," Sarma added.

During the event, Chief Executive Member



(CEM) of BTR, Pramod Boro, expressed confidence that NDA alliance partners would secure the majority of seats across Assam, including Kokrajhar and Darrang-Udalguri constituencies.

He stated that the meeting would boost morale and energise NDA party workers, contributing to the healthy upliftment and development of the state. The meeting witnessed the participation of thousands of senior party workers and leaders representing the UPPL, BJP, and AGP parties under the NDA alliance. Discussions focused on election matters and strategies for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Deputy CEM of BTR, Gobinda Chandra Basumatary, AGP general secretary Dr Kamala Kalita, Assam cabinet (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Cong candidates asked to seek public funding amid financial strain: Prithviraj Sathe

**GUWAHATI, March 30:** Senior Congress leader Prithviraj Sathe on Saturday said it has asked candidates to seek monetary help while approaching them for votes, and accused the BJP of indulging in "tax terrorism" in the wake of the grand old party receiving fresh notices from the income-tax department.

Sathe was participating in a protest demonstration here against the latest I-T notices, asking the Congress to pay around ₹ 1,823 crore.

"We have been saying that democracy is in danger in India and it is turning into a reality now. Another example of this is the tax terrorism by the BJP. Congress is fined by the I-T department, but the BJP is exempted," Sathe, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) secretary, alleged.

The Congress had on Friday accused the BJP of "serious violations" of income-tax laws for which it should be penalised to the tune of ₹ 4,600 crore.

Sathe maintained that the Congress was facing serious financial problems due to the action "at the behest of the ruling party".

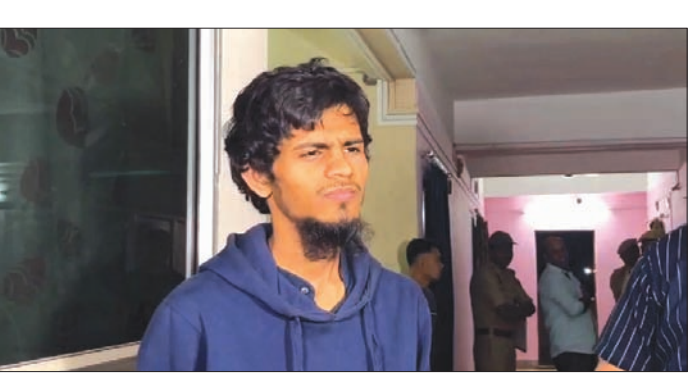
"We have asked our candidates to approach the public for votes and monetary help, and explain to them



why such a situation emerged and how the BJP is destroying democracy," he asserted. Sathe also claimed that the BJP was stifling democracy by not allowing the opposition to protest on the streets.

"Protests always take place on the streets. But, we are not even allowed to do that. We had to stage protests inside the party office here," he added. (PTI)

## Arrested IITG student's parents in Guwahati to meet their son



**GUWAHATI, March 30:** The parents of the IIT-Guwahati student, who had allegedly pledged allegiance to ISIS, have arrived here to meet their son who has been arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, a senior police officer said.

The parents of Touseef Ali Farouqui, a fourth-year B Tech student of Bioscience department, arrived here on Friday.

They had gone to the police station where he is currently in 10

days of police custody since Sunday.

The official, however, did not confirm whether they have met their son yet.

The accused was detained on March 23 at Hajo in Kamrup district and arrested the next day under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and UAPA.

Assam Police's Special Task Force (STF) inspector general Parthasarathi Mahanta had earlier said that after interrogating him,

## The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama had escaped from Lhasa on March 17, 1959 Assam Rifles recalls association with Dalai Lama on his entry into India over 6 decades ago

**GUWAHATI, March 30:** As the escape of the 14th Dalai Lama to India from his homeland Tibet completes 65 years on Saturday, the Assam Rifles, which was entrusted with his safe evacuation, recalled its continued association with the spiritual leader.

The 5th battalion of the force was given the task of bringing in the Dalai Lama and his entourage safely through the North East Frontier Agency, now Arunachal Pradesh, to Assam as they entered Indian territory on March 31, 1959.

"The legacy of the 5th Assam Rifles' escort of the Dalai Lama in 1959 remains a poignant chapter in the shared history of India and Tibet, symbolising the enduring spirit of friendship, support and humanitarianism," the paramilitary force said in a statement.

It added that the bond with the



Dalai Lama has continued over the years, with a body of the troop, often called the "the Dalai Lama battalion", visiting the leader every year in Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh to seek his blessings.

The spiritual leader has also kept

had escorted him till Tezpur in Assam.

As a token of appreciation, the Dalai Lama presented his personal weapons to the 5th Assam Rifles, which are now displayed at the Assam Rifles Museum in Shillong.

The 5th Assam Rifle was deployed in Kameng Frontier Division of Arunachal Pradesh in 1958 and its posts span over a large area including Chuthangmu, Bumla and Chuna in Kameng Frontier and Longju and Taksing in Subansiri Frontier. The 14th Dalai Lama had escaped from Lhasa on March 17, 1959, and on March 26, his caravan reached Lhuntee Dzong - a few days march from the McMahon Line, the border between India and Tibet.

As news of the Dalai Lama's escape spread, the Indian government responded by dispatching a contingent of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# Punjab farmers fear wheat crop damage due to rains

**CHANDIGARH, March 30:** With rains lashing many parts of Punjab on Saturday, wheat growers expressed fear that unseasonal showers could damage their standing crops.

Rains with strong winds and hailstorms at some places lashed Punjab's several parts, including Bathinda, Fazilka, Ludhiana, Patiala, Amritsar and Pathankot.

Heavy rains with strong winds came at a time when the wheat crop was ready for harvesting. Wheat procurement season starts on April 1 in Punjab and Haryana.

Several farmers rued that their crops got flattened because of rains and high-velocity winds, which will hit the crop yield.

A farmer in Bathinda said the



yield of his wheat crop will be affected because of untimely rains.

Meanwhile, the Shiromani Akali Dal asked Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann to order a 'gird-

wari' to assess crop damage due to rains and hailstorms.

"Unseasonal rain and hailstorms have flattened the wheat crop across vast swathes in the Malwa

region of the state. This is a double blow to farmers who faced a hailstorm some time back.

"CM @BhagwantMann should order a girdwari to assess damage to the wheat crop as well as provide interim compensation to farmers immediately," SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal said in a post on X.

His wife and Bathinda MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal said, "Today's hailstorm in the Malwa region, the second in a month, has flattened and destroyed wheat crops across vast swathes in Punjab. Farmers, who have not been compensated for the earlier crop damage, should be awarded interim compensation immediately till such time the girdwari is not ordered and completed". (PTI)

## Joyshree Das Verma takes over as FLO president

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 30:** Joyshree Das Verma took over as the 41st national president of FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO), the oldest women-led and women centric business chamber of South East Asia for the year 2024-25.

Joyshree Das Verma, through her 25 years of corporate and entrepreneurial journey nurtures a diverse professional presence. As a public figure, she holds the position of Honorary Consul of Israel, Northeast India. Joyshree Das Verma's entrepreneurial role is defined as director of Kaapro Management Solutions Pvt Ltd, her pan India entrepreneurial HR consulting company in which she is a co-promoter.

As a slice of her growth journey and success milestones as Consul of Israel to Northeast India - integrating her work with all the 8 Northeastern states of India to advance and strengthen the strategic relations between India and Israel in sectors such as agriculture, water, IT, technology, health, innovation, tourism, trade and commerce. Taking the vision of FLO forward, the theme for 2024-25, under the leadership for Joyshree Das Verma, is "collective vision, collaborative action." "I am honoured to lead FICCI FLO as the 41st National president. Under the theme 'Collective Vision, Collaborative Action for the year 2024-25, our endeavour is to build a strong, inclusive community dedicated to sustainable progress, fostering individual growth, and inspiring impactful change," said Verma. "Empowering women is not just a goal; it's a shared vision that requires collaborative action. We will collectively pave the way for a future where every woman can thrive and succeed", she added.

## Net leasing of office space up 44% at 11.5 mn sq ft during Jan-Mar: Report

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** Net leasing of office space rose 44 per cent annually in this quarter across eight major cities on higher demand from corporates for expansion of their businesses, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

According to data released on Saturday by real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield (C&W) India, the net leasing of office space stood at 11.54 lakh (11.5 million) square feet (sq ft) during January-March as against 80.09 lakh (8 million) sq ft in the year-ago period.

"This is the third-highest level recorded in the last five years, demonstrating a robust appetite for office space among businesses," the consultant highlighted.

Net absorption or leasing rose in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi-NCR and Chennai but fell in Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

"The Indian office market is experiencing a robust momentum. We haven't witnessed 20 million square feet of gross leasing being recorded for two consecutive quarters in recent history.

"This strong performance may signal a shift and has the potential to become the new standard for the Indian market," Anshul Jain, Chief Executive, India & Southeast Asia and Head of Asia

Pacific Tenant Representation at C&W, said. Gross leasing of office space across eight cities rose 33 per cent to 201.31 lakh (20.13 million) sq ft in January-March from 151.57 lakh sq ft in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The strong leasing signifies a surge in tenant interest in office space, he added.

"As witnessed in the previous quarters, the impressive surge in office demand is primarily driven by fresh leasing. We are confident that a balanced supply pipeline and continued tenant demand will propel further growth in the Indian office market," Jain said. Among cities, Mumbai witnessed a more than three-fold jump in net office leasing to 24,69,912 sq ft from 7,23,735 sq ft. In Bengaluru, the net absorption of office space jumped more than two times to 35,98,732 sq ft from 15,65,599 sq ft.

Net office space leasing in Chennai surged 77 per cent to 8,75,783 sq ft from 4,95,886 sq ft. Delhi-NCR saw a modest growth of 18 per cent in net leasing to 14,51,214 sq ft from 12,34,254 sq ft.

However, the demand for net leasing fell in Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmedabad.

In Kolkata, the net leasing fell 82 per cent to 1 lakh sq ft from 5.51 lakh sq ft.

Ahmedabad saw a 53 per cent fall in net leasing to 1,08,551 sq ft from 2,32,733 sq ft.

In Pune, the net office leasing fell 17 per cent to 13,04,107 sq ft from 15,65,754 sq ft.

The net office space leasing in Hyderabad declined marginally by 2 per cent to 16,05,953 sq ft during January-March 2024 from 16,40,242 sq ft in the year-ago period.

Gross leasing of office space means all leasing activity in the market, including renewals of contracted term by corporates.

Net absorption or leasing means new space occupied, adjusted for exits, if any.

Nikhil Madan, co-founder of coworking operator The Office Pass, said, "Similar to the previous quarters, we continued witnessing the robust demand for our flex space solutions in Q1 of 2024 as well."

As more and more companies pushing for work from office or hybrid working for their employees, the enquiries for spaces are constantly on rise, he said.

"Owing to this strong demand, we added two more coworking offices at Golf Course Road, Gurugram in this quarter and looking to add another 25,000-30,000 sq ft in couple of months to remain the front-runner in the highest number of coworking offices in Delhi NCR," Madan said. (PTI)

# Zee lays off 50% staff at its Bengaluru-based Technology and Innovation Centre

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** Zee Entertainment on Friday said it has "pruned" its Technology and Innovation Centre (TIC) by about 50 per cent following the guidance of a special committee, which had conducted a critical assessment of its several business verticals.

The MD & CEO has pruned TIC staff strength by 50 per cent to achieve a cost-effective structure, a Bengaluru-based business vertical of the company that offers technology solutions, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) said in an official statement.

Though the company has not shared the exact number of employees impacted by the move, ZEEL in its latest annual report said, "The centre has over 650 engineers who give us an unparalleled edge in the race to win the digital ecosystem".

ZEEL has formed a monthly management mentorship, called 3M Program, which will guide and enable the management team to achieve key performance metrics.

"Basis the guidance received from the board during the recently conducted 3M Program, the MD & CEO (Punit Goenka) has pruned the TIC's structure by approxi-

mately 50 per cent and streamlined its scope of work," ZEEL said in the statement.

Going forward, TIC will maintain a sharper focus on enhancing the overall content creation, distribution and monetisation process for the company by utilising technology-led tools to gain deeper insights into consumer preferences, it said. "We are laser-focused towards creating exceptional content that is rich and engaging for our viewers. We have a huge responsibility on our hands to live up to the expectations of billions of viewers across the globe and we will continue to win their hearts... To achieve this, we need the blend of a creative approach, detailed consumer insights and futuristic technology," said Goenka.

Earlier this week, ZEEL had said the committee conducted a detailed analysis of TIC, which had incurred an expenditure of about ₹ 600 crore last year.

The committee has advised to "reduce the expenditure at the TIC by 50 per cent, for the Financial Year 2024-25 and utilise its services to enhance the company's content development, distribution, and monetisation approach.

Though TIC has developed a

substantial level of technology and tools, it needs to focus on return on investment, it said.

The committee further advised the management to "stay focused on its core expertise, ethos and DNA i.e. content" and to utilise the services of TIC to enhance its content development and distribution process. "It has also advised that the management should leverage the TIC's Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) tools to gain a deeper insight into the consumer profiles," it had said.

ZEEL had recently announced a strategic realignment of its revenue vertical, that is being directly driven by the MD & CEO.

Earlier this month, in an investor's conference call, Zee Chairman had said since 2020, ZEEL's performance has been impacted due to industry-wide macro slowdown, transitory issues, and management bandwidth constraints due to merger activities.

The board has also decided to closely monitor the business model and plan presented by the MD & CEO of the company, wherein he has provided the roadmap to improve the performance and efficiency of each of the businesses to achieve higher EBITDA. (PTI)

## No objection to resolution in Byju's EGM, claim sources

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** Shareholders of edtech major Think and Learn, owner of Byju's brand, on Friday, did not object to the firm's resolution to increase its authorised share capital at its extraordinary general meeting to pave the way to absorb the recently raised \$200 million through rights issue, as per the company sources.

None of the miffed investors, who proposed to oust Byju's founder and family from the management seat, took part in the meeting, they added.

However, sources from the investors' side said their authorised representatives participated in the meeting, and the voting option is still open through postal ballot till April 6, after which the final result will be known through the scrutineers' report.

"The meeting started at 10 am with approximately 20 investors' representatives in attendance, along with Think and Learn management. The requisite quorum required for EGM was there. A few questions regard-

ing the postal ballot were asked and answered by the chairman and CS (company secretary). Resolutions were called out. No objections (were) raised," sources said.

Byju's called the EGM (extraordinary general meeting) to get shareholders' approval to increase the authorised share capital to enable the company to complete the exercise of the \$200 million fundraising through the rights issue.

In February, the embattled edtech firm raised \$200 million to meet its operational requirements, especially expenses related to employee salaries. However, it cannot issue additional equity to subscribers of the rights issue unless the authorised capital is increased.

A group of four investors —Prosus, General Atlantic, Sofina, and Peak XV—along with support from other shareholders, including Tiger and Owl Ventures, have approached the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) against Byju's EGM.(PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Top leader among 3

Narendra Modi and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had attracted him to the party. Criticising the Congress, he claimed that it has lost touch with the roots, and decisions were taken by a handful of people in closed rooms. "We want to work for the people and hence, have decided to join a party connected with the people," Borah, who had contested the 2014 Lok Sabha polls from Guwahati on a Congress ticket, added.

Meanwhile, another senior Congress leader Kishore Bhattacharya has also reportedly quit the party and is likely to join the BJP soon, sources said. A number of key Congress leaders have resigned from the party in the months leading to the general elections. (PTI)

## 1st phase of polls: Sarba

AAP's Rishiraj Kaundilya. In Lakhimpur, nine candidates will contest the polls with the main fight being between sitting BJP MP Pradan Baruah and Congress candidate Uday Shankar Hazarika. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one each from the state. (With inputs from PTI)

## NIA charges 3 men in

Amir Hamza and Dilbar Hussain by Assam Police, the probe agency said. The trio had been given the notes by Sudip and Safikul for circulation, according to investigations by NIA, which had taken over the case in October 2019. (PTI)

## All communities supporting

minister Jayanta Mallabaruah, Darrang-Udalguri Lok Sabha constituency candidate Dilip Saikia, UPPL general secretaries Raju Kumar Narzary and Madhab Chandra Chetry, along with several senior NDA leaders, including MLAs, were present.

## Bharat Ratna awardees list

at the centre of politics of an agriculture-based nation. "I express my gratitude to Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi for realising the farmer-centric governance of Chaudhary Charan Singh," he said.

On Swaminathan, Shah said he was an "epochal figure" in the county's history. He said Swaminathan transformed the fate of the nation and millions of impoverished people with his scientific brilliance.

The architect of the 'Green Revolution', Swaminathan worked with "unflinching determination" towards ensuring that the benefits reached the farmers, he said.

"Conferring Swaminathan with the Bharat Ratna by Rashtrapati Smt Droupadi Murmu today is a reiteration of the Modi government's commitment to the farmers. Gratitude to PM @narendramodi," he said.

Referring to Thakur, the home minister said the day will be remembered for ages in the history of the struggle of the underprivileged.

"Today, Honourable President Smt. Droupadi Murmu has honoured the struggle for the rights of backward and extremely backward people by honouring Jannayak Karpoori Thakur with Bharat Ratna.

"The seed of empowerment of backward classes which was sown by Karpoori Thakur from the land of Bihar, is being taken forward today by the Modi government," he said. P V Prabhakar Rao, the son of former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao, received the award conferred on his father from the president.

Jayant Chaudhary, Singh's grandson and chief of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), accepted the honour from Murmu.

Swaminathan's daughter Nitya Rao and Thakur's son Ram Nath Thakur received the award from the president. (PTI)

## Arrested IITG student's

A black flag, "purportedly similar to that of ISIS", was found in his hostel room and has been sent for verification to specialised agencies which deal with proscribed outfits. (PTI)

## Assam Rifles recalls association

5th Assam Rifles to ensure his safe passage into the country. On March 31, the spiritual leader was received by the party of the 5th Assam Rifles and the people of Monyulat at the Frontier Post of Chuthangmu in Kameng Division.

He was escorted by the paramilitary force through Tawang, Bomdila and then to Tezpur, from where he proceeded further into the country.

Following the Dalai Lama's forced exile to India, the frontier posts of Chuthangmu, Bumla and Chuna saw a mass ingress of armed Tibetan refugees called 'Khampas', and the 5th Assam Rifles thereafter escorted approximately 12,000 refugees through the Kameng Frontier Division.

The force also recalled that the Dalai Lama's escape marked a crucial moment not just in Tibetan history but also in the evolution of the Indo-Chinese relationship.

"The Chinese Government considers the Dalai Lama a separatist threat due to his advocacy for Tibetan autonomy. The entire episode of the Dalai Lama fleeing through the Indo-Tibet border to India, irked China to the extent that it moved its troops to the India-China border and claimed vast areas of Indian Territory in Kameng and Subansiri Frontier Division," the statement said.

The border outpost of 5 Assam Rifles at Longju in Subansiri Division was later evacuated following an armed clash with the Chinese forces in August 1959, it added. (PTI)

## The UPI effect transforming India's economy and job market

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** India's digital landscape, revolutionizing the way financial transactions are conducted. Now, its influence extends far beyond the nation's borders, shaping global conversations around economic growth, entrepreneurship, and job creation. A recent webinar, titled "Times Ascent - Driving Job Creation Through Digital Payments," organized by the Times of India, showcased how UPI is propelling India's digital economy to new heights. With industry stalwarts like Atul Saigal, Senior Vice President - Commercial Cards, Axis Bank, Dr Sankarshan Basu, Professor in the Finance and Accounting Area at the IIM Bangalore, Girish Krishnan, Director Payments, Rewards, BigData, Merchant Services, Amazon Pay, Zubair Ulla, Head - Digital Channels, Ujjivan Small Finance Bank and Moderated by Akhil George, TOI Business Editor, the event provided invaluable insights into UPI's impact on various sectors.

**Insights from Industry Leaders: Unveiling the Impact of UPI on Job Market**

"Indeed, UPI has been a game-changer, offering a level playing field for digital transactions. The government-backed digital infrastructure has instilled trust from day one, fostering rapid adoption and innovation. The simplicity of UPI empowers users to conduct transactions seamlessly across various platforms, promoting financial inclusion and efficiency," said Girish Krishnan.

**Navigating the Payment Landscape: UPI's Impact on Credit and Debit Cards**

"UPI's convenience and digital empowerment are reshaping payment ecosystems, leading to a harmonious coexistence of traditional and digital methods. As we navigate this transformative landscape, the future holds promise for seamless transactions and enhanced financial empowerment," said Zubair Ulla.

Zubair highlights a decline in debit card usage, especially in e-commerce, favoring UPI instead. While credit cards offer extended credit periods, UPI's integration with credit cards sparks consumer interest. He envisions a coexistence of payment methods, with

UPI driving transformative changes in the payment landscape towards convenience and financial empowerment.

**Unveiling the Role of Digital Payments in Job Creation**

During the webinar, Atul Saigal and Girish Krishnan highlight the role of digital payment systems in catalyzing job creation, emphasizing both direct and indirect employment opportunities. Atul notes that UPI has been instrumental in driving the digital payment revolution, leading to increased efficiency and acceptance across consumer and business sectors, thereby boosting cash flows for businesses and fostering expansion. Moreover, the proliferation of fintech firms in the payment sector has directly employed around 80,000 individuals and indirectly contributed to over 200,000 jobs.

Girish explores the secondary effects of digital payments on job creation and economic growth, noting that UPI serves as a nexus connecting consumers and service providers, leading to a wide range of employment opportunities. He also highlights how the increasing demand for digital payments compels merchants to adopt technology, resulting in enhanced efficiency and integration into the digital economy.

**Exploring Emerging Tech Roles in the Digital Payment Sector**

"Technology-driven financial inclusion is reshaping the digital payment sector, democratizing access and catalyzing economic growth," said Dr Sankarshan.

Dr. Basu draws parallels between the digital payment revolution and the transformative impact of electronic stock exchanges like NSC on stock market trading. He highlights UPI's democratizing effect on financial access. Additionally, Dr. Basu underscores the importance of data analytics in developing credit scoring models and predicting financial risks, which fosters financial resilience. He also discusses the growing demand for cybersecurity professionals to protect consumer data and emphasizes the integration of digital payments across various sectors, driving employment growth.

**The Rising Tide of Digital Transactions**

Atul emphasizes the need for

strong risk management systems in financial institutions and fintech firms amidst the rapid growth of digital transactions. He stresses the importance of dedicated teams to combat fraud and maintain the security of digital financial ecosystems. In response to increasingly sophisticated cyber fraud tactics, FIs and fintechs must continuously strengthen their cybersecurity defenses.

Zubair highlights the crucial role of consumer awareness in fighting cyber fraud. He emphasizes the importance of information security specialists in mitigating risks associated with digital payments and underlines the need for financial institutions and fintech firms to bolster their cybersecurity defenses against evolving threats.

**Navigating the Transformative Landscape of Financial Roles in the Digital Era**

In the wake of the digital revolution, the financial sector finds itself at the forefront of transformation. Dr. Sankarshan said - "In the digital era, technology and data redefine the landscape of finance, empowering decision-making, mitigating risks, and highlighting the critical importance of cybersecurity."

He mentioned that in today's digital era, institutions must invest in talent and cybersecurity. With digital banking on the rise, the need for data security experts is booming. Equipping themselves with skilled staff and robust security measures enables institutions to thrive in this increasingly digital financial environment.

**Empowering MSMEs Through Digital Lending: A Deeper Insight**

"Atul highlights the transformative potential of digital lending for MSMEs, emphasizing the collaborative efforts between fintech companies and traditional institutions in bridging the credit gap and driving economic empowerment." Atul delves into the transformative impact of digital lending on small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), addressing their significant credit gap. Fintech solutions leverage data and digital payment infrastructure to bridge this divide, fostering economic growth and financial inclusion for underserved MSMEs.

**Shaping the Future of FinTech: Insights from Industry Leaders**



# Nari Shakti is Maha Shakti propelling Bharat forward: Sarbananda Sonowal

HT Correspondent

**DIBRUGARH, March 30:** Union minister of ports, shipping and waterways and Ayush, Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday termed 'Nari Shakti' as Maha Shakti, which is propelling Bharat forward in the 21st century.

While addressing the 30th foundation day celebrations of the Moran Jatiyo Mahila Parishad at Borguri in Tinsukia, Sonowal hailed Nari Shakti (women's power) as the symbol of patience and perseverance.

Sonowal said, "Nari Shakti is Maha Shakti - one that is propelling Bharat forward towards Atmanirbharta and Vikas. Swami Vivekananda once said that a country is great where the women are respected. The role of a mother in shaping her sons and daughters to become able citizens of the society is unparalleled. The power of the country grows manifold when the power of women grows."

"With this vision, under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi the government has launched the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao initiative, which has given tremendous results towards nation building. Today, the empowered self help groups, mostly driven by women around the country, has been contributing immensely towards the growth of the Indian economy as well as moving towards Atmanirbharta. From the greatest achievements of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to our women power in defence forces, the women of the country has been contributing in all fields," Sonowal stated.

The Union minister added, "Today, women have been able to diligently run a household to a country. Nari Shakti is the symbol of patience and perseverance. Our mothers are our biggest influ-



ence to become the persons we have become. Your role in building the future of the society is unparalleled."

The Union minister further asked the youths must respect their historical lineage, heritage and try to learn from the great history of Morans in building the future of the community as a force of reckoning as they move towards building a Viksit Dibrugarh - aligning with the vision of PM's Viksit Bharat. He asked them to shape their outlook with the inspiring heroics of Bir Raghab Moran. They must study these heroic tales of the past and shape their minds towards contributing to a great Moran society.

He further added, "I call upon all the commu-

nity organisations to provide avenues for the youths to build their personalities around these heroic characters of our golden past. Once this is done, I am confident that Moran community will become one of the best communities in the world, with a positive outlook towards the process of nation building."

"To beat the growing competition, it is imperative that we must shape the future generations and make them capable of meeting future challenges. To become the best of this age, we must compete in a well equipped manner. In this, the greatest contributor is the woman. This 'Nari Shakti' must shape the personalities of the young minds of our society," Sonowal said.

# Exploring legal options: Borah on Himanta's claim of Congress chief joining BJP

**Bhupen Bora claimed he is in politics because of his ideology, commitment to people**

**GUWAHATI, March 30:** Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah said on Saturday that he is exploring legal options against chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over the latter's assertion that Borah will join the BJP.

"I have discussed with my lawyer and he will let me know how to go about it," Borah told PTI here.

Sarma has been making statements before the media, claiming that Borah will be joining the ruling BJP by early next year.

Refuting the claim, Borah said, "The CM is publicly announcing time and again that he is ready to

give me minister's post, even chief ministership. But, I want to tell the people of Assam that I am not in politics for personal interest. I am here because of my ideology, commitment to people and the society."

He also wondered how the people will benefit if he becomes a part of the BJP.

Stating that he and Sarma were in the Congress together, Borah added: "In 2014, when the wave was in favour of the BJP, Sarma understood it and joined the saffron party. I understood it, too, but I did not join that party as I am not someone who goes with the wave." (PTI)

# Govt amended Black Acts to protect people of Assam, says legal experts

HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, March 30:** The Centre and state government have abrogated a number of outdated and harmful acts to protect the people of the state, said legal experts during a lawyers' conference held at the BG Palace in ASTC premises in Sivasagar on Saturday.

The lawyers' conference was organized by the BJP Sivasagar District Law Cell.

Attending the conference as the chief guest, senior advocate Bijon Mahajan said, "The state and the central governments have abrogated a number of outdated and

harmful acts to protect the people of the state. The state government has taken strict legal measures against the use of drugs and its prevalence has decreased considerably. The forest laws have been properly implemented to prevent the killing of animals, especially rhinoceros."

The meeting was attended by over 200 lawyers. The convener Jayant Kumar Goswami said the lawyers are the 'opinion makers' of the society and hence, should come out openly to support the government that has been trying to adopt an independent way rooted in In-

dian culture and ethics to reform British laws.

The meeting was chaired by the president of the District Law Cell, Chiranjeev Bezbaruha and the objectives of the meeting were explained by Sibsagar District Law Cell convener, Shikharani Dutta. The meeting was attended by State Law Cell member Diganta Prakash Goswami, Gautam Shaikia and district Law Cell Co-Convener Smriti Rekha Dutta, member Vijay Buragohain, Women's Morcha president Midhusmita Singh and several other state and district level leaders of the BJP.

# Expenditure observer visits Haflong

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 30:** The expenditure observer for Haflong-ST LAC constituency, Shankar Lal Verma visited the Dima Hasao district and interacted with officials of different cells of the district election office to review and discuss about the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in the state.



During his visit, the expenditure observer also held a preliminary review with the team of election expenditure monitoring cell. He also discussed about how to maintain the expense records and reviewed the plans shown by the district election office. Verma expressed his satisfaction on the preparedness of different cells after the interaction meeting held at the conference hall of the district commissioner. He will be available to meet the general public at the circuit house in Haflong.

# Section 144 imposed in Cachar

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, March 30:** In anticipation of illegal activities like extortion of money and kidnapping of persons by miscreants using vehicles, the district magistrate of Cachar, Rohan Kumar Jha has issued prohibitory orders under section of 144 of Indian penal code.

These restrictions have been imposed on Friday to curb violence for smooth conduct of the parliamentary elections on April 26 in the Silchar Lok Sabha constituency in Cachar district.

The order states that the use of tinted glass or black papering, curtains etc. has been banned. This order will remain in force till further orders in the entire district with immediate effect to prevent kidnapping, extortion and other illegal activities. Vehicles already fitted with tinted glass, papering or curtains have been instructed to remove them at the earliest. However, this directive will not be applied to government vehicles and vehicles of senior government officials bearing designation plates.

# Bihu workshop organised in Demow

HT Correspondent

**DEMOW, March 30:** A ten-day Bihu dance, dhol badan and pepa badan workshop has been organized at the Saragua High School Playground near Demow in Dibrugarh district under the patronage of the Saragua Udayan Cultural Group.

A large number of children participated in the workshop. While Dimbeswar Gogoi was the chief instructor, Ranjita Sarma imparted training on Bihu dance to the participants. Biswajit Konwar and Shyamal Konwar imparted training to the participants on dhol badan.

The participants were given certificates of participation during the workshop that began on March 19 and concluded on March 28.

# Mother-son duo apprehended with drugs in Margherita

HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, March 30:** The police have apprehended a mother-son duo involved in drug peddling in Margherita in Tinsukia district. 77.59 grams of heroin were also seized from their possession.

The duo has been identified as Chandana Debnath and Paban Debnath. They are residents of the Lazum area in Margherita.

According to sources, Chandana Debnath and her son Paban Debnath have been involved in drugs peddling for many years. Acting on a tip off, the Margherita police on Friday night conducted a raid at their house and arrested them.

Meanwhile, a case has been registered against the accused under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS). They have been remanded to judicial custody.

# NHRCCB alleges violation of govt guidelines by IOCL petrol pumps

HT Correspondent

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 30:** The National Human Rights and Crime Control Bureau (NHRCCB) have sought intervention regarding the non-compliance of government guidelines by certain Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL) petrol pumps.

Nishant Thard, state president of NHRCCB said that it has come to attention that several IOCL petrol pumps were not adhering to Clause 18.3 of the Union ministry of petroleum and natural gas, marketing discipline guidelines for petrol, diesel and kerosene stations. This clause unequivocally mandates the provision of free air facilities to customers during the operating hours of the outlets. Additionally, it underscores the importance of maintaining other customer-centric amenities such as clean toilets with proper

lighting and water facilities, first aid boxes with valid medicinal aids, and ensuring the accurate quantity and quality of products.

The organization said failure to adhere to these guidelines not only compromises customer satisfaction, but also reflects poorly on the reputation and integrity of esteemed corporation. It is imperative that corrective measures are swiftly implemented to rectify this situation and uphold the standards expected of consumers' cooperation.

Furthermore, the state president urges all customers to be vigilant and proactive in ensuring compliance by asking for and inspecting the records book of petrol pumps during their visits. Transparency and accountability are essential in fostering trust and confidence among the patrons.

# Ji Kathar to contest LS polls from 6- Diphu (ST) parliamentary constituency

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, March 30:** The All People Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) supported independent candidate and president of APHLC, Ji Kathar, who has filed his nomination papers in Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

Kathar will contest the Lok Sabha election from 6- Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency. He presented his papers to the returning officer and district commissioner, Madhumita Bhagwati at the DC office.

Ji Kathar after filing his nomination here said that APHLC will fight for the rights of indigenous, tribes and implementation of Article 244 (A) of the Constitution of India, i.e., granting of

autonomous state. The autonomous state under Article 244 (A) of the Constitution comprises the hill districts of the state viz., Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

Referring to the removal of the word 'Autonomous District' from Diphu (ST) Autonomous District Parliamentary Constituency, he said, "We are very sorry to say that previously it was Autonomous Constituency now the word Autonomous has been removed by the BJP government. We will try to get this word back. We are also sorry to see that the Panchayat law has been promulgated in Dima Hasao. We will fight till the last for regaining the 6th Schedule power in Dima Hasao also."

Ji Kathar said that he will work for the removal of Panchayat law from Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. Only the APHLC has been speaking of protection of tribal rights and tribal land. The APHLC will protect indigenous Assamese people, Adivasis and tribals. He appealed to the public to vote him to power so that he wins. He asked them to vote wisely as unlike in the olden days when battles are fought with guns, bombs and swords.

His first work after winning will be the issue of autonomous state, which may be separate for Dima Hasao and the APHLC has no objection to it. The UCC and CAA will also be abolished, said Ji Kathar.

# Book on political theory released



**DIPHU, March 30:** A text book entitled 'Political Theory: Concepts and Debates' was formally released in a function organised at Thong Nokke College, Dokmoka on Saturday.

The book has been specially written for the NEP-FYUGP second semester students of DSC political science of Assam University and major of second semester students of the Rabindranath Tagore University.

The book was formally unveiled by Darsing Ronghang, MLA of the Hawraghat Constituency and Longki Phangocho, former district commissioner and presently member North Eastern Council (NEC) Shillong in presence of Dhanjoy Narzary, principal of the Thong Nokke College and other dignitaries, faculty members and students of the college.

Written by Lutfur Rahman Choudhury, head of the political science department of the Thong Nokke College, the book is expected to benefit the second semester students offering major in the subject in the universities, who have been facing immense hardship owing to the dearth of specific reading materials and textbooks in the aftermath of the introduction of the NEP syllabus. The book has been published by the Central Library Publication Board, TNC.

# UOFA candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi campaigns in Margherita

HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, March 30:** United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA) candidate for the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency, Lurinjyoti Gogoi on Saturday campaigned at various places in Margherita.

Lurinjyoti Gogoi was accompanied by Sanjay Kumar Deb, secretary of the Assam Jatiya Parishad's central committee, president of Jatiya Chah Shakti's central committee Suresh Bhowmij, president of Jatiya Chah Shakti's Tinsukia district committee Jewel Topno, president of Margherita block Congress committee Tara Prasad Dehingia, president of Margherita Youth Congress Avishek Beldar, Asom Jatiya Parishad leader Anita Das Mahanta, Bupai Das and many other leaders and workers of UOFA. Addressing a public meeting in Margherita, Lurinjyoti Gogoi said, "BJP is a party, which depends on large donations. They collect huge amounts of donations through electoral bonds and have collected more than ₹ 84,000 crore in the past five years."



Gogoi said that earlier Union minister and BJP candidate from Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency, Sarbananda Sonowal was known as Jatiyo Nayak. However, he is now regarded as Jatiyo Khalnayal of the state and the greater Assamese society as during his tenure as the state's chief minister, five youths were killed mercilessly during the CAA agitation.

"The three golden words of the BJP were 'Jati, Mati and Bheti'

when they had come to power. However, at present nothing is safe; even our very Constitution is in danger," he said.

The UOFA candidate also appealed to the public to cast their valuable votes in a responsible manner as lakhs of people from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan will take shelter in the state in the near future after the central government notified the CAA.

# NTPC Bongaigaon organises rural sports meet

**Sports meet aimed at fostering spirit of healthy competition, promote physical activity among students**

HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, March 30:** The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Bongaigaon Salakati, in collaboration with its Sports Council and the district sports officer of Kokrajhar have organized a rural sports meet showcasing sportsmanship among the youth of the surrounding villages.

The event, held under the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative of the power station, aimed to foster a spirit of healthy competition and promote physical activity among students.

The sports meet, which witnessed enthusiastic participation from five local schools, namely Dholmara High School, Salakati M.E. Salakati Junior College, Jaregaon High School, and BTPS High School, featured six exciting events. They included 100-meter and 200-meter races, 100 x 4-meter relay race, long jump, shot put and discus throw. Around 45 students showcased their skills and determination, with the top three winners in each category receiving certificates of achievement and medals.

Moreover, all the participants

were felicitated with school bags and certificates of participation as tokens of appreciation for their efforts and sportsmanship.

The event was graced by Karunakar Das, executive director of NTPC Bongaigaon along with senior management officials including K.C. Muralledharan, CGM (O&M), Parash Mathur, AGM (TS), Onkar Nath, AGM (HR) and Sushil Kumar Gupta, AGM (Civil). Representatives from various sports associations and unions were also present to support and encourage the budding athletes.

Speaking on the occasion, Karunakar highlighted the enthusiasm exhibited by the participating students. He emphasized the significance of such events as catalysts for community engagement in sports and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle encompassing both physical and mental well-being. He also reiterated NTPC Bongaigaon's commitment to supporting such endeavours that not only nurture sporting talent but also serve as platforms for community integration and holistic development. He expressed optimism



regarding the long-term impact of such initiatives in instilling values of discipline, resilience, and teamwork among the youth.

The highlight of the event was the crowning of the Champion School, Dholmara High School, whose talented students clinched a remarkable tally of 10 medals, including four gold, five silver and one bronze. Salakati Senior Secondary School emerged as the runner-up, securing a commendable

eight medals comprising of three gold, four silver and one bronze.

Officials from the Kokrajhar district sports office were judges in the matches, ensuring a fair and transparent competition for all participants. NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati through the event not only promoted physical fitness, but also instilled values of teamwork, discipline and determination among the youths, thereby contributing to their holistic development.



## Whispers of the past: Unveiling the enigmatic Kachari ruins of Dimapur



By: Dharma Dhaj Sonowal

Nestled amidst the bustling town of Dimapur in Nagaland, India, lie the Kachari ruins, silent sentinels whispering tales of a bygone era. These enigmatic remnants, believed to date back to the 10th century, stand as a testament to the once-flourishing Kachari civilization.

The ruins, known as the Kachari ruins or the Kachari Rajbari ruins, are a collection of unique, mushroom-domed pillars. While their exact purpose and origin remain shrouded in mystery, they continue to captivate historians, archaeologists, and curious travelers alike.

**A glimpse into the Kachari Kingdom: A legacy etched in stone**

The Kachari kingdom, reigned supreme in the region from the 10th to the 13th century. Their domain encompassed parts of present-day Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, and Tripura.

The Kacharis were known for their prowess in warfare, administration, and cultural pursuits. Evidence suggests a well-developed society with a sophisticated system of governance and rich traditions.

The Kachari ruins in Dimapur are believed to be remnants of a grand palace complex or a significant administrative center. Historical accounts suggest that the Kachari kings constructed elaborate structures using locally-sourced stone. The strategic location of Dimapur, along the banks of the Dhansiri river, might have made it a crucial center of trade and political power for the Kachari kingdom.

The Ahom invasion in the 13th century marked a turning point in the region's history. The Kacharis were eventually overpowered, and their kingdom disintegrated. The once-grand palace complex fell into disrepair, and the relentless passage of time transformed it into the ruins we see today.

**Unveiling the architectural marvel: The enigmatic pillars**

The most striking feature of the Kachari ruins is the collection of distinctive, tall pillars with large, hemispherical caps, resembling mushrooms. These monoliths, carved from a hard variety of sandstone, stand tall even today, a testament to the craftsmanship of the era.

The size of the pillars varies, with the tallest reaching an impressive 15 feet. Some pillars are adorned with intricate carvings, although their meaning remains a subject of debate. The lotus motif is a recurring element, possibly symbolizing purity or prosperity in Kachari culture.

The arrangement of the pillars also sparks curiosity. Historical accounts suggest that they were once arranged in three parallel rows, forming a rectangular enclosure. This layout hints at a planned structure, possibly a central courtyard or a grand hall within the palace complex.

Theories abound regarding the purpose of these pillars. Some believe they served as structural supports for the palace buildings. Others propose they held religious significance, perhaps marking sacred spaces or representing deities. An interesting theory suggests they were used in a game resembling chess, with the pillars acting as giant pieces on a vast board.

The lack of extensive archaeological excavation and written records from the Kachari period makes it challenging to definitively determine the purpose of these enigmatic pillars.

However, their presence undoubtedly offers a glimpse into the architectural skills and the symbolic language employed by the Kachari civilization.

**A bridge between past and present: Challenges and conservation efforts**

The Kachari ruins stand today as a powerful reminder of a glorious past. However, these historical treasures face significant challenges. Urbanization and encroachment threaten the integrity of the site. The lack of proper maintenance has led to the deterioration of some pillars.

Efforts are underway to preserve this vital piece of Nagaland's heritage. The Nagaland Tourism Department has recognized the Kachari ruins as a historical tourist destination and are taking steps to improve accessibility and awareness. Initiatives include signage, basic amenities for visitors, and the promotion of the ruins as a historical and cultural landmark.

Archaeological research also plays a crucial role in unraveling the mysteries surrounding the Kachari ruins. Careful excavation, analysis of artifacts, and collaboration with historians can shed light on their construction techniques, purpose, and the broader context of the Kachari civilization.

Public engagement is another essential aspect of conservation. Raising awareness among local communities about the significance of the ruins can foster a sense of ownership and encourage their participation in safeguarding this irreplaceable heritage.

The Kachari ruins are much more than just a collection of stones. They offer a window into a rich and vibrant civilization that once thrived in this region. Understanding their significance goes beyond the architectural marvels.

**A call to action: Preserving the whispers of the past**

The Kachari ruins stand as a powerful symbol of Kacharis rich and complex history. Preserving these enigmatic whispers of the past is crucial for several reasons:

**Connecting with the ancestors:** The ruins are a tangible link to the people who came before. By safeguarding them, we honor their legacy and ensure their stories continue to be told for generations to come.

**Boosting tourism:** The historical and cultural significance of the Kachari ruins makes them a potential tourist magnet. Careful development and promotion can attract visitors interested in Nagaland's heritage, leading to economic benefits for the local community.

**Fostering cultural identity:** The ruins serve as a source of pride for the people of Nagaland. Understanding their past strengthens their cultural identity and fosters a sense of belonging.

**Preserving the Kachari ruins requires a multi-pronged approach:**

**Increased funding:** Allotting adequate resources for archaeological research, site maintenance, and educational initiatives is essential.

**Community involvement:** Engaging local communities in the preservation process can foster a sense of ownership and ensure the sustainability of efforts.

**Sustainable development:** Developing the site for tourism must be done with sensitivity, ensuring the ruins are protected while enhancing the visitor experience.

By working together, the government, archaeologists, historians, and the local community can ensure that the Kachari ruins continue to stand tall, whispering tales of a glorious past for generations to come.

**Beyond the written word: Exploring the Kachari ruins with multimedia**

Here are some suggestions for a more immersive experience:

**Virtual tours:** Technological advancements offer exciting possibilities for showcasing the Kachari ruins to a wider audience. Creating 360-degree virtual tours can allow viewers to

explore the site from the comfort of their homes, examining details and navigating the ruins as if they were present.

**Interactive exhibits:** Museums or dedicated information centers near the ruins can house interactive exhibits that bring the Kachari civilization to life. These exhibits could incorporate multimedia elements like touch screens displaying historical timelines, reconstructions of the palace complex, or audio guides narrating stories and theories about the ruins.

**Augmented Reality (AR):** AR technology can be a powerful tool for enhancing the visitor experience at the Kachari ruins. Imagine visitors holding up their smartphones or tablets and seeing the ruins come alive with holographic projections depicting how the palace complex might have looked in its prime. AR can also be used to display information about specific pillars, their carvings, and potential uses.

**Documentaries and films:** Visually compelling documentaries or short films focusing on the Kachari ruins can capture the public's imagination. These films could explore the history and mystery surrounding the ruins, showcase the ongoing archaeological efforts, and highlight the cultural significance of the site.

These multimedia approaches can not only attract more visitors to the Kachari ruins but also foster a deeper understanding and appreciation for this historical treasure.

**A look ahead: The future of the Kachari ruins**

The future of the Kachari ruins hinges on a commitment to comprehensive preservation efforts. Here are some potential areas for further development:

**Archaeological digs:** Carefully planned and executed archaeological excavations can unearth valuable artifacts that shed light on the daily lives and cultural practices of the Kacharis. These discoveries can significantly enhance our understanding of the civilization and the purpose of the ruins.

**Collaboration with international institutions:** Partnering with international archaeological teams and research institutions can bring in fresh perspectives, advanced technologies, and expertise to further explore the mysteries of the ruins.

**Educational programs:** Developing educational programs for schools and universities can introduce younger generations to the Kachari civilization and the importance of preserving historical sites. These programs could involve interactive workshops, field trips to the ruins, and curriculum integration.

By actively pursuing these initiatives, we can ensure that the Kachari ruins not only stand the test of time but also continue to inspire future generations.

**A legacy carved in stone**

The Kachari ruins in Dimapur are more than just remnants of a bygone era. The Kachari ruins are not just historical remnants; they are a bridge connecting the past to the present, paving the way for a future where history is valued, celebrated, and shared with the world. They are a living testament to the ingenuity, artistry, and rich cultural heritage of the Kachari civilization. As we go through deeper into their mysteries, we gain a profound appreciation for the people who built them and the enduring legacy they left behind.

Preserving these ruins is not just about protecting stones; it's about safeguarding the whispers of the past and ensuring their stories continue to inspire and educate future generations. The Kachari ruins stand as a powerful reminder that history is not confined to dusty textbooks.

It lives in the very stones beneath our feet, waiting to be unearthed, understood, and cherished. Unveiling their secrets is a continuous process that requires collaboration, dedication, and a commitment to preserving this invaluable heritage.

Through ongoing research, innovative storytelling, and community engagement, we can ensure that the whispers of the past continue to resonate, enriching our understanding of the Kachari civilization and its enduring legacy.

## Mount Kailash: China's Border Maneuvers and Strategic Gambits Unveiled

By: Dipak Kurmi

The historical tapestry of Western Tibet, especially around Mount Kailash in the vicinity of the India-Nepal-Tibet trilateral junction, is intriguing. Notably, Purang/Taklakot and the nearby Toyo have etched their names in history through the epic confrontation between General Zorawar Singh's Dogras and the Tibetan forces.

In the chilling December of 1841, the victorious Dogra forces, having recently subdued Western Tibet, faced a formidable adversary—the Tibetans, and an even harsher opponent—winter itself. Tsepon Shakabpa, the eminent Tibetan historian, vividly recounts the Battle of Taklakot/Toyo. Responding swiftly, the Tibetan government dispatched General Shendra Wangchuk Gyelpo and the Ü Tsang militia, led by Cabinet minister Pellhün, to Ngari.

The strategic positioning of the Dogra regiments in Rutok, Trashigang, and Rupshö prompted covert preparations for the Tibetan troops to engage each unit separately. The seasoned Dogra troops, under the command of Zorawar Singh, found themselves confronted in the frigid eleventh month, as the Tibetan forces orchestrated a synchronized assault from all directions amid the coldest weather of the year.

The decisive moment for Zorawar Singh and his troops unfolded, as described by Shakabpa: "Three days into the conflict, a relentless snowfall sealed the fate of the Sikh forces stationed at Taklakot. Battling not only the harsh weather but also the ferocious Tibetan assault, the Sikhs found themselves frozen in the icy grip of winter."

Amidst the desperate struggle, Zorawar Singh, galloping on his horse, became a recognizable target for a Yasor named Mikmar. In a chilling encounter, Mikmar hurled a spear, causing Singh to tumble from his horse. Swiftly dismounting, Mikmar severed Singh's head and proudly carried it into the heart of the Tibetan camp. The gruesome sight shattered the morale of the Sikh (Dogra) soldiers, prompting them to flee in disarray, seeking escape in any possible way.

Several months after the harrowing events, Maharaja Gulab Singh decisively thwarted the Tibetan forces attempting to invade Ladakh.

The capture of Dapön Zurkhang and Dapön Pelzhi marked a turning point, leading to their transport to Leh. It was in Leh that a peace treaty between the Dogras and Tibetans was solemnized, reaffirming the age-old boundary between Ladakh and Tibet. Notably, Toyo, now making headlines for unrelated reasons, is home to the enduring tomb of Zorawar Singh, a silent testament to the region's historical significance.

A recent report in Chinese media highlights the establishment of a newly constructed village in Toyo. Emphasizing China's ongoing commitment to enhance rural living conditions, the

focus lies on initiatives such as environmental landscaping, aesthetic enhancements, and water purification. The transformations observed in Toyo serve as a tangible representation of the Ngari region's dedicated endeavors to create a picturesque and comfortable rural environment.

Over the last three years, Western Tibet has seen the execution of 31 projects solely aimed at constructing livable, industrially equipped, and aesthetically pleasing villages. A local Communist Party official articulates in his terms that this initiative aligns with the principles of creating villages characterized by beauty, leisure, happiness, livability, cleanliness, and orderliness. The question arises: What prompts the establishment of a new village in Toyo?

According to Newsweek, China seems to have finalized the construction of a new dam in its southwestern border regions, a venture with potentially significant strategic consequences for its southern neighbors, India and Nepal. Situated on the Mapcha Tsangpo (also recognized as the Peacock River, Ghaghara or Saryu in India, and Karnali in Nepal), the dam serves as a continuous source of freshwater supply for the populations downstream.

It is noteworthy that the presence of this hydropower plant, situated near the Indian border, was conspicuously absent from any previously published Chinese plans. Despite satellite imagery indicating a medium-sized river-of-the-river dam without a substantial reservoir, there arises a legitimate cause for concern downstream in India. However, the situation unveils additional layers of complexity.

A forthcoming airport is under development a few kilometers north of both the hydropower plant and the designated "model" village. In June 2018, the Civil Aviation Administration of China disclosed plans for three new airports in Tibet. Chinese-language press provided details about their locations: one near Lhuntse, situated to the north of Arunachal Pradesh, the second north of a border post with Nepal, and the last in Purang.

As outlined by the Chinese website seetao.com, the purpose of these three airports is dual-fold. In times of peace, they serve for civilian aviation and military aircraft training on the plateau. However, in times of war, these airports are designed for direct military utilization, facilitating military operations and playing a pivotal role in strategic defense.

While the announcement might have faded from memory for many in India, the airport is now operational. Videos showcasing the newly constructed airfield surfaced on Chinese social media on November 10, 2023. It is essential to perceive these three advancements—the model village, hydropower station, and airport—as interconnected. Undoubtedly, all three are designed for dual purposes, serving both civilian and military functions.

A noteworthy development demands attention: the suspension of the Kailash Yatra for Indian pilgrims. The majestic 6,638-meter-tall diamond-shaped mountain is revered as the dwelling place of Lord Shiva and holds profound significance in Jain, Buddhist, and Bon religions.

For centuries, pilgrims from India have embarked on spiritual journeys to this sacred site. Since the 1990s, they accessed Tibet through the Lipulekh Pass in Pithoragarh district and later via Nathu-la in Sikkim. However, following the Doklam incident in 2017, Indian yatis were barred from using these routes.

Despite Kathmandu's request being overlooked by Beijing for the aerial sightseeing of Mount Kailash, Nepali tour operators took the initiative to provide an alternative. A significant number of devotees then opted for the Nepal route, utilizing chartered helicopters from Simkot to Purang. Regrettably, the program had to be halted later due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Upon its reopening for Nepali participants in 2022, the Chinese authorities disallowed Indian visitors from flying to Purang. This decision came despite the fact that in the previous year alone, Nepali tour operators had received an overwhelming 50,000 bookings from Indian pilgrims eager to embark on the sacred pilgrimage.

As reported by the Kathmandu Post, a novel solution has emerged: a flight that remains within Nepalese territory, allowing for a "remote" darshan of the sacred mountain. A recent announcement stated, "Shree Airlines operated a first-of-its-kind aerial pilgrimage tour of the holy places, making the pilgrims' dream come true without a Chinese visa." It is evident that China aims to restrict Indians from experiencing a genuine darshan of the holy mountain or approaching the burial site of Zorawar Singh. These recent developments in the region shed light on the motivations behind these measures. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

## Rising Titans: Empowering India's youth for a brighter tomorrow

By: John Mech

At the heart of the Indian subcontinent lies a vibrant nation, buzzing with life and driven by its energetic youth. India, The Rising Bharat, a diverse mix of cultures, traditions, and languages, thrives on the enthusiasm and passion of its growing population. The young people of India have a big job ahead - they're responsible for making sure the country becomes not just safe, but strong and successful for everyone. They're the ones who will shape the future, steering it towards progress, strength, and prosperity for generations to come.

To fulfil this important role, Indian youth need to understand and use the rights given to them in the Constitution of India. These rights, like the right to be treated equally and the freedom to speak up, are crucial for a thriving democracy. They give individuals the power to make a real difference in the country's journey forward.

As rightful inheritors of these rights, Indian youth have the chance to use them for the good of the nation. In brief, I want to state that the constitution of our country has empowered each one of us to stand for our rights without any fear, coercion, or threat.

Building a more secure, resilient, and prosperous India starts with young people getting involved in activities such as volunteering for "Neighbourhood Justice" initiatives wherein educated local youth can support government initiatives in their areas there are issues in law and governance if the administration of the area is failing in its constitutional mandate, the local youth can hold their MLA as well as local government department accountable.

Youth can also be involved in spearheading awareness campaigns dedicated to crime prevention and fervently advocating for enhanced law enforcement measures. Young Indians wield the power to significantly influence the creation of safer environments conducive to the well-being of all citizens. Through their proactive participation and unwavering commitment, they emerge as indispensable agents of public welfare and positive change, nurturing the founda-



tions upon which a harmonious and prosperous society can flourish.

Education is key to progress and development and it's something every young Indian should have access to.

By getting a good education, learning new skills, and broadening their intellectual and social horizons, young people can set themselves up for success. Whether they're diving into technology, starting their businesses, or exploring new ideas, the possibilities are endless when they have the tools they need to succeed.

Being involved in civic life is also crucial for youth in India. By staying informed about social issues in the region, and local politics, voting in elections, and holding leaders accountable and answerable, young people can make sure their voices are heard in decisions that affect them and their communities.

In a democracy, voting is not just a right - it's a responsibility that every citizen should take seriously. By using their vote wisely, young Indians can help shape the future of their country.

Social entrepreneurship is another way for Indian youth to make a difference. By starting initiatives that tackle important social issues like education, healthcare, and the environment, young people can create positive change in their communities.

With their innovative ideas, commitment to nationalist ideals, and compassion for fellow citizens, they can make a real difference in the lives of those who need it most. By working together, young Indians can build a brighter future for everyone.

In the northeastern state of Nagaland, there's a rich history and culture that deserves to be cele-

brated.

However, Nagaland faces challenges like uneven development and governance issues. However, these challenges also present opportunities for young people to step up and be change-makers.

By working together and using their knowledge, strength, and talents, the youth of Nagaland can help their state reach its full potential and become a place where everyone can thrive.

Unity, integrity, equitable development, and equal distribution of opportunities to grow along with fairness and justice, are essential for Nagaland to grow and prosper. One-sided narratives of development cannot be built when the whole fifty per cent of Nagaland is spread over a vast expanse of the Eastern region languishing in darkness and seemingly perpetual injustice.

By working together and focusing on the common good, young people in Nagaland can make a real difference in their state's future. It's important for them to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and to work towards a Nagaland that's strong, united, and full of opportunity for everyone.

As someone proud to call Nagaland home, I know firsthand the beauty and strength of this state. It's a place that's shaped me and taught me important lessons about community, resilience, and love for my country.

Hopefully, with constitutional justice for our brothers and sisters from Eastern Nagaland, the socio-political-economic disparity in Nagaland will be annihilated. Hopefully, everyone in the Eastern region will get equal rights in the growth and prosperity of the state. Hopefully, one day we will see a Chief Minister from Eastern Naga-

land leading a state.

Hopefully, drugs, HIV, alcohol, corruption menace will be cleaned out once and for all. Hopefully, all the International Trading Centers in Nagaland will be made fully operational with international trade and commerce being encouraged.

Hopefully, discriminated people in the state of Nagaland, compelled to live on the margins deep in the jungles and mountains of the Indo-Myanmar Border, will get dignified work/sustainable employment so that they can live a simple, dignified life like other people living in Kohima, Dimapur, Chumukedima.

Hopefully, universal quality healthcare will reach every corner of Nagaland so that people will not have to die without their fault. Hopefully, one day Tuensang will shine like Kohima. I believe that Nagaland has a brighter future ahead, and I'm excited to see what young people here will accomplish in the years to come.

I believe, that only the highly educated youth of modern times with modern, scientific, liberal outlooks strong moral character and a sense of universal justice will bring change in states like Nagaland which has become a centre of corruption in India.

Only the modern youth of Nagaland can become harbingers of "Constitutional Justice" and "Transformation" for Nagaland and our country at large.

The youth of India have everything they need to make their country safer, stronger, and more prosperous. By understanding their rights, getting a good education, getting involved in their communities, and working together, they can build a future that's full of promise and potential.

Let's join hands and embark on this journey of nation-building with determination and optimism.

Also, as residents of Nagaland, I and thousands of youth in Nagaland do understand their responsibility towards building a new world for themselves and the generations to come for the state of Nagaland and the great mother India. I believe, we all, together can create a brighter and secure future for India. Jai Hind!" (The author is the Bureau Chief, Dimapur & Nuland Districts, Project Constitutional Justice)



# Exploring the unique beauty of India's seven sisters

By: Kanchan Basu

Many of us will already know that the "Seven Sisters of India" is a term used to collectively refer to the seven north-eastern states of India, comprising Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. Known for their geographical expanse that borders several countries including China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Bhutan, these states are celebrated for their rich cultural heritage, diverse ecosystems, and breathtaking landscapes.

Despite being an integral part of India, the Seven Sisters possess a distinct identity that sets them apart from the rest of the country. This identity is rooted in their unique historical backgrounds, languages, traditions, and lifestyles that reflect the incredible diversity of India. So with the stage set, let's go on a deeper exploration of these Seven Sisters, one state at a time.

**Assam:** Assam serves as the pivotal gateway to North East India and stands as the primary entry point, ensuring that travellers driving to any of the north-eastern states first experience the rich mix of Assam's cultural and natural heritage. Situated along the Brahmaputra River plains, Assam is famous for its wildlife sanctuaries, tea plantations, and the Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its significant population of one-horned rhinos. One of the largest tea is renowned for its strong, robust flavour.

The tea gardens around Dibrugarh and Jorhat, present an endless green landscape that's iconic to the state. The Brahmaputra

River at sunset offers spectacular views, with the changing colours of the sky reflecting on its vast waters. Something that is on many bucket-lists is the annual Bihu festival here, a series of festivals marking the Assamese New Year and celebrating the state's agricultural cycle. One special highlight of Assam is the Majuli Island, the world's largest river island, which offers a serene escape with its vibrant cultural landscape, including satras (monastic centres) that showcase the Assamese Neo-Vaishnavite culture.

**Nagaland:** Nagaland's biggest draw is the Hornbill Festival, often dubbed the "Festival of Festivals." It brings together all the state's tribes in a vibrant showcase of cultural exhibits, traditional dances, folk songs, and handicrafts. Adding to Nagaland's allure is its fiery culinary tradition, notably featuring the Bhut Jolokia—one of the world's spiciest chillies. The state's cuisine, infused with the potent Naga chilli peppers, offers an unforgettable gastronomic adventure.

A state known for its rich tribal heritage, Nagaland's landscape is dominated by verdant hills and valleys, which directly means many trekking opportunities. To wrap up our journey through Nagaland, I wanted to talk about its most stunning photo spot—the Dzukou Valley. When the Dzukou Lily blooms, the valley turns into a dream scene for photographers. Imagine rolling hills dotted with colourful flowers, all set against a backdrop of towering mountains. It's a sight that truly captures the beauty of Nagaland in a single, mesmerising view.

**Manipur:** Known as the "Land of Jew-



els," Manipur boasts unique varieties of orchids and the surreal landscape of Loktak Lake, the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India. Loktak Lake, the largest freshwater lake in the North East, is known for its unique 'phumdis (floating islands). The state is also home to Keibul Lamjao National Park, the only floating national park in the world. But when I think of Manipur, it's more the hospitality of the people here that comes to mind. Speaking of dance, Manipur boasts the classical dance "Manipuri", known for its grace themes drawn from Vaishnavism.

**Meghalaya:** Apty named 'the abode of clouds', Meghalaya boasts the wettest place on Earth, Mawsynram. Mawsynram and Cherrapunji, both in Meghalaya, receive some of the highest annual rainfall in the world and as a result state is home to some beautiful waterfalls, notably the mesmerising Nohkalikai Falls, the tallest plunge waterfall in India.

The capital city Shillong, is often re-

ferred to as the "Scotland of the East" due to its picturesque landscapes. There's one more thing about Meghalaya, that I think super unique example of bioengineering by the state's Khasi tribe—the living 'Root Bridges'.

The incredible thing about these bridges is that the roots of the trees here are made to grow in a certain way to form natural, sturdy bridges across rivers. The state is also home to the Mawlyngong Village, acclaimed as Asia's cleanest village. And who can forget the Dawki River near the Bangladesh border. The crystal-clear waters of this river make it another must-visit for stunning landscape shots.

**Mizoram:** With its hilly terrain, Mizoram offer stunning panoramic views of dense bamboo forests, serene lakes, and cascading waterfalls. The state is celebrated for its Chapchar Kut festival, marking the beginning of the farming season with vibrant dances, traditional music, and colourful attire. But when I think of Mizo-

ram, it's more the hospitality of the people here that comes to mind. The Mizo people's hospitality is legendary, often welcoming guests with their traditional bamboo dance. To add to that, we have Mizoram's Blue Mountain (Phawngpui), the highest peak in Mizoram offering stunning views, while the Vantawng Falls and Tam Dil Lake are perfect spots for nature lovers.

**Tripura:** Adorned with palaces, temples, and diverse fauna, Tripura reflects a blend of Bengali and indigenous cultures, with the Garia Puja festival standing out. It is celebrated to honour the deity of livestock and wealth, featuring traditional music, dance, and elaborate rituals. Similar to the famous Wagah Border ceremony in Amritsar, you can experience the Indian Border Security Force's Flag Down parade at the India-Bangladesh border here. A famous temple here is the Tripura Sundari Temple, one of the 51 Shakti Peethas scattered across the Indian subcontinent. Speaking of architecture, two places really stand out in Tripura.

First is the Ujjayanta Palace, located in the capital city of Agartala, which is an architectural marvel and now houses the Tripura State Museum. Second is the Neermahal Palace, located in the middle of Rudrasagar Lake, which provides a stunning architectural and natural scene. The reflections of the palace on the water during the golden hour after sunrise and before sunset create a beautiful symmetry, ideal for photography.

**Arunachal Pradesh:** Known as the land of the Dawn-lit Mountains, Arunachal Pradesh boasts a diverse topog-

raphy, including the Himalayan foothills. The state boasts a diverse topography that includes the foothills of the Himalayas. Arunachal is renowned for its lush valleys, serene lakes, and the Tawang Monastery, one of the largest monasteries in the world, set against a backdrop of snow-capped peaks. This state is home to over 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes, each with its distinct dialect, customs, and traditional attire.

Another top draw is the Sela Pass, which offers mesmerising views of snow-capped peaks and crystal-clear lakes, making it a perfect spot for landscape photography. The Golden Pagoda of Namsai also provides a stunning architectural subject against the backdrop of lush greenery. And how can we not talk of the wildlife here. The Namdapha National Park is a haven for wildlife enthusiasts, offering glimpses into the habitat of tigers, leopards, and the rare red panda.

Each of these states contributes to the overall beauty and diversity of Northeast India, making it a region of immense interest for travelers, geographers, and nature enthusiasts. The cultural vibrancy of the Seven Sisters, manifested in their festivals, dance forms, languages, and traditions, makes the region a living museum of human culture.

The Seven Sisters of India represent a unique blend of cultural richness, natural beauty, and historical depth, making them a must-visit for travelers. So, if you haven't already planned a trip to the Seven Sisters of Incredible India, it's time to start planning and experience the incredible diversity that India has to offer.

## My old banger at breakdown

By: Kamal Baruah

It's not just shifting foot down on pedals from left to right, a drive without a destination is a great way to relieve some stress and that's why experts says driving is a vital for mental health. As people grow older, they do drive for fun. No matter what seat they're cruising around. It's unlikely that it's a Ferrari or an Aston Villa but it didn't matter, I've only got an old banger but not tearing around a track at 200 mph. There is no reason why I shouldn't drive around in my rusty car, where attractions go far beyond its appealing looks at onlookers.

The woes of congestion, stalling at the crossing, parallel parking and honking horns rarely bother as I overcome those frustrations after crossing city limit. I move on the road humming a cheerful tune while head out onto the streets of Meghalaya, they're lovely, shaded by tall hills and lush greenery and I pleased offering lifts to dear one but I discover the sheer pleasure for miles to drive before it dusks. Isn't all about driving hedonism?

I experience such exciting state rather than stressful outing inside urban lanes. But there's no denying that why it's fun and feel truly alive while holding the steering of an SUV at high sitting position to make you feel on top of the world. One gets to explore places



and discover sights and sounds while expanding horizon. Some might love to listening music but I prefer to drive in silence with the nature to help clear my head. What important at the end of the day is that you're driving for pleasures to escape from the strains of everyday life.

While I was returning so fast after a joyful driving, I at once drove across a big rumble strips over a flyover, and it started blowing emergency beep unceasingly with the vibration and changing noise of jarring sound of tires.

The startling noise alerted me of speed restriction on the edge of the road and caused a moment of fright but I found no way other than to stall the vehicle finally at the crossroads.

Although it was swiftly deactivated by switching the Ignition anti-locked, shockingly enough, the key was locked and the beep went louder and so annoying. I felt so helpless be-

cause there was nothing much I know about electrical failure toget things all right. It didn't catch the eye of any passerby and traffic police were out of sight as it was the time for the end of the day.

I was shocked to learn about the availability of road-side-assistance for vehicles ageing less than seven years. My decade old car found no franchise for a service bay. The search for an alternative has intensified. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness as the shutter was already down. The manager was kind and ready to help provided I had to sit at wheel at my breakdown car.

Disconnecting the supply to horn gave some respite at pick up siteto stop beeping so to extend the life of battery. The mechanic straight away put the hazard light on and my car was hauled by a rope from the recovery vehicle. He alerted me of getting hit while moving. I didn't understand his cau-

tionary about the hazards lying ahead. Soon it started pulling; I found more pressure required on brake pedal and also felt the steering wheel become heavy suddenly. Power is provided by hydraulic pump which gets power from the engine. It was hell of a driving to maneuver even at a snail's pace. I had to press the hand brake forcefully off and on. Whatever the outcome, an hour of grappling hooks behind the wheel was one hell of a fight. It was purely required a mechanical force. How fatal would be without a running engine while on drive? Never turn the ignition off, when the vehicle is in motion as one will no longer be able to steer the vehicle and that was the hardest lesson of ABC (Accelerator-Brake-Clutch) to witness while I had a breakdown on the middle of the road. I was once tempted to exchange my old frail, unreliable one. It sounds good while drive in an old car to drive out in a new one. It sounds great in fact! But I have my own taste. It's time to hit the road again and I always will, love my classic old banger Fiat for its low pitch rumble.

Even loud exhausts aren't uncommon for sports car. Sometimes I want to do things on my own to set the cruise control on 100 mph and drive like Formula One champion, no less. I don't want to be stuck again on the side of the road.

## When Winds Blow Wintry Whistles Insect of Hatred

By: Bipul Chandra Kalita

When winds blow wintry whistles

I become a tree  
Full of leafless branches  
With a status  
Of silent emotions  
Or, gradually roaring loneliness...

Many a suffering weighs my patience

Pinching my conscience  
Punching my firmness  
To distract me  
From being ready to be green again...

When pains become my bosom friends

Wintry winds blow trombones  
To make me prepare for a new suffering  
And I make myself ready to be tolerant...

Foes fail to defeat me rhetorically  
Kindness protects my isms;  
Friends win my simplest heart  
Love keeps it open like a widely read book...

## Share With Love

By: Otteri Selvakumar

Share with love.

Anything can be shared with love.

Love is not making many problems with others.

Love is not sharing unwanted things for others too.

Love shares the love all around; teaching the love, enjoying activity, helping others.

Love is not a bank; love is not about money.

Enjoy life in loving with others.

Don't make mistakes with others.

Be love enjoy all love just be love's fun...

Life is so much joy being love for all enjoying love's fun!

## Illumination

By: Antonio Ma-et

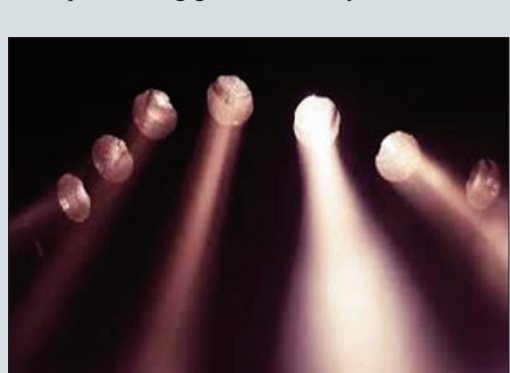
An imperfect actor,  
Enthroned upon a tumultuous stage,  
Awoken by the brilliance,  
To perform under the spotlight's gaze.

Every gesture uniquely his own,  
Unfolding in unforeseen moments.  
Infront of a crowd that hungers and thirst.

The valour of entertainment.  
His heart beats in rhythm,  
Commanded to lead,  
Mentally bound to enact,  
An untold saga of his existence.

He yearns to grasp the stars, within  
the grasp of his hand, Or to ride the moon's glow,  
Where his soul's desires command.

With no script to guide him, The actor must improvise,  
Through the night and day,  
He hopes nothing gets on His way.



## BOOK REVIEW

# Journey through India's fast changing socio-political scenario

By: Vivek Rajappan

India's reawakening as a great civilization with global responsibility was its magnificent transformation, a subject of deep discussion and study. As a nation it has been striving for something bigger and glorious ever since the British left its soil. Governments that governed India since then had made great contributions to establish this land as an exemplary democracy.

Probably, their efforts bore fruit and we as a nation have gone through various facets of democracy flourishing in India irrespective of its cultural variety menacingly disturbing its amiability occasionally. There has always been a thread of unity passing through the beads of variety connecting everybody and holding them together into one national heritage. This has been the impact of the inclusivity that India has nourished, cherished and propagated for millennia. This has again been the reason that we survived as a nation irrespective of attempts to dismantle its civilizational essence.

Great sacrifices were made by rishis, reformers, political leaders and common men. India fascinated many and continues to fascinate even today. India's cultural essence and its renaissance can't be examined without Swami Vivekananda being studied. He was largely instrumental in reviving India's spiritual vigor, without which, he declared this nation would not survive.

While presenting India's spiritual depth to the west, Vivekananda candidly gave an indubitable account on what India represented as a civilization and why its existence gave a unique hope to the whole world. "Between Perception Battle and Reality" gives strong intuitions on this socio-political reality of India.

Undoubtedly, the book contemplates India's frequently changing socio-political scenario. There are multiple factors that accelerate this change, it observes. It extensively presents the changes that India witnessed socially, politically and culturally and it also exhibits their effects on our social life.

As a nation we became more diverse socially, culturally and politically but practically remained illiterate about maintaining amiability among societies. At the same time we failed to embrace the inner core of inclusiveness that remained the base of our societal essence.

Diversity was not only the result of the ideologies we represented but we became strangely diverse in multiple aspects. In a never before manner, we continued to become emotionally ugly and acrimonious and conveniently forgot the fact that there could be values and practices and at least some genuine emotions like compassion and kindness that we could use to patch up our differences with.

We created classes on every passing day dividing the societies on imaginary differences and kept shifting our focus from trying to find ways to collectively progress. Diversity became too dividing a factor that we found less space for concomitance

and factors that could have contributed for meaningful coexistence such as religion, region, language and other familiar subjects became prominent in our social discourse deeply dividing us entirely. The more we confined our thoughts inside the boundaries of a barricaded social atmosphere, the more we learnt to live under its pressure.

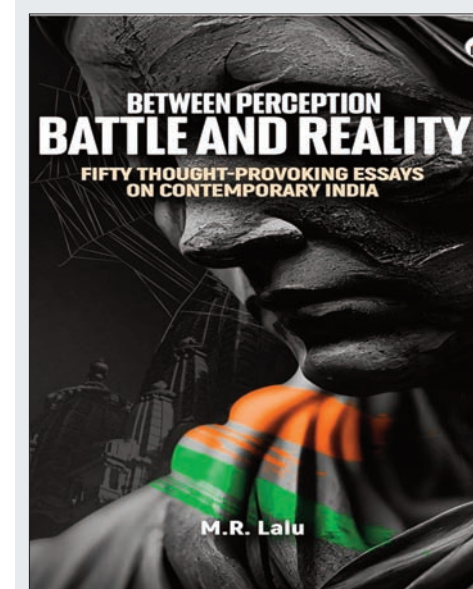
In this process what we lost was an emotional link with the rest of the world. As a country we became more selfish and secluded behind the boundary that we built with bricks of animosity, greed, lust and colossal insensitivity and we lost the essential humanness, the quality that we were once known for.

We have experienced the rise and fall of rulers and parties that tested the power of the country's democratic depth, veracity and style for decades. But the rise of a nationalist regime in India was determined to establish that aspect of India's cultural renaissance

bank regimentation and policies were born to appease religions and religious groups that stood together as a rigorous bargaining force gaining maximum benefits. Reforms were designed to satiate such groups and those who stayed a divided house, the majority, irrespective of its humongous population was disrespected and devalued.

The Modi era came as a catastrophic storm that dismantled many among the political class that once dominated India's politics making minority appeasement their winning strategy. But divided in the name of the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the political opposition of the Modi government had further swooped into a new low.

The sheer spectacle of the event, the pran pratishtha symbolized the revival of India's civilizational glory. The whole country erupted into a cultural euphoria with millions dancing in joy. The temple became a reality



**Book:** *Between Perception Battle and Reality*

**Author:** M.R.Lalu

**Publisher:** Authors Press, New Delhi

**Pages:** 193

**Price:** ₹ 395

**Seller:** Amazon

which began with Swami Vivekananda.

Political interventions and administrative reforms brought drastic changes in the way how the west and the rest viewed India and the fact that needs special appreciation is its audacity to liberate this country from its political duplicity. This political duplicity was the custom that India was made to deeply slip into, but Narendra Modi's nationalist regime brought a defining moment into Indian politics that was cultural, nationalistic, unprecedentedly development oriented and inclusive.

Keeping India's civilizational ethos its guiding force, the regime successfully completed a decade and the country has witnessed progress. Politics in India was primarily focused on minority vote-bank based on the appeasement of particular communities that insisted for communal recognition and resisted all forms of collective progress.

Their bargaining power had been so overwhelmingly suffocative that the regimes that ruled India remained shamefacedly servile to such forces in the name of secularism. This appeasement mechanism remained a prominent custom and system for long.

Applauds were heard for parties that leaned toward prominent vote-

after centuries of struggle and sacrifice. An event of this spiritual significance and cultural magnitude was capable of churning the cultural essence of the country beyond politics but deliberate attempts to term it as Narendra Modi's petty political gimmicks had dampened the naysayers' prospects further.

This arrogance of some parties possibly made the rift between them and the majority deeper. Profoundly disconnected from the cultural values of the country, they further slipped into severe insignificance but the cultural eminence of India is sure to rise again with the impact of a reinvigorated devotion to Lord Ram turning Ayodhya into a global spiritual attraction.

With the consecration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, India's civilizational essence received a fresh fillip and the dawn of a new Ram Rajya is expected to further bring Mahatma Gandhi's ideals into action and Vivekananda's vision into actuality. 'Between Perception Battle and Reality' is an attempt to delve into a thought-provoking pattern of personal musings. It is really a meaningful journey through India's fast changing socio-political scenario. (The author is a freelance journalist who can be reached at mrlalu30@gmail.com)



Clinton said voters should put aside their differences given the stakes of the race

## Biden says most of world leaders told him not to 'let Trump win' 2024 Presidential elections

**NEW YORK, March 30:** Making a forceful case for his re-election, US President Joe Biden has claimed that during his meetings with world leaders, including at the G20 summit in India, almost every one of them told him not to let his predecessor Donald Trump win in 2024 as they feel it would put their democracies in danger.

Former Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton also joined Biden on Thursday night in New York at the most lucrative fundraiser of the 2024 campaign, warning fellow Democrats that Trump, a Republican, must be defeated.

"Trump says if he loses again — again in November, there will be a 'bloodbath.' What the hell is with this guy? No, I'm — I'm not — no, I'm really serious. It concerns me the most," Biden said.

"And — but whether it's the G20 meeting in — in

India or whatever the meeting where there are other heads of state, I am not exaggerating when I say — and I say it in front of the press without giving the names — almost every one of the world leaders finds an excuse to get me alone for a moment, put their hand on my arm, and say, 'You can't let him win.' 'My' — meaning his country or her country — 'my democracy is at stake. My democracy is at stake,' he said.

India hosted the G20 Summit in New Delhi for the first time from September 9-10.

Biden, 81, the incumbent, faced no viable competition for the Democratic nomination. His predecessor in office, Trump, 77, on the other hand easily saw off a crowded field in the Republican primary. Now they are set for a rematch of 2020 in the November 5 elections.

Biden also slammed Trump for walking away



from NATO.

"This is a guy who walked away from NATO...told Putin he could do whatever he wants if they're not paying their dues," Biden said.

"Just — just look at what he's done. The rest of the world is wondering what in the hell is happening to us. And they're relieved, not because I'm so special but that I'm not Trump. I'm serious. I wish it was because they thought Biden was such a wonderful guy," Biden said amidst laughter.

"I think they respect me. I think they listen to me. But the point is, it's because they're scared to death for their countries if he (Trump) were to win again," Biden said.

All Americans including Democrats, independents, and Republicans should say that there is no place ever for political violence, for physical violence in the country's political system, he said.

"We're at a real inflection point in history. Things are changing. This guy denies

there is global warming. This guy wants to get rid of not only Roe v. Wade (right to abortion) - by the way which he brags about having done - he wants to get rid of the ability of anyone anywhere in America to have the right to choose. All the things he's doing are so old," Biden said.

Clinton said voters should put aside their differences given the stakes of the race. Clinton accused Trump while in office of taking credit for an economy that had started improving under Obama and said Biden later inherited "a mess" left by Trump.

"Joe is absolutely right that we've got not just a nominee, but frankly a party and an entire infrastructure that increasingly seems unconcerned with the essence of America," Obama said of Trump and Republicans.

"But we also have a positive story to tell about the future," he said. (PTT)

## US welcomes the new Palestinian government following its repeated calls for political reform

**JERUSALEM, March 30:** The United States has welcomed the formation of a new Palestinian autonomy government, signaling it is accepting the revised Cabinet lineup as a step toward Palestinian political reform.

The Biden administration has called for "revitalizing" the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority in hopes that it can also administer the Gaza Strip once the Israel-Hamas war ends. The war erupted nearly six months ago, triggered by an October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel.

In a statement late Friday, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said the United States looks forward to working with the new group of ministers "to deliver on credible reforms."

"A revitalized PA is essential to delivering results for the Palestinian people in both the West Bank and Gaza and establishing the conditions for stability in the broader region," Miller said.

The Palestinian Authority administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. It is headed by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who has not faced an election in almost two decades.

The United States sees the Palestinian Authority as a key part of its preferred plans for post-war Gaza. But the authority has little popular support or



legitimacy among Palestinians, with many viewing it as a subcontractor of the occupation because of its security cooperation with Israel in the West Bank.

Earlier this month, Abbas tapped Mohammad Mustafa, a US-educated economist, as prime minister. On Thursday, Mustafa named his new lineup. It includes relatively unknown technocrats, but also Abbas' interior minister and several members of the secular Fatah movement he leads. Several of the ministers are from Gaza, but it's not clear if they are currently living there.

The Islamic militant group Hamas, a rival of Abbas, drove his security forces from Gaza in a 2007 takeover. The United States wants a reformed Palestinian Authority to return and administer Gaza, an idea that has been rejected by both Israel and Hamas.

A major challenge for the Palestinian Authority, should it be given a role in administering Gaza, will be reconstruction. Nearly six months of war has

destroyed critical infrastructure including hospitals, schools and homes as well as roads, sewage systems and the electrical grid. Airstrikes and Israel's ground offensive have left more than 32,000 Palestinians dead, according to local health authorities.

The fighting has displaced over 80 per cent of Gaza's population and pushed hundreds of thousands to the brink of famine, the UN and international aid agencies say.

The war began after Hamas-led militants stormed across southern Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking about 250 others hostage.

Israel has said it will maintain open-ended security control over Gaza and partner with Palestinians who are not affiliated with the Palestinian Authority or Hamas. It's unclear who in Gaza would be willing to take on such a role.

Hamas has warned Palestinians in Gaza against cooperating with Israel to administer the territory, saying anyone who does will be treated as a collaborator, which is understood as a death threat. Hamas has rejected the formation of the new Palestinian government as illegitimate, calling instead for all Palestinian factions, including Fatah, to form a power-sharing government ahead of national elections, which have not taken place in 18 years. (AP)

## Zelenskyy fires more aides in a reshuffle as Russia launches drones and missiles across Ukraine

**KYIV, March 30:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed a longtime aide and several advisers on Saturday in a continuing reshuffle while Russia unleashed fresh attacks overnight.

Zelenskyy dismissed top aide Serhiy Shefir from his post of first assistant, where he had served since 2019. The Ukrainian president also let go three advisers, and two presidential representatives overseeing volunteer activities and soldiers' rights.

No explanation was given immediately for the latest changes in a wide-reaching personnel shakeup over recent months. It included the dismissal on Tuesday of Oleksii Danilov, who served as secretary of the National Security and Defense Council, and Valerii Zaluzhnyi as head of the armed forces on Feb. 8. He was appointed Ukraine's ambassador to the United Kingdom earlier this month.

Ukraine's air force said Saturday that Russia launched 12 Shahed drones overnight, nine of which were shot down, and fired four missiles into eastern Ukraine.

Russia unleashed a barrage of 38 missiles, 75 airstrikes and 98 attacks from multiple rocket launchers over the last 24 hours, Ukraine's armed forces said in social media posts.

Ukrainian energy company Centrenergy announced Saturday that the Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant, one of the largest thermal power plants in the eastern Kharkiv region, was completely destroyed following Russian shelling last week.

Power outage schedules were still in place for around 120,000 people in the region, where 700,000 people had lost electricity after the plant was hit on March 22.

Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure in recent days, causing significant damage in several regions.

Officials in the Poltava region said Saturday there had been "several hits" to an infrastructure facility, without specifying whether it was an energy facility.

Meanwhile, the toll of Friday's mass barrage of 99 drones and missiles hitting regions across Ukraine came to light on Saturday, with local officials in the Kherson region on Saturday morning announcing the death of one civilian.

A resident of the Dnipropetrovsk region died in a hospital from shell wounds, according to regional Gov. Serhiy Lisak. (AP)

## Zardaris supersede Sharifs with most legislators from same family in Pakistan



**LAHORE, March 30:** The Zardaris have overtaken the Sharifs to hold the record for having the most number of lawmakers from a family in Pakistani politics after President Asif Ali Zardari and slain former premier Benazir Bhutto's youngest daughter Aseefa was elected unopposed as a member of Parliament.

Aseefa, who is set to become the First Lady, had filed a nomination for the National Assembly seat NA-207 from the Shaheed Benazirabad (formerly Nawabshah) area of Sindh province for the bye-election scheduled for next month.

According to a notification issued by the Returning Office of the area, Aseefa was elected unopposed after three candidates who had filed papers against her withdrew their names from the contest.

The three candidates were Abdul Rasool Brohi, Amanullah and Mairaj Ahmed.

It left her with no challenger and she was declared a winner in her maiden electoral contest Friday. The seat was vacated by her father, Asif Ali Zardari after he was elected as the president.

With her victory, the Zardari family

## Police say 3 hostages have been released but the situation in a Dutch town is not over

**EDE (NETHERLANDS), March 30:** Three people who were held hostage for hours in a nightclub in the central town of Ede were released Saturday, police said, but they added that the "situation is not over".

Gelderland Police announced the hostage release in a message on X, formerly Twitter. They gave no further details about whether more hostages remained in the club. Heavily armed police and special arrest teams, some wearing masks, were massed outside the popular club.

Video from the scene showed three people walking out of the club with their hands in the air following their release.

Police said in a message on X, formerly Twitter, that "at the moment there is no indication of a terrorist motive."

Earlier Saturday, officers cordoned off a square in central Ede and evacuated about

150 nearby homes, saying that multiple people were being held hostage in a building there.

Police spokesman Simen Klok told The Associated Press people were being held hostage but he declined to give more details of the incident or say how many people were involved.

The hostages were being held in Cafe Petticoat, a popular bar and nightclub in Ede, according to an AP videographer at the scene.

Images from the scene in Ede, a rural market town 85 kilometres (53 miles) southeast of Amsterdam, showed police and firefighters on the streets in a cordoned-off area.

The municipality said that all shops in the centre of Ede would remain closed while the situation continued. Trains to and from the town's station also were halted. (AP)

## As conflict worsens in eastern Congo, 2 armed groups pledge to respect civilians

**GENEVA, March 30:** Under a crystal chandelier in a hall where the first Geneva Convention was signed in the mid-19th century, representatives of two armed groups in Congo signed solemn pledges this week to both their violence-wracked country and the wider world: We will do better to respect and protect civilians.

With several Western diplomats looking on, the envoys made commitments that their forces will work to end sexual violence, food insecurity and conditions of famine and to ensure greater access to health care in the parts of increasingly violent eastern Congo that they operate in and control.

The ceremony Tuesday at City Hall in Geneva, a Swiss city that's known for an internationalist bent and as home to the international Red Cross, is the culmination of years of work by the humanitarian group Geneva Call, which works to protect civilians in conflict zones.

Congo, Africa's second largest country, has seen a recent upsurge in insecurity in its mineral-rich east, an area that has been wracked by conflict for decades. More than 120 armed groups are fighting for land and power and, in some cases, protecting their communities. However, M23, the largest and best-known group, allegedly linked to neighboring Rwanda, has not engaged with Geneva Call.

President Felix Tshisekedi, who started his second five-year term in January, had made quelling violence in the eastern parts of the Central African country a priority in his first term — but has struggled to

deliver results. In Geneva, two armed groups that are loosely aligned with the government against M23 inked separate "Deeds of Commitment" on the rules they've vowed to respect. Geneva Call was quick to say these are not formal agreements and don't "legitimize" the armed groups.

One of the two, CMC-FDP (the French language acronym for Collective of Movements for Change/Self-Defense Force of Congolese People), has worked with Geneva Call for five years and taken steps such as releasing 35 children who were formerly in the group and rehabilitating schools and health centers.

"We are here as representatives of a patriotic resistance group in the Democratic Republic of Congo and we're here in Geneva to reiterate our commitment to respect international humanitarian law and human rights," said Jimmy Duce Butsitsi, an assistant to the group's president, Christophe Mulumba. The larger of the two groups is N D C - R/Guidon (Nduma Defense of Renewed Congo/Guidon), which has about 5,000 fighters. It has released over 20 hostages, undergone training in humanitarian law, and handed over 53 "perpetrators" of sexual or gender-based violence in its ranks to authorities as part of its work with the Geneva group.

"Before all these training courses that we've taken, we could let ourselves do whatever we wanted," said group spokesman Marcellin Shenkuku N'Kuba, who was accompanied in Geneva by

Jérémie N'Kuba, the group's political chairman. "Now, we feel — we can see — there's a change on the ground, and so we can't let ourselves do whatever we want anymore." Shenkuku N'Kuba acknowledged that respecting the commitments "isn't easy" and said he's "not a prophet" but that the group will endeavor to adhere to them now that the pledges have been made.

He said his group was also motivated out of a desire to debunk preconceived notions that people around the world might have about resistance groups, and "show our desire and to influence others also to adhere to the philosophy of respect for human rights... despite the circumstances our country is going through for the moment."

Alain Déléroz, Geneva Call's director-general, said the idea behind such commitments is "to encourage other groups to follow the examples of these bigger groups."

The humanitarian group was born in 2000 out of an effort to ban landmines, and it has shepherded nearly 120 such pledges from armed groups in countries, including Iraq, Myanmar and Syria, on issues like child protection, sexual violence and gender discrimination.

Geneva Call will keep tabs on any signs that the two groups might be violating their commitments, and would first raise any issues with their leaders confidentially. If troubles persisted, the aid group could go so far as to "reputate" the deeds — but that has never happened in any other country.

The ceremony took place in the City Hall's "Alabama Room," under a painting that commemorates a meeting of bearded and mustachioed envoys from Europe and the United States who signed the first Geneva convention on aid to war-wounded in 1864. (AP)

## Brazil's top court denies Bolsonaro's request for passport return to travel to Israel

**RIO DE JANEIRO, March 30:** Brazil's Supreme Court has denied a request by former president Jair Bolsonaro's lawyers that his passport be returned to him so that he can travel to Israel, according to an official document released here.

Bolsonaro's lawyers said in a statement on Thursday that Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu had invited Bolsonaro to an event in May, and requested the Supreme Court to restore his passport.

"It is absolutely premature to remove the restriction imposed on the investigated person," Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes wrote in his decision, which was in line with a recommendation from the prosecutor general's office cited by Moraes. Bolsonaro's passport was taken, precisely, to prevent him from leaving the country, given "the danger to the development of criminal investigations and the possible application of criminal law," the prosecutor general's office said earlier in its opinion.

Federal Police seized Bolsonaro's passport in February during a raid related to an investigation into whether he and top aides plotted to ignore the 2022 election results and stage an uprising to keep the defeated leader in power. Bolsonaro lost the election to his rival and successor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The attorneys submitted Bolsonaro's request to the Supreme Court on Monday, the same day The New York Times published security camera footage revealing that the former president spent two nights at Hungary's embassy in Brasilia, just days after the far-right leader lost his passport.

The revelation of Bolsonaro's stay sparked widespread speculation he may have been attempting to evade arrest, as agents would not have jurisdiction to enter embassy grounds due to diplomatic conventions restricting access.

Bolsonaro's lawyers denied that was his intent, saying in a separate statement it was "illogical" to think he was seeking asylum or avoiding authorities. The stay formed part of his political agenda with the Hungarian government, with whom he has "well-known alignment," the statement said. In his petition to the Supreme Court for authorization to travel to Israel from May 12 to 18, Bolsonaro's lawyers had said the proposed trip wouldn't jeopardize the ongoing legal processes he faces, as he had scheduled appointments after the planned date of return.

The request didn't specify which event Bolsonaro had hoped to attend, but the proposed period coincided with Israel's Independence Day. (AP)

## China holds 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of its Tibet takeover in new villages along India and Bhutan borders

**BEIJING, March 30:** China, which is building numerous villages in Tibet close to its borders with India and Bhutan, has held several celebratory events to mark its takeover of Tibet in the new border villages with a mix of border troops and the local population, the official media here reported.

China, which refers to Tibet by its Chinese name Xizang, in recent years as part of new nomenclature of all references to the Tibetan region celebrates March 28 as democratic reform day in the Himalayan region marking the end of the rule of the Dalai Lama, who fled to India in 1959. Chinese troops took over Tibet in 1951.

"Last Thursday marked the 65th anniversary of the democratic reform that ended feudal serfdom in southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region, with multiple grand celebrations and commemorative activities held across the region," state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

State-run Global Times in its report highlighted the commemoration of the day in the new border villages built along the borders of India and Bhutan. China has been pressing ahead with its plans to build well-furnished villages in both the Indian and Bhutan borders, raising concerns in both countries.

According to a report by the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post last month, three of the villages with new buildings to accommodate locals and soldiers were built on the disputed boundary with Bhutan.

The Post report said the villages were part of China's state-led poverty alleviation scheme to provide better living conditions but they also

doubled as "citadels" to strengthen national security. The Global Times reported that so far, China has built about 624 villages in the border region.

"Across the border regions of southwest China's Xizang (Tibet) Autonomous Region, the 65th anniversary of democratic reform was celebrated with enthusiasm and reflection," Global Times reported on Friday.

"Today's Xizang sees continuous, rapid development in its border areas, with 624 border well-off villages fully established," it said.

Yan Jinhai, deputy secretary of the ruling Communist Party of China, Xizang Autonomous Regional Committee, and chairman of the People's Government of Xizang Autonomous Region, while highlighting the connectivity of the region with 100 per cent of broadband and 4G signals, said Xizang will persist in balancing troop stationing with civilian settlement and emphasizing both border consolidation and development, the report said. "Efforts will be made to tilt policies, projects, and funds more toward the border areas, promoting frontier prosperity to reinforce border defence, border security, and the happiness of border residents," he said.

In Yadong county, located in the southern borderlands of Xigaze city and intersecting with India and Bhutan, eight celebration events were held across its townships from Tuesday to Thursday, the Global Times report said.

The celebrations were also held in Medog county in the south of Nyingchi, at the China-India border besides the newly-built Cona city, it said. (PTT)





# No withdrawal of candidature in Nagaland

PDA comprises NDPP and BJP and supported by legislators of other parties in the state



**HT Correspondent**  
DIMAPUR, March 30: None of the three candidates whose nominations papers were

found valid to contest the April 10 Lok Sabha elections for the lone parliamentary seat in Nagaland withdrew their candidature

on the last of withdrawal of papers on Saturday, according to the returning officer's office for the seat in Kohima.

The nominations papers of the ruling People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) consensus candidate from Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) Dr Chumben Murry, Congress candidate S Supongmeren Jamir and Independent candidate Hayithung Tun-goe Lotha were found valid after scrutiny on March 27. The PDA comprises NDPP and BJP and supported by legislators of other parties in the state.

In the meanwhile, NDPP president Chingwang Konyak has constituted 16 region election committees across 16 districts of the state for the purpose of contesting the ensuing election. These committees have been tasked to coordinate with region NDPP offices and PDA party leaders during the entire period of the election period.

The committees will also oversee party campaigns and rallies and ensure that appropriate permissions and clearances are obtained through the region party offices for the same, Konyak said in a notification.

In the first phase of its election campaign, the PDA will cover Mokokchung and Wokha on April 5, Phek and Kohima on April 6, Peren and Dimapur on April 8 and Zhubeboto and Pseminyu districts on April 9.

## NSDMA asks people to remain vigilant



**HT Correspondent**  
DIMAPUR, March 30: The Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA) on Saturday

asked the public to remain vigilant as an extreme pre-monsoon weather event may occur in the state in the coming days. It also advised them to stay alert and report any eventualities to the respective district disaster management authorities DDMA.

An official report on Saturday said an extreme weather event affected the state, especially in the districts of Peren, Niuland and Phek on March 26. The storm adversely affected houses, crops and also caused minor injuries.

The NSDMA and the DDMA concerned have extended immediate relief to the affected families and communities especially in Peren district while in Niuland and Phek districts, assessment of damage is underway, the report said.

It said the NSDMA through the DDMA concerned are vigilantly

monitoring and reaching out to the affected families and community.

It is also informed that the affected families and communities not reached by the concerned DDMA may approach the concerned circle Administrative officers and report in order to obtain necessary assistance.

The Peren District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) said it distributed 220 tarpaulin sheets to the 10 severely affected villages as immediate relief. Along with relief materials, it said, medical aid was also provided to the seriously and minor injured persons. There was no report of any casualty so far.

The two assessment teams for preliminary assessment were also immediately dispatched to Aithbung and Tenning subdivision, most affected by the disaster on March 26, by the DDMA on March 27 to assess the extent of damages and submit a report to the government.

## INC list 40 star campaigners for LS polls in Manipur

**IMPHAL, March 30:** Indian National Congress (INC) has released a list of 40 star campaigners for Manipur, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, among others. These leaders will campaign for the party candidates in Manipur during the ensuing Lok Sabha elections scheduled to be held in two phases.

The polling in the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency will go in the first phase (April 19) while that of Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency will go in two phases, on April 19 and 26.

The Congress is fielding its candidates in both the seats with Dr Angomcha Bimol Akoi-jam in the Inner constituency and Alfred Kangnam S Arthur in the Outer constituency.

A total of 40 star campaigners will campaign for the two candidates for the ensuing polls as per a list submitted by INC general secretary KC Venugopal to the secretary Election Commission of India (ECI) on March 27.

Among others, the list of star campaigners included Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Jairam Ramesh, Girish Chodankar, Shashi Tharoor and Salman Khurshid, among the AICC Central leaders. The INC further listed MPCC president K Meghachandra, former CM Okram Ibobi Singh, CWC member Gaikhangam besides several former MLAs and MPs. (PTI)

## Cong to protect Naga tradition, culture, solution to ENPO demand: Jamir

**KOHIMA, March 30:** Congress nominee for the lone Lok Sabha constituency in Nagaland S Supongmeren Jamir said the party will work to protect the tradition, culture of the state and find a solution to the Naga political issue and Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) demand for separate statehood.

The present People's Democratic Alliance government in the state is "controlled" by the RSS-BJP government at the Centre and it has "failed" to deliver to the people in all aspects be it Naga political solution, demand for separate statehood by Eastern Nagaland people, protection of the Naga tradition and culture and the rights of the minority, Jamir told PTI in an interview.

"The party (Congress) is of the firm belief that we should stand for the people of the state," he said.

The party high command has told the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee to send the message to the people that Nagaland needs peace and development and equal rights for citizens, youngsters, the business sector and even entrepreneurs.

He claimed that the PDA government in the state is the alliance of BJP-NDA in Centre and both are directly controlled by the RSS because of which there is "rampant corruption and lack of development in the state."

"People in the grassroots are not getting their facilities... the government comes up with various welfare schemes but it never reaches the grassroots people here," he said.

While the white-coloured jobs have reached a saturation point, the state government is not coming up with measures to help the educated youths to start self-employment schemes.

"There is no vision for youths and women of the day," he said.

Jamir said once the Congress-led INDIA Bloc comes to power, Rahul Gandhi has assured to bring out schemes not only for the educated and middle-class people but even for pensioners and welfare for the small sector workers, entrepreneurs, farmers and women.

"The sad part of the state government is that all 60 (MLAs) have become opposition-less and are now being systematically controlled by the RSS-BJP at the Centre. We cannot expect any positive deliverance from the state government," he said.

The Centre is playing in such a way that they have forced the state legislators to come under one banner of an opposition-less government in the pretext of a solution to the Naga issue because of which the 60-elected members are unable to voice for a solution.

Civil societies and general public

has the weapon of utilising their precious vote to bring the much-needed change in the state in particular and the Centre in general, he said, while appealing to the electorate to come forward in consciously exercising their franchise.

"Cast your vote in favour of secularism, which only the Congress upholds and continues to fight on those objects," he said.

Jamir asserted that besides these problems, once elected his priority would be resolution of the vexed Naga political issue and also fulfilling the genuine demand of the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) for separate statehood.

Jamir said the Centre has signed two agreements with the Naga groups but without any solution which is 'very irrational'. The Naga groups have been patient enough for the best solution but the Government of India is taking advantage of them, he said.

On the ENPO issue, he said their demand is 'very genuine' and alleged that GoI has been playing with them for almost two years despite the state government continuing to "neglect" the development of the eastern areas. "If INDIA Bloc led by Congress comes to power at the Centre, solution of these issues will definitely be brought about," he claimed.

Jamir said despite being a Christian

majority state, Nagas are living in harmony with other minority communities in the state but RSS-BJP is "working hard to bring disharmony."

He also said that the Congress is fully aware that it is facing the 60 MLAs who follow the doctrine of the RSS and BJP but people are not under them and they should be conscious of utilising their votes.

"Once INDIA Bloc comes to power there will be drastic changes and faster solutions to the problems of the state," he said.

Asked about reaching out to the people without having a single MLA in the state since 2015, Jamir said "Congress is well aware of the peoples' cry and we will try its level best to reach out as 10 years of Modi government has affected the Naga people in all aspects."

Sixty-one-year-old Jamir is a former MLA.

Voting for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland will take on April 19.

The other two candidates for the Nagaland Lok Sabha constituency are ruling NDPP-led People's Democratic Alliance candidate Chumben Murry and Independent candidate Huyithung Tun-goe Lotha.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections NDPP nominee Tokheho Yeptom had won from the Nagaland Lok Sabha seat. (PTI)

## Tripura to get Vande Bharat Express: Union minister Pratima Bhoumik

**AGARTALA, March 30:** Union minister Pratima Bhoumik on Saturday said Tripura is set to get Vande Bharat Express, a medium-distance superfast train service with the Northeastern Frontier Railway working on electrification of tracks. The North East Frontier Railway (NFR) has already begun works on the electrification of the existing railway network from Dharmanagar to Agartala. It is expected to be completed by June or July.

"It will take only four to five hours to reach Guwahati from Agartala once the Vande Bharat express train is extended up to Agartala after the electrification works," the Union minister of State for Social Justice and Social Empowerment said during an election rally at Dhanpur in the Tripura West Lok Sabha constituency.

Bhoumik said, "They (previous governments) had taken 44 years to bring a train from Dharmanagar (entry point to Tripura) to Churaibari, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi took only two years to take the broad gauge railway service up to Agartala. The train service has been made available up to Sabroom by 2020."

Sabroom is situated in the southern part of the state. The BJP leader said, "I had a meeting with the Union Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav regarding the railway works in the northeastern states and found out that the electrification work up to Agartala is expected to be completed by June or July."

Once the electrification work is completed, Vande Bharat Express will be extended up to Agartala and the Tripura people would reach Guwahati within four to five hours. At present, it takes 12 hours for people to travel between the two destinations by train.

The development in railway connectivity has been possible because of Modi ji, she said. The state has got as many as six universities in the past six years, besides various welfare schemes such as PMAY, PM-Kisan, Ayushman Bharat and Jan Dhan Yojana, Bhoumik said.

Bhoumik, who won from the Tripura West Lok Sabha constituency in the 2019 polls by over three lakh votes, was denied a ticket this time.

She also won last year's Assembly election from Dhanpur but later she resigned due to an 'unknown reason' and continues to be the minister of state. (PTI)

## Manipur declares dry day

**IMPHAL, March 30:** Manipur government has declared a 'dry day' in connection with the voting and the counting of Lok Sabha polls in the state. The polling for the two Lok Sabha seats in Manipur will go on in two phases. The polling across the polling station in the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency will go on April 19 while that of Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency will go twice, on April 19 and 26. As per an order issued by the Excise department, there will be dry days in the state from 4pm on April 17 till 4pm of voting of first phase (April 19).

Similarly, from 4pm of April 24 till 4pm of the second phase polls (April 26), the state will be dry days. A dry day has also been declared on the day of counting of votes — June 4. It will be effective till the end of the counting, the order stated. Further, no spirituous, fermented or intoxicating liquor substances of like nature shall be sold, given or distributed at hotel, eating house, tavern, shop or any other places or public, within a polling area during the 48 hours ending with the hour fixed for the conclusion of poll for election in the polling areas. The order covered all the 57 liquor license holders including exempted categories, the order issued by additional commissioner of Excise Ng Roman Singh added. (NNV)

## Nagaland cabinet, eastern Nagaland MLAs urge ENPO to participate in LS polls

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, March 30:** The Nagaland cabinet and the Eastern Nagaland Legislators Union (ENLU) unanimously made an earnest appeal to the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) and its constituent members not to abstain from the upcoming Lok Sabha election scheduled for April 19 in the state but to participate in the elections and complete the democratic duty for the greater benefit of the eastern region of the state and its constituents.

The appeal was made after a joint meeting, convened by the state cabinet, with the ENLU members in Kohima on Saturday to discuss the election boycott call by the ENPO.

The meeting said upon installation of the new popular government at the Centre, a conducive atmosphere would be created for further negotiation on ENPO's demands.

In light of this, the cabinet and ENLU members urged the ENPO and its constituents to prioritise the democratic principles and ensure widest possible participation in the upcoming general elections in order to pave

the way for a brighter and more inclusive future for eastern Nagaland.

In the meeting, the ENLU members briefed the cabinet net on their recent visit to Delhi and their meeting with the ENPO in Tuensang on March 28.

The issue of participation in the forthcoming general elections and ensuring the representation of all voices within the political

process was also discussed.

At a meeting on March 19, the ENPO, along with other tribal bodies, unanimously resolved to go by their February 23, 2024, resolution not to participate in any central and state election in protest against the delay and refrain from casting votes in these elections against by the Centre to settle the offer for creation of Frontier Nagaland Territory before the announcement of 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

They had also called "public emergency" all over eastern Nagaland comprising six districts of Mon, Tuensang, Longleng, Kiphire, Shamator and Noklak against the delay.



## Voting is not just a right but a responsibility also: First-time voters in Arunachal

Expect representatives to uphold ethical standards and respect democracy

**ITANAGAR, March 30:** For many first-time voters in Arunachal Pradesh voting is not just a right but a responsibility also for building a strong base for a vibrant democracy.

First-time voters in Arunachal Pradesh constitute 46,144 of the total 8,82,816 electorate. Voting for the two Lok Sabha constituencies and the 60-member Arunachal Pradesh Assembly will be held simultaneously on April 19.

Eighteen-year-old Millo Sunyo who will vote for the first time said: "Voting is not just a right but a responsibility of all eligible voters to exercise their adult franchise for building a strong base for a vibrant democracy."

She says elections should be free of money culture, and freebies like distribution of petrol, diesel, liquor, edibles, etc.

Sunya, who hails from Ziro-Hapoli assembly constituency, said people, especially new voters, should turn out in good numbers as it is essential for a healthy democratic process.

"Many a time, we criticise the government but skip participating in the voting process," said 23-year-old Mingo Ete, who hails from Aalo in West Siang district, and will exercise



his franchise for the first time.

Ete says as a first-time voter, he would like

his representatives in the assembly and parliament to be accessible, accountable and trans-

parent in their actions, keeping constituents informed about progress and addressing their concerns.

He also expects his representatives to uphold ethical standards and respect democracy. "Voters should choose a candidate who demonstrates a commitment to these responsibilities and can effectively address local needs," he said.

Ete added that capable and honest people should be voted and corrupt politicians should be shown the door.

"We must choose the right leader who has the potential to bring changes in our society," he said, adding that as educated voters we must not allow 'money culture' to influence voters.

"As a voter, I know the value of a vote and my vote should count", Ete said.

"I would vote for a capable and honest person, who will work to bring in developmental changes," he said.

Citing unemployment among youth as a huge problem in the state, Ete said he would like his leader to solve the common problem. Eighteen-year-old Gedo Kato, who will vote

for the first time in the assembly and parliamentary polls from Liromoba constituency, said, "I am not interested in politics."

"I will vote for a candidate who my parents ask me to," Kato said.

Nineteen-year-old Chukhu Y, who is a first-time voter, echoed Kato's take, saying "I will vote for whoever my parents ask me to."

Originally from Lower Subansiri district, she will cast her vote from Itanagar, this time. "I personally would like to elect a leader who has a pleasing personality and who will fight against corruption and work for the welfare of the educated unemployed youth," she said.

Nani Bath, professor of Political Science Department in Rajiv Gandhi University said, "I don't think our youth are interested in the political process."

Many of them don't have much idea about the issues and politics, he said.

"My understanding is that many of the young voters tend to vote on issues in the parliamentary elections. In the assembly elections, they follow their parents and elders," Bath added. (PTI)



# Prez confers Bharat Ratna on ex-PMs Narasimha Rao, Charan Singh, 2 others posthumously

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday conferred Bharat Ratna on former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, agriculture scientist M S Swaminathan and two-time former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur, posthumously at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here.

The country's highest civilian honour to Rao, Singh, Swaminathan and Thakur were received by their kin at a ceremony attended by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other dignitaries.

"As the ninth prime minister of India, P V Narasimha Rao led far-reaching economic reforms. Earlier, in his youth, he had taken an active part in the freedom struggle, especially against the misrule and oppression in the Nizam-ruled Hyderabad. He was known for his command over several languages and literature," the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a post on X.

On behalf of Rao, Bharat Ratna was received by P V Prabhakar Rao, his son, it added.

P V Narasimha Rao was prime minister from 1991 to 1996. Often referred to as the Chanakya of Indian politics, he is known for initiating far-reaching economic reforms and for his skilful political manoeuvring.

He was the first prime minister from the south, the first Congress leader from outside the Nehru-Gandhi family to com-



plete a full five-year term and the man who steered India through the turbulent early 1990s.

Born in an agrarian family at Karimnagar (now in Telangana), on June 28, 1921, Rao had the distinction of holding important non-economic portfolios at the Centre -- External Affairs, Defence and Home -- at different times in the 1980s. He died on December 23, 2004, at the age of 83.

In another post, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said, "Chaudhary Charan Singh was an ardent patriot. He was imprisoned many times during the freedom struggle. His contribution to zamindari abolition

and land reforms, and his deep understanding of the economy, especially rural and agricultural economy are respectfully remembered. His connect with farmers was legendary."

On behalf of Chaudhary Charan Singh, Bharat Ratna was received by Jayant Chaudhary, his grandson, it added.

Chaudhary Charan Singh, a Jat leader from western Uttar Pradesh, was prime minister between July 28, 1979 and January 14, 1980. He died in 1987. Born on December 23, 1902, at Noorpur in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh in a middle-class family, Singh shifted to Meerut

in 1929 and later joined the Congress.

President Murmu conferred Bharat Ratna upon M S Swaminathan posthumously, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said.

"Swaminathan played a major role in making India self-sufficient in food production. He is known as the 'Father of India's Green Revolution'. With his exceptional insight into the entire agricultural value chain, he guided several initiatives for research, education, and development of new varieties and methods," it said.

Swaminathan dedicated his entire life to the goal of food and nutrition security for all.

"He was working on promoting sustainable agriculture with his vision of 'evergreen revolution'," the Rashtrapati Bhavan said.

Swaminathan's daughter Nitya Rao received the award.

Swaminathan, who died on September 28, 2023, at the age of 98, is most widely known for transforming India from a drought-stricken country dependent on the United States for foodgrain imports in the 1960s to being declared self-sufficient in food production in 1971.

Fondly addressed as MS by his friends and colleagues, Mankombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, in his long career, demonstrated what he advocated -- developing new varieties for food security -- and ensured bumper crops by working side by side with farmers. (PTI)

# Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to head BJP manifesto committee for LS polls

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** The BJP on Saturday announced a 27-member committee, which included several Union ministers and chief ministers, headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to prepare its manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will be its convener and Union minister Piyush Goyal co-convener.

Several other Union ministers, the chief ministers of states such as Gujarat, Assam and Madhya Pradesh, and seasoned hands like Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Vasundhara Rajee are among the members of the committee. Rajnath Singh, a former party president, was the head of the BJP's manifesto committee for the 2019 polls as well. Many members have been repeated in the current panel as well.

Union ministers Dharmendra Pradhan, Ashwini Vaishnaw, Bhupender Yadav, Kiren Rijiju, Arjun Munda, Arjun Ram Meghwal, Smriti Irani and Rajeev Chandrasekhar are among its members.

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chhattisgarh's Vishnu Deo Sai and Madhya Pradesh's Mohan Yadav are also in the committee.

However, not all chief ministers, including Yogi Adityanath of Uttar Pradesh, are its members, with party sources saying that senior leaders of the party who are not in the committee may be made part of other organisational exercises related to the elections.

Bihar leaders Sushil Kumar Modi and Ravi Shankar Prasad, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad

Maurya, former Union minister Jai Oram, party's organisational leaders like Vinod Tawde, Radha Mohan Das Agrawal, Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Tariq Mansoor and Anil Antony have been included in the committee too.

Antony and Mansoor are among the party's Christian and Muslim faces respectively. Former Haryana BJP president O P Dhankar is also a member.

The party is already in the process of seeking suggestions from different groups and its national president J P Nadda had last month flagged off "Viksit Bharat Modi ki Guarantee" video vans, which are meant to travel across the country to collect people's inputs on the contents of its manifesto.

That this is the first time in many decades that some of the core ideological promises of the BJP may not find mention in its election manifesto has added to the general curiosity about what will be the highlights of the ruling party's poll pledges this time.

With Article 370 repealed by the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in its second term and the Ram temple construction in full swing and already open to devotees, two of the party's core promises for several polls stand fulfilled.

Its governments in some states are also working to implement the Uniform Civil Code, another of its foundational pledges.

With PM Modi often asserting that his third term will be marked by big decisions, the buzz around its manifesto has been gaining in traction. (PTI)

## Excise policy case: Delhi min Kailash Gahlot appears before ED



**NEW DELHI, March 30:** Delhi minister and AAP leader Kailash Gahlot appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday for questioning in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy for the capital, officials said.

Gahlot (49), an Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA from Najafgarh, is the minister for transport, home and law in the Delhi government led by chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has been arrested in the case by the federal agency.

The minister was seen entering the ED office in central Delhi around 11:30 am.

Sources said Gahlot has been asked to appear for questioning in the case and getting his statement recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

He is expected to be questioned with regard to the formulation of the policy as he was part of the Group of Ministers (GoM), along with former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and former urban development minister Satyendar Jain, on the preparation and implementation of the new liquor scheme for 2021-22.

The ED has alleged that the excise policy was leaked to the "South Group" liquor lobby that included Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha.

This group is alleged to have given Rs 100-crore kickbacks to the AAP and its leaders, according to the agency.

The ED has also alleged in its chargesheet that Gahlot handled a single SIM number but his IMEI (international mobile equipment identity) was changed thrice.

The agency has mentioned Gahlot's name in its chargesheet and in the context of Vijay Nair, the AAP communications in-charge arrested earlier in the case, saying Nair lived in the government bungalow allotted to Gahlot, who "ironically" lives in Najafgarh in southwest Delhi.

Describing this practice of allowing the use of a government residence to someone else by a public servant as a "criminal breach of trust", the ED had said it had asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to take action in the matter.

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

Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities in the formulation and implementation of the liquor policy. Subsequently, the ED registered a case under the PMLA.

AAP leaders Sisodia and Sanjay Singh were arrested by the ED in the case earlier and they are in judicial custody. The AAP and its leaders have repeatedly denied the charges of wrongdoing, with Kejriwal alleging that the case was built by the BJP-led Centre to create a "smoke-screen" that the AAP is a corrupt party. (PTI)

## PM to address poll rally in UP's Meerut today, RLD chief Jayant Chaudhary to be present

**MEERUT /LUCKNOW, March 30:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will kickstart his Lok Sabha election campaign in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday with a rally in Meerut where the BJP has fielded actor Arun Govil of TV serial 'Ramayan' fame as its candidate.

According to sources, apart from Govil, Rashtriya Lok Dal president Jayant Chaudhary, who recently joined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, will share the dais with the prime minister.

Govil became a household name after essaying the role of Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar's 'Ramayan'.

A BJP leader said, "After the consecration of Lord Ram's idol at the temple in Ayodhya, PM Modi is starting his election campaign in the state from the constituency of Arun Govil, who played the role of Lord Ram and is highly respected."

The party's state General Secretary Anoop Gupta has been given the responsibility of coordinating the prime minister's rally. A senior BJP leader said



that apart from Meerut, people from nearby Baghpat, Bijnor, Muzaffarnagar and Kairana Lok Sabha constituencies will also participate in the rally on Sunday.

Prime Minister Modi's Meerut rally will prove to be a milestone in western Uttar Pradesh, senior BJP leader and MLC Govind Narayan Shukla said and asserted that the party and its allies would win all 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

A BJP leader said, "This is the first rally of the 2024 elections (in Uttar Pradesh). The party workers are fortunate that the prime minister is going to start the election campaign from Meerut."

According to RLD spokesperson Atir Rizvi, party chief Jayant Chaudhary will share the stage with BJP leaders at the rally.

Leaders of the BJP and RLD said that Bharat Ratna to former

prime minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, issues related to sugarcane growers and farmers as well as the development of Western Uttar Pradesh would feature in the rally.

On Saturday, President Droupadi Murmu conferred 'Bharat Ratna', the country's highest civilian award, to Chaudhary Charan Singh posthumously. The award was received by the former prime minister's grandson Jayant Chaudhary during an event at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi.

The local administration has beefed up security measures ahead of the prime minister's Sunday rally. Flying drones, kites or balloons in an eight-km radius from the venue of the rally has been banned under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Polling in Uttar Pradesh will be held in all seven phases of the Lok Sabha elections. Voting in Bijnor, Muzaffarnagar and Kairana Lok Sabha constituencies will be in the first phase on April 19. Meerut and Baghpat will see polling in the second phase on April 26. (PTI)

## Priyanka Gandhi accuses govt of 'pressuring' judiciary after electoral bonds judgment

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday accused the Centre of "pressuring" the judiciary after the Supreme Court struck down the electoral bonds scheme and wondered whether the Narendra Modi government does not approve of an independent and strong judiciary.

The Congress general secretary's remarks come two days after Prime Minister Modi criticised the grand old party in reaction to more than 600 lawyers writing to the Chief Justice of India, alleging that a "vested interest group" is trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts. Modi on Thursday said it was a "vintage Congress culture" to browbeat and bully others.

In a post in Hindi on X, Priyanka Gandhi said, "The manner in which the judicial system is being pressured by getting letters written after seeing the layers of scams being exposed by a decision of the Supreme Court on electoral bonds (which the public is calling 'extortion racket'), and then the

prime minister himself entering the arena and making negative comments on the judiciary, shows that there is something fishy."

"And there is something about which he himself is probably nervous," she said.

"Troubled by political interference, Supreme Court judges holding press conferences, sending a judge to Rajya Sabha, fielding a (former) judge as a candidate in elections, trying to control the appointment of judges and commenting on the judiciary when decisions are against them... Does Modi's government not approve of an independent and strong judiciary?" Priyanka Gandhi said. More than 600 lawyers, including senior advocate Harish Salve and Bar Council chairperson Manan Kumar Mishra, have written to Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, alleging that a "vested interest group" was trying to put pressure on the judiciary and defame courts, especially in cases of corruption involving politicians. (PTI)

## AAP alleges connection between excise policy scam witness and BJP

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday alleged connection between one of the witnesses in the alleged excise policy scam and the BJP, and challenged the enforcement directorate (ED) to conduct a probe into it.

Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, whose son Raghava Magunta Reddy was arrested by the ED in connection with the excise policy case, has been fielded by the BJP's ally TDP in the Lok Sabha polls, senior AAP leaders and Delhi Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bhardwaj alleged in a press conference.

"I challenge the ED if it is an independent agency to bring in record this connection and probe it," Atishi said and alleged that the BJP has connections with the so-called 'South Lobby' of liquor traders.

No immediate reaction was available from the BJP on AAP's allegation.

Kejriwal was arrested on the basis of four statements including by the Maguntas, the AAP leaders claimed. The Delhi chief minister was arrested on March 21 in connection with the excise policy-linked money laundering case being probed by the ED. (PTI)

# Over 60 environmental groups demand ban on mega infrastructure projects in Himalayas

*'The far-reaching impact of these infrastructure projects is manifested in the form of floods'*

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** More than 60 environmental and social organisations in the country have demanded a complete ban on all mega infrastructure projects, such as those related to the railways, dams, hydro projects and four-lane highways in the Himalayas, and have urged for referendums and public consultations to be made compulsory for all development projects. The organisations, jointly leading the "People for Himalaya" campaign, issued a five-point charter of demand for all political parties for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls during an online press conference.

They called for a complete moratorium on all mega infrastructure projects, including those related to the railways, dams, hydro projects, tunneling, transmission lines and four-lane highways, along with a comprehensive multidisciplinary review of the impacts of the existing projects.

The organisations demanded that democratic decision-making through referendums and public consultations be made compulsory for large infrastructure projects.



They also called for the strengthening of the Environment Impact Assessment Notification-1994, the scrapping of the EIA-2020 amendments and FCA-2023 amendments, and free prior informed consent of gram sabhas for all development projects.

Addressing the press conference, climate activist Sonam Wangchuk said, "While industries exploit the riches of the Himalayas, the local people bear the brunt of disasters. The government uses taxpayers' money for rehabilitation efforts, yet those who reap the benefits are not held accountable."

Wangchuk, who recently went on a 21-day fast to demand that Ladakh be included under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, said, "Bureaucrats from Chandigarh or Lucknow may not fully understand the fragility of the region. The best of all could also make mistakes and the worst of all would sell it off to industries."

Mohan Saikia from the Northeast Dialogue Forum warned of severe ecological impacts of massive hydropower development proposed on the Brahmaputra river and its basins, without the consent of the local indigenous communities.

"The far-reaching impact of these infrastructure projects is manifested in the form of floods," Saikia said.

Guman Singh from the Himalaya Niti Abhiyan and Atul Sati of the Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti said the Beas floods and the land subsidence in Joshimath are "man-made, policy-led disasters". Vimla Vishwapremi of the Parvatiya Mahila Adhikar Manch, Himachal Pradesh said pastoralists, landless Dalits and

women, who contribute the least to these policy disasters and the climate crisis, are the worst hit.

"They remain invisible and lack support when it comes to rebuilding their lives," she said. Anmol Ohri from the Climate Front Jammu warned that mindless pilgrim tourism, road construction in glacial regions and riverfront development projects will increase the risk of floods in the region.

The organisations also demanded that state laws and regulations, such as the Van Panchayat Rules in Uttarakhand, which protect the private and community resource rights of nature-dependent communities, be strengthened.

They also emphasised that gram sabhas, panchayats and municipal bodies should be involved in disaster governance through regular sharing of information on the latest risk studies and consultations on climate adaptation strategies, disaster risk mitigation and the work carried out under the National Mission on Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem. (PTI)

## INDIA bloc rally not person-specific but to protect democracy, Constitution: Cong



**NEW DELHI, March 30:** The Congress on Saturday asserted that the INDIA opposition bloc's "Loktantra bachao rally" to be held at the Ramlika Maidan here is aimed at saving the Constitution and democracy and not any particular person.

It said a "strong message" will be sent out from the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance's (INDIA) rally on Sunday to Lok Kalyan Marg (where the prime minister's residence is located) that the BJP-led government's "time is up".

Addressing a press conference on the rally, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi will address the rally, among other senior leaders.

"It is not a person-specific rally. That is why it is called Loktantra Bachao Rally. This is not one party's rally, about 27-28 parties are involved in it. All constituents of the INDIA janbandhan will be taking part in the rally," Ramesh said.

His remarks assume significance in view of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders pitching the rally as being specific to protesting against the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate.

Ramesh said the INDIA bloc sounded its Lok Sabha poll bugle in Mumbai on March 17 and the rally would be its second poll bugle.

He said it will also send out a message of solidarity and unity among the bloc.

Ramesh said the issues of rising prices, the highest unemployment rate in 45 years, economic disparities, social polarisation and injustice against farmers will be raised by opposition leaders at the rally.

He said another key issue that would be raised is the targeting of the opposition through the "misuse

of central agencies".

Two chief ministers and several ministers have been arrested in a bid to target opposition parties politically, Ramesh alleged.

"This shows the mindset that the prime minister wants to cripple opposition parties politically and financially," he said.

The former Union minister said the issues of "extortion" through electoral bonds and the Congress being targeted with "tax terrorism" will also be raised at the rally.

"We got two more income-tax department notices on Friday," he said, without divulging the details.

Ramesh said the most important objective of the rally is to protect the Constitution, which he claimed is in danger with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders saying they want to rewrite it.

He said, if the Constitution is changed, secularism, socialism and social justice enshrined in it, will be in danger.

"The rally is not to protect one person but to protect the Constitution," he said.

Ramesh said the likes of Jharkhand chief minister Champai Soren, NCP (SP) chief Shreed Pawar, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI general secretary D Raja, National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti, Samajwadi Party supreme Akhilesh Yadav, DMK's Tiruchi Siva, TMC's Derek O'Brien, among others, will participate in the rally.

The rally, Ramesh said, will also focus on the "biggest scam of the last 75 years", the Electoral Bonds scheme, through which he claimed the BJP collected Rs 8200 crore.

He pointed out, these bonds were held illegal and unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of India.

Speaking at the presser, AICC in-charge of Delhi Deepak Babaria said that the rally will have maximum participation and convey a message for saving the democracy and Constitution.

Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, who also addressed the press conference, said the rally will mark the beginning of the decisive and final political assault on the BJP from the people of the country. (PTI)



## Global talk not backed by local walk: Cong slams Modi gov't's record on environmental issues

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** The Congress on Saturday listed the Narendra Modi government's "failures" on environmental issues, claiming that its "global talk is not backed by local walk" and when the INDIA bloc "takes over in June", the regressive steps of the current regime will be rolled back.

The party's general secretary and former Union environment minister Jairam Ramesh alleged that the last 10 years of the Modi government have been a disaster, not just for India's people and democracy, but also for the environment and those who depend on it.

"The prime minister, who famously said that the 'climate is not changing, we are changing', has systematically destroyed protections for the environment in India," he alleged.

Ramesh claimed that the key patterns are to strip local communities of any power over their forests and make it easier to hand forest land over to the Modi government's "crony corporate friends".

He listed 10 "failures" of the Modi government on environmental issues.

These are, "the disastrous Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, anti-Adivasi Forest Conservation Rules, dilution of the Biological Diversity (Amendment), secretive amendments to the Environment Protection Act, legalisation of projects after violation of forest clearance, weakening Environmental

Impact Assessment norms, destruction of independent environmental institutions, rising air pollution, Wildlife Protection Act weakened, and coal mines were given on corporate lobbying", he said.

Ramesh said the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 is a critical law to protect forests from encroachment and deforestation. However, a 2023 amendment by the Modi government has hollowed it from within, he alleged.

"The amendment removes protections for 25 per cent of India's forest cover, or almost 2 lakh square km of forest, in violation of the 1996 TN Godavarman Supreme Court order. The intention is to hand over access to our forests to the prime minister's corporate friends," Ramesh alleged.

He also claimed that in addition to the attack via the Forest Conservation Amendment Act, the Modi government has attacked the traditional forest rights of Adivasis and forest-dwelling communities with the 2022 Forest Conservation Rules.

Adivasis are now vulnerable to the corporate takeover of their forest lands and resources, he claimed.

The Congress' 'Paanch NYAY Pachees Guarantee' includes a promise to implement the Forest Rights Act in letter and spirit, and on a deadline, Ramesh claimed, adding all pending claims will be settled in a year and rejected claims will be reviewed within six

months.

The Congress leader alleged that there had been a "dilution of the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Act".

Through repeated dilutions and an amendment, the Modi government has allowed private companies to have easier access to biodiversity products without benefit-sharing with communities, Ramesh alleged. "It is clear that this is on the instigation of a well-known businessman and yoga guru who expressed support for the BJP in the past."

The Congress leader further said that when the entire world was dealing with the Covid pandemic, the Modi government passed 39 amendments to rules under the Environment Protection Act. "Illegal and regressive changes were made to relax environmental protection."

He alleged that PM Modi wants to make it easier to hand over India's forests and pollute the environment, "to benefit his crony corporate friends".

"The Environment Ministry opened a temporary amnesty window for just six months in March 2017 to clear projects in a novel violation category."

"In July 2021, the Environment Ministry issued a notification that made it routine, and provided express fact approval to such projects," he said, adding that since then, over 100 projects run by big corporations were allowed to start work in violation of environmental clearances. (PTI)

son said several rounds of meetings and joint site inspections have already been conducted.

RVNL authorities wrote letters to the Joint Commissioner of Police, Traffic Department on January 5, March 12 and 14 requesting him to provide NOC for the traffic block. Another letter had also been sent to the Commissioner of Kolkata Police on February 6 requesting him to provide NOC for traffic diversion to construct one span, middle support at the median of EM Bypass for the foot over bridge at Belegghata station, the spokesperson said.

Kolkata Police sources said talks were on with RVNL and Metro about building the required infrastructure without disturbing the traffic movement along the busy stretch where thousands of vehicles ply every day.

On March 29, Garg undertook speed trials on the overhead 4.4-km section between Ruby and Belegghata and inspected the entry and exit gates, ticketing system, escalators, lifts, signage boards, electronic interlocking (EI) system, and signal equipment room of Belegghata, Barun Sengupta, Ritwik Ghatak and VIP Bazar stations.

Once commissioned the New Garia-Belegghata stretch will cover a distance of over 10 km which is important for commuters, especially in the rush hour traffic.

The Kolkata Metro and Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) are building the 30-km line, also known as the Orange Line, connecting New Garia on the southern fringes of the city to the airport on the northern fringes via the satellite towns of Salt Lake and New Town.

Presently trains ply along the Ruby Crossing-New Garia stretch which began from March 15. (PTI)

## Mukhtar Ansari laid to rest, thousands attend funeral procession amid tight security

*The 63-year-old had been behind bars in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab since 2005 and had over 60 criminal cases against him*

**GAZIPUR/LUCKNOW, March 30:** Gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari was laid to rest in Ghazipur on Saturday amid a blanket of security as a large crowd took part in the funeral procession while a few people tried to forcibly enter the burial ground, giving tough time to police personnel trying to maintain order.

Some people in the procession raised slogans while an argument broke out between Ghazipur District Magistrate Aryaka Akhouri and Mukhtar's brother Afzal Ansari after the administration, in an attempt to manage the crowd, allegedly stopped some from entering the Kali Bagh burial ground to offer soil on the grave as part of rituals.

Ansari, a five-time MLA from Mau Sadar, was interred at his family's ancestral burial ground about half a km from their residence, near his parents' graves. According to family sources, the body was brought to his hometown around midnight on Friday and pre-burial rituals took place at their residence.

The 63-year-old had been behind bars in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab since 2005 and had over 60 criminal cases against him. He died on Thursday night at Rani Durgawati Medical College after being taken there from Banda jail when his health deteriorated.

Local police said thousands of people from Ghazipur district and nearby areas turned up to attend the last rites. Despite elaborate security arrangements outside Ansari's residence and the grave-



yard, police faced a tough time managing the crowd as some people tried to force their way into the burial ground where entry was restricted.

The funeral procession took longer than expected to reach the burial ground in Mohammadabad because of the large crowd that accompanied the body, said Ravindra Singh, a local.

Varanasi Zone Additional Director General of Police (ADG) Piyush Mordia was present in Mohammadabad to supervise the arrangements.

According to local sources, there was a heated exchange of words between the district magistrate and Afzal Ansari, an MP, during the burial rituals.

A video purportedly of the incident surfaced on social media platforms in which Afzal Ansari can be heard saying, "You cannot stop anyone from offering soil." To this, the district magistrate replied,

"Family members can offer soil. Will the entire town offer soil?"

Not just from the town, anyone from anywhere who wants to offer soil will do so, retorted Afzal Ansari as seen in the clip. When the Akhouri asked if any permission had been sought for the same and cited the prohibitory orders imposed in the district, Ansari said, "You cannot stop anyone from participating in a burial despite the imposition of CrPC section 144."

The DM went on to say that videography is being done and legal action will be taken.

Following the death of Mukhtar Ansari, prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), which bars large gatherings, were imposed across the state and additional security personnel were deployed in the Banda, Mau, Ghazipur and Varanasi districts.

Ansari, who hailed from Mau,

was believed to have a strong influence in the adjoining Ghazipur and Varanasi districts as well.

Sources said the funeral procession started from Mukhtar Ansari's ancestral residence with his brother Afzal Ansari, son Omar Ansari and nephew Suhaib Ansari, an MLA, along with other family members and supporters took part. However, Mukhtar Ansari's elder son and MLA Abbas Ansari could not attend the funeral. He is lodged in Kasganj jail in connection with criminal cases.

A large crowd accompanied the procession and some also raised slogans. On reaching the cemetery, Afzal Ansari appealed to the crowd to maintain peace. His elder brother, former MLA Sibgatullah Ansari, also attended the funeral.

According to the DIG of Varanasi Range, O P Singh, adequate police force was deployed everywhere. The Ansari family cooperated with the police. People started gathering in the area from Friday night and announcements were made to ensure that there was no overcrowding, he said.

"Before Mukhtar Ansari was laid to rest, Namaz-e-Janaza was offered near the house and later at the nearby Prince Maidan," Singh said.

Asked about some people in the crowd raising slogans, he said Mukhtar Ansari's family members had given a list of 40 to 50 people who were allowed to stay at the Kali Bagh cemetery at the time of burial. The rest were stopped after the prayers. There is complete peace, Singh added. (PTI)

## Calling spouse 'bhoot', 'pishach' not cruelty: Patna HC

**PATNA, March 30:** The Patna High Court has observed that the use of "filthy language" by an estranged couple, who call each other names like "bhoot" (ghost) and "pishach" (vampire), does not tantamount to "cruelty".

The remarks came from a single-judge bench of Justice Bibek Chaudhuri, who was hearing a petition filed by Sahdeo Gupta and his son Nareesh Kumar Gupta, both residents of Bokaro in adjoining Jharkhand. The father-son duo had challenged an order passed by courts in Bihar's Nalanda district, on a complaint filed by Nareesh Gupta's divorced wife in Nawada, her native place. The complainant had filed a case against her husband and father-in-law, way back in 1994, accusing them of physical and material torture to press for the demand for a car in dowry.

The case was later transferred to Nalanda from Nawada upon a prayer by the father-son duo, who ended up being slapped with rigorous imprisonment for a year, by the Chief Judicial Magistrate, in 2008 and their appeal before the Additional Sessions Court was rejected 10 years later. In the meantime, the couple was granted divorce by the Jharkhand High Court.

Opposing the petition filed before the Patna High Court, the divorced woman's advocate pleaded that "a lady, in the 21st century" was called "bhoot" and "pishach" by her in-laws, which was "a form of immense cruelty". The court, however, observed that it was "not in a position to accept such an argument". "In matrimonial relations, especially in failed matrimonial relations", there have been instances of "both the husband and the wife" having "abused each other" with "filthy language". (PTI)

## Metro Railway rues delay in getting NOC from police for construction work near Belegghata station

**KOLKATA, March 30:** The Metro Railway authorities on Saturday rued the delay in getting a no objection certificate (NOC) from Kolkata Police for construction of the viaduct near Belegghata station in the north-eastern part of the city.

The construction is necessary for commissioning metro services along the Ruby Crossing-Belegghata stretch on the elevated tracks running parallel to the arterial EM Bypass, the lifeline between the northern and southern parts of the city.

In a statement, the Metro Railway spokesperson said after inspecting the stretch, "Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety, Janak Kumar Garg verbally advised to construct additional 90-metre viaduct beyond Belegghata station limit for signal overlap and Foot Over Bridge (FOB) to enable commuters cross the busy bypass to enter Belegghata station safely."

Garg, who completed the inspection of Noapara to DumDum Cantonment stretch of Yellow Line and Ruby Crossing (Hemanta Mukhopadhyay) to Belegghata stretch of the Orange Line, expressed "unhappiness" that these works have been held up as the "traffic block" was not effected along that spot on bypass, the statement said.

"Necessary diversion of road, extra widening of the road, new road bridge have been constructed by RVNL (Rail Vikash Nigam Ltd) and proper illumination has also been done as per the requirement of traffic department to address the issue of movement of vehicular traffic during the block, but the traffic police authorities are yet to issue necessary NOC," the spokesperson said.

This was resulting in "unnecessary" delay in the project, he said. The Metro Railway Spokesper-

son said several rounds of meetings and joint site inspections have already been conducted.

RVNL authorities wrote letters to the Joint Commissioner of Police, Traffic Department on January 5, March 12 and 14 requesting him to provide NOC for the traffic block. Another letter had also been sent to the Commissioner of Kolkata Police on February 6 requesting him to provide NOC for traffic diversion to construct one span, middle support at the median of EM Bypass for the foot over bridge at Belegghata station, the spokesperson said.

Kolkata Police sources said talks were on with RVNL and Metro about building the required infrastructure without disturbing the traffic movement along the busy stretch where thousands of vehicles ply every day.

On March 29, Garg undertook speed trials on the overhead 4.4-km section between Ruby and Belegghata and inspected the entry and exit gates, ticketing system, escalators, lifts, signage boards, electronic interlocking (EI) system, and signal equipment room of Belegghata, Barun Sengupta, Ritwik Ghatak and VIP Bazar stations.

Once commissioned the New Garia-Belegghata stretch will cover a distance of over 10 km which is important for commuters, especially in the rush hour traffic.

The Kolkata Metro and Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) are building the 30-km line, also known as the Orange Line, connecting New Garia on the southern fringes of the city to the airport on the northern fringes via the satellite towns of Salt Lake and New Town.

Presently trains ply along the Ruby Crossing-New Garia stretch which began from March 15. (PTI)

## Portion of under-construction bridge over Ganga collapses in UP's Bulandshahr

**BULANDSHAHR (UP), March 30:** Three slabs of an under-construction bridge over the Ganga river in Gajraula village of this Uttar Pradesh district have collapsed, officials said on Saturday. However, no casualty was reported, a senior official said.

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav pulled up the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the incident, accusing it of playing with people's lives by compromising with the quality of projects. A committee led by the chief development officer (CDO) has been formed to investigate the matter, District Magistrate (DM) Chandra Prakash Singh said.

According to the DM, the bridge is being built over the Ganga to connect Bulandshahr with Amroha. Three slabs that were laid on Friday night got damaged and collapsed, he said.

No loss of life was reported in the incident, the DM said, adding that the work got over around 11 pm on Friday after which the weather turned bad and the slabs got damaged. There was no one around the bridge at the time of the incident, he said. The committee led by the CDO will investigate the matter and strict action will be taken against anyone found guilty, Singh said.

He said the bridge is being built on the EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) mode and its quality is checked from time to time.

"The committee will submit its report and we will take action accordingly. No damage has been caused to the pillars of the bridge," the DM added. In a post in Hindi on X, Yadav said: "People are asking how much of the 'election donations' received by the BJP in return for the contract was given by the contractor building the bridge on the Ganga in Bulandshahr that collapsed during its construction."

"By playing with the quality of projects, the BJP is playing with the lives of people," the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister added. (PTI)

## Indian Navy frees Iranian fishing vessel hijacked by pirates, rescues 23 Pakistani crew members



**NEW DELHI, March 30:** The Indian Navy has freed an Iranian fishing vessel that was hijacked by pirates and rescued its crew of 23 Pakistani nationals, following "intense coercive tactical measures" as part of an anti-piracy operation at sea that lasted for more than 12 hours, officials said.

Following Friday's operation, specialist teams from the Navy undertook a thorough sanitisation and seaworthiness check of the fishing vessel in order to escort it to a safe area for resuming normal fishing activities, according to an official statement shared by a Navy spokesperson.

The Navy said late on Friday evening that it was engaged in an operation to free the fishing vessel from pirates.

Nine armed pirates had reportedly boarded the vessel.

The hijacked vessel was intercepted on Thursday, the Navy said.

"INS Sumedha intercepted FV 'Al Kambur' during early hours of Friday and was joined subsequently by the guided missile frigate INS Trishul," it said.

"After more than 12 hours of intense coercive tactical measures as per the SOPs, the pirates on board the hijacked fishing vessel were forced to surrender. The crew, comprising 23 Pakistani nationals, have been safely rescued," the Navy added.

The fishing vessel was approximately 90 nm (nautical miles) southwest of Socotra when the pirates reportedly

boarded it, it said.

The Indian Navy said it remains committed to ensuring maritime security in the region and the safety of seafarers, "irrespective of the nationalities".

The Socotra Archipelago is in the northwest Indian Ocean near the Gulf of Aden.

The Navy will take "affirmative action" to ensure a safer and more secure Indian Ocean Region, its chief, Admiral R Hari Kumar, told a press conference on March 23 while citing the anti-piracy and other maritime security operations undertaken by the naval force in the preceding 100 days under "Op Sankalp". As part of the maritime security operations, the Navy has undertaken anti-piracy, anti-missiles and anti-drones operations. A total of 110 lives -- 45 Indians and 65 foreign nationals -- were saved during "Op Sankalp" in that 100-day period, according to a PPT presentation given by a naval officer before the Navy chief's press conference.

It was also mentioned in the presentation that from November last year till March, "more than 90 maritime incidents have happened", including 57 drone or missile attacks or sightings and 39 incidents of piracy, hijacking and suspicious approaches. (PTI)

## 'The Huntsmen': Global espionage, secret missions, rescue effort et al



**NEW DELHI, March 30:** International espionage, illegal trading, secret missions and a race against time with innocent lives at stake, Bappaditya Chakravarty's novel 'The Huntsmen' promises an old-fashioned noir with a twist.

A series of seemingly random events around the globe are slowly found to be interconnected to an unnamed top-secret Indian government agency. Two clerics are murdered in London, a professor goes missing while researching in Goa, a terrifying explosion in New Delhi creates a hotchpotch with armed assailants, with a mysterious diary at the heart of this trefail - who could be causing these flow chain of events, and with what motive?

Rudra Sengupta, a special forces officer of the army, is dispatched to Kolkata to investigate the matter. Professor Deshmukh, a geologist and professor at Bombay University is suddenly reported missing while conducting research. He had couriered some documents to his friend and another geologist, Prof. Mitra, to vet some top-secret information that he had stumbled upon.

Prof. Mitra, very anxious about his friend being missing and the curious

documents now left with him, passes them on to his PhD scholar, Sushmita, to meet Mrs Mitra and hand it over to her in person.

Sushmita, a geologist is accompanied by her friend Sharmila, on this trip. They are soon getting followed by curious shadowy men, and have to brave a few murder attempts from armed assailants.

Using their contacts they understand that they are embroiled in an insidious conspiracy, all because of the documents they are now entrusted with. Rudra rescues the women and to escort them halfway, but suddenly there is an insane, nail-biting car chase with a risk of the women's lives. He must act fast before it is too late.

Chakravarty deploys all the tropes of the genre of thrillers and adventure tales in the book, published by Olive Turtle, an imprint of Niyogi Books.

The plot involves interesting and realistic details about the communication styles and day-to-day routines of army men, middlemen and agents dealing in extra-legal procedures and government security forces.

The book, spanning 380 pages, was released at the Kolkata Book Fair in January. (PTI)



### Kendriya Vidyalaya Diphu, Karbi Anglong Admission Notice for Balvatika : 2024-25

Balvatika-3 admissions will be done through offline mode. Registration will commence at 10:00 am on 01.04.2024 (Monday) and will close at 05:00 pm on 15.04.2024 (Monday). Minimum age for admission in Balvatika-III will be 5 years but below 6 years. Reckoning of age shall be as on 31.03.2024 (Child born on 1st April should also be considered).

\*For more details, kindly visit our website: [www.diphu.kvs.ac.in](http://www.diphu.kvs.ac.in) or contact : 8638416113

बालवाटिका-3 प्रवेश ऑफलाइन मोड के माध्यम से कए जाएंगे। पंजीकरण 01.04.2024 (सोमवार) को सुबह 10:00 बजे शुरू होगा और 15.04.2024 (सोमवार) को शाम 05:00 बजे बंद हो जाएगा। बालवाटिका-III में प्रवेश के लिए न्यूनतम आयु 5 वर्ष परन्तु 6 वर्ष से कम होगी। आयु की गणना 31.03.2024 के अनुसार होगी (1 अप्रैल को जन्मे बच्चे पर भी वहीार कथिजाएगा)। \*अधिक जानकारी के लिए, कृपया हमारी वेबसाइट देखें: [www.diphu.kvs.ac.in](http://www.diphu.kvs.ac.in) या संपर्क करें: 8638416113

Sd/  
(Dr. Surender Singh)  
Principal



**MUMBAI, March 30:** Actors Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh and Arjun Kapoor will feature in the follow-up to the hit comedy "No Entry", producer Boney Kapoor confirmed. Anees Bazmee, who helmed the 2005 film, featuring Salman Khan, Anil Kapoor, and Fardeen Khan, is returning for the sequel.

The original stars won't feature in the new movie, said Boney Kapoor, adding the team is now in the process of casting 10 female actors for the project. "That chapter is over (of the old star cast). Now, we have Diljit, Varun and Arjun in the film. Varun and Arjun are best of friends, and Diljit is fantastic at comedy. So, I think this makes for a good and interesting combination," the producer told PTI. "While, the male actors and Bazmee are locked but the 10 female leads are yet to be cast in the film," he added. "No Entry" revolved around two married men (Anil Kapoor and Fardeen Khan), who find them-

selves in trouble because of their womanizing friend, Prem (Salman), after he sets them up with a hooker, leading to lies and confusions.

Actors Lara Dutta, Esha Deol and Celina Jaitley played the female leads in the first part with Bipasha Basu in an extended cameo appearance.

In January, there were unconfirmed media reports, stating that Dhawan, Arjun Kapoor and Dosanjh will feature in the sequel.

"No Entry 2" will go on floors in December, added the producer, who is awaiting the release of his upcoming production "Maidaan", starring Ajay Devgn. It is set to be released in theatres on April 10. Boney Kapoor also gave an update about the sequel to the classic 1987 movie "Mr India", which featured Anil Kapoor and Sridevi. It was directed by Shekhar Kapur.

One of the first sci-fi movies in Hindi cinema, the film was about a man who discovers the formula to

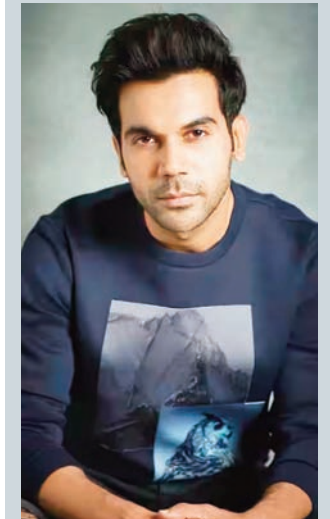
## Varun Dhawan, Arjun Kapoor & Diljit Dosanjh will star in 'No Entry' sequel, confirms Boney Kapoor

become invisible and uses its powers to fight evil forces. The filmmaker-producer said he is in talks with a Hollywood studio for "Mr India 2". "That ('Mr India 2') also will happen, maybe as soon as 'No Entry 2' is out. I have been approached by a big Hollywood studio to do 'Mr. India'. So, it's Zee (Studios), me and the (Hollywood) studio," he claimed.

In 2020, Zee Studios had announced they have signed director Ali Abbas Zafar to helm a "Mr India" trilogy, a re-imagining of the popular film. (PTI)



**Rajkumar's biopic on industrialist Srikanth Bolla gets new title, film to release in May**



**MUMBAI, March 30:** Actor Rajkumar Rao's "Srikanth", a biopic on visually impaired industrialist Srikanth Bolla, will hit the screens on May 10, the makers announced on Saturday.

The film, which was earlier titled "Sri", is directed by Tushar Hiranandani from a script written by Jagdeep Sidhu and Sumit Purohit.

Bollywood studio T-Series has backed the movie in collaboration with Chalk N Cheese Films Production LLP.

"A remarkable journey that will open your eyes! #Srikanth, earlier titled 'SRI', releasing on the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, 10th May 2024," T-Series posted on its social media handles. "Srikanth" portrays the life of Srikanth Bolla, an industrialist who fearlessly pursued his dreams despite his visual impairment, ultimately founding Bolla Industries.

The movie also stars Alaya F, Jyotika, and Sharad Kelkar in pivotal roles. It is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar and Nidhi Parmar Hiranandani. (PTI)

**Tamil and Telugu versions of 'MasterChef India' to stream on SonyLIV in April**

**MUMBAI, March 30:** The Tamil and Telugu versions of reality programme "MasterChef India" will premiere on Sony LIV on April 22, the streamer has announced.

The competitive cooking series will provide a platform to cooks from small towns and villages of South India through its maiden Tamil and Telugu editions.

The show aims to immerse viewers in the cultural flavors of Tamil and Telugu cuisine, SonyLIV said in a press statement.

The Tamil version will feature celebrity chefs Koushik Shankar, Shreeya Adka and Rakesh Raghunathan as the judges.

Whereas, the panel for the Telugu edition includes chefs Sanjay Thumma, Nikitha Umesh and Chalapati Rao.

Both the Telugu and Tamil shows have started conducting auditions for contestants.

Hindi language "MasterChef India" released its eighth season last year on SonyLIV with celebrity chefs Vikas Khanna, Ranveer Brar, and Pooja Dhingra. (PTI)



## Tabu, Kareena & Kriti's 'Crew' earns ₹ 20.07 crore in worldwide gross on day one

**MUMBAI, March 30:** Heist comedy "Crew", starring Tabu, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Kriti Sanon, has grossed ₹ 20.07 crore globally on its opening day at the box office, the makers said on Saturday. Directed by Rajesh A Krishnan, the film was released in theatres across the country on Friday. It is produced by Anil Kapoor, Rhea Kapoor, Ektaa Kapoor and Shobha Kapoor.

According to the makers, the film has set a record by registering the "highest-ever opening for a three-female lead film worldwide". The film's net collection in India is ₹ 10.28 crore.

In a post on Instagram,

producer Ektaa R Kapoor wrote, "Thanku INDIA !!!! My girls n our director showed d world how it's done!!! World wide dhamaka! (sic)."

Tabu and Kriti also celebrated the day one collection of "Crew", calling it "historic".

"We are overwhelmed with love for our Crew! The Biggest Female Led opener in the History of Hindi Cinema Worldwide! 'Crew' is in Cinemas NOW," they posted on their respective Instagram pages.

Kareena said she is glad to continue her association with Rhea Kapoor and Ektaa R Kapoor with "Crew". She had earlier collaborated with the two producers for her 2018

movie "Veere De Wedding". "Round 2 with @rheakapoor, @ek-tarkapoor and me! What started with Veere Di Wedding and now continues with 'CREW'. So lucky to be on board with these lovely ladies @kritisanon, @tabutiful & the amazing @rajoosworld. We got this," she wrote on Instagram. "Crew" features Kareena, Tabu and Kriti as three air hostesses, whose future seems uncertain as their airline Kohinoor is on the verge of bankruptcy, until they find a dead passenger smuggling gold biscuits.

The heist comedy also stars Diljit Dosanjh and Kapil Sharma in pivotal roles. (PTI)

## Senthil Venu's 'The Silent Prayer' to premiere at Red Lorry Film Festival

**MUMBAI, March 30:** "The Silent Prayer", based on the 1984 riots in Coimbatore, is set to premiere on April 5 at the inaugural edition of the Red Lorry Film Festival.

The Hindi-Tamil language film is directed by Senthil Venu, who previously helmed short movies such as "Happy Birthday Anna" and "The

events far beyond their control, according to the makers.

It pays tribute to their unconquerable spirit, illustrating how, amidst the gravest of times, the purest light of humanity is often ignited by the youngest among us all, it added.

"I have some very disturbing memories from the riots of 1984 in Coimbatore

journey of rebuilding from scratch, forging ahead with their lives. They harbored no animosity towards the city or its inhabitants, choosing instead to view the ordeal as a dark chapter in their past," he added.

Patial said "The Silent Prayer", which is the debut production of Palampur Talkies, reflects the banner's commitment to telling stories that matter and are rooted. "In an era captivated by the spectacles of global conflicts and the tragedies of war," the producer said, adding, she is honoured to have the legendary Ilaiyaraaja compose the music for the movie.

The Red Lorry Film Festival, which will be held from April 5 to 7 at Maison Inox and Madison PVR at the BKC here, will present a slate of over 100 titles, including movies and TV series in different languages such as English, French, Spanish, German, Turkish, and Russian.

The festival is curated by BookMyShow, India's leading entertainment destination. (PTI)



Roving Ambassador of Tamil". Legendary Maestro Ilaiyaraaja has scored the music for the movie.

Starring Anam Kaur, Samarjit Singh and Amitjodeep Singh, "The Silent Prayer" is produced by Nisha Patial of Palampur Talkies.

Set in Coimbatore, the movie is portrayed through the lens of young Sikh siblings caught in the whirlwind of

ore. But as I travelled around India and the world, I discovered that the broader populace remained unaware of the riots that ravaged Coimbatore. Yet, amidst the ashes of destruction, I observed something remarkable – the resilience of the Sikh community," Venu said in a statement.

Despite their establishments being reduced to ashes, they embarked on a

## Akshay Kumar wraps up shooting of 'Khel Khel Mein'



**MUMBAI, March 30:** Superstar Akshay Kumar has completed filming for his upcoming movie "Khel Khel Mein", co-starring Taapsee Pannu and Vaani Kapoor. The movie is written and directed by Mudassar Aziz, best known for helming romantic-comedy "Happy Bhag Jayegi" and "Pati Patni Aur Woh". It also features Ammy Virk, Aditya Seal and Pragya Jaiswal. Actor Fardeen Khan, who has been on a sabbatical from movies for a while, is part of the cast as well. Production house T-Series shared the update about the film on its official social media handles on Friday night. "That's a wrap! Filming for #KhelKhelMein starring #AkshayKumar #TaapseePannu #VaaniKapoor #AmmyVirk #AdityaSeal #PragyaJaiswal & #FardeenKhan in the lead has concluded. Brace yourself for an exhilarating mix of laughter and drama, written and directed by #MudassarAziz," the post read. The movie started shooting in October last year.

"Khel Khel Mein" is presented and produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Vipul D Shah, Ashwin Varde and Rakesh Bahl. Also produced by Shashi Sinha and Ajay Rai. (PTI)



# It's just a matter of us playing our best cricket for 40 overs: Ponting



**VISAKHAPATNAM, March 30:** Playing an inconsistent game didn't work for Delhi Capitals, and head coach Ricky Ponting was confident of turning

things around by producing their "best cricket" across 40 overs in Sunday's IPL game against Chennai Super Kings here.

Delhi lost their first two matches to Punjab Kings and Rajasthan Royals respectively. "We had a couple of chats about our cricket and the con-

sensus out of those meetings is that we have played some really good and bad cricket. So, we need to find somewhere in the middle where we can play con-

sistently good cricket over 40 overs," Ponting said on Saturday in his pre-match press meet.

"We could have easily won both our first games, with Ishant going down in the first game didn't really help and the other day we went for a few more runs in the bowling innings of that match. "However, we are very confident that we're going to be able to turn things around against a good CSK team, but it's just a matter of us playing our best cricket for 40 overs," he added. Speaking about the approach going forward, Ponting said he is expecting a more aggressive intent from his team. "It's not a short tournament, it's quite a long tournament, but by saying that, you would prefer to get off to a good start than get off to a slow start. We have still got 12 games to play. "I'm pretty sure we'll have a more positive intent going into this game, we'll be a lot more aggressive in this game than we've been in the first couple of games, and I think if we take the right attitude into this game then we can definitely win."

When asked about playing two home matches in Visakhapatnam, the former Australia captain said, "This is our second home for this tournament, this is not a neutral venue by any chance. "We have got our first two games here and we want to make sure that this is a place that we can win." (PTI)

## Real Kashmir FC's fluent win confirms NEROCA FC's relegation



**SRINAGAR, March 30:** Real Kashmir FC dished out a fine performance to outclass NEROCA FC 3-0 in the I-League here on Saturday, the result relegating the Manipur outfit to the second division following a poor season. Goals from Real Kashmir's Gnohere Krizo (35'), Hyder Yousuf (45') and Shaheer Shaheen (67') sealed the fate of NEROCA FC in the league.

This loss left the Orange Brigade in 12th place, with a total of 13 points from 21 matches. Their record of four wins, one draw, and 16 losses reflects the challenges they faced throughout the season.

With only three matches left to play, NEROCA find themselves in an insurmountable position, and even if they were to win all their remaining fixtures, they would only earn a total of 22 points, falling short of overtaking Churchill Brothers, as Namdhari are exempt from relegation this season.

The other team to have been relegated is their city rivals TRAU FC. Real Kashmir, on the other hand, finally notched up a win after playing out consecutive draws in their last four matches. They also extended their unbeaten streak to nine matches.

The last time the Snow Leopards had lost a match in the league was against Rajasthan United FC back on February 9. The win took

them to second spot in the standings even though they are out of the title race. They now have 40 points from 22 matches with 11 wins, seven draws and four losses.

NEROCA came into the match on the back of two derby wins over TRAU and were in a do-or-die situation.

However, they failed to put up a meaningful challenge on Saturday. The Snow Leopards dominated from the outset and created a flurry of chances before taking the lead in the 35th minute.

Carlos Lomba launched a long ball from the deep towards the direction of Krizo. The Ivory Coast striker controlled the ball with his head and surged past two NEROCA players Baoringdao Bodo and Ronaldo Nongthombam to set himself up in a one-on-one position with goalkeeper Khoirom Jackson Singh.

With the custodian coming off his line, Krizo intelligently chipped the ball over Jackson's head to open the scoring.

Real Kashmir doubled their advantage at the stroke of half time.

Kashmir defender Shaheer Shaheen saw Yousuf making a run on the overlap and sent a long ball forward.

Yousuf beat the offside trap brilliantly with a well-timed run before bringing down the aerial ball with a deft touch and unleashing a skilful left footer to score in the 45th minute. (PTI)

## Shaheen Afridi contemplates quitting as T20 captain

**LAHORE, March 30:** Disappointed that he was not involved in discussions concerning Pakistan cricket and his future as T20 skipper, fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi is contemplating stepping down as captain. A well-informed source close to Shaheen said that the bowler was upset that not even once the PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi or the national selectors have spoken to him about their future plans as far as the captaincy or appointment of coaches is concerned.

"Shaheen is rightly upset as being the

national T20 captain he expected that even if the board/selectors wanted to remove him they have the decency to also inform him for the reasons behind this and keep him in the loop about everything," the source said. The source said Shaheen was disappointed that he was not kept in loop as PCB chief held discussions with the national selectors and Babar Azam this week to discuss the T20 World Cup, appointment of coaches and captaincy.

"Shaheen believes that if the Board wants to remove him they should have in-

formed him by now as he is even willing to step down himself. In fact now he has been advised by some of his close ones to do this and step away from all the chaos and confusion being caused by the Board," the source said.

Shaheen was named T20 captain after the World Cup in India last November when Zaka Ashraf was heading the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

Shaheen's appointment was made on the basis of his ability to lead Lahore Qalandars franchise in the Pakistan Super

League (PSL) to two successive titles.

But after being named captain, Shaheen lost the T20 series in New Zealand 1-4 and also couldn't repeat his magic with Qalandars as they finished at the bottom of the table in the recent PSL.

Shaheen, who is in the training camp in Kakul under the supervision of Army trainers is expected to hold frank talks with other senior players including Babar, Muhammad Rizwan, Shadab Khan and Fakhar Zaman on the captaincy issue and then make a final call himself. (PTI)

## AIFF forms panel to probe alleged physical assault of two women footballers in Goa

**NEW DELHI, March 30:** The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Saturday asked its executive committee member Deepak Sharma to refrain from game-related activities till the conclusion of a probe by a panel into his alleged physical assault of two women footballers in Goa.

Two footballers of Himachal Pradesh-based Khad FC, taking part in the Indian Women's Football (IWL) League second division, had alleged that Sharma, the owner of the club, had barged into their room and physically assaulted them on the night of March 28.

They filed a complaint with the competition committee of the AIFF and the Goa Football Association (GFA), which was hosting the tournament, also lodged a complaint at the Mafusa police station on the basis of the complaint of the two women footballers.

In the complaint, according to sources, the two players said Sharma was in an inebriated state for most of the time and they were "scared of their lives".

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur earlier in the day asked the AIFF to take "quick" and "strong legal action" against the official.

The AIFF stopped short of suspending Sharma, who is also the secretary-general of the Himachal Pradesh Football Association, besides being the owner of the club and a member of the executive committee of the national federation.

"The AIFF was formally notified by players from Khad FC,

participating in the IWL 2 in Goa, of certain incidents of alleged physical assault and harassment on them on March 29," the AIFF said in a release after an emergent meeting of its senior members.

"The AIFF president has instructed the committee to submit a report within seven days. In the meantime, Mr Deepak Sharma, who was allegedly involved in the unfortunate incident, has been directed to step back and refrain from participating in all football-related activities until the conclusion of the committee's process.

"The AIFF is also working with the players involved to ensure their safe passage home."

The committee comprises executive committee member Pinky Bompal Magar, AIFF's Safety and Child Safeguarding Officer Rita Jairath and Vijay Bali.

Taking a serious note of the incident, Thakur had said that the safety and security of players are of utmost priority for the sports ministry.

"The Ministry of Sports has taken a serious note of an alleged physical assault upon women footballers by an official during the ongoing Indian Women's League in Goa," he tweeted.

"AIFF has been directed to take quick action and ensure the safety and security of our footballers. The ministry has further directed AIFF to take strong legal action and inform the ministry about actions taken. The safety and security of players are our utmost priority." (PTI)

## Saina Nehwal lashes out at anti-woman remarks by Congress leader



**BENGALURU, March 30:** Star shuttler Saina Nehwal on Saturday lashed out at Shamanur Shivashankarappa, veteran Congress leader from the state, for making "sexist jibe" at Gayatri Siddeshwara, a BJP candidate from the Davangere constituency.

Shivashankarappa, a 92-year-old sitting MLA from Davangere South, had said that Gayatri, wife of former Union Minister and incumbent MP Siddeshwara GM, "belonged to the kitchen".

Taking exception to his remark, Nehwal posted on her X account: "Women should be restricted to the kitchen - this is what a top Karnataka leader Shamanur Shiv-

ashankarappa ji has said. The sexist jibe at @bjp4india candidate from Davanagere, Gayatri Siddeshwara ji is least expected from a party that says Ladki Hoon Lad Sakti Hoon."

The 34-year-old Nehwal, who had won the bronze medal during the 2012 London Olympics, said such misogynistic remarks were upsetting when women in the country are aspiring to leave their mark in every field.

"When I won medals for Bharat on the play field what would Congress party have preferred, I should have done? Why say like that when all the girls and women dream of achieving big in any field.

"On one hand we are doing Nari Shakti ko Vandana. The Women's Reservation Bill has been passed under leadership of our PM Modi sir and on the other hand Nari Shakti ka apman & misogynistic people...really upsetting," wrote Nehwal. Shivashankarappa made the controversial remark while addressing Congress party workers at Bunts Bhavan in the district recently.

"She (Gayathri) does not even know how to speak properly. She is fit to cook food at home," said Shivashankarappa, who once owned a franchise, Davanagere Diamonds, in the erstwhile Karnataka Premier League (KPL). (PTI)

## I'm pinching myself that I've been lucky to play with Kohli, Rohit: Green

**MUMBAI, March 30:** Cameron Green's fledgling IPL journey has seen him appearing in 19 matches over two seasons for Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, but it has also given him a chance to work up close with two modern-day giants — Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

The Australian all-rounder termed it as an opportunity to learn the nuances of T20 cricket, and how champion cricketers approach their game.

"They are both greats in the game. Every time I think about it, I'm still pinching myself that I've been lucky enough to play with two of the greats of world cricket, if not Indian cricket," said Green during a virtual interaction facilitated by RCB on Saturday.

So, what makes Kohli, his current teammate at RCB, and Rohit, his former captain at MI, different from others? "They're both equally happy

to help the team win matches. They're both equally happy to give you a lot of their time, to give you information on the other team and their own experiences and what's worked for them, what hasn't," said Green.

The 24-year-old Aussie shared a small nugget that he learned while watching Kohli from close quarters.

"Sometimes he taps the bat and sometimes he keeps the bat up when he goes to play (a) cricket shot.

It's pretty interesting with the things that he comes up with — obviously he's worked it out himself (as to) what works for him.

"When he wants to hit the ball really far, he taps the bat to generate more bat speed. So yeah, there's (that) one thing (but) I don't really want to give away his secrets. Though, he's good enough that it won't affect his game," Green noted.

The Western Australian cricketer so far has played in



all three matches of the RCB, and batted in No. 3 and No. 5 slots.

Green wanted to maintain that flexibility in his batting and be ready to tackle any sit-

uations.

"I am still really fresh in my T20 career and still trying to work out where I am best suited. But I feel I have got the skill sets to bat anywhere.

"I (have) had success at the top of the order in the IPL. But at the same time, I feel like I physically have the capability to bat down the order," said Green. (PTI)



# Sunrisers Hyderabad's explosive form threatens Gujarat Titans



**AHMEDABAD, March 30:** A depleted Gujarat Titans bowling attack will have to raise its game by quite a few notches if it intends to stop a marauding Sunrisers Hyderabad team fresh from its record total against Mumbai Indians, in the upcoming afternoon IPL match here on Sunday.

Sunrisers are coming here on the back of breaking the ceiling for all time IPL total when they plundered 277 against Mumbai Indians to secure their first win of the season.

First time skipper Shubman Gill's Titans, who started off with a win at home against Mumbai Indians, on the other hand slipped in Chennai in their previous game.

The profligate Umesh Yadav is no match for injured Mohammed Shami and that is proving to be a big factor for Titans.

The resounding 63-run affected their net run rate as it plummeted to -1.425, worst among the league's 10 teams, which could cause some problems towards the business end of the tournament. It can't be denied that losing Haridk Pandya, who lend necessary balance with his all-round skills has also been a big factor.

Winners and runners-up in the last two seasons, GT's success under Pandya has centred around one of their batters ability to come up trumps and play a match winning role.

Whether it's Wriddhiman Saha, David Miller, Pandya, or Rahul Tewatia, one of them has typically ignited the batting lineup. However, in the absence of the inspirational India all-rounder, their batting display appears drab and lacking its usual spark.

GT had a one-day style batting approach chasing Chennai Super Kings' imposing 207, and barring Sai Sudharsan none could reach 30s.

The likes of Sudharsan, Vijay Shankar look unidimensional, while Gill's T20 batting will again come for scrutiny, after his knocks of 31 and 8.

That their finisher Miller (12 and 21) is also struggling underscored their slow approach in the middle overs (11-15) where they managed just 34 runs.

They would hope that Miller is able to get his mojo back as they would have to bat out of their skin to match to SRH's batting might.

Tournament dark horses SRH have lit up the IPL with a record-breaking performance at home in their last match.

Their 277/3 against Mumbai in Hyderabad on Wednesday took them past the previous record IPL total of 263/5 set by Royal Challengers Bangalore against Pune Warriors in 2013.

Australia World Cup winner Travis Head (62; 24b) made a stunning debut for SRH, smashing the fastest fifty for the franchise, taking 18 balls for the milestone to give them an explosive start.

The feat was then bettered by uncapped Indian Abhishek Sharma who got to his fifty in just 16 balls.

With the South African duo of Aiden Markram and Heinrich Klaasen too have been in imperious form lower down the order, the likes of Umesh Yadav and Rashid Khan will be tested.

Being an afternoon match, the dry surface may also prove handy for the spinners as Rashid and Sai Kishore will be crucial for either sides.

It's not just their batting their bowling also looked balanced and the Australian World Cup winning skipper Pat Cummins has shown his ability to utilise his resources well.

Despite a thin spin presence, Cummins did well to use left arm orthodox Shahbaz Ahmed to good effect in dismissing Ishan Kishan inside the power-play.

In the pace bowling, front Cummins has formed a fine ally with Indian veteran Bhuvneshwar Kumar who bowled a superb 13th over, giving away just five runs in a game dominated by batters the other day.

Cummins then conceded just three runs in the 15th over and also dismissed Tilak Varma against the run of play to turn the course of the game.

On paper though both teams have two points from as many matches but after their batting carnage in Hyderabad, SRH appear strong favourites, while the onus would be on GT batters to raise their game.

## Squads

**Gujarat Titans:** Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Robin Minz, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Mandhar, B Sai Sudarshan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Azmatullah Omarzai, Shahrukh Khan, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Kartik Tyagi, Shshant Mishra, Spencer Johnson, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Umesh Yadav, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma and Manav Suthar.

**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Travis Head, Wanindu Hasaranga, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaasen, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upen-dra Singh Yadav, Umran Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh and Jhathavedh Subramanyam.

Match starts: 3.30pm. (PTI)

## KKR's pummeling reveals lack of variety in RCB bowling



**BENGALURU, March 30:** Three matches might be too small a sample size to form an opinion but going by the lack of variety that has been on show in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's bowling attack, they might just be staring at a long, tiring IPL season this year.

The match against Kolkata Knight Riders on Friday offered the latest and the largest footprint of this particular weakness as the RCB bowlers failed to check a set of free-hitting batters while defending 183.

The immediate defence will be to project the presence of dew and an improved M Chinnaswamy pitch during the second innings. But a deep dive will give a different picture.

Defending a total, even a competitive one like 183, demands a tight beginning, however, the RCB bowlers were profligate.

Mohammed Siraj's length ball was walloped over mid-wicket for a six by Phil Salt, and the Englishman was served with two more juicy offerings on the fifth stump which were carted for a six and four each. The first over produced 18 runs.

Alzarri Joseph was introduced in the third over. But the pacer gave Sunil Narine a length ball on leg-stump which was dispatched for a six over long-on and two balls later a short-pitched delivery was sent in the same direction for a maximum.

These are the balls that will be punished at this level -- dew or no dew, whether it is easy pitch or tough pitch.

There was an exception in Vysakh Vijayakumar who used knuckle balls and pace-off deliveries to good effect to return with excellent figures of 1/23, but the more experienced names were reluctant to bring in those variations -- at least consistently.

"The second innings was slightly better to bat because the ball came on to the bat a bit quicker because of the dew. I was trying to use hard-length balls and short balls banged into the pitch to contain batters," Vijaykumar said in the post-match press conference.

"But it was still gripping from both the ends. We did try to mix it up but they (KKR batters) got away with it."

There's some truth in his words. The stats show that KKR bowlers used 22 balls under 120 kph and conceded just 20 runs off them to pick up three wickets.

Meanwhile, the RCB bowlers bowled 19 balls under 120 kph, but gave away 40 runs and could bag only a wicket.

The primary reason for this contrast was the areas where the KKR and RCB bowlers pitched their slower balls as the latter set landed those deliveries predominantly well outside the off-stump or on the leg-side for comfortable pick-ups for batters.

It reflected in their cumulative figures on the night too. The three RCB pacers -- Siraj, Joseph and Yash Dayal -- leaked 126 runs from nine overs, while KKR's Mitchell Starc, Harshit Rana and Andre Russell conceded 115 runs from 12 overs for four wickets in return.

But it also tells us that KKR had planned better for the pitch and the bowlers.

"The far end (from Vijayakumar was bowling) was still tricky. But the other end (the media box side) certainly got better and the communication was to target the bowlers from there," said KKR batter Venkatesh Iyer, who made a 30-ball 50.

Unfortunately, RCB did not have enough options, especially in spin department, to try a new run-checking ploy that can lead them to wickets.

"We've tried (Glenn) Maxwell. Finger spinners are effective but today there wasn't much spin. With KKR having a left-right combination, spinners can find it tricky," RCB captain Faf du Plessis said.

"We needed a wrist-spinner who could turn it both ways."

They had two excellent options -- Yuzevendra Chahal and Wanindu Hasaranga -- but chose to let go both of them, and cricket often is unforgiving to such callous decisions. (PTI)

## Sitwala, Haria enter CCI Billiards quarter-finals

**MUMBAI, March 30:** National champion Dhruv Sitwala and Dhvaj Haria scored convincing victories to sail into the quarter-finals of the All India CCI Billiards Classic here on Saturday. Sitwala, the left-handed India No. 1, got the better of seasoned pro Arun Agrawal 979-399, while Haria defeated last year's runner-up Rob Hall of England 1055-425.

The Mumbai-based Sitwala produced a single sizeable break of 296 and had smaller runs of 60, 62, 76, 71 and 94 on way to his win against Agrawal, while Haria constructed a high break of 399 against his pre-quarterfinal opponent.

The Gujarat-based Haria had two more century efforts of 159 and 131 and a couple of breaks of 85, 55 and 53. Hall, who was down with a stomach bug, could only muster breaks of 65, 80 and 94.

Strong favourite and reigning champion Pankaj Advani continued to rule as he outclassed Aditya Agrawal 1236-428 to move closer to the defense of his title.

World champion Advani started with a neat break of 258 and then constructed a solid 365 to knock the fight out of Aditya. Advani had two more centuries of 111 and 197 and breaks of 72, 66 and 77 to run away with the match. Aditya had breaks of 103, 89 and 71. In another last-16 match between two former National champions Sourav Kohari and S. Shrikrishna, the latter came up with a last-ditch effort, rolling in an unfinished break of 78 points, to snatch a come-from-behind 492-473 victory and a place in the quarter-finals. (PTI)

## PCB wants to bring Babar back as captain

**LAHORE, March 30:** PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has offered Babar Azam captaincy in the white ball formats but the star player has not yet made his decision, sources have claimed.

It has been learnt that Babar has set down conditions for accepting the captaincy, including having a say in appointment of coaches. Babar has conveyed that he should given the reins of the side in all three formats.

The national selection committee, though is divided on the issue. A former Punjab caretaker minister, who apparently has no cricket background, is not in favour giving back absolute power to Babar.

"Some members of the selection committee now feel the best thing is to let Shaheen Shah Afridi continue as captain for the home T20 series against New Zealand in April and give him a chance to prove his credentials," one well-informed source said.

He said there was a feeling among some selectors it would be best to wait for a series or two before taking a final decision to bring back Babar as captain.

The interesting part is that the selectors including Muhammad Yousuf, Asad Shafiq, Abdul Razaq, Wahab Riaz and the former minister, Bilal Afzal after meeting with Mohsin Naqvi asked him to make the final call.

"They made their opinions clear to the PCB chief and have now



asked him to make a final call and Naqvi has told them to convince Babar to accept the white ball captaincy for now and the Board will take a call on the red ball captaincy after the T20 World Cup," the source added.

This despite the fact that the PCB chief gave clear mandate to the selectors while appointing them to select the captain.

The Test captaincy is with Shan Masood.

Similarly there is also no clarity on what the PCB is doing about the appointment of foreign coaches with the national team.

"As of now the PCB has met

with refusals from several foreigners including Adam Voges, Luke Ronchi, Shane Watson and Mike Hesson," the source said.

He said presently the PCB is hoping that their negotiations with Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillespie are successful as they want them to take over as white ball and red ball coaches.

"The only catch is that both Kirsten and Gillespie are adamant they will bring their own support staff while the PCB wants to make the other appointments as it wants some of its local players on the support staff as assistant specialist coaches," he said. (PTI)

## 'Sharath Kamal to be flag-bearer in Paris Olympics'

**CHENNAI, March 30:** The Tamil Nadu's Athletics Association has questioned the IOA's decision to name star table tennis player Achantha Sharath Kamal as India's flag-bearer for the upcoming Paris Olympics, calling him a "nondescript sportsman" and demanding that ace javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra be given the honour.

An Indian Olympic Association (IOA) source, however, told PTI that making Chopra the flag-bearer for the opening ceremony would have been "sheer waste of crucial last minute preparation time" for the superstar javelin thrower as his event starts towards the end of the July 16 to August 11 Games.

Legendary long jumper Anju Bobby George had also reportedly expressed her unhappiness over Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Chopra not being made the flag bearer.

A joint statement issued by TNAA president W Davaram and secretary C Latha on Friday said the IOA's decision had sent "shockwaves" across the country.

"The nomination of TT player Sharath Kamal as the flag-bearer of the Indian Olympic contingent has sent shockwaves across the nation. It is not only the sports-persons but everyone who follows sports are aggrieved with the injustice of leaving out Neeraj Chopra, the only Indian gold medalist in athletics during the 130-year-old history of the Olympics. (PTI)

## Battle of Unequals: DC needs Shaw boost against formidable CSK

**VISAKHAPATNAM, March 30:** Delhi Capitals will be aiming to rejig their out-of-depth batting order by bringing the flamboyant Prithvi Shaw in the mix against the defending champions Chennai Super Kings in what could be safely termed as a 'battle of unequals' on Sunday's Indian Premier League encounter.

In T20 format, reputations do go for a toss but DC in their last four meetings haven't been able to get past CSK and the margins of defeat -- 91, 27 and 77 runs respectively paints a sorry picture. One also needs to take into account that in those three heavy losses, the core of the Delhi team has been more or less same save their last meeting when Rishabh Pant wasn't available.

Hence a win against CSK would be considered as a big upset in the tournament.

If CSK once again looks like a team to beat with all its bases nicely covered, it has been quite the opposite for the Ricky Ponting coached Capitals, which has been outplayed in both departments of the game.

DC's co-owners GMR and JSW have

been completely messing up the team composition at the auction table itself for some years and there is hardly anything that Ponting or Director of Cricket Sourav Ganguly could do with domestic talent that lacks quality.

CSK got an uncapped Sameer Rizvi for 8.40 crore and the two sixes in his first IPL innings against Punjab Kings showed why the franchise was desperate to get him on board. Among all franchises, DC probably has had the weakest talent scout program and it is paying a huge price for poor recruitments.

The gulf between domestic cricket and IPL once again became evident with Ricky Bhui, the highest scorer in Ranji Trophy with 902 runs in the just concluded season.

That Bhui is out-of-depth at this level was cruelly exposed by young South African paceman Nandre Burger of Rajasthan Royals. The manner in which he set up with a fast full delivery to peg Bhui on the backfoot and then a well-directed bouncer that was aimed for his skull left the burly Andhra captain both scared and scarred.

Shaw, who made a comeback to com-

petitive cricket during second half of Ranji Trophy, might not exactly conform to the fitness standards set by Ponting and his support staff but even the biggest 'punter' in the DC change room knows where to put his money if the choice is between Shaw and Bhui.

There is too much on the plate of David Warner, who is well past his prime and skipper Rishabh Pant, who will take some time to find his groove. Mitchell Marsh's time with DC for the past two seasons can't exactly be termed consistent and the presence of Shaw will indeed add some muscle to DC's batting against an attack comprising Mustafizur Rahman, Deepak Chahar, Matheesha Pathirana and Ravindra Jadeja.

Add to it, Daryl Mitchell's seam-up stuff and Rachin Ravindra, whose bowling potential hasn't yet been unlocked by CSK's 'spiritual captain' Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

If DC bring in Shaw, they can push Marsh as one down, which could lend a bit more solidity to the top-order but the real challenge will be facing the pace-off deliveries bowled by Mustafizur, who cleverly mixes his variety of cutters to



make life miserable for the batters.

The problem with DC is lack of quality power hitters among domestic talents in case Pant fails to fire and also there isn't much difference between Sha Hope and Tristan Stubbs, both of whom take time before going for the jugular.

Similarly DC's death bowling is one of concern and save Axar Patel, whose econ-

omy rate is less than six in two games, none of the other bowlers have gone for anything less than 7.50 per over.

Anrich Nortje couldn't hit the right length in the Royals game where DC lost it in the last five overs of their bowling innings. DC would need Ishant Sharma to come back as he could have some questions for Rachin Ravindra,

who has started the tournament in impeccable fashion.

Shivam Dube's pyrotechnics will meet its match in Kuldeep Yadav's guile and that will be one battle that cricket lovers would be waiting for.

## Teams

**CSK:** MS Dhoni (c), Moeen Ali, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Abishek Porel, Axtar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Shivam Dube, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Ravindran Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Mandal, Mukesh Choudhary, Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Mitchell Santner, Simarjeet Singh, Nishant Sindhu, Prashant Solanki, Maheesh Theekshana, Rachin Ravindra, Shardul Thakur, Daryl Mitchell, Sameer Rizvi, Mustafizur Rahman and Avaneesh Rao Aravelly.

**Delhi Capitals:** Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Yash Dhull, Abishek Porel, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Pravin Dubey, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Kuldeep Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Khaleel Ahmed, Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Tristan Stubbs, Ricky Bhui, Kumar Kushagra, Rasikh Dar, Jhye Richardson, Sumit Kumar, Swastik Chikara and Shai Hope. Match Starts: 7:30 pm. (PTI)