

**6** WORLD

**8** NATION

- Russia renews attacks on Ukrainian energy sector
- Hamas is reviewing an Israeli proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza
- Never opposed ban on PFI as claimed by Shah: Digvijaya
- BJP will change Constitution if it returns to power: Priyanka

## Wait for few more days for Amethi, Rae Bareilly candidates: Cong chief

**GUWAHATI, April 27:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday said that the names of party candidates for the prestigious Amethi and Rae Bareilly seats in Uttar Pradesh will be announced in a "few days".

Addressing a press conference here, he claimed that though the BJP says the corrupt must be put in jails, when leaders facing corruption charges join the saffron party, they are "put on the lap" and sent to Rajya Sabha or assembly.

He also took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that the latter's "words have lost credibility", while also accusing him of trying to polarise the country. "You have to wait for a few

more days... when the names of candidates come from people to me and I sign the notification, it will be announced," he said when asked about candidates for Amethi and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituencies.

"Those questioning Congress leaders for changing constituencies must also tell me how many times have (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee and (Lal Krishna) Advani changed their seats," Kharge said, when asked about the BJP criticising Rahul Gandhi for fighting the elections from Kerala's Wayanad instead of Amethi. "There was a demand from the people of Wayanad and he went there. Leaders have (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 77.35 pc turnout recorded in second phase of LS polls in Assam

# Polling percentage may go up: Official

**GUWAHATI, April 27:** An estimated 77.35 per cent of 77.26 lakh voters exercised their franchise in the second phase of polling in five Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam, election officials said on Saturday.

The final polling percentage could be further revised as the compilation of figures is yet to be completed, an official said.

Nagaon Lok Sabha constituency recorded the highest voter turnout of 80.56 per cent, followed by 78.41 per cent in Darrang-Udalguri, 75.97 per cent in Silchar (SC), 75.63 per cent in Karimganj and 73.11 per cent in Diphu, they said. Sixty-one candidates are in the fray in this phase.

Assam transport minister Parimal Suklabaidya is pitted against



Surya Kanta Sarkar of the Congress in Silchar, while BJP's Amarsing Tisso is contesting against Congress's Joyram Englang in Diphu.

Nagaon's sitting Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi is contesting against BJP's Suresh Bora, while Karimganj's BJP MP Kripanath Malla is pitted against Congress's Hafiz Ahmed Rashid Choudhury.

In Darrang-Udalguri, the main contest is between BJP MP Dilip Saikia and former Congress MP

Madhab Rajbongshi.

Altogether 77,26,668 voters, including 38,61,559 women and 179 persons of third gender, were eligible to exercise their franchise at 9,133 polling stations, of which 1,220 were identified as 'critical'.

There were 906 urban and 8,227 rural booths, while 473 were managed by women, 12 by persons with disabilities (PwD) and there were also 90 model polling stations.

More than 36,000 polling officials and around 40,000 security personnel were deployed during the second phase of polling on Friday. In the first phase polls held on April 19, 78.25 per cent voter turnout was recorded in Kaziranga, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur constituencies. (PTI)

## Nobody can break Delhi CM: Kejriwal's wife Sunita

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is a "sher" (lion) and nobody can break him, said his wife Sunita Kejriwal as she held her maiden Lok Sabha poll roadshow in support of the AAP's East Delhi candidate Kuldeep Kumar on Saturday evening.

Standing through the sunroof of a vehicle, Sunita Kejriwal greeted voters in the Kondli area of East Delhi constituency with folded hands. She also shook hands with some women.

She said the Delhi chief minister was jailed because he built schools, provided free electricity and opened Mohalla Clinics.

"We will vote to remove dictatorship and save democracy," Sunita Kejriwal said. "Your CM is a 'sher', nobody can break him or make him (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Shah urges third term for Modi to combat terrorism and naxalism

**PORBANDAR, April 27:** Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday urged people to make Narendra Modi the prime minister for the third term to rid the country of terrorism, Naxalism and poverty, and to make India the third largest economy in the world.

In the last 10 years, PM Modi took several tough decisions without caring for the vote bank, he said as he cited the scrapping of Article 370 and construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Addressing a public rally to drum up support for Union minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who is contesting the Lok Sabha election from Porbandar constituency in



Gujarat, Shah also said that after two phases of polls, it is now clear that people of the country have decided to bring Modi to power once again. There are 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, of which the Bharatiya Janata Party's candidate from Surat has been elected unop-

posed. "I would appeal to you to vote for lotus (BJP's poll symbol) on the remaining 25 seats and make Modi prime minister for a third term. Making him PM for the third term means freedom from terrorism and Naxalism, freedom from poverty, making arrangements to give a platform to the youth so they could go hand in hand with the world and create a great India," the senior BJP leader said.

PM Modi worked to brighten the name of Gujarat on the world map, and gave a new identity to the state that is known for Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel, he said. Attacking Congress, Shah said, "When Article 370 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## ASDC challenges APHLC over re-polling demand

**DIPHU, April 27:** The aftermath of the recent elections in Diphu on Saturday took a contentious turn as Daniel Teron, the publicity secretary of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), questioned the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) led by JI Kathar, asking if they would demand re-polling following their defeat, akin to their actions after the last Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) election.

Speaking at a press conference held at the ASDC Central Committee office on Saturday, Teron criticised APHLC for failing to form a non-BJP alliance to counter the saffron party in the Lok Sabha election.

He further challenged whether APHLC, in the event of another defeat, would resort to demanding re-election, citing the peaceful conduct of the voting on April 26.

"Whether we win or lose elections, we will continue with the Autonomous State movement," Teron as-



serted, highlighting the ASDC's commitment to the implementation of Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution. He also emphasised ongoing issues such as land encroachments and intergovernmental policies, vowing to resume vigorous activism. Teron also disclosed that during a recent meeting with the chief minister of Assam, the ASDC urged him not to subject Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Large number of Sikhs join BJP

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** A large number of Sikhs, including members of the Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee, joined the BJP on Saturday.

Citing a host of measures taken by the government to help the minority community, BJP president J P Nadda on the occasion said if anybody has really worked for the community, it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Nadda also cited central government decisions such as the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib corridor, the FCRA registration for donations to the Golden Temple and the action against accused in the 1984 anti-Sikh riot cases. He said the BJP highly regarded the contribution and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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# Centre approves 99,500 tonnes of onion exports to 6 neighbouring nations

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** The Centre on Saturday said it has allowed exports of 99,500 tonnes of onions, mainly sourced from Maharashtra, to six neighbouring countries despite the ban on shipments.

The Centre has also allowed exports of 2,000 tonnes of white onion cultivated, especially, for export markets in the Middle East and some European countries.

On December 8, 2023, the government banned export of onions.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution said the government has "allowed export of 99,150 tonnes of onion to six neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, UAE, Bhutan, Bahrain, Mauritius and Sri Lanka".

The export prohibition has been imposed to ensure adequate domestic availability against the backdrop of estimated lower Kharif and Rabi crops in 2023-24 compared to the previous year.

The ban was imposed amid an increase in demand in the international market, it added.

The National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL), the agency for the export of onion to these countries, sourced the domestic onions to be exported through e-platform at L1 prices.

NCEL has supplied to the agency or agencies nominated by



the government of the destination country at the negotiated rate on a 100 per cent advance payment basis.

The offer rate of NCEL to the buyers takes into account the prevailing prices in the destination market and also international and domestic markets.

The quota allocated for export to the six countries is being supplied as per requisition made by the destination country.

"As the largest producer of onion in the country, Maharashtra is the major supplier of onions sourced by NCEL for export," the statement said.

The government had also allowed the export of 2,000 tonnes of white onion cultivated, espe-

cially for export markets in the Middle East and some European countries.

"Being purely export-oriented, the production cost of the white onion is higher than other onions due to higher seed cost, adoption of good agricultural practice (GAP) and compliance to strict maximum residue limits (MRL) requirements," the statement said.

In March, the Union Agriculture Ministry released the data for onion production.

As per the data, onion production in 2023-24 (First Advance Estimates) is expected to be around 254.73 lakh tonnes compared to around 302.08 lakh tonnes last year. This is due to a decrease of 34.31 lakh tonne output in Maharashtra, 9.95 lakh tonne in Karnataka, 3.54 lakh tonne in Andhra Pradesh and 3.12 lakh tonne in Rajasthan, the data showed. (PTI)

procurement, storage and farmers registration to begin the procurement of any store-worthy onion.

A high-level team of the Department of Consumer Affairs, NCCF and NAFED visited Nashik and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra from April 11-13, 2024, to create awareness among the farmers, FPOs/FPCs and PACs about the procurement of 5 lakh tonnes of onion for buffer stock.

To reduce the storage loss of onions, the department has decided to enhance the quantum of stocks to be irradiated and cold stored from 1,200 tonnes last year to over 5,000 tonnes this year, with technical support from BARC, Mumbai. The pilot of onion irradiation and cold storage taken up last year has been found to have resulted in the reduction of storage loss to less than 10 per cent, the statement said.

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## Office Space Leasing In Delhi-NCR Drops 25% Annually In Jan-Mar: Vestian

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** The office space leasing in Delhi-NCR fell 25 per cent annually to 18.1 lakh square feet in January-March this year on lower demand from corporates, according to real estate consultant Vestian.

The office space absorption stood at 24 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.

The leasing of office space in Delhi-NCR dropped 40 per cent from 30 lakh square feet in the October-December quarter.

The real estate consultant on Saturday released the data for office leasing across the top seven major cities. Office absorption increased 13 per cent to 134 lakh sq ft in January-March 2024 from 118.5 lakh square feet in the year-ago period.

However, the absorption declined by 31 per cent during the first quarter of this year after peaking in the fourth quarter of 2023.

Vestian CEO Shrinivas Rao said, "2024 started on a positive note, as major office markets of India witnessed sustained absorption activities". "Return to office mandates are likely to renew demand for office spaces across the country and may drive the next wave of growth amid global headwinds," Rao added.

Southern cities (Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad) accounted for 61 per cent of the Pan-India absorption in Q1 2024.

Their combined share increased from 54 per cent a year earlier.

Moreover, the IT-ITeS sector dominated absorption with 47 per cent share, followed by the BFSI sector with 11 per cent share.

Flexible spaces garnered interest from large conglomerates post-pandemic, accounting for 8 per cent of the pan-India absorption in Q1 2024.

In Bengaluru, office leasing declined to 26.2 lakh square feet in January-March this year from 33 lakh square feet in the year-ago period. In Chennai, the leasing of office demand doubled to 33.5 lakh square feet from 16 lakh square feet.

Office leasing in Hyderabad rose to 22.7 lakh square feet from 15 lakh square feet.

In Mumbai, the office space absorption doubled to 24.9 lakh square feet from 12 lakh square feet.

Kolkata saw a decline in leasing to 1.6 lakh square feet from 3.5 lakh square feet.

The office leasing in Pune declined to 7.1 lakh square feet during January-March 2024 from 15 lakh square feet in the year-ago period. (PTI)

## RBL Bank Q4 results: PAT jumps 30% to ₹ 353 crore, deposits up 22%

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** Private sector lender RBL Bank on Saturday reported a 30 per cent rise in the post-tax net profit for the March quarter at ₹ 353 crore, driven by non-interest income.

The Maharashtra-based lender had reported a net profit of ₹ 271 crore in the year-ago period.

Its core net interest income grew 18 per cent to ₹ 1,600 crore on a 20 per cent loan growth. However, it was limited by a compression in the net interest margin to 5.45 per cent against 5.62 per cent a year ago.

The other income grew 30 per cent to ₹ 875 crore during the reporting quarter. Its managing director and chief executive R Subramaniakumar told reporters that he sees advances continuing to

grow in the 20 per cent range going forward as well. The deposit growth came at 22 per cent even in the challenging market.

On the asset quality front, overall slippages increased to 0.56 per cent of the assets from the year-ago period's 0.44 per cent and were driven by microlending and also unsecured loans.

The gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 2.65 per cent from 3.37 per cent in the year-ago period.

The overall provisions came at ₹ 414 crore against ₹ 235 crore in the year-ago period.

The overall capital adequacy ratio was 16.18 per cent as of March 31, which included the core tier-I ratio at 14.38 per cent. (PTI)

## ADIF, IITG collaborate to energize startup ecosystem

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 27:** In a bid to invigorate the startup landscape, the Alliance of Digital India Foundation (ADIF) and IIT Guwahati's Technology Incubation Centre (IITGuwahati TIC) have formalized a significant Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Saturday.

This strategic alliance, spanning two years, is poised to fortify the startup ecosystem by fostering synergy between ADIF's extensive network of startups and entrepreneurs, and the reservoir of innovators, faculty, and incubation facilities at IITGuwahati. The MOU entails ADIF extending alliance membership to the portfolio startup companies of IITG TIC, thus granting them access to a comprehensive startup toolkit comprising discounted services, resources, and mentorship avenues. Concurrently, IITG TIC will provide invaluable assistance to ADIF members through mentorship, market linkages, pitching support, networking events, and acceleration programs.

Collaboratively, the partners will orchestrate an array of ini-



tiatives including startup courses, workshops, hackathons, and research endeavors, engaging students, faculty, and entrepreneurs. ADIF will further amplify the visibility of IITGuwahati TIC's events and programs through its channels. Expressing enthusiasm, Prateek Jain, Associate Director at ADIF, remarked, "We are excited to partner with the prestigious IITGuwahati, Technology Incubation Centre to empower early-stage startups through our combined resources and networks."

Echoing Jain's sentiments, Prof. G. Krishnamoorthy, President, Council of Management,

IITG, TIC, affirmed, "IIT Guwahati Technology Incubation Centre is delighted to join hands with ADIF to create a more conducive environment for our brightest minds to transform their innovations into successful businesses, especially in the North East India."

The signing ceremony was graced by Dr. Swapnil Sinha, CEO, Bionest IIT Guwahati, Miss Pooja Thakur, Incubation Manager, and Mr. Kulendra Roy Choudhary, Assistant Accounts Officer from IITG TIC, underscoring the collective commitment towards nurturing entrepreneurship and fostering innovation.

## US FDA gathering information on Indian spices after alleged contamination

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** India and Chinese Taipei have asked the WTO's dispute settlement body not to adopt any ruling against New Delhi's import duties on certain information and technology products till July 26 as both sides are engaged in resolving the matter, an official said.

The issue came up during a meeting of the dispute settlement body (DSB) in Geneva on April 26.

In the meeting, the two countries asked DSB to delay consideration of a dispute panel's reports until July 26, 2024 in order to help facilitate resolution of the disputes, the Geneva-based official said, adding that the body agreed to that.

Earlier also, DSB had agreed to three previous requests from India and Chinese Taipei to delay consideration of the reports.

As per rules of the WTO, the panel's ruling will have to be adopted by DSB for implementation within 60 days of the release of the order. However, countries

can mutually request DSB for delay in adoption of the ruling.

In its report, a dispute panel of WTO on April 17, 2023 said import duties imposed by India on certain information and technology products violate global trading norms.

The ruling followed a case filed by the EU, Japan and Taiwan against these duties in WTO.

In May 2019, Chinese Taipei had filed a case against India in the WTO over the import duties imposed on certain electronic goods, including telephones for cellular networks; machines for reception, conversion and transmission or regeneration of voice, images or other data; and parts of telephone sets. India has stated that these ICT products are part of WTO's Information Technology Products (ITA-2) agreement, and New Delhi is not part of this pact. India is a part of ITA-1, signed in 1997, which did not have any obligation to eliminate customs duties on these products.

Besides formulating norms for global exports and imports, the Geneva-based 164-member multilateral body adjudicates trade disputes among the member countries.

According to WTO rules, a member country can file a case in WTO if they feel that a particular trade measure is against the norms of WTO.

Bilateral consultation is the first step to resolving a dispute. If both sides are not able to resolve the matter through consultation, either of them can approach the establishment of a dispute settlement panel.

The panel's ruling or report can be challenged at WTO's appellate body.

Interestingly, the appellate body is not functioning because of differences among member countries to appoint its members. Several disputes are already pending with this body. The US has been blocking the appointment of the members. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Wait for few more days

to go as demanded by the people," he said on Gandhi contesting from Kerala. Hitting out at the Prime Minister, Kharage alleged, "Modi is trying to intimidate everyone, with either CBI or ED or something else."

Comparing PM Modi with his predecessor Manmohan Singh, he said, "In his 10 years as the Prime Minister, did you ever hear Manmohan Singh talking about snatching someone's mangalsutra? Did he badmouth anyone?" "Singh would make one statement and it would be printed worldwide. If Modi speaks and his words have no credibility, what can we do about it?" he said. Asked about PM Modi's allegation that Congress' manifesto is about appeasement of Muslims, Kharage asserted that it is a document with assurances for everyone, from youths to farmers, workers, women and backward classes.

Lashing out at the PM, he said, "You should think before you speak. Our Nyays and guarantees are for everyone... when you are repeatedly saying it's for Muslims, you are polarising, dividing the people and one day you will repent."

Asked for his reaction to Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's remark that "Kharage should join the BJP", following the Congress chief's statement that "Modi should read the grand old party's manifesto first, then we can have a discussion", the Rajya Sabha MP said he will speak to the PM, who is his opponent in Parliament, and not to a CM. "I have spoken to Modi and not your (Assam) CM because I am Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha. I was also in Lok Sabha. I have a little bit of competency in Parliamentary office as well... I will speak to Modi. Why he (Himanta) bothers about it? Let him face the people here (in Assam) and then speak about me," Kharage added.

Alleging that the BJP "rolls out the red carpet" for opposition party leaders facing corruption charges when they enter the saffron fold, Kharage said, "They (BJP leaders) say that corrupt leaders will be put in jail, but when those same people join the BJP, they make them sit on their lap." He said there are many such examples of corrupt leaders from other parties joining the BJP and being made ministers, MLAs or Members of Parliament.

Kharage questioned turncoat leaders "who grew up in the Congress and later left it" that if the grand old party was "so bad, why did they waste 30-40 years" in it. "Congress is like a flowing river, it is not affected by a few people leaving it. It is more than a century-old party. It has a history of making India independent and giving it democracy and a constitution. We have shown that democracy has sustained in India only due to the Congress," the party president asserted.

Noting the contribution of Congress leaders in the freedom struggle, Kharage said, "People who freed the country are in the Congress. No one from the BJP had fought for Independence or development. They talk about patriotism and try to project that (Jawaharlal) Nehru, Indira (Gandhi) and Lal Bahadur Shastri were nothing in front of them." "It is only Modi for them and they think India attained Independence in 2014," he added. Kharage maintained that the ongoing elections are about "sustaining democracy and saving the Constitution".

"Those in the government, especially Modi, said they are for 'sabka saath, sabka vikas'. But actually what happened was 'sabka satyanaash'," he alleged. To a question on whether the Congress failed to make electoral bonds a poll issue, the party chief said it has raised the matter. "We have been saying there is no level playing field. Loss-making companies were giving them (BJP) donations of ₹ 500-1,000 crore. It was 'chanda do, dhanda lo'," he added. (PTI)

## Shah urges third term

was scrapped, Rahul Gandhi opposed the move saying a river of blood will flow in Kashmir after that. But in the last five years, let alone the river of blood, nobody dared to throw even a stone there. Modi worked to finish terrorism and Naxalism from the country." When Manmohan Singh was the country's prime minister, anyone could enter the country from Pakistan and blow up bombs, he said.

"When Pakistan carried out terrorist attacks in Pulwama and Uri, it forgat that Modi was the prime minister. Within 10 days, Modi carried out surgical and air strikes to finish off terrorists on Pakistan soil. Modi worked to secure the country and make it prosperous," he said.

In 10 years of the Congress-led UPA government's rule (between 2004 and 2014), the country's economy was at 11th position, Shah said. "PM Modi brought it to the fifth position in just 10 years. And I give you a guarantee, make him the prime minister for the third term and India will become the third largest economy," he said. After two phases of election, it is now clear that Rahul Gandhi is finished, Shah said.

"In east, west, north, south and central (parts of India) - wherever you go, people across the country welcome the BJP workers by shouting 'Modi-Modi' slogans. People of the country have decided to bring Modi to power once again. The entire country is committed to make Modi prime minister for the third time," he said. Modi took tough decisions without caring about the vote bank, he said. Under the UPA government, the Congress left no stone unturned to do injustice to Gujarat, Shah said.

"In 10 years, the BJP government resolved the issue of Narmada dam. Congress party granted only Rs 1.22 lakh crore to Gujarat in 10 years of this rule, while Modi granted Rs 5.55 lakh crore in the last decade," he said. Shah alleged that the Congress party did not consider anyone except Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi as leaders, and forgot Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

"Modi constructed the Statue of Unity (the world's tallest, at Kevadia in Narmada district of Gujarat) to immortalise Sardar Patel's name. The statue was in accordance with the kind of respect that the people of the country have in their hearts for Sardar Patel," he said.

Shah also targeted Congress president Mallikarjun Kharage over his remarks that people of Gujarat and Rajasthan have nothing to do with Kashmir after the scrapping of Article 370.

"Kharage saheb, you have crossed 80 years of age and have not been able to understand the country. Every single youth here is ready to sacrifice his life for Kashmir. Shouldn't Article 370 be scrapped? For 70 years, Congress took care of Article 370 like an adopted child for its vote bank politics," he said. Shah also said that the Modi government made possible the construction of Lord Ram temple at Ayodhya.

"For 70 years, Congress kept the issue hanging for vote bank politics. In five years of the second term, we won the election, laid the foundation, and consecration on January 22," he said.

For 500 years, our God was in a tent at a temporary place. It's Modi who worked to construct his grand temple after 500 years, he said. Modi also built Kashi Vishwanath Corridor as Mughal emperor Aurangzeb had destroyed the temple, Modi said. He also made the Mahakal corridor, enlivened Badrinath and Kedarnath, and Somnath temple is being built using gold, he said. (PTI)

## ASDC challenges APHLC

to the Uniform Civil Code and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), a request to which the CM reportedly acquiesced.

## Nobody can break Delhi

bow down," she added. As Sunita Kejriwal's carcade snaked through narrow lanes, a large number of AAP supporters, carrying the Delhi chief minister's cut-outs and blue and yellow Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) flags, gathered there and raised slogans like "Jail ke tale tutengey, Kejriwal chhutengey". Patriotic songs were also played during the roadshow. Many supporters stood in balconies and windows.

A local leader of AAP's alliance partner Congress also attended the roadshow with their supporters. A local resident, Vimla Devi, said the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal just before the elections was not good. "I feel that the INDIA alliance will sweep the Lok Sabha polls. The chief minister has provided a lot of facilities to the people of Delhi. People will surely vote for his party," Devi said.

With Arvind Kejriwal behind bars in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy, his wife will spearhead the AAP's poll campaign and hold roadshows, including one in West Delhi Lok Sabha constituency on Sunday, according to party leaders.

Sunita Kejriwal will also campaign for AAP candidates in South Delhi and New Delhi constituencies as well as in Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab, the party leaders said. (PTI)

## Large number of Sikhs join BJP

sacrifices of the community for the country and will keep working for its welfare. The BJP has been in an overdrive to deepen its bond with Sikhs and is looking to put up a strong fight in the Lok Sabha polls in Punjab, where they are in a majority. A number of well known Sikh politicians from the state have joined the party recently. (PTI)

## Reserve Bank of India gives nod to reverse merger of IDFC-IDFC First Bank

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** Reserve Bank of India has given its nod for the reverse merger of IDFC Ltd with its banking subsidiary IDFC First Bank.

The boards of IDFC First Bank



and IDFC have approved the reverse merger in July.

"...IDFC Limited and IDFC Financial Holding Company (IDFC FHCL) have received letters dated December 26, 2023 from RBI whereby RBI has conveyed its 'No Objection' to the composite

scheme of amalgamation, subject to compliance with the terms specified therein," IDFC Ltd said in a regulatory filing.

As part of the composite scheme of amalgamation, IDFC FHCL would first merge with IDFC and then IDFC into IDFC First Bank

Ltd. The scheme remains subject to other statutory and regulatory approvals, including from the National Company Law Tribunal and the respective shareholders and creditors of the companies involved under the applicable laws, it said. Under the proposed reverse merger scheme, an IDFC shareholder will get 155 shares for every 100 shares she/he holds in the bank. Both stocks have a face value of Rs 10 each.

Post the merger, the standalone book value per share of the bank will increase by 4.9 per cent, as calculated on the audited financials as of March 2023, it said, adding that as of June 2023, IDFC through its non-financial holding company, owned 39.93 per cent in IDFC First Bank. IDFC was an infra lender in the private sector space, and following its bigger peers like ICICI and IDBI, it also launched a banking subsidiary in 2015 -- IDFC Bank -- but could not make a mark as the other two could do. (PTI)

**HIRING AND OPERATING MULTI-UTILITY VEHICLE**

E-Tender Notice No. LMGI/Engg/58 of 2024; Dated: 22-04-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN.1. Brief Description of Item:** Hiring and operating Multi-Utility vehicle for 24 months in connection with site visit & transportation of materials in the section of SSE/W/Jagiroad, SSE/W/Chaparmukh & SE/W/Line/Lumding under the jurisdiction of DENII of Lumding Division. **Tender Value:** ₹44,56,800/- **Earnest Money:** ₹8,110/-

E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs on 20-05-2024 and opened at 15:00 hrs on 21-05-2024. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 20-05-2024 in website <http://www.Gem.gov.in>

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# Kharge addresses rally at Kayakuchi in Barpeta

## Modi's 'factory of lies' won't work forever: Kharge on BJP's claims

**BARPETA, April 27:** Rejecting the BJP's claims that the Congress' election manifesto resembled that of the Muslim League, party president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday asserted that "Modi's factory of lies" won't work forever.

Addressing an election rally at Kayakuchi in Barpeta district of Assam, he said unemployment is a big problem in the country and that 65 per cent of educated youths have no jobs.

"The INDIA bloc will surely come to power and stop the BJP. Modi's BJP will be decimated. Once our government comes to power, we will control price rise and our focus will be on poor people. We will fill up 30 lakh vacancies in government departments," he added.

Terming Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "sardar (leader) of liars", Kharge charged him with lying about providing two crore jobs annually, bringing back black money to the country and giving ₹ 15 lakh to each citizen, and doubling farmers' income.

"Modi's 'factory of lies' won't last forever. He even called the Congress manifesto Muslim League's manifesto and

spoke lies about it," he added.

Kharge also alleged that the BJP was "looting" the country's wealth and handing it over to the rich.

"PM Modi waived ₹ 16 lakh crore loans of his few rich friends. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. But we will never loot and divide the country like BJP and RSS that are experts in creating fights between communities, castes and religions," he claimed.

He also criticised Modi for not visiting Manipur even once despite the state reeling under ethnic clashes since May last year.

Kharge said that while party leader Rahul Gandhi led the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' crisscrossing the country, Modi was working for 'Bharat todo' or dividing the nation.

"Prime Minister Modi is continuously attacking the Congress and the Gandhi family as he is scared and trembling in fear of losing power," he claimed.

"One who can't feel the pain of the poor does not have the right to stay in power," Kharge added.

On the employment scenario in the country, he claimed, "Joblessness is a



major issue in India, with 65 per cent of the educated youths being jobless. We will reserve 50 per cent of posts for women. We will give ₹ 1 lakh as apprenticeship stipend to every unemployed youth during his or her training period till he or she gets a proper job." Kharge addressed the massive crowd

seeking votes for party candidates Deep Bayan for Barpeta constituency and Garjan Mushahary for Kokrajhar.

"You (Modi) always ask what Congress has done in 70 years. We ruled for 55 years and created the wealth that you and (Amit) Shah are selling now. You are destroying everything," he added.

Kharge also attacked Modi for raking up food habits of people, and Mughal tenure in India.

"Modi was the chief minister of Gujarat and he did nothing there," he alleged, while criticising the Prime Minister for failing to control rising prices of essential commodities such as petrol, diesel and LPG, among others.

Slamming Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over an earlier post regarding caste system in India, Kharge claimed Sarma supports 'Manusmriti' and caste hierarchy as described in the book.

"He said Shudras should serve the higher castes. Such a person is your CM. I am ashamed that if such an educated person speaks like this, how will the country progress? If such Manuvadi thinking is there, how will we get equal-

ity?" he questioned.

Kharge, who is a Dalit, said that "if Manu's philosophy is followed, then he would have to go and serve Sarma", who is a Brahmin.

In December last year, Sarma had uploaded an audio-visual post on his social media handles, including X and Facebook, that he claimed was from Sloka 44 of Sanyas Yoga from 18th chapter of Gita.

The animated video stated that farming, cow-rearing and commerce are habitual and natural duties of the Vaishya, while serving the three 'varnas' -- Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya -- is the natural duty of the Shudras.

Sharing this video, Sarma had said, "Lord Sri Krishna himself described the types of natural duties of Vaishya and Shudras."

This sparked a massive political row with opposition leaders denouncing what they called the "BJP's Manuvadi and regressive ideology". Facing a volley of criticism, Sarma later deleted the post from all his social media platforms and apologised for uploading the post with casteist remarks. (PTI)

## CM Sarma campaigns for NDA candidate Joyanta Basumatary at Manas

**HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, April 27:** Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday campaigned for NDA candidate Joyanta Basumatary at the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency ahead of the third phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

The third phase will be held on May 7 for four Lok Sabha constituencies of Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Barpeta and Guwahati.

Sarma addressed a meeting held at the Bashbari under Manas Legislative Assembly constituency in support of the NDA alliance (BJP, AGP, UPPL) candidate. He was accompanied by cabinet ministers Ranjit Kumar Dass, Urkha Gwra Brahma and the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro.

Over 20,000 party supporters, workers and well wishers attended the programme and extended support to the NDA candidate Basumatary in Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency.

CM Sarma was accorded a warm welcome and felicitated with a traditional Aronai, Phulam Gamocha, Adivashi traditional Ponshi on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, CM



Sarma said, "People's grand participation and extensive support to the NDA alliance candidate is a sign of their faith in the BJP government that has been working towards the welfare and development of the common masses in the region."

"The NDA alliance's more than 12 candidates, who are contesting the Lok Sabha polls from various constituencies including, Kokrajhar will win the elections in a massive margin of votes. The NDA alliance government in the state and government of Bodoland Territorial Region are committed to work for all round development of the citizens," he said.

## Shikhadri Mahanta achieves Dr Brock Faulkner 04 fellowship

**HT Correspondent NAGAON, April 27:** Shikhadri Mahanta, a student of the University of Texas has achieved Dr Brock Faulkner, 04 fellowship for 'Biological and Agricultural Engineering Spring 2024' for her accomplishments in research and other achievements.

She is the daughter of Jagannath Mahanta and Dipali Mahanta of Fouzdaripatty in Nagaon.

Mahanta was a student in the department of biology and agricultural engineering and pursued her studies in sustainable agriculture, post harvest losses, cotton processing and air quality. He also participated in the 68th Annual COALS Convocation organized by the Agricultural and Natural Resources Internship Programme (ANRP) recognition and also awarded with CIRTLP Practitioner certificate (2023) as well as scholar certificate (2024).

The ANRP was established in 1990 and has provided students with opportunities in private pol-



ity development at state, national and international level. She was able to learn about agricultural policy on an international scale and also got the opportunity to intern at the committee of World Food Security at the food and agriculture organization of the United Nations during summer last year.

Similarly, she was selected for CIRTLP Practitioner Certificate (2023) and CIRTLP Scholar Certificate (2024) for conducting classroom activities and developing a new teaching methodology in collaboration with a faculty member. She has conducted her research on undergraduate engineering education.

## World Veterinary Day observed

**HT Bureau DIPHU, April 27:** On the occasion of the 'World Veterinary Day', 'The All Claws and Paws Diphu Veterinary Clinic organised a free anti-rabies vaccination and animal health check-up at its premises in Diphu on Saturday.

The theme for this year's 'World Veterinary Day' is 'Veterinarians are essential health workers'.

The free vaccination camp has been organised to inform pet owners and the general public the need to routinely immunize their pets. It also aims to recognise the service of veterinarians for their excellent work on the well being of animals and humans. The vaccination camp began at 9 am in the morning, where pet owners brought their pets including dogs and cats for vaccination and health check-up. Dogs of various breeds and puppies were brought for vaccination and free health check up.

Veterinary surgeon Lonee Dutta, consultant of All Claws & Paws Diphu Veterinary Clinic informed that till the afternoon 200 dogs and cats were vaccinated with anti rabies vaccination and 55 animals were given free animal health check-up. She said an interaction with farmers and pet owners to inform them on the importance of maintaining healthy life of animals was also conducted on the occasion.

Speaking on the importance of the day, Dutta said the day is celebrated to raise awareness that veterinarians play a critical role in safeguarding animal health, which directly translates to human well-being. It also encourages people to know about the spread of disease from animals and the need to routinely immunize their pets.

Field assistance Suresh Hanse and Samir Kathar conducted the immunization of animals, while their health check-up was done by Dutta.

## Woman stabbed to death

**HT Correspondent TEZPUR, April 27:** The police have arrested a man for killing his wife at the Chamdhora village in Sonitpur district. According to sources, the accused, Indrajit Ghosh killed his wife, Santi Ghosh early during the day on Friday. Later, Ghosh surrendered at the Barghat police outpost. When contacted, the police informed that the accused confessed that he had committed the gruesome killing because of a long standing family conflict. The police took the accused in to custody and are investigating into the matter.

## Foundation Day of Lekhika Association celebrated

**HT Correspondent DEMOW, April 27:** The Lekhika Association, Assam Demow Branch Biennial has celebrated its foundation day at Dehajan Kachumari in Demow with a day-long programme.

The programme began on Friday with the ceremonial lighting of the earthen lamp. Padma Lahon Chetia, president of Lekhika Association, Assam Demow Branch presided over the meeting. Lakhima Phukan, joint secretary of the association anchored the meeting and also elaborated on its aims. Nayan Bhagawati gave the welcome speech.

The association also felicitated Nayan Nilabh Bhagawati with a phulam gamosa and books for passing the HSLC examination with flying colours this year.

## 3 killed in elephant attack in state

**HT Bureau TEZPUR, April 27:** Three persons, including two forest guards, were killed and another person was injured in an attack by a wild elephant in Sonitpur district on Saturday, a forest official said.

A wild elephant strayed into the Dhirai Majuli village from the nearby Dhekiajuli forest and trampled three persons to death on the spot and injured another employee of the forest department, when the forest personnel were patrolling the area. West Tezpur divisional forest officer Nipen Kalita said.

The deceased have been identified as forest guards Koleswar Boro and Biren Rabha, and the local person as Jatin Tanti, he said, adding the injured person, Dibakar Malakar, has been admitted to a hospital and his condition is stated to be critical.

According to the sources, Joton Tanti (62) had gone to the lavatory when the wild elephant, taking shelter in the area, attacked and killed him on the spot.

While Koleswar Boro was a resident of Samukia under Bihaguri police outpost, Biren Rabha was a resident of Singri area under Dhekiajuli Police Station in Sonitpur District and posted as forest guard under Amarbari range of the Sonitpur forest department.

Efforts are underway to push back the elephant into the forest, he added. Meanwhile, locals of the Dhiraimajuli area alleged that the wild elephant have been creating havoc among the villagers for the past few days. (With inputs from PTI)

## 1 killed in accident

**HT Correspondent JORHAT, April 27:** A person was killed in a road accident on the National Highway 715 (formerly NH 37) at Kakojan on the outskirts of Jorhat on Saturday when he was hit by a vehicle engaged in construction works on the highway.

According to local people, the victim Nasir Ali (39) was reportedly hit by the vehicle when it had been moving back.

After the incident a crowd gathered at the spot and protested alleging that negligence in safety measures during construction works and much delay in completion of the project has led to loss many lives due to accidents on the highway in the past few years.

Police personnel soon arrived on the accident site and brought the situation under control. They took the body to the Jorhat Medical College and Hospital for post mortem, the report of which is awaited.

Students and several other organisations have been protesting since the past three years against alleged malpractices, inferior quality of work and delay in the execution of the project resulting in a lot of difficulties for commuters while traveling through the key road of Upper Assam.

## World Veterinary Day observed in Guwahati

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 27:** AZAAN, a health care society of the state celebrated the 'World Veterinary Day' in a befitting manner at a function at Gauhati Press Club in the city on Saturday.

The theme of this year's WVD is "Veterinarians are essential health workers". In addition to helping animals, an essential part of the veterinary professionals are protecting and improving the health of people and their communities. Veterinarians' competencies must be regarded as an essential and integral part of health at large. The application of veterinary science contributes not only to animal health and well-being, but also to human's physical, mental and social wellbeing.

World Veterinary Day is being celebrated worldwide every year on the last Saturday of April. Indian Veterinary Association has also decided to celebrate the WVD in a befitting manner to spread the message of 'One World One Health' in the society.

During the programme veteri-

## Bir Lachit Borphukan College gets autonomous status



**HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, April 27:** The Bir Lachit Borphukan College in Sivasagar has been accorded the autonomous status from the University Grants Commission.

Principal of the college, Dipali Neog received an e-mail on April 24 about the college being accorded the autonomous status. The achievement of the college comes close on heels with the up gradation of the Sibsagar College into a state university by the state government.

The state government upgraded the Sibsagar

College at Joysagar in Sivasagar into a university through the Sibsagar University Act, 2023.

The Bir Lachit Borphukan College, was founded by Ananda Gogoi 1981. The college was initially housed in a temporary shed in Darikapar. It was later shifted to a new building by the National Highway -37 in 1999.

Dipali Neog said, "The college fulfils the criteria under seven heads set by the UGC. We invited National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) to the college for its assessment and certification on March 27 and 28 last

year. We received the results on April 11. The college received B+ 2.65 cgp. After the NAAC assessment, we applied for autonomous status within a year in prescribed forms."

"Our entire staff and students are very happy on our college being awarded the autonomous status on the basis of merit. At the same time, we are aware of our new responsibilities as well. We have a long way to go to make the college a full-fledged one," Neog further said.

As an affiliated college of the Dibrugarh University, the college now will have the liberty to prepare questions papers on its own. Further, this will also boost its infrastructure and many more facilities would be made available to students within the college campus.

Dhrubajyoti Borthakur, assistant professor of the college said that the new building was constructed with collective grants and aids from various sources during the stewardship of former principals Navin Gogoi and Pratima Gohain. MP funds from former Jorhat MP late Bijoy Krishna Handique and Rajya Sabha MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa and MLA funds from MLAs Drupad Borhohain, Promod Gogoi, and Pranob Gogoi along with CSR aid from ONGC also helped the institution to develop its infrastructure.

## Awareness meeting on road safety held



**HT Correspondent MARGHERITA, April 27:** The District Legal Services Authority, Tinsukia in collaboration with the Legal Awareness Network Centre on Saturday organised awareness meeting on road safety and drunken driving at the Gandhi Vidya Mandir High School in Margherita.

The meeting was attended by senior advocates of Margherita, Shiv Kumar Agarwal, Rajat Paul, Bhavana Agarwal, Gandhi Vidya Mandir High School's headmaster Anil Kumar Singh, retired professor of the Margherita College Chura Giri, Margherita Children Friends Club's president Papu Sah and retired teacher

and president of SMDC Margherita GVM High school Shailesh Sutradhar. The students of the Gandhi Vidya Mandir high school who have passed their HSLC exams this year also attended the awareness programme.

Senior advocate of Margherita Shiv Kumar Agarwal said, "The government accords great importance to road safety. If anyone violates the rules then a heavy fine will be imposed on them. Everyone should follow the safety rules on the roads." In this meeting Children Friends Club felicitated 15 students of the Gandhi Vidya Mandir High School with certificates and prizes for qualifying in the 2024 HSLC examination.



# Musical beauty of Ankiya Bhaona

By Arup Saikia

Music is an energetic expression of mind. The creation of music is not the result of any process; it is spontaneous formation of thought. Then what is the foundation of its creation? Emotive thought blended with reality created music. Music and instruments are real, concept is abstract. Once in a live show in USA, one African singer has told that Africans were singing songs with the cutting sounds of wood in jungles. The conversation of the Africans in sorrow, joy or excitement unknowingly resulted in songs mingling with cutting sounds.

The classification of music means – mode. Mode is also emanated from the various stages of synchronization of the said conversation with sound. Somebody claps and hug someone can imply a musical tone. Music is an impulse of mind. Nobody plans beforehand whether he/she will cry or laugh. When people go for catching animals in group, they usually sing or deliver fast encouraging tune. That tune set to the mode of music. The music has seven modes in entire world.

All the seven modes have similar counterpart in respective regions. The seven western modes are – Ionian (Bilawal), Dorian (Kafi), Phrygian (Bhairavi), Lydian (Yaman), Mixolydian (Khamaj), Aeolian (Ashowari) and Locrian (Todi). (All the Indian ragas are written in brackets.)

**Borgeet:** Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva developed a new classical form of music for his songs – Borgeet. The “Bor” means great and “Geet” means song. The name of the music is Sankari or Satriya. The two names have disputes. The followers of Satriya claim it as Satriya and mostly Namghar centric Mahapurushiya call it as

Sankari. It is true that all the Satras don't remain as Sankari organization because of brahmanical influence. The Borgeets are the musical foundation of Sankari culture. Sankaradeva did fusions of two/three ragas together for some specific characters of Bhaona. It is not known how many ragas or talas he has created. Because he wrote total two hundred forty numbers of Borgeets. But the fire broke out and burnt down all the Borgeets. Sankaradeva recovered only thirty four number of Borgeets from memory. He stopped writing later out of sorrow.

So the level of influence or similarity couldn't be verified for non-availability of all the songs. Notwithstanding Sankaradeva created Borgeets independent of Carnatic or Hindustani music. Ultimately three varieties of classical music were created. These are – Hindustani of North India, Carnatic of South India and Sankari of North East India. The Hindustani music got lot of influence of Arabic-Indian music. Within the Indian Dhruwad style, a new Persian genre was emerged.

The Muslim monarchs patronized the Indian music and resulted in minimizing Hindu religious and spiritual themes. The king of Hindustani classical music Ramtanu Pandey aka Tansen (1500–1589) was musician at Mughal court under emperor Akbar. He joined Mughal court almost after the period of Sankaradeva in 1562. The grammatical development of Hindustani music was started from Tansen era only. So Sankaradeva had got nothing from his genre.

The Sankari music was created among the ethnic tribes of Assam. The Borgeet existed before Sankaradeva also in unorganized or verbally without any grammatical form.

The Tibeto-Burman community mainly Bodo-Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, Mishing, Karbi etc. have also practice of



some pathetic kind of devotional songs. The crying and sorrow of the Assamese tribes are minutely conceptualized by Sankaradeva. We can comprehend the similarity with Borgeet in some of their verses. The Borgeet is like a prayer to attain salvation from sinful mundane world. So pathetic expression is prevalent. Sankaradeva molded it in written form to give birth a new musical form in North-East of India namely – Sankari.

The “Raga” and “Tala” of Borgeet is indebted to the ethnic communities of Assam. The all oral songs of the said tribes are not sorrowful. But all have presence of refined words unlike erotic Bihu songs. Among the prior available ingredients of Borgeet, Vyas Ojapali and Sonowal Kachari songs are prominent. The spiritual songs in Vyas-Ojapali tradition are now known as Borgeet sung in the conclusion of Ojapali without the accompaniment of musical instrument. So the tradition of Borgeet was running on the both poles of Assam. The Sonowal Kachari practiced inherently in the Eastern side and by Vyas-Ojapali in Kamrupa including adjacent western Assam.

Besides romantic “Bonoriya Geet” and jovial agrarian songs before Bihu, many other religious or solemn songs were also prevalent in Assam. The “Charyapada” of Buddhism is

one of the ancient Assamese lyrics written in the seventh century approximately. Besides “Ramayani Geet”, Kamrupi folk song – “Deh Bichar Geet” are noteworthy. Sankaradeva took one benedictory style from Ahom during praying. The word – “Joi” (Victory) Sankaradeva used frequently before, Naam (Recitation of religious verse) and in time of blessings. The Ahom practices this in “Bihu” and “Husori” performance.

Another prominent secular universal song is lullaby or cradle song. This song is existed in all societies of the world. It is very soothing and likely to be devotional. The humanistically spiritual children's songs gained the status of secular credentials. According to Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati, cattle rearing Lord Krishna centric Borgeet was written basing on this context.

Borgeet wasn't similar to “Khyal” school of music created by Amir Khusrau (1253–1325). The ragas of Borgeets seem to be similar to that of Hindustani music. But in reality these are different from Carnatic, Hindustani or Khyal. Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva created twenty four and seven ragas respectively. Some of the prominent ragas are Dhanashree, Ashowari, Kalyan, Bhatiyali, Sindhura, Belowar, Sri Gandhara, Mallar, Bhupali, Bhatiyali etc.

Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva created Ankiya Bhaona on available Assamese folk traditions. So it is natural that Sankaradeva was inspired by the pre-existing folk songs and composed Borgeets and Ankiya songs.

“The Assamese Ojapali ritual dates back to before the appearance of Mahapurusha Sankaradeva; for he made the essence of his verses known to the people through the Ojapali ritual at the beginning of his preaching. There seems to be reason to think that the Beula song of Durgabar was composed before Sankaradeva. Poet Durgabar also translated the Ramayana into songs. Writing the book in the form of songs was a common custom in those days. There was a poet named Pitambar in the Bhati region of old Kamrupa. He was a contemporary of Sankaradeva but had outside influence. He also recited poetry in the form of songs.” (Old Assamese Literature by Dr. Banikant Kakati)

**Songs of Bhaona:** The prime creation of Sankaradeva is Ankiya Bhaona. The dialogue of the Ankiya is mostly lyrical and the drama is song and dance based. An Ankiya Bhaona even can be performed by the play of songs only without any dialogue. So songs occupy a major portion of a drama. The “Raga” and “Tala” of the songs are from Borgeet. There is different kind of songs sung by Gayan Bayan, Sutradhara. Moreover the entry song of the actors, Payar, Bilap (Lament), Bhatima (Panegyric) etc. are important part of Ankiya music.

The “Payar” is very submissive/devotional tunes of actors in Ankiya. The Bilap is pathetic lyrical dialogue. There is different kind of Bilap and Payar in Bhaona set to specific raga and tala. These are – Madhyawali, Chandra payar, Pitambari, Lechari, Dulori, Muktawali,

Payar Porital, etc. The “Sopoy” is a peculiar lyric presented in light moment and to persuade beautiful lady by wicked character. On the other hand entry songs vary character wise. The specific scale or raga set the mood of music. The ragas are different for the pious and wicked characters.

The raag “Sindhura” is fixed for the entry of God like Lord Krishna or Rama. The proud powerful character like king Duryodhana or Ravana are entered by the raga “Canada”. The entry song of good and pious characters are set to raga “Ashowari”. King Yudhishtira or monkey King Sugriva are included in this category. The most special character of Bhaona is Sutradhara. He is like interlocutor of the entire drama. The “Suhai Ekta” is set for the Sutradhara. The meaning of bhatima - worship or glorification. There are different kinds of bhatima mentioned below.

(1) Naat (Drama) Bhatima  
(2) Raj Bhatima (Panegyric to king)  
(3) Guru Bhatima (Panegyric to teacher)  
(4) Deva bhatima (Panegyric to God)

The Naat bhatimas are introductory verses of benediction like “Nandi”. These are descriptive songs about the story of a particular drama, concluding songs namely “Mukti Mangal bhatima.” etc.

Regarding “Raj bhatima” for example - Sankaradeva praised king Nara Narayan in the drama namely Ram Vijay. The Guru bhatima was written by generally Madhavdeva addressing Sankaradeva. The Deva bhatima is frequently used to praise the supreme Deity.

The Ojapali is a living tradition of Assam and considered as the predecessor of Sankari dance. The style and substances of Byah (Vyas) Ojapali later merged in Sankari dance. That's why it's similar to the latter.

During the Bhakti movement, the semi dramatic presentation of Sankari Ojapali was based on poetic verses of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Kirtana Dashama, Bhagawat Purana etc. The songs were played in various pre Ankiya episodes like in Raas Leela, birth of Lord Krishna etc. Even in the birth and death anniversary of Mahapurush Sankaradeva Ojapali was performed.

Therefore the Vyasa-Ojapali singing style is evident in the characteristics of the Sankari songs. In short, the position of Vyasa-Ojapali tunes and ragas can be seen in the singing verses of the main literary creation of Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva - Kirtan-Ghosha. These are the Sankari songs that echo the indigenous melodies of Assam.

There are different types of Ojapali performed in Kamrup and Barpeta districts. The two easily noticeable streams of Hinduism - Sakta and Vaishnava are evident in all aspects of practice.

The epic-based Ojapali is a product of Vaishnava environmental art. And non-epic Ojapali was molded in Sakta environmental art. While Vyasa Ojapali (Epic based) sings hymns from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas and Sukanani Ojapali (Non-epic) is associated with Sakta deity worship like Manasha Devi with hymns from the Padma Purana. The streams and genres of music can't be demarcated or separated properly. The Sankari music doesn't remain in original mode for more than five hundred years. Likewise the Hindustani or Assamese tribal traditional music also have been changing. So complete genuine verification is not possible. The writings are based on present observation and input. (The author is noted cultural enthusiast, writer and Bhaona artist of Assam who can be reached at arupsaikia07@gmail.com)

## That savvy businessman of Stratford-upon-Avon



By: Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee

Andy Warhol once wrote: “Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.” Shakespeare never got much money from the royalty of his plays which were published posthumously. Today we only know that Shakespeare led a rather frugal life in London and used most of his earnings to buy property and investments in his home town of Stratford-upon-Avon. His wife and children stayed behind as he made his living at London and although he did visit his home, Shakespeare spent much of his life away from his family.

Perhaps they felt the living he was able to provide for them was adequate compensation for an absent husband and father. Because Shakespeare was careful with his money, he died a wealthy man, unlike many of his contemporaries in the literary scene, and he was able to give his family a generous inheritance when he died. As a resident playwright for about twenty years, he would have had a salary, plus a benefit for each performed new play.

Unlike other playwrights, he was also a shareholder in a most successful London theatre company, which ended up owning two theatres, the Globe and Blackfriars. This is likely to have brought him around £150 a year. Performances at Court were another good source of money, as was patronage. Among his patrons were Lord Strange, the Earl of Southampton (to whom he dedicated Venus and Adonis), and King James. In addition, Shakespeare prudently invested in land and other business ventures.

From a poor horse keeper in the theatre he rose as an actor and a writer himself of the dramas, but first and foremost as a good father, a good husband and a good citizen to the people of Stratford. After all a poor struggling Shakespeare might not have given the world his marvelous plays if he was not wealthy. Shakespeare's original monument at Holy Trinity Church was a bag of grain which was replaced in the 18th century by a pillow with a quill on it. Researchers from Aberystwyth University in Wales have recently focused on the impor-

ance of business motif in Shakespeare's writings.

Jayne Archer a lecturer in medieval and Renaissance literature at Aberystwyth analysed how he led a parallel life of a creative writer and that of a grain merchant, moneylender and tax dodger. Howard Thomas and Richard Marggraf Turley also searched the historical archives to uncover details of the dramatist's personal life as a property owner in the town of Stratford upon Avon. Shakespeare played a major role in the transformation of the English language. His business motif is reflected in his vocabulary that he used for his characters in the drama though it is almost a sacrilege to the lovers of English literature to tell them about Shakespeare's success more as a businessman than a writer. Albert Einstein once wrote, “The hardest thing to understand in the world is the income tax.”

Still in our money minded world when many artists and writers are chasing dreams of making money, many are eager to explore Shakespeare's dramas if his business as a grain merchant and moneylender had any bearing on them. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries a blight of bad weather gripped England. This period which was called ‘Little Ice Age’ saw poor harvests and consequently famine. At that time Shakespeare was a grain merchant and property owner and for over 15 years he sold barley, grain, and malt to his neighbours at inflated price. True but it is almost unbelievable that Shakespeare was under investigation for tax evasion and in 1598 he was prosecuted for hoarding grain.

One fact that justifies this is that Shakespeare saw his own father falling on hard times and as a result some of his siblings did not receive the same education that he was able to do. It was a challenge for Shakespeare to be wealthy and as a savvy businessman of his time he got time for writing his immortal plays. F. Scott Fitzgerald is said to have written short stories for Washington Post for earning a huge amount of money for writing his fictional masterpieces like The Great Gatsby and The Last Tycoon.

Shakespeare was an actor, playwright and poet with lots of opportunities to earn an income in the new theatre business. As a young actor, he would have been paid a

weekly wage. As a playwright he could sell his plays to a company at £6-£8 apiece.

Everyone knows it today that he made his fortune as a part owner of his theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men or later the King's Men. Shakespeare's portrayal of the moneylender Shylock in The Merchant of Venice shows Shakespeare's own self-loathing for his profession as a grain merchant. King Lear is set a time of famine and Lear's decision to divide his land between his daughters would have impacted on the distribution of food. The play Coriolanus is set in Rome at a time of famine and the riots that ensue would have reflected the peasants uprising in 1607 in the Midlands where Shakespeare lived. Shakespeare's fear of hunger may have been a major motivation for him.

We are no less surprised by the good number of words that are used widely as a part of today's business vocabulary. Take the famous drama Othello. Shakespeare gives advice here as if to the business entrepreneurs new or old, “How poor are they that have not patience?” For starting a new business or for waiting for promotion or one trying to close a life-changing deal the key to success is not to rush things. As in Romeo Juliet he reiterated the same advice “Go wisely and go slowly.”

Those who rush stumble and fall. Shakespeare's pragmatism is so clearly focused in Troilus and Cressida “Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing.” “Manager” used by Shakespeare is such a word. In Midsummer Night's Dream we get “Where is our usual manager of mirth?” “Marketable” in As You Like It. In Much Ado About Nothing we get another business word “negotiate” Henry V In Two Gentlemen of Verona Shakespeare uses the most important business word of today's world ‘employment’: “They are reformed, civil, full of good/And fit for great employment, worthy lord.”

Then comes the most important word of today's business world, “Investments” in both Henry IV and Hamlet. In both instances, “investments” refers to clothing, and it is used metaphorically in a scene in Hamlet when Polonius warns his daughter Ophelia about the prince: “In few, Ophelia, /Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers, /Not of that dye which their investments show.” In Cymbeline we get the word “Outsell” which Shakespeare uses to describe a beautiful woman but today we need to outsell our competition. The word “undervalued” in The Merchant of Venice is used “Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued” The very word ‘business’ was used by Antony in Antony and Cleopatra “To business that we love we rise betimes and go to ‘with delight’”. Today many are making Art a business, Shakespeare in his unique way made Business an immortal Art. Pablo Picasso wrote in an oxymoron, I want to live the life of a poor with lots of money.” May be Shakespeare too wanted this. (The author is a senior academician cum trilingual poet cum writer who may be reached at profpratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)

## 350 years of cultural, spiritual, and educational eminence in Assam

### The Majestic Journey of Sri Sri Uttar Kamlabari Satra

By: Dipak Kurmi

In the heart of Majuli, a serene riverine island nestled amidst the mighty Brahmaputra, Sri Sri Uttar Kamlabari Satra stands tall, commemorating an astounding 350 years of unwavering service to humanity, Bharatiya Sanskriti, Hindutva, and the rich tapestry of Assamese society.

Founded in 1673 by the venerable Pujyapad Sri Sri Badla Padma Ata, a devoted disciple of Srimant Shankar Dev and Mahapurush Madhab Dev, this sacred institution has transformed into a beacon of Vaishnav bhakti, centered around the divine love of Shri Krishna and Rukmini. Situated 400 kilometers from Guwahati and 120 kilometers from Dibrugarh, Majuli radiates picturesque beauty as the backdrop to this historic celebration.

Beyond its spiritual significance, the Satra has been a catalyst for cultural and educational resurgence, along with actively contributing to social reform over the centuries. A testament to its cultural impact is the evolution of Satriya, a classical dance form that reverently portrays devotion and surrender to Bhagwan Sri Krishna. Sri Sri Uttar Kamlabari Satra, with its profound heritage and unique stature, continues to play a pivotal role in preserving and propagating the essence of Assamese tradition.

**What is Satra?** Satra, akin to a sacred sanctum, a math, or an akhara, serves as an integrated center for comprehensive societal development rooted in the profound principles of the Vaishnav tradition of Hinduism, pioneered by the medieval Bhakti saint of Assam, Shrimant Shankar Dev. Functioning as a hub for Nam Keertan, the rhythmic resonance of devotional music, and the nurturing ground for the exquisite Satriya dance form, Satra embodies a holistic approach to spiritual and cultural enrichment.

Through the ages, it has enjoyed the patronage of Ahom Kings, evolving into a representative classical dance form that encapsulates the essence of Assam's cultural heritage. This institution not only sustains the spiritual legacy initiated by Shankar Dev but also blossoms into a beacon of artistic expression and traditional values.

The Satra parampara, a venerable tradition spanning over 550 years, is deeply ingrained in the fabric of Assam and the broader landscape of Northeast India. The enduring resilience of these Satras holds a commendable place in history, as they played a pivotal role in



fortifying Ahom Kings and the Assamese society against the challenges posed by Mughal and Islamic invasions, as well as the encroachment of Western civilization spearheaded by the Britishers.

The steadfast commitment of the Satras not only withstood external pressures but also stood as a testament to the indomitable spirit that safeguarded the cultural and spiritual identity of the region.

At the pinnacle of Satra, the supreme religious and spiritual authority rests with the Satradhikar Prabhuh, serving as the living embodiment of Srimant Shankar Dev Mahapurush and the revered founder of the Satra parampara. Across Assam, a mosaic of over 100 Satras exists, each with its distinctive sphere of influence and operational domain. Under the guidance of the Satradhikar Prabhuh, these Satras stand as vibrant centers, nurturing the spiritual essence and cultural heritage imparted by the illustrious lineage of Srimant Shankar Dev.

**Satra as an Educational Centre** Beyond their religious role, Satras serve as hubs for comprehensive educational, cultural, and spiritual training. Embracing the journey from as early as the tender age of two, children become integral members, receiving a well-rounded education across various subjects through the schools and colleges affiliated with the Satra.

In addition to conventional studies, they are immersed in dharmik shiksha, a spiritual education personally guided by the esteemed Satradhikar Prabhuh. This holistic approach fosters not only academic excellence but also a deep-rooted connection to cultural and spiritual values.

The revered Satradhikar Prabhuh, Pujyapad Janardanandev Goswami of Sri Sri Kamlabari Satra, extends his influence beyond the spiritual realm by overseeing a network of ekal vidyalayas in and around Majuli. Actively engaging in various programs orchestrated by VHP and RSS, his commitment to the dissemination of Vaishnav culture stands as a formidable defense against conversion endeavors by churches of diverse denominations. Through his unwavering dedication, he has rendered invaluable service to the cause of Hindutva, contributing significantly to the noble pursuit of nation-building.

The culmination of 350 years in the journey of this ancient tradition is a source of immense pride not only for the Assamese society but also for devotees of Hinduism at large. This remarkable milestone not only signifies the enduring legacy of the tradition but also marks its expansion, reaching out to various corners of the country. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)



## Looked for 'Yathra', but owned a 'Ngultrum' instead!



By: Kamal Baruah

You just can't believe, a foreign visit is possible without a passport, visa, forex card/foreign currency, travel insurance or air ticket. And we got into our car and drove off at dawn. After a hundred kilometer drive from Guwahati, we entered into a sleepy border town, where happiness index of a state has a prime priority over GDP. We were delighted to traverse through its stunning gateway with all the flavours of a foreign destination. Go on, take a guess. It's Samdrup Jongkhar, the eastern valley of Bhutan.

I expected the entry point rather to be like a town out of a western movie set of bygone years, while stopping by gun-toting commandos. Alas! No questions were asked by the guards stationed at the gate. We proceeded further in queue with caution.

However an identification slip for entry permit for Indians at Bhutan was issued almost instantly at the border Immigration office after verification of our Voter ID cards. Visiting Bhutan is a visa-free experience for citizens of India.

After a brief stopover at the religious learning center for the younger monks at Rabadey Dratshang monastery, we took a stroll at Mani Dunkhor temple. Bhutanese construction is spellbound by the presence of divinity in their monastery. We were awestruck by the design of the structures from the Ti-

betan tradition of Buddhist architecture captivating rich artistic embellishments and colours. Monks rarely bother with visitors' presence and lives their life in prayer and contemplation in a monastery.

But what makes us surprising the quietness of the land of the thunder Dragon at Samdrup Jongkhar, one of the twenty Dzongkhag (District) of Bhutan. The streets are neat and clean and traffic moves one way. People are going about their activities with happiness and wellbeing. Cars were so quiet making no noise and never saw a vehicle sped by honking its horn. Our little nephew was very excited to go with the environs and shared his experience at school, when a caravan of honking vehicles often pierced his eardrums. The perils of "horn ok please" sparked by shrill horns from speeding and rash driving are the order of the day.

So we had another day in tranquil and serene surroundings at a peaceful place. There were many more foot-travelers on the road than motor vehicles and we just saw two traffic police personnel in the market area helping pedestrians. Lamas lead a disciplined and contemplative life dedicated to the pursuit of spiritual realization. We were fascinated with the Bhutanese local cuisine with "ema" (chilies), which is the integral part of every Bhutanese dish. They embraced the ambitious goal of becoming the world's first 100% organic nation.

We had a lick of ice cream in the evening and watched Bhutanese stroll in the aisles by quietly. Interestingly, serving alcohol is a sign of respect, honour and hospitality in their culture but never saw a paan shop there. The shops were very relaxed and rarely heard any aggressive marketing. No public address systems or jarring music played anywhere. Ah, what a lovely place! The Bhutanese way of life is refreshing for all its contrasts. Like our place, we didn't notice Bhutanese swiping finger-screen for social media. It says, Bhutan respects its cultural values, and while there are no specific restrictions, it's advisable to be mindful of on-line activities that may be considered inappropriate. However QR code scanning is used by Bhutanese at border entry.

One can't simply ignore the display of King and Queen of Bhutan in their traditional attire "Gho" and "Kira" in almost every shop. A souvenir is attributed to a travel diary and I was looking for the local luxury and authentic souvenir "Yathra" - a thick handwoven woolen textile with intricate designs, but our little one wanted a Bhutanese coin instead. A "Ngultrum" coin is designed from its national emblem "Coat of Arms" containing a flag of Bhutan and Buddhist symbolism. Incidentally, Bhutan accepts INR, and we could bring their currency back with us.

While returning, we wanted to browse around the vegetable market at neighbouring border town at Tamulpur. The local greengrocer gave back us a change of Bhutanese notes. I stood there in awe moment. With complete sincerity and commitment, I accepted the "Ngultrum". We all were overjoyed then for receiving another "Ngultrum" currency. Hope to exchange it anytime. "Bhutan is calling" offered a great opportunity to visit it for just a day.

## Back from Manimahesh to survive

By: Kanchan Basu

In July 2023, we four friends (Bhanu da, Sanjoy, Jayanta and I) went to Manimahesh visit. On July 7, we reached the car from Bharmour to Hadsar and started walking from Hadsar. The distance from Hadsar to Manimahesh is 15 km in total. Walking from Hadsar, 7 km away, we reached Dhancho and night stay there. The next morning we started walking from Dhancho in the rain. We started walking again after lunch in a place called Sundarsi, 4 km away from Dhancho.

The rain is falling in the stream. We reached Manimahesh by four o'clock in the afternoon to get wet in the rain. In that rain we took shelter a large tent around Manimahesh Lake. We entered the tent and we became a bit of warm of our hands and feet in fire. The velocity of the rain seemed gradually increasing. It was raining on the sky by showing up outside the tent at midnight. Water of Manimahesh Lake is entering our tent. We spent the rest of the night upon cots in the tent.

The next morning, the owner of the tent said the three - kilometre road, including the iron bridge from Hadsar to Dhancho, was wiped out in the water. As a result, you will have to reach Hadsar by the other slope of the hill through this tent.

Meanwhile Sanjoy has had a fierce fever since yesterday night. We have given him the medicines we had. Sanjoy is lying down with drugs but he no longer has the ability to walk. The owner of the tent assured us that when Sanjoy could not move in this situation, he rest here. If Sanjoy is healed, he will guide him and we will definitely wait for Sanjoy to Hadsar.

Then we left for Hadsar, wishing Sanjoy a quick healing without seeing any other way. There were some local people with us. We started moving with them. The rain was falling a little then. There were several glacier and fountains on the way we were down. It was not possible for us to move as soon as those local people crossed those glacier and fountains.

As a result, the three of us were walking for a while. This way I and Jayanta rushed in front of a narrow canal walking through a big shower. Bhanu da was then a lot behind us. The narrow canal in the rain water is



gradually widening. In the meantime, Jayanta crossed the narrow canal and moved to Hadsar. Jayanta told me to go too but it was not possible for me to leave Bhanu da. I kept waiting on that narrow canal to Bhanu da.

Shortly after Bhanuda crossed the big fountain in front of narrow canal, his feet were stuck in the stone and he was stuck in the fountain. It was not possible for me to bring Bhanu da out of that fountain. I then tied the handkerchief on my stick and stirred the stick in the hope of attracting an invisible person on the other side of the narrow canal.

After a while, a sheep wallet like the angel is to cross that narrow canal to me actually I show him how my friend Bhanu da is stuck in the shower. Then the shepherd whose name is Santa Kumar and I slowly took Bhanu da out of the fountain and put it on that narrow canal's bank. But Bhanu da no longer had the ability to move because he was stuck of the cold water of the fountain for an hour or more.

At that time I had to handle Bhanu da. In the meantime, Santa Kumar collected wood and a type of flammable grass from the surroundings and set fire. Then I put Bhanu da on that fire for an hour.

Slowly Bhanu da feels somewhat healthy. Meanwhile it is raining. So Santa Kumar collecting some corrugated sheets from the ground, putting

on the rocks, made a little shelter for us. In the meantime, that narrow canal for the heavy rain is a large stream. So it was not possible for Santa Kumar to cross the stream and return to his dorm. On the night of July 9, under the almost open sky between natural disasters, we three people survived with the fire. The next morning, Santa Kumar and I arranged for him to move with the heat of the fire on Bhanuda's legs.

On that day (10 July), Santa Kumar delivered me and Bhanu da to a safe place called Gauri Kund. There we meet Sanjoy. Sanjoy was healed and came down there. He thought he would arrive in Hadsar anyway in two days. Sanjoy was very happy to see us. Bhanu da gave Santa Kumar a reward of Rs. 15,000. Bhanu da said that life is not worth saving. I feel blessed to be able to hand over this little amount to Santa Kumar as I am grateful. In the future he intends to help him further. If Santa Kumar did not save me and Bhanu da on July 7, 2023, we might not have lived. Santa Kumar left us with good luck.

Anyway that day and the next day we rest in Gauri Kund. On the afternoon of July 7, a group of five members of Himachal Pradesh Police reached Gauri Kund, led by Pankaj Chauhan, to rescue the three of us in Hadsar. I learned from Pankaj Chauhan that our friend Jayanta Roy arrived in Hadsar. Jayanta Roy re-

ported the incident to Janak Raj, M.L.A. of Bharmour and Narendra Kumar Chouhan, Additional District Magistrate of Bharmour to rescue us. As a result five police personnel came to rescue us. From the satellite phone of Pankaj Chauhan, the team leader of rescue team, we reassured them when we talked to the people of our house.

On the morning of July 12, 2023, three of us were with five police personnel and three porters left for Hadsar. With the help of the police and the porters, I and Bhanu da arrived in Hadsar at night on nine o'clock. It is not possible for me to describe how both of us hold the hands of the two porters in the dark night by the slopes of the steep hill to reached Hadsar. Pankaj Chauhan and a porter reached Hadsar with Sanjoy on 1 a.m. The Himachal Pradesh government arranged a "Home Stay" to our stay in Hadsar. Three of us taken bath in hot water and completed dinner. Pankaj Chauhan wrote the report of the whole incident that night, despite the hard work all day, and signed me.

The next morning, Narendra Kumar Chouhan, Additional District Magistrate of Bharmour met us and thanked all the police personnel and porters, including Pankaj Chauhan, for rescuing us all in a healthy body. Narendra Kumar Chouhan, Additional District Magistrate of Bharmour arranged for us to stay in PWD Banglow in Bharmour that day and the next day we reached Chhamba by a government vehicle and arranged to stay at the circuit house. I will remember the support of Santa Kumar and Himachal Pradesh government.

Meanwhile, many tourists were trapped due to horrific collapse in various parts of Himachal Pradesh in the heavy rains of July and August 2023. Himachal Pradesh government rescued the detained tourists by moving National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).

On the other hand, Navin Pal, President of Himachal Pradesh Travel Agent Association and owner of Himachal Helpline Tourism rescued about 300 tourists and arranged for them to food and accommodate and then reached them to Chandigarh on his own initiative. I congratulate this humanitarian initiative of Navin Pal. In the future he gets more success in doing this prayer.

### BOOK REVIEW

## 'Pragyan', is a readable work adorned with entertaining and sensitive poems that appeal to the child's mind

By: Suresh Chandra Sarvhara

The first poem of the 'Pragyan' collection is 'Bane Santan Adarsh Hamari', in which a parent cherishes dreams for his upcoming child. How do parents want their children? The poet thinks about his upcoming child. Giving the example of our heroes, the poet says that his child should also incorporate their good qualities in life and follow the path shown by them. In this poem, our heroes and heroines have been depicted naturally. The poet believes that it is important for every common child to have our ideals -

If you have a son, he should be like Prahlad, he should follow the path of religion.

May he become as steadfast as the pole star, showing the true path to everyone.

By giving birth to a daughter, I will light the flame of friendship, Gargi, and knowledge.

Let my children become ideal, I will teach them those things.

Children's literature is children's literature. In this, the tender feelings of children are taken care of. Children like entertainment, but the poet wants children to get information about life also. The poet also considers it his duty to make children aware of the inconsistencies prevalent around him. He wants to extend the sensitivity of children to the entire society. This emotional sentiment of the poet in the poem 'Google Ki Aash Mein' is touching -

The phone has taken away all the joys from childhood. Grandmother sat and watched the change in generation.

The mind years for things, wondering who is at home. Everyone is sitting silent, holding the phone.

Today's children are the leaders of tomorrow. When they grow up, they will take over the reins of the country. It is necessary to inculcate the feeling of patriotism in children from the very beginning so that when they grow up; they can become good citizens and perform their duties towards the country well. In the poem 'Ude Tiranga Beech Nabh', the poet has said while instilling a sense of pride in the minds of children towards their country -

Love for the country is love that pulls you towards yourself.

The tricolor sky flew, and a lot of waves arose. Take this determination in your heart that the tricolor should remain proud.

Be in every home, every heart, and become an identity.

Childhood is the golden period of life. It is this

time that determines the condition and direction of a person's future. Childhood is the foundation on which the building of a child's future is built. The influence of the values laid down in childhood remains throughout life. The poet wants children to make life beautiful by making good use of their time. Through the poem 'The Path of Morality', the poet gives the message of moving with time and says -

Let us all never forget, gratitude to the teacher. Create new records and give Guru Dakshina a gift.

Give a step to life through the path of morality.

With his blessings, we become humans.

Environmental protection is a great need in today's times. Nowadays, even breathing is becoming difficult due to increasing air pollution.

Trees provide us with vital air and also control the temperature by maintaining moisture in the atmosphere. The density of trees helps in bringing rain. Through the poem 'Ozone', the poet explains the importance of trees to children and inspires them to plant trees -

Who will keep an eye on poisonous gas today? Chimneys spewing fire, ozone being destroyed.

There were a lot of fangames in my childhood too.

Boat sailing in the sand, train flying in the sky. That village of childhood remains in my memories.

The courtyard of a mud house, and the shade of a Neem tree.

Children feel connected to nature. Natural scenes attract them a lot. The little child inside the poet also looks at these beautiful scenes of nature with fascination.

'Bachpan ke woh Geet' is one such poem in which the poet has humanized childhood and depicted its changing form from moment to moment in a very beautiful manner. The use of symbolic and figurative

style is immediately visible -

Whenever I sit, I remember my childhood. My mind started to wander, I started talking to fairies.

The phone has taken away all the joys from childhood.

Grandmother sat and watched the change in generation.

The poet believes that we should accept changes easily. Elderly people have always been strong pillars of the family. The poet does not like his departure. After the departure of his grandparents, the poet's life has become desolate, the poet imagines in various ways so that he remembers them all the time. The freshness of the poet's imagination is visible in the poem 'Grandfather and Grandfather' -

Without grandparents, the door is deserted. Which story should I tell now, give me the

Whether pollution increases or decreases, what do we care about today? Everyone is looting the mills; we are the shame of

the earth.

Parents have a paramount place in the lives of children. They depend on their parents to fulfill their every need. The happy life and development of children cannot be imagined without parents. In the poem 'Rishte', which forms the basis of the title of this poetry collection, the poet has said while depicting the roles of mother and father in the life of a child -

Father adds every penny, here day and night. Gives the gift of happiness to children.

Mother, consider the pain of children as your pain.

Only he has this style.

There is no disappointment and sadness by always being dynamic in life. We should keep trying to move forward without fear of obstacles. Through the example of the river, the poet gives a positive message to the children to continue doing their assigned work without any fear and says in the poem 'Samay Sindhu' -

If the traveler's feet are afraid of the thorns on the road.

How will he reach his beloved's village? Don't stop, keep going, life is a struggle.

Live like a bluetroat, and drink the poison happily.

Childhood is a time of sweet imagination. Every child dreams big dreams in his childhood. These dreams are the beautiful jewels of children's hopes. This optimistic approach toward life fills the lives of children with colors of enthusiasm and excitement. In the poem 'Bachpan Ke Geet' based on child psychology, the poet has given words to these feelings of children and said -

There were a lot of fangames in my childhood too.

Boat sailing in the sand, train flying in the sky. That village of childhood remains in my memories.

The courtyard of a mud house, and the shade of a Neem tree.

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The poet believes that we should accept changes easily. Elderly people have always been strong pillars of the family. The poet does not like his departure. After the departure of his grandparents, the poet's life has become desolate, the poet imagines in various ways so that he remembers them all the time. The freshness of the poet's imagination is visible in the poem 'Grandfather and Grandfather' -

Without grandparents, the door is deserted. Which story should I tell now, give me the

love of the lullaby.

Became grandparents, only now they complain.

Make the courtyard happy, and remember them constantly.

The condition of the poet's sensitivity is such that he sees the image of old people even in the old broom. The poet's heart is pained by the neglect of the elderly. The tendency to throw away work is based on selfishness and narrow-mindedness. The poem 'Vridhhi Ki Har Baat Ka' which teaches us to respect elders is amazing -

Who takes care of everything about the elderly?

Under the guise of modernity, every house is in distress.

This is the proven step towards fame, glory, happiness, and peace.

A home is an empty house without an elderly person.

It is clear from the above examples that the

main tone of the works of Pragyan Bal Sangrah is human sensitivity and compassion.

Environment, weather, sunshine, morning, bird, butterfly, squirrel, leaves, grass, elephant, cloud, lake, moon, sun, childhood, mom, dad, lamp, letters, daughters, new year, country, festival, morality Beautiful compositions have been created with full seriousness by child psychology on the topics of forgiveness, our martyrs, tuition, Google, tricolor, book, school, police, grandparents and other relationships, etc.

The language is simple, interesting, and easily understandable according to the child's mind. The printing is beautiful and error-free.

The cover decorated with the charming picture of the poet's son 'Pragyan' along with the expanding sky is very attractive. Hearty congratulations to Dr. Satyavan Saurabh ji for creating a readable work 'Pragyan' adorned with entertaining and sensitive poems that appeal to children.

### Election

Original Assamese: Mowsam Hazarika  
Translated by: Birendra Kumar Sarma

Is it fertile valley or mirage of desert?

Is it desire to serve or deceit of exploitation?

Is it reproach of patriotism or secret counsel of plunder?

Which one is true? Which one is false? How to select or elect!

Some are multiformed

Some are versed in jugglery.

Some are musk-holders  
Some are opportunists.

Which one is true? Which one is false? How to select or elect!

The fertile valley has slowly transformed into desert.

Where is the fertile valley? or all are mirage of desert.

Which one is true? Which one is false? How to select or elect!

### Morning Walk

By: Khemu Parashar

Morning walk is very unique, it always gets applause for health,

refreshes the body, it eradicates diseases in a moment,

on seeing it, the chaos created in troubles, gets cleared up, the mind becomes pure with morning walk,

there is no place for tiredness, only gets immense love

Scientists have also praised morning walk, it has been considered necessary for humans, there are many reasons for it,

pure air in morning walk, environment remains calm, there is sweet chirping of birds





Russia said its air defense systems had intercepted more than 60 Ukrainian drones over the southern Krasnodar region.

## Russia renews attacks on Ukrainian energy sector

**KYIV, April 27:** Russia launched a barrage of missiles against Ukraine overnight, in attacks that appeared to target the country's energy infrastructure. Meanwhile, Russia said its air defense systems had intercepted more than 60 Ukrainian drones over the southern Krasnodar region.

Ukraine's air force said on Saturday that Russia had launched 34 missiles against Ukraine overnight, of which 21 had been shot down by Ukrainian air defenses.

In a post on Telegram, Minister of Energy Herman Halushchenko said energy facilities in Dnipropetrovsk in the south of the country and Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv in the west had been attacked and that an engineer was injured.

Private energy operator DTEK said four of its thermal power plants were damaged and that there were "casualties," without going into detail.

Earlier this month Russia destroyed one of Ukraine's largest power plants and damaged oth-

ers in a massive missile and drone attack as it renewed its push to target Ukraine's energy facilities.

Ukraine has appealed to its Western allies for more air defense systems to ward off such attacks.

At a meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group on Friday, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced the U.S. will provide Ukraine with additional munitions and gear for its air defense launchers.

Further east, a psychiatric hospital was damaged and one person was wounded after Russia launched a missile attack overnight on Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv.

Photos from the scene showed a huge crater on the grounds of the facility and patients taking shelter in corridors.

Regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said a 53-year-old woman was hurt.

Also in the Kharkiv region, a man was killed in an overnight attack on the city of Vovchansk,



according to Ukraine's State Service for Emergency Situations.

In Russia, the Defense Ministry said Russian air defense systems had intercepted 66 drones over the country's southern Krasnodar region. Two more drones were shot down over the Moscow-annexed Crimean Peninsula.

The governor of the Krasnodar region, Veniamin Kondratyev, said that Ukrainian forces targeted an oil refinery and infrastructure facilities but that there were no casualties or serious damage.

The regional department of the Emergency Situations Ministry reported that a fire broke out at the Slavyansk oil refinery in Slavyansk-on-Kuban during the attack.

Ukrainian officials normally decline to comment on attacks on Russian soil, but the Ukrainian Energy Ministry said Saturday that two oil refineries in the Krasnodar region had been hit by drones.

Five people were wounded in a drone attack in a border village in Russia's Belgorod region, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. (AP)

## Hamas is reviewing an Israeli proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza

**CAIRO, April 27:** Hamas said on Saturday it was reviewing a new Israeli proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza, as Egypt intensified efforts to broker a deal to end the months-long war and stave off a possible Israeli ground offensive into the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

Senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya said the Palestinian militant group was evaluating Israel's proposal, and "upon completion of its study, it will submit its response."

He gave no details of Israel's offer but said it was in response to a proposal from Hamas two weeks ago. Negotiations earlier this month centered on a six-week cease-fire proposal and the release of 40 civilian and sick hostages in exchange for freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Hamas' statement came hours after a high-level Egyptian delegation wrapped up a visit to Israel where it discussed a "new vision" for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza, according to an Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to freely discuss the developments.

It was not immediately clear whether Israel's latest response to Hamas on a cease-fire was directly related to Friday's visit to Tel Aviv by Egyptian mediators.

The discussions between Egyptian and Israeli officials focused on the first stage of a multi-phase plan that would include a limited exchange of hostages held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners, and the return of a significant number of displaced Palestinians to their homes in northern Gaza "with minimum restrictions," the Egyptian official said.

The mediators are working on a compromise that will answer most of both parties' main demands, which could pave the way to continued negotiations with the goal of a larger deal to end the war, the official said.

As the war drags on and casualties mount, there has been growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach an agreement on a cease-fire and avert a possible Israeli attack on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have sought refuge after fleeing fighting elsewhere in the ter-



ritory.

Israel has been insisting for months it plans a ground offensive into Rafah, on the border with Egypt, where it says many remaining Hamas militants are holed up, despite calls for restraint from the international community including Israel's staunchest ally, the United States.

Egypt has cautioned an offensive into Rafah could have "catastrophic consequences" on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, as well as on regional peace and security.

The Israeli military has massed dozens of tanks and armoured vehicles in southern Israel close to Rafah and hit targets in the city in near-daily airstrikes.

Early Saturday, an Israeli airstrike hit a house in Rafah's Tel Sultan neighbourhood, killing six people, including four children, according to officials at a local hospital.

The strike killed a man, his wife and their three sons, aged 12, 10 and 8, according to records of the Abu Youssef al-Najjar hospital's morgue. A neighbour's four-month-old girl was also killed, the records showed.

Hamas said Friday it is open to any "ideas or suggestions" that take into consideration the needs of the Palestinian people such as an end to Israel's attacks on Gaza, the return of displaced people to their homes and an Israeli withdrawal.

The Palestinian group has said it will not back down from its demands for a permanent cease-fire and full withdrawal of Israeli troops, both of which Israel has rejected. (AP)

## Ready to serve nine more years in prison rather than striking deal with people enslaving Pakistan: Imran

**LAHORE, April 27:** Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has ruled out an agreement with those who have "enslaved" the country, saying he is ready to serve for nine more years in prison but will never strike a deal with them.

In a message released on Friday for the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's 28th Foundation Day, Khan said that the "worst dictatorship" was imposed on the country which was becoming the basis for the "destruction" of the economy, government rule, democracy and judiciary."

He called on every individual to play their role in stopping this descent towards the country's ruin.

"It is my message for the nation that I will give any sacrifice required for actual freedom but will never compromise on my or my nation's freedom."

Khan said he was kept behind bars for the past nine months due to "fake [and] concocted cases".

"I will remain in jail if I have to for nine more years, or more, but I will never strike a deal with those who have enslaved my na-

tion."

Since his removal from power in a no-confidence motion in April 2022, the 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician has been convicted in at least four cases. Khan has been lodged at Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi after conviction in multiple cases.

Since falling out with the powerful military, Khan's party has been facing a crackdown. The party faced pressure in the form of arrests and desertions in the wake of the May 9 violence that broke out after Khan's arrest last year. Khan's message came shortly after PTI leader Shehryar Afridi claimed that the party would have talks but not with the Bilawal Bhutto-Zardai-led Pakistan Peoples Party or the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz after their recent overtures.

"We will talk with the Army chief, the DG [ISI] and the army because the need of the hour is to [prioritise] the country's security," Afridi said.

Termining the two parties a "rejected lot", Afridi reiterated that the party would talk with the army chief for Pakistan's freedom and future because the country

"needs" Khan. He said the two parties only had one option to abandon their mandate and then the PTI would decide whether to move forward with them or not.

Afridi claimed that it was Khan's wish "since the first day for us to engage [with the military leadership] but there was no response forthcoming".

He said if any "response" had come then it would have been brought before the public.

Earlier this week, PTI leader Barrister Gohar Ali Khan had claimed that Khan was being pressured to accept a "deal".

Rejecting speculation about secret talks with the establishment, Barrister Gohar had made it clear that the party was neither interested in nor holding talks with anyone. Independent candidates backed by Khan's PTI won more than 90 seats in the National Assembly in the February 8 general election. However, the PMN-L led by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and the PPP formed a post-poll alliance and sidelined the jailed former prime minister's party from forming a federal government which assumed power last month. (PTI)

## Iran says it has granted consular access to Indian crew from the seized Portuguese-flagged ship

**DUBAI, April 27:** Iran on Saturday said the mostly Indian crew of a Portuguese-flagged ship that was seized by Iranian forces in its maritime territory two weeks ago is being granted consular access, raising hopes for their early release and extradition.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard on April 13 seized the Israeli-affiliated, Portuguese-flagged MSC Aries, a container ship, manned by a crew of 25, including 17 Indians, near the Strait of Hormuz as a result of a series of attacks between Iran and Israel.

A statement from Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Portugal's newly-appointed Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel had a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian and exchanged views on the bilateral relations & the situation in the region, with the developments in Palestine standing out in their talks.

It was during this telephonic conversation that both sides exchanged their latest views on the Portuguese-flagged Israeli ship seized by Iranian forces.

"We (will) seriously consider the release of the ship's crew as a humanitarian issue and we have announced to their ambassadors in Tehran their access to consular services, release and extradition," Amirabdollahian said. (PTI)

## US and China talk past each other on most issues

**BEIJING, April 27:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrapped up his just-concluded latest visit to China with a stop at a Beijing record store where he bought albums by Taylor Swift and Chinese rocker Dou Wei in a symbolic nod to cross-cultural exchanges and understanding he had been promoting for three days.

Music, he said at the Li-Pi shop on his way to the airport late Friday, "is the best connector, regardless of geography."

Yet Swift's "Midnights" and Dou Wei's "Black Dream" could just as easily represent the seemingly intractable divisions in the deeply troubled relationship between the world's two largest economies that both sides publicly and privately blame on the other.

Blinken and his Chinese interlocutors, including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Foreign Minister

Wang Yi, all referred to these rifts even as they extolled the virtues of keeping communication channels open to manage these differences and avoid misunderstandings and miscalculations.

Blinken went out of his way to champion the importance of US-China exchanges at all levels. In Shanghai, he ate at a famous soup dumpling restaurant, attended a Chinese basketball playoff game and visited with American and Chinese students at the New York University branch. In his official meetings with Chinese leaders in Beijing, he spoke repeatedly of improvements in ties over the past year. But he also stressed that the US has serious and growing concerns with China's policies and practices on the local, regional and global stages. And, he said, the US would not back down.

"America will always defend our core interests and values," he said.

On several occasions, he slammed Chinese overproduction of electric vehicles that threatened to have detrimental effects on US and European automakers and complained that China was not doing enough to stop the production and export of synthetic opioid precursors.

At one point he warned bluntly that if China does not end support for Russia's defence industrial sector, something the Biden administration says has allowed Russia to step up its attacks on Ukraine and threaten European security, the US would act to stop it. "I made clear that if China does not address this problem, we will," Blinken told reporters after meeting with Xi.

Chinese officials were similarly direct, saying that while relations have generally improved since a low point last year over the shoot-

down of a Chinese surveillance balloon, tensions remained fraught. "The two countries should help each other succeed rather than hurt each other, seek common ground and reserve differences rather than engage in vicious competition, and honour words with actions rather than say one thing but do the opposite," Xi told Blinken in a not-so-veiled accusation of US hypocrisy.

Wang, the foreign minister, said China is fed up with what it considers to be US meddling in human rights, Taiwan and the South China Sea and efforts to restrict its trade and relations with other countries.

"Negative factors in the relationship are still increasing and the relationship is facing all kinds of disruptions," he said. He urged the US "not to step on China's red lines on China's sovereignty, security, and development interests." (AP)

threat environment and can engage targets at stand-off ranges.

Speaking at the occasion, Admiral Ashraf emphasised the importance of maritime security under the prevailing geo-strategic environment and the Navy's resolve to ensure regional peace and stability.

## Student anti-war protesters dig in as faculties condemn university leadership over calling police

**NEW YORK, April 27:** Students protesting the Israel-Hamas war at universities across US, some of whom have clashed with police in riot gear, dug in Saturday and vowed to keep their demonstrations going, while several school faculties condemned university presidents who have called in law enforcement to remove protesters.

As Columbia University continues negotiations with those at a pro-Palestinian student encampment on the New York school's campus, the university's senate passed a resolution on Friday that created a task force to examine the administration's leadership, which last week called in police in an attempt to clear the protest, resulting in scuffles and more than 100 arrests. Though the university has repeatedly set and then pushed back deadlines for the removal of the encampment, the school sent an email to students on Friday night saying that bringing back police "at this time" would be counterproductive, adding that they hope the negotiations show "concrete signs of progress tonight."

As the death toll mounts in the war in Gaza, protesters nationwide are demanding that schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies they say are enabling the conflict. Some Jewish students say the protests have veered into antisemitism and made them afraid to set foot on campus.

The decisions to call in law enforcement, leading to hundreds of arrests nationwide, have prompted school faculty members at universities in California, Georgia and Texas to initiate or pass votes of no confidence in their leadership. They are largely symbolic rebukes, without the power to remove their presidents. But the tensions pile pressure on school officials, who are already scrambling to resolve the protests as May graduation ceremonies near. California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, gave protesters who have barricaded themselves inside a building since Monday until 5 pm Friday to leave and "not be immediately arrested." (AP)

## Long lines form and frustration grows as Cuba runs short of cash

**HAVANA, April 27:** Alejandro Fonseca stood in line for several hours outside a bank in Havana hoping to withdraw Cuban pesos from an ATM, but when it was almost his turn, the cash ran out. He angrily hopped on his electric tricycle and travelled several kilometers to another branch where he finally managed to withdraw some money after waiting the entire morning.

"It shouldn't be so difficult to get the money you earn by working," the 23-year-old told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

Fonseca is one of an increasing number of frustrated Cubans who have to grapple with yet another hurdle while navigating the island's already complicated monetary system — a shortage of cash. Long queues outside banks and ATM's in the capital, Havana, and beyond start forming early in the day as people seek cash for routine transactions like buying food and other essentials.

Experts say there are several reasons behind the shortage, all somehow related to Cuba's deep economic crisis, one of the worst in decades.

Omar Everleny Pérez, a Cuban economist and



university professor, says the main culprits are the government's growing fiscal deficit, the nonexistence of banknotes with a denomination greater than 1,000 Cuban pesos (about USD 3 in the parallel market), stubbornly high inflation and the non-return of cash to banks.

"There is money, yes, but not in the banks," said Pérez, adding that most of the cash is being held not by salaried workers, but by entrepreneurs and owners of small- and medium-size business who are more likely to collect cash from commercial transactions but are reluctant to return the money to the banks.

This, Pérez says, is either because they don't trust the local banks or simply because they need the Cuban pesos to convert into foreign currency.

Most entrepreneurs and small business owners in Cuba have to import almost everything they sell or pay in foreign currency for the supplies needed to run their businesses. As a consequence, many end up hoarding Cuban pesos to later change into foreign currency on the informal market.

Converting those Cuban pesos to other currencies poses yet another challenge, as there are several, highly fluctuating exchange rates in the island. For example, the official rate used by government industries and agencies is 24 pesos to the US dollar, while for individuals, the rate is 120 pesos to the dollar. However, the dollar can fetch up to 350 Cuban pesos on the informal market.

Pérez notes that in 2018, 50 per cent of the cash in circulation was in the hands of the Cuban population and the other half in Cuban banks. But in 2022, the latest year for which information is available, 70 per cent of cash was in the wallets of individuals. (AP)

## Ex-Pak PM Sharif set to retake helm of PML-N amidst internal strife



**LAHORE, April 27:** Pakistan's three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif is all set to retake the helm of the ruling PML-N next month to guide the party amid internal strife, seven years after he relinquished the post after being disqualified by the apex court.

Nawaz, 74, will be elected president of the ruling party on May 11 in a meeting of the party leadership, a senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader told PTI.

In 2017, the Supreme Court of Pakistan disqualified Nawaz as premier and party president for his alleged corruption in cases related to the Panama Papers revelations about his illegal wealth stashed abroad.

He relinquished his position within the party following his disqualification,

which also led to his departure from the prime minister's office. PML-N Punjab president Rana Sanaullah told a press conference that a decision to make Nawaz the president of the party again was taken at a party meeting on Friday.

"A resolution was passed at the party meeting today to make the elder Sharif PML-N president to undo the injustice meted out to him (Nawaz) in 2017 by the Supreme Court," Sanaullah, a former interior minister, said.

The party will request Nawaz on his return from China to accept the president's office of the party. Nawaz is currently on a five-day private visit to China.

"Nawaz Sharif was removed from the party president's office through a conspiracy. Now Nawaz has been acquitted in all (corruption) cases, he should again take up the party's reins," Sanaullah said and added the party would be re-organised under his (Nawaz's) leadership.

Sanaullah's announcement comes amidst internal tensions within the ruling party in Punjab and at the federal level. The Express Tribune newspaper said.

Several prominent figures within the

party, including Sanaullah, portfolio-less Federal Minister Javed Latif, Senator Javed Abbasi, and former Senator Asif Saeed Kirmani, have publicly criticised the leadership.

Their remarks have ranged from questioning cabinet formations to expressing disillusionment with the party's alignment with the establishment, straying from its "vote ko izzat do" (respect the vote) slogan. The airing of these grievances has tarnished the party's reputation as a proponent of democracy.

Following his return to Pakistan after a four-year self-exile in London in October last year, Nawaz got a clean chit in mega corruption cases allegedly with the blessings of the powerful military establishment. He was all set to become prime minister for the fourth time but his party failed to get a clear majority in the National Assembly on its own in the February 8 general elections.

Nawaz then allowed his younger brother and the incumbent party president Shehbaz Sharif — who is considered the favourite of the military establishment — to lead a six-party coalition government at the Centre. (PTI)

## Islamabad signed agreement for the acquisition of eight submarines during Xi's visit to Pak China launches first of the 8 Hangor-class submarine built for Pakistan

**ISLAMABAD/BEIJING, April 27:** China has launched the first of the eight Hangor-class submarines to be built for its all-weather ally Pakistan to provide it with state-of-the-art warships, adding a new dimension to their growing bilateral military cooperation.

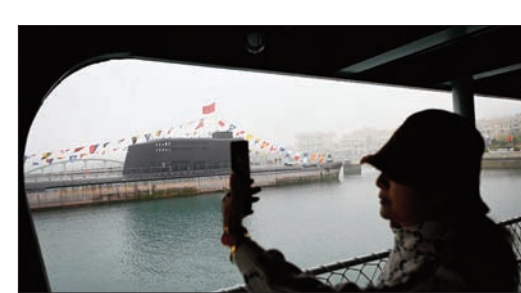
The launch ceremony, held at Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry Group's (WSIG) Shuangliu Base on Friday, was attended by Pakistan Navy chief Admiral Naveed Ashraf, Geo News reported.

The development comes as part of the

agreement between Islamabad and Beijing under which the latter had agreed to provide the former with eight state-of-the-art advanced submarines.

Out of the total eight vessels, four are to be built by WSIG, while the remaining four are being built at KS&EW (Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works) under the Transfer of Technology (ToT) agreement.

The submarines, having advanced stealth features, are to be fitted with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors to operate under a multi-



threat environment and can engage targets at stand-off ranges.

Speaking at the occasion, Admiral Ashraf emphasised the importance of maritime security under the prevailing geo-strategic environment and the Navy's resolve to ensure regional peace and stability.

The Navy chief also underscored that the Hangor-class S/M Project will "add a new dimension to the all-weather Pak-China friendship and shows strong military cooperation between two countries".

Friday's launch ceremony comes after Pak-

istan commenced the manufacturing of the 6th Hangor-class submarine by KS&EW in February earlier this year.

Pakistan enjoys close military ties with China with its bilateral relations provisioning various arms imports by Islamabad from Beijing.

Last year, the Pakistan Navy inducted two newly built Chinese Type 054 A/P frigates. Both countries had inked the contract for four multi-role frigates back in 2018. The first and second ships PNS TUGHRIL and PNS TAIMUR joined the PN fleet in 2022. (PTI)



# Stern warning to group responsible for killing two CRPF personnel

Out of the four injured, two succumbed to injuries



**IMPHAL, April 27:** Security advisor to Manipur government, Kuldip Singh, on Saturday issued a stern warning to the group responsible for the attack on a camp of security forces in Bishnupur district, which resulted in the deaths of two CRPF personnel and injuries to two others.

We are mobilising all necessary resources and agencies to identify and apprehend the perpetrators. "The militants came and fired at the IRBn (India Reserve Battalion) camp at Naranseina in Moirang police station area in the early hours of Saturday. Though it was dark, the forces retaliated. Out of the four injured, two succumbed to injuries," Singh said, adding "these forces have come from dis-

tant places to maintain peace in this region."

Singh added, "Starting today, we have instructed all security forces, including Assam Rifles and the army, to intensify operations. We are formulating strategies for day-to-day operations. We will leave no stone unturned in our investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice."

Reacting to recent IED explo-

sion that damaged a bridge in Kangpokpi district, Singh expressed concern over attacks on national infrastructure and central forces.

"I have seen that groups are now targeting national infrastructure such as roads and bridges. They are also attacking central forces. This cannot be tolerated. We will probe everything and take action against the culprits," he said.

Expressing surprise at the attack on security forces, Singh said, "We did not anticipate such assaults, especially considering that both Meitei and Kuki militants have historically refrained from targeting forces engaged in maintaining peace. We have always strived to maintain neutrality between both communities. In the past, both communities have welcomed the presence of central forces, so why attack neutral forces now?"

The deceased were identified as sub-inspector N Sarkar, a native of Assam's Kokrajhar district, and head constable Arup Saini of Bankura district in West Bengal, police said.

The injured were inspector Jadav Das and constable Aftab Das, police said, adding that they sustained splinter wounds. (PTI)

## 2 CRPF personnel killed in militant attack in Manipur



**IMPHAL, April 27:** Two CRPF personnel were killed and two others injured as militants attacked a camp of security forces in Manipur's Bishnupur district in the early hours of Saturday, police said.

The militants attacked an IRBn (India Reserve Battalion) camp at Naranseina in the Moirang police station area, they said.

"The militants fired indiscriminately from hilltops, targeting the camp. It started around 12.30 am and continued till about 2.15 am. The militants also hurled bombs, one of which exploded in the outpost of CRPF's 128 battalion," a senior police officer said.

The deceased were identified as sub-inspector N Sarkar, a native of Assam's Kokrajhar district, and head constable Arup Saini of Bankura district in West Bengal,

he said.

The injured were inspector Jadav Das and constable Aftab Das, he said, adding that they received splinter wounds.

"The two injured personnel were admitted to the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal. They are out of danger," the officer said.

The CRPF personnel were deployed to provide security to the IRBn camp.

A massive search was underway to find the perpetrators of the attack, police said.

Condemning the incident, Chief Minister N Biren Singh said, "Such actions demonstrate cowardice against dedicated security personnel who work tirelessly day and night to uphold peace and stability in the state. Their sacrifice will not go in vain." (PTI)

## Gunfight between two groups in Manipur, 1 dead



**IMPHAL, April 27:** Gunfight broke out between two groups in Manipur, following which a 33-year-old man was found dead, police said on Saturday.

The gunfight happened at Sinam Kom on the border of the Kangpokpi and Imphal East districts on Friday night, they said.

A 'village volunteer' who went missing following the gunfight was found dead on Saturday morning, they added.

He was identified as Laishram Prem, police said.

Security forces were deployed in the area to prevent a flare-up, they said. (PTI)

## Assam Rifles organises a day with company commander



**GUWAHATI, April 27:** The Assam Rifles organised "A day with Company Commander" for 40 students of class 12th standard of Meluri Government Higher Secondary School, Phek District, Nagaland.

The programme commenced with warm welcome by Assam Rifles for the school authorities and students. The event included providing career counselling to the students and numerous fun filled activities like Tug of war and other games. The students felt happy and expressed gratitude to Assam Rifles.

## Martyr CRPF jawan paid tribute

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 27:** A sombre reception and tribute was paid to Saheed Sub-Inspector Nashiruddin Sarkar who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty in Manipur by 128 Battalion CRPF at Guwahati Airport on Saturday.

Eminent persons from North-east zone, CRPF as well as state authority were present at the event to pay last respect to the departed soldier.

Danesh Rana, IPS, IG, NES, Shri Vimal Kumar Bisht, IG, NEZ, and other senior officers of NEZ, NES, Range Guwahati and Commandants of 128 & 175 CRPF were present. From the state side, M.S. Manivannan, IAS, commissioner & secretary, Government of Assam and

Akhilesh Kumar Singh, IPS, IGP Assam Police were also present.

Saheed Nashiruddin Sarkar, a sub-inspector in CRPF, was deployed with his platoon at 2nd IRB, Naranseina Outpost, Moirang, owing to the prevailing security problems in the state of Manipur.

On the intervening night of April 26 an 27, the platoon post came under heavy fire from unknown militants.

The militants resorted to firing from automatic weapons at the sentry after throwing grenade into the camp.

Heavy exchange of fire was witnessed and the platoon component of Bravo Company, 128 CRPF repelled fire with fire and repelled the attack.

However, during the exchange of fire sub-inspector Nashiruddin Sarkar and Havildar Arup Saini sustained fatal injuries and were declared brought dead at RIMS Hospital, Imphal.

Post commander inspector Jadab Das and Constable Aftab UI-Hussain were also wounded during the incident and are hospitalized at RIMS, Imphal.

Saheed sub-inspector Nashiruddin Sarkar was enlisted in CRPF as Constable in 1991 and had served in all the security theatres of the country.

A cordial soldier, he is a native of Kokrajhar, Assam who later on relocated to Bonbaria, Barpeta. He is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

## Man goes missing in Manipur; sit-in protest staged

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 27:** In a fresh missing case in this ethnic strife state, a sit-in-protest against the missing of Khangemba Apamba Singh was organized at Thangmeiband, near the Manipur Legislative Assembly on Saturday.

The whereabouts of Khangemba Apamba, 37, a resident of Thangmeiband Khomdram Selungba Leikai, in Imphal West District is yet to be established after he crossed Imphal West District and entered the red zone in Kangpokpi district, predominantly inhabited by the Kuki communities on April 19.

The CCTV footage installed at the police stations on National Highway 102 showed that he crossed the red zone after casting



his vote for the Inner Manipur Lok Sabha elections on April 19.

To find out about the missing man's whereabouts, several voluntary organizations formed a Joint Committee of Khangemba Apamba Singh, Imphal on April 23, 2024.

The committee organised the protest demanding the government

find the missing person at the earliest.

Elangbam Joykumar, the Committee spokesperson told the media that the representatives of the Committee met the Chief Minister N Biren Singh recently and demanded to rescue the missing person. N Biren Singh disclosed that with the renewed missing case of Apamba, a total of 29 individuals remain on the missing list amidst the ongoing communal violence between the Kukis and Meiteis in the state that erupted on May 3, 2023.

Out of the 64 missing cases, the CM disclosed that 26 individuals were discovered deceased, while nine were successfully located alive.

## ULB elections, with 33% women reservation, in Nagaland on June 26

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 27:** The Nagaland government has approved to hold urban local bodies (ULB) elections in the state on June 26. Notably, ULB elections will be held in Nagaland after a gap of 20 years. Municipal elections in Nagaland were last held in 2004.

The administrative approval for hold-

ing ULB elections was given by Nagaland Cabinet during its meeting held on Friday (April 26). This would be the first-ever municipal elections in the state to be held with 33 per cent women reservation.

It may be mentioned here that tribal bodies and civil society organisations in Nagaland had earlier objected to 33 per cent women in ULB polls that delayed

holding the elections.

Nagaland state election commission has revised and updated the electoral roll for all 39 municipal and town councils for the conduct of elections to constitute municipal and town Councils in Nagaland with a view to accommodate the subsequent changes in the roll after November 2022.

## Three Tripura government employees suspended for flouting MCC



**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 27:** Three government officials in Tripura have been suspended for violating the Model Code of Conduct during election to Tripura East Lok Sabha constituency.

A statement from the office of the Tripura Chief Electoral Officer confirmed the suspension of the three government employees for MCC breaches.

Among those suspended is Prabajika Roy, a teacher at Kulai SB School in Am-

bassa under Dhalai district of Tripura.

Currently on deputation to Lambuchara High School in Kamalpur subdivision under Dhalai district of Tripura, Roy was serving as the First Polling Officer for polling in Surma (SC) assembly constituency.

She breached protocol by engaging with the media under the guise of representing a political party.

Consequently, she has been temporarily suspended from service based on the recommendation of the returning officer of Tripura East (ST) parliamentary constituency.

In addition, Sameer Ranjan Deb, a teacher at Bishalgarh English Medium School, and Rifleman (GD) Subhankar Debroy of the 10th Battalion of TSR, have also faced suspension for violating the election code of conduct.

## WWF-India's 'City Nature Challenge' reaches Arunachal, Assam

India top participant in world's biggest nature challenge

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 27:** WWF-India is inviting participants to submit photos of wild plants, animals and fungi from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh along with several Indian states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and New Delhi.

The 9th edition of "City Nature Challenge" started from April 26 to 29. Out of 675 cities participating globally, 206 are from India.

Archita Baruah Bhatlacharya, State Coordinator, WWF-India Assam & Arunachal Pradesh State Office

being the driving efforts states said, "CNC 2024 this year is outreach to entire North East States & WWF-India AAPSO kick started it in Assam Guwahati on Earth Day 22nd April through Community Radio & online CNC NE Orientation session. We are thrilled to announce engagement of youth from various colleges and universities across Assam conducting Bioblitz. In Assam we have two Cities - Digboi covering Tinsukia district & Guwahati for rest of Assam. From Guwahati, Gauhati University, Cotton University, SB Deorah College, Handique Girls' College, schools and



many more are participating and are uploading their findings. Likewise in Arunachal Pradesh we have Ziro for only that area & Itanagar City for rest of the state and the participating Youth, Community & Schools can upload the findings. Through CNC we would like to bring individuals closer to nature raising awareness for Biodiversity conservation & nature connect where one can get the opportunity to join this Citizen Science program to

upload their own clicked photos in iNaturalist app from their mobiles or in website.

As scientists increasingly rely on community-generated data, it becomes more important than ever for common citizens to document nature observations on iNaturalist."

As citizen science initiatives build momentum around the world, this year's ninth annual City Nature Challenge (CNC) is taking place in more than 675 cities across seven

continents. With nearly a third of that number (206 cities) from India, the effort kicks off Friday, April 26 at 12:01 am IST. CNC runs through 11:59 pm on Monday, April 29. The global event calls on current and aspiring citizens, nature and science fans, and people of all ages and education backgrounds to observe and submit pictures of wild plants, animals, and fungi using free mobile apps like iNaturalist, a PR stated.

## Second phase Lok Sabha poll in Manipur registers 76.06% voter turnout

**IMPHAL, April 27:** Except sporadic violent incidents in some polling stations, the voting in the remaining 13 assembly segments of Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency spread across the eight districts concluded peacefully with 76.06% voter turnout on Friday.

The Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency covers 28 assembly segments and the voting in the 15 assembly segments was held on April 19, the first phase of the seven-phase 18th Lok Sabha general elections.

The voting in the remaining 13 assembly segments spread across eight districts - Ukhrul, Kamjong, Tamenglong, Noney, Senapati, Jiribam, Pherzawl and Tengnoupal - was held today.

Sporadic violent incidents were reported in some polling stations in Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Tengnoupal districts.

Except these sporadic incidents of violence, no major poll-related violence reported from other parts of the eight districts even though reports said that the voting in the first hours in Jiribam district was disrupted by a heavy rainfall.

However, after the rainfall stopped, voters turned out in large numbers to exercise their franchise.

Meanwhile, as per the office of the chief electoral officer (CEO) Manipur, the overall voter turnout was 76.06% at 5pm. The office registered 15.49% voter turnout at 9am, 33.22% at 11 am and reached 54.08% at 1 pm.

The voting at 848 polling stations across the eight districts commenced at 7 am and concluded by 4 pm. At some polling stations, the



voting continued even after the end of the official deadline as the voting was delayed due to various reasons including technical problems in the EVMS.

There are a total of 4,84,949 voters, including 2,39,140 men, 2,45,807 women, and two transgender individuals eligible to cast their votes in the 13 assembly segments.

In the 15 Assembly segments of the parliamentary seat where the voting took place on April 19, 61.98% voter turnout was registered.

Four candidates are in the fray for the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency. They are Alfred Kangam S Arthur of Congress, Kachui Timothy Zimik of NPF and two independent candidates - S Kho John and Alyson Abonmai.

The faiths of the four candidates will be known after the counting of votes scheduled on June 4.

Manipur has two Lok Sabha seats and the voting for the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency in which six candidates are in the fray was held on April 19. The constituency registered 68.62% voter turnout. (NNN)

## DoNER Task Force meets for devp of tourism in Northeast

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 27:** The 4th meeting of the Task Force for the Development of Tourism in the North East was held in New Delhi on Thursday.

Present in the meeting were the officials of all the North Eastern States - Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The other stakeholders were NITI Aayog, the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprise, the Ministry of Textile, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and private partners.

The task force discussed the strategies along with the action plan for the comprehensive and sustainable development of tourism in the North East Region through engagements with stakeholders including those in the private space.

Earlier, in pursuance of decisions taken in the meeting of the Consultative Committee for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) in September 2022, the constitution of a Task Force for the development of Tourism in North Eastern Region was proposed.



# Never opposed ban on PFI as claimed by Amit Shah, BJP fought polls with it: Digvijaya Singh

Singh said he never opposed the ban on PFI and claimed he was the first to ban SIMI during his tenure as the CM of Madhya Pradesh

**BHOPAL, April 27:** Senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh on Saturday rejected Union Home Minister Amit Shah's allegation that he had opposed the ban on the Popular Front of India and instead accused the BJP of contesting polls in Karnataka in alliance with PFI's political unit.

Singh, the Congress candidate from Rajgarh Lok Sabha constituency in Madhya Pradesh, also countered Shah's allegation concerning the Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), saying he had banned the outfit when he was MP's chief minister.

Addressing a rally in Khilchipur under Rajgarh Lok Sabha seat on Friday, Shah had accused Singh of opposing the ban on PFI and the capital punishment for Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru besides using the term 'bhagwa aatankwad (saffron terror)'.

Singh said Shah took his name 17 times and spoke lies about him eight times.

Singh wrote on X that Shah had claimed that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi included personal loans for Muslims in their party manifesto on his advice.

But the fact is that there is no mention of "Muslim personal loan" in Congress' manifesto, said Singh, asserting that he had



never used the term "bhagwa aatankwad" as claimed by Shah.

The Rajya Sabha member said he never opposed the hanging of Afzal Guru. On the contrary, Singh claimed, he had favoured Guru's hanging at the earliest.

"Amit Shah lied that Digvijaya Singh had opposed the ban on PFI," Singh said, accusing the BJP of contesting the local elections in Karnataka in alliance with the Islamic extremist outfit.

Singh said he never opposed the ban on PFI and claimed he was the first to ban SIMI during

his tenure as the CM of Madhya Pradesh.

Singh had represented the Rajgarh Lok Sabha constituency in 1984 and 1991. His hometown Raghogarh falls under this parliamentary seat, which will go to polls in the third phase on May 7.

In his social media post, Singh said he had arranged oxygen cylinders during the Covid pandemic and never opposed the vaccination as alleged by Shah.

The medical college in Rajgarh was proposed during the Congress government in the state, he

claimed, seeking to highlight the work done by his party. The railway line from Bhopal to Ramganj Mandi was also proposed during that time, he said.

In another tweet, the Congress leader also responded to Shah's "farewell from politics" comment alluded to him.

"The time has come to give him a permanent farewell from politics... 'Aashiq ka janaaza hai, zara dhoom se nikle'. Defeat him with a massive margin and make him sit at home," the senior BJP leader had said.

Singh claimed that Shah asked people to take out his "janaaza" (funeral).

"That means BJP leaders want to take out my funeral!! And why? Because I care about all of you. If I had wanted, I would have refused to contest the elections but the neglect of the people of my home area forced me to contest this election," Singh said, adding that he would continue to fight for the people till his last breath.

The BJP has renominated sitting MP Rodmal Nagar from the Rajgarh seat.

Singh had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha election from Bhopal where BJP's Pragya Singh Thakur defeated him by nearly 3.65 lakh votes. (PTI)

## Lok Sabha polls: AAP's Chabbewal banks on Mann govt's work for victory in Hoshiarpur



**CHANDIGARH, April 27:** The AAP's Raj Kumar Chabbewal is banking on the Bhagwant Mann government's schemes, especially providing free electricity and setting up aam aadmi clinics, to win the Hoshiarpur Lok Sabha seat.

A radiologist by profession, the former two-time MLA is contesting the parliamentary polls on an AAP ticket from Hoshiarpur, currently represented by the BJP's Som Parkash.

Chabbewal last month quit the Congress and joined AAP.

The 54-year-old also resigned as MLA from the Chabbewal constituency in Hoshiarpur district. He was the deputy leader of opposition in the Punjab Assembly when he quit.

Chabbewal first became an MLA from the Chabbewal assembly segment in 2017 and retained the seat in the 2022 polls.

He had unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha elections from Hoshiarpur in 2019, losing to Parkash by a margin of more than 48,000 votes.

"People are quite happy about the work done by the AAP government in the past two years. With zero electricity bills (300 units of free electricity per month in the domestic category), people are getting relief of ₹ 4,000 to 5,000 per month," he told PTI.

People's financial burden has also been lowered following the opening of aam aadmi clinics, where they get free treatment and medicines, he said.

The state government has also shut several toll plazas, bringing relief to commuters, the AAP leader added.

Many steps have been taken to generate employment and around 43,000 government jobs provided in the past two years. The state government is also focusing on the education sector, he claimed.

Speaking on the farming community, Chabbewal said farmers are getting adequate water for irrigation.

Joining AAP in the presence of Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Chabbewal had said that he was impressed with the state government's "pro-people" policies, especially for the poor and the

weaker sections.

"I am taking the work done by the Mann government to the people and seeking their votes," he told PTI.

Asked about the rival political parties in Hoshiarpur, Chabbewal said he doesn't see any competition.

The people of Punjab are "upset" with the BJP, he said, referring to the ongoing farmers' agitation, and accused the Centre of not agreeing to their demand of a legal guarantee on minimum support price for all crops.

The farmers were not allowed to head towards Delhi in support of their demands, Chabbewal said.

He also alleged there is "discipline and factionalism" in the Congress' Punjab unit and claimed "infighting" has "demoralised" party workers.

The Shiromani Akali Dal, on the other hand, is facing a fight for "survival", Chabbewal claimed.

The AAP candidate also shared his roadmap for Hoshiarpur.

Chabbewal said he will prioritise setting up a government hospital and medical college. A satellite centre of the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research will also be brought to Hoshiarpur.

The AAP candidate said he will make efforts to bring a rail coach factory to the constituency to boost employment and also work to upgrade the Panjab University's regional campus.

He stressed on the need for a rail link between Tanda and Hoshiarpur and four-laning of the roads between Hoshiarpur and Garshankar and Garshankar and Dasuya to boost economic activity.

He also intends to boost tourism in Hoshiarpur, a sub-mountainous area.

Chabbewal is contesting from Hoshiarpur against the BJP's Anita Som Parkash, the wife of incumbent MP Parkash, and the Congress' Yamini Gomar. The Shiromani Akali Dal has fielded former minister Sohan Singh Thandall.

Polling for Punjab's 13 Lok Sabha seats will be held on June 1. (PTI)

## BJP will change Constitution if it returns to power, PM Modi a 'mehengai' man: Priyanka

**DHARAMPUR (GUJARAT), April 27:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi on Saturday claimed that the ruling BJP's top leadership may be pretending to be in denial mode now, but the party will change the Constitution if it returns to power.

Targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi over inflation, she called him a "mehengai" man.

"BJP leaders and candidates are saying that they will change the Constitution. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi is denying it. This is their tactic," she said at a public rally at Dharampur village of tribal-dominated Valsad district held in support of Congress candidate for ST-reserved Valsad Lok Sabha seat, Anant Patel.

"First, they will always deny what they want to do. But after coming to power, they will implement it. They want to change the Constitution to weaken the common people and deprive them of their rights given in our Constitution," said the Congress leader.

PM Modi enters the stage during elections like "Superman", she said, asking people to remember him as a "mehengai (inflation)" man.

"BJP leaders project the prime minister as powerful and say that 'chutki bajake ladai rukva dete hai (he can stop the war - Russia-Ukraine - with the snap of fingers)'. Then why is he unable to remove poverty just like that," she asked.

The Congress leader claimed that the tribal population in Gujarat, which is Modi's home state, and in the country is suf-



fering due to issues like rising inflation, unemployment, low remuneration, loss of land, violence against women and other atrocities. Highlighting the Congress's manifesto, she said it addresses the issues faced by the tribal population. Their party will bring an MGNREGA-like scheme for urban areas where families will get 100 days of guaranteed work, she said.

She also said that the Congress is committed to filling about 30 lakh vacancies in government jobs, providing subsidised diesel to fishermen, taking minimum wage to Rs 400, working out "sub-plans" for Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs), a special budget for tribals and declaring tribal-dominated areas as scheduled areas.

The Congress general secretary alleged that PM Modi reduced the price of LPG cylinders only due to the general elections, claiming he had no sympathy for the people. She also responded to PM Modi's relentless

attack on Congress over "wealth redistribution".

"He is now warning people that Congress will enter their houses with an X-ray machine to conduct a search, then snatch your ornaments as well as 'mangalsutra' kept in safes and give it away to others. Is that even possible? Is he doing this out of nervousness," she asked.

PM Modi never talks about education, health or inflation, she said. "I don't think people can tolerate this for five more years... He just organises mega events and roams across the world. Now, when people are asking for his report card, he is getting nervous. That's why he is raising issues of Hindu-Muslim or being a Vishwaguru" Gandhi said. She said such talks are meaningless if the PM can't provide employment or drinking water to people and urged voters to compel him to apologise for his deeds whenever he visits Valsad.

"He is the first PM of our country who speaks lies in such a manner. He abused our entire family, be it my mother, grandmother, grandfather, brother (Rahul Gandhi) and my husband. But, we never cared. Let him say what he wants, she said, adding that former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a "sabhya insan (civilised person)".

The BJP has fielded Dhaval Patel against Congress' Anant Patel in the Valsad constituency. All 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat will go to polls in the third phase of general elections on May 7. BJP had clean-swept the state in the 2014 and 2019 polls. (PTI)

## Trinamool Congress lodges complaint with West Bengal CEO against CBI Sandeshkhali raid

**KOLKATA, April 27:** Trinamool Congress has lodged a complaint with the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of West Bengal stating that the CBI had "deliberately carried out an unscrupulous" raid at an "empty location" at Sandeshkhali during the second phase of polling in the state.

The TMC said that while elections were going on at Darjeeling, Raiganj and Balurghat Lok Sabha constituencies on Friday, the central agency carried out an "unscrupulous" raid at an empty location at Sandeshkhali.

The CBI on Friday seized arms and ammunition, including a police service revolver and foreign-made firearms, during searches at two premises of an associate of now-suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali.

The searches were conducted in connection with the January attack on an Enforcement Directorate (ED) team by a mob that was allegedly instigated by Sheikh, who was arrested by the West Bengal Police on February 29 in the case.

The Trinamool Congress in a letter to the CEO on Friday said that media reports suggested that CBI had called in additional forces including the bomb squad of NSG.

"It has also been reported in the media that arms and ammunition have been recovered from a house during the such raid by the central agency", it said.

The party said while 'law and order' fell completely within the domain of the state government, the

CBI did not issue any notice to it or the police authorities before carrying out such a raid.

The TMC stated that the West Bengal police has a fully functional bomb disposal squad at its command, it could have assisted in the operation if the CBI indeed felt its requirement during the raid.

"However, no such assistance was sought. But, surprisingly, the raids had become nationwide news stating that weapons had been recovered during the raids", TMC said.

The party also doubted "there is no way of knowing with certainty as to whether these weapons were indeed recovered during the search or whether they were surreptitiously planted by the CBI or NSG".

The TMC alleged the entire exercise smacks of an effort by the CBI to create a nationwide hatred against the TMC and its candidates, during the election period, while feeding with the wrong information that the location belonged to a supporter of the party. The letter said that the incident had again demonstrated the fact that the "BJP has weaponised" the central investigation agencies including the CBI to carry out a smear campaign against the party.

"It further iterated that in the absence of any representative of the state government, the purported recovery of arms and ammunition is possibly a ploy by the BJP in conspiracy with the CBI and the NSG to plant weapons in the site", the party said in the letter. (PTI)

## 76.24 pc turnout recorded in three IS seats of Chhattisgarh in Phase-II

**RAIPUR, April 27:** A voter turnout of 76.24 per cent was recorded in three Lok Sabha constituencies in Chhattisgarh that went to polls in the second phase a day ago, an official said on Saturday.

"Voting was held in Kanker (Scheduled Tribe-reserved), Rajnandgaon and Mahasamund Lok Sabha constituencies on Friday in the second phase of elections. It went off largely in a peaceful manner, and altogether 76.24 per cent voting was recorded in these three constituencies," state's Chief Electoral Officer Reena Babasaheb Kangale said in a statement.

In Rajnandgaon constituency, 77.42 per cent voter turnout was recorded, while 75.02 per cent was registered in Mahasamund and 76.23 per cent in Kanker, she said.

In 2019 Lok Sabha elections, 74.95 per cent voter turnout had been recorded in these three seats - Rajnandgaon (76.04 per cent), Mahasamund (74.51 per cent) and Kanker (74.27 per cent).

Altogether 6,567 polling booths were set up in these constituencies and of them, 23 polling booths were categorised as vulnerable and 458 as critical. The fate of 41 candidates, including former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel and former state home minister Tamradhwaj Sahu, was locked in EVMS across the three seats, where the main fight is between the Congress and BJP.

The maximum number of 17 contestants are in Mahasamund followed by 15 in Rajnandgaon and nine in Kanker. (PTI)

## PM hell-bent on 'revenge': Cong

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** The Congress on Saturday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been hell-bent on taking "revenge" on the people of Karnataka since they "decisively rejected" him in the 2023 assembly elections.

The opposition party's attack came after the Centre approved about ₹ 3,499 crore as drought relief to Karnataka following the state government taking the matter to the Supreme Court.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X, "Ever since Mr Modi was rejected decisively by the people of Karnataka in the 2023 assembly elections, he has been hell-bent on taking his revenge." First, Modi tried to "sabotage" the Anna Bhagya food security scheme but the Congress government was unshaken and launched a direct cash transfer scheme for the 4.49 crore beneficiaries, Ramesh said.

"Second, he cut off funds to Karnataka. Between April 2023 -- when he lost -- and January 2024, total central transfers to Karnataka have declined by 23 per cent. Central grants have fallen by 56 per cent," he alleged. Third, the Centre delayed the legitimate drought relief funds due to the farmers of the state, Ramesh further claimed.

"223 out of 236 talukas in Karnataka are facing drought conditions, with 196 taluks being categorised as severely hit. As early as September 2023, the Karnataka government had approached the Modi sarkar to release funds of ₹ 18,172 crore for drought relief. It was delayed for months," the Congress leader said.

Today, after the Karnataka government dragged the Modi government to the Supreme Court for failing to provide drought relief, the Union finance ministry finally agreed to release more than ₹ 3,498 crore to Karnataka's farmers, he said. Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said the Centre has approved ₹ 3,499 crore as drought relief and released only ₹ 3,454 crore. (PTI)

As many as 31 fresh incidents of forest fire were reported from various parts of the state on Friday, destroying 33.34 hectares of forest land, according to officials

## IAF helicopter roped in to douse forest fires in Uttarakhand



**DEHRADUN, April 27:** An IAF helicopter was pressed into service on Saturday to extinguish the raging forest fires in Uttarakhand's Nainital district, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said.

The situation in the district worsened on Friday with the flames reaching the High Court Colony in the Pines area.

An MI-17 helicopter collected water in a Bambi Bucket from Bhimtal lake and poured it over the burning forests of Pines, Bhumiadhar, Jyolikot, Narayan Nagar,

Bhawali, Ramgarh and Mukteshwar areas of the district, officials said. Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said all efforts are being made to bring the fires under control and it will be done soon.

"An IAF helicopter has already started dousing the fires," he said.

Dhami said he will hold a meeting with forest officials in Haldwani later in the day to review the situation.

Three people were arrested in Rudraprayag on Friday while trying to set fire to forests.

As many as 31 fresh incidents of forest fire were reported from various parts of the state on Friday, destroying 33.34 hectares of forest land, according to officials.

The fire that broke out in the forest near Nainital took a horrific form on Friday, posing a threat to the residents of High Court Colony. It also affected traffic movement in the area.

Besides forest department staff, Army personnel are involved in efforts to control the fire.

Anil Joshi, a resident of the Pines area and assistant registrar of the Uttarakhand High Court said, "The fire had engulfed an old and vacant house located near The Pines on Friday. It did not cause any damage to High Court Colony but it came dangerously close to the buildings."

The district administration has banned boating in Naini lake in view of the blaze.

Nainital Divisional Forest Officer Chandrashekhar Joshi said, "We have deployed 40 Manora Range personnel and two forest rangers to extinguish the fire."

From November 1 last year till now, a total of 575 incidents of forest fire have been reported in Uttarakhand, affecting 689.89 hectares of forest area and costing the state ₹ 14 lakh. (PTI)

## Cong seeks explanation from CPI(M) over Jayarajan's meeting with Prakash Javadekar

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/KANNUR, April 27:** The controversy arising out of the charges levelled against LDF convener E P Jayarajan that he planned to join the BJP, refused to die down on Saturday with the Congress demanding that the CPI(M) leadership explain why he met BJP leader Prakash Javadekar.

Dismissing the allegations, the Left party said it was a ploy of the Congress party to hide its embarrassment over party leaders joining the BJP en masse. Senior BJP leader Shoba Surendran had alleged that a middleman tried to help Jayarajan "who expressed interest to join the BJP". On the day of the election, Congress chief K Sudhakaran and Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly, V D Satheesan had attacked the LDF convener saying there was a secret understanding between the BJP and the CPI(M).

Addressing reporters on Saturday, Satheesan said the CM had defended the meeting between Jayarajan and Javadekar.

"Why would the LDF convener meet the BJP in charge of Kerala, Prakash Javadekar? What did they discuss? Did they discuss some business deal? Or an election deal? Is there any business between them?" he asked. Satheesan also raised suspicion over whether Jayarajan was acting as a "bridge between the chief minister and the BJP" to settle the cases against Vijayan.

"Vijayan was defending Jayarajan's meeting with Javadekar. But, criticised his meeting with Nandakumar (power-broker)," Satheesan alleged. Meanwhile, Isaac told the media that the matter will be discussed in the appropriate party forum.

"The controversial matter will be definitely discussed in the appropriate party forum. The CM had mentioned the party stand. The rest will be discussed and decided in the party forum," Isaac added.

Coming out in support of the LDF convener, CPI(M) leader M V Jayarajan today said the controversy was created by the Congress party to hide the fact that their leaders were joining the BJP.

"The defection of Congress leaders to the BJP is a national phenomenon. The KPCC president himself had said that he will go with the BJP. Days before the elections, news came out that a section of Congress leaders from Kerala were ready to join the BJP. They are trying to hide their embarrassment," M V Jayarajan said. M V Jayarajan also said that just days before the elections in Kerala, Sudhakaran's former PA joined the BJP. He also said that senior Congress leader A K Antony's son Anil K Anthony joined the BJP and contested on the BJP ticket from Pathanamthitta seat. (PTI)



## MVA will sweep Mumbai, people want to save democracy: Cong nominee Varsha Gaikwad

**MUMBAI, April 27:** Mumbai Congress president Varsha Gaikwad on Friday claimed the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition will win all the six Lok Sabha seats in the metropolis as people have made up their minds to save the Constitution and democracy.

In an interview with PTI, Gaikwad, the Congress nominee from Mumbai North Central Lok Sabha seat and the sitting MLA from Dharavi, which falls under Mumbai South Central constituency, said she is not an "outsider" and will function as "people's MP" if she is elected.

Mumbai North Central constituency was earlier represented by Gaikwad's party colleague Priya Dutt and has been represented by BJP MP Poonam Mahajan for the last two terms.

"My assembly segment Dharavi falls under Mumbai South Central parliamentary constituency and is separated from Mumbai North Central constituency by a 200-metre bridge. I am not an outsider here because as the Mumbai Congress president for the last 10 to 11 months, I have visited every nook and corner of the city and interacted with party cadres," said the former Maharashtra minister.

"I am an organisation person. I am known as a people's politician and will be a people's MP who is always available to them to resolve their problems and highlight their issues," asserted the Congress leader, whose late father Eknath Gaikwad



was a party veteran and served as an MP and an MLA. The BJP won Mumbai North Central seat in the last two Lok Sabha polls and the undivided Shiv Sena played a big role in that. Now, the Shiv Sena (UBT) is with us along with the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar), Gaikwad noted.

The Congress, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) are constituents of the MVA.

Gaikwad's candidature was announced by the Congress on Thursday, after weeks of deliberations. She had expressed interest in contesting from Mumbai South-Central seat, which was earlier represented by her father.

She, however, does not agree that there was a delay in announcing her candidature.

"There was no delay in announcing the ticket. Things are done at the right time," she said.

"The MVA will win all the six seats (in Mumbai) as the situation is conducive for the opposition alliance. People have made up their minds to punish those who malign the state's civilised politics... they want to protect the Constitution and save democracy," she added.

Mumbai North Central constituency goes to polls along with 12 other seats in Maharashtra on May 20 in the fifth round

of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections.

Gaikwad said she has a strong connection with people who are aware of her work as a public representative.

"I am a loyal worker of the party and a follower of its ideology. I will always be available to highlight people's issues and fight for them. People call me 'tai' (elder sister) and they should treat me like their family member," she said. As part of its seat-sharing arrangement with MVA allies, the Congress is contesting Mumbai North Central and Mumbai North seats.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) is contesting the remaining four seats in the financial capital - Mumbai South, Mumbai South Central, Mumbai North East and Mumbai North West. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party has named candidates for all four seats. The Congress did not win any Lok Sabha seats in Mumbai in the 2014 and 2019 general elections.

The undivided Shiv Sena, in alliance with the BJP, had won three seats in 2019. Out of its three MPs, only Arvind Sawant (Mumbai South) remained with Thackeray after the party suffered a split in June 2022.

The two other MPs, Rahul Shewale (Mumbai South Central) and Gajanan Kiritkar (Mumbai North West), switched to the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. While Shewale has been renominated from his seat, Kiritkar did not get a ticket. (PTI)

## Bemetara communal flare-up in Chhattisgarh last year: CBI takes over youth's murder case



**RAIPUR, April 27:** The Central Bureau of Investigation has taken over the probe into the murder of 22-year-old Bhuneshwar Sahu in communal violence in Chhattisgarh's Bemetara district in April last year.

A statement from the Press Information Bureau said the CBI on Friday re-registered a case in connection with the incident on a request of the Chhattisgarh government that was received on April 25 as well as further notification by the Union government's Department of Personnel and Training on April 26.

On April 8 last year, some children returning from school in Biranpur village were beaten up allegedly by members of another community over an altercation, and when Sahu and a few others went to the locality of the alleged accused, they were pelted with stones, as per police.

Sahu died after being attacked with knives and other sharp weapons by 12 persons, all of whom were arrested at the time and are presently in judicial custody.

The PIB statement said the CBI has now taken over the case registered on April 8 last

year against these 12 persons in Saja police station in Bemetara under Indian Penal Code sections 147, 148, 149, 336, 307, 302 and 120-B.

In a post on social media platform X on Saturday, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said, "Now CBI will investigate the Biranpur murder case. Based on the decision and consent of the cabinet of our government, the Centre has also issued a notification. Late Bhuneshwar Sahu's family will definitely get justice."

Incidentally, Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, who holds the Home portfolio, had announced in the Chhattisgarh Assembly in February this year that the state government would recommend a probe into the incident.

The communal clash in Bemetara had made national headlines as just two days after the death of Sahu, the bodies of Rahim Mohammad (55) and his son Idul Mohammad (35), residents of the same village, were found with multiple injuries.

The clash had seen imposition of section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), which bars assembly of four or more persons in the area, for nearly 20 days.

The BJP had attacked the then Congress government under Bhupesh Baghel on the communal flare-up and had fielded Sahu's father Ishwar Sahu from Saja seat in the 2023 Assembly polls against then state minister Ravindra Choubey.

Sahu defeated Choubey in the polls, which were swept by the Bharatiya Janata Party. (PTI)

## TN CM asks officials to ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply

**CHENNAI, April 27:** Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin on Saturday directed the officials to ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply to the people this summer.

Chairing a review meeting with the state government officials here in the wake of heat wave conditions prevailing in many parts in the state, the chief minister said summer has brought with it two kinds of crisis.

"One is excessive heat and another is increasing demand for drinking water," Stalin said.

Although the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu received heavy rainfall leading to floods during the previous Northeast Monsoon season, other parts of the state, especially the western districts of Tamil Nadu considered as catchment areas, received less rainfall, he said.

At the meeting, the chief secretary and other departmental secretaries explained to the chief minister about the drinking water shortage. Further, the Indian Meteorological Department has mentioned that during the southwest monsoon season, the amount of rainfall may be less than expected in the first month or two.

"Therefore, we are now in a difficult situation where we have to use the water in the dams sparingly and meet the drinking water requirement for the next two months," he said. Considering the present situation he requested all department officers to take stock of the situation by visiting the areas affected by drinking water problems and solve the problems immediately.

He said 22 districts in the state have already been declared as drought-stressed districts and Rs 150 crore has been earmarked from the State Disaster Relief Fund for taking up water supply works.

Civic officials should monitor the functioning of various combined drinking water schemes and maintain them, he said. Corporation Commissioners should meet the people in the affected areas in person and resolve the problems without delay.

In panchayat areas where borewells have gone dry, arrangements should be made to provide drinking water through tankers.

"The demand for water is high during summer while the availability for water becomes less. Keep this in mind and strive unitedly for the benefit of the people," the chief minister urged the officials. (PTI)

## UT administration asked to pay ₹ 5 lakh compensation to former Jamaat-e-Islami spokesman

**SRINAGAR, April 27:** The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh has directed the UT administration to pay a compensation of ₹ 5 lakh to the former spokesman of banned Jamaat-e-Islami outfit advocate Ali Mohammad Lone alias Zahid for his illegal detention under the Public Safety Act.

Quashing Lone's detention under the PSA, Justice Rahul Bharti observed that the detention order passed by the Pulwama district magistrate read with consequent government orders of approval and confirmation of the preventive detention are held to be illegal and unwarranted.

"Therefore, the said order along with the petitioner's preventive detention are hereby set aside and quashed. The Superintendent of the Jail concerned, where the petitioner is being detained, is directed to release the petitioner free from his prison," the 13-page order passed by Justice Bharti reads.

Although the petitioner had claimed a compensation of ₹ 25 lakh, the court held that a compensation of ₹ 5 lakh would meet the ends of justice.

"Therefore, besides holding and declaring the preventive detention of the petitioner illegal, also holds the petitioner entitled to compensation of rupees five lakh payable by the respondents within a period of three months from the date of this judgment," it added.

Lone was first arrested in 2019 but his preventive detention was quashed by the court in July that year. However, he was detained again under preventive laws within six days but the order was set aside by the court in 2020.



Within three months, he was again booked under preventive laws but the detention was set aside by the court in 2021.

"The passing of the impugned detention order, which is fourth in a row, against the petitioner by same set of mind operating through SSP Pulwama and mechanically followed by the Govt., has been effected least bothering the SSP Pulwama and the respondent No.2-District Magistrate Pulwama and the respondent No.2-District Magistrate Pulwama to at least spare a reading, lest an appreciation, to the last judgment dated 24/02/2021 in which this court, in very clear and categorical terms, held the basis of the petitioner's third time preventive detention to be resting upon stale grounds,"

the court observed.

"Now if three judgments of this Court quashing preventive detention of the petitioner made three times hereto before have not been spared a passing glance, lest an application of mind, by and on the part of the SSP Pulwama, the respondent No.2-District Magistrate Pulwama and last by the respondent No.1-Govt. of UT of J&K as well, then how can it be claimed by the said three authorities at their respective end that the fourth time preventive detention of the petitioner is an outcome of an open and fair mindset acting upon changed factual scenario," the court further observed.

Taking strong note of the authorities ignoring its orders, the court said, "This court cannot be diplomatic to avoid observing that if left to the whims and fancies of the SSP Pulwama and the respondent No.2-District Magistrate, Pulwama then the judgment of the High Court of J&K and Ladakh quashing a given preventive detention of a person is of no interest to them and same very person by repeat of the pretext can be made to suffer cyclic preventive detentions to outnumber judgments quashing the given preventive detention."

"It seems that the SSP Pulwama and the respondent No.2-District Magistrate Pulwama in continuing with the preventive detention of the petitioner meant to be law unto themselves having extra constitutional authority at their respective disposal in the matter of targeting the petitioner with repeated preventive detention custody unmindful of fact that each time failing to sustain the said preventive detention custody before the court of law," the court added. (PTI)

## Four accidents leave nine dead, over 20 injured in 24 hours in Madhya Pradesh

**BHOPAL, April 27:** Nine persons were killed and over 20 injured in four separate accidents in the past 24 hours in Madhya Pradesh, police said on Saturday.

Three persons each were killed in two separate accidents in Maihar and Rajgarh districts while one person was killed in Mandla district, officials said. Two others lost their lives in an accident involving a car and truck in Seoni district, they said.

In Maihar district, three persons were killed, including two on the spot, and one injured when the car they were travelling in crashed into a truck near Bori village on National Highway 30 around 4 am on Saturday, Amdara police station in-charge Sanjay Dubey said.

In Seoni, woman teacher Priyavinda Bisen (32) and her brother Bansat Patel (40), who was driving their car, were killed after the vehicle hit a truck on the Chhappara bypass of Jabalpur-Seoni Highway, some 44 km from the district headquarters, around 5 am, Chhappara police station assistant sub-inspector Premnaryan Suryavanshi said.

The teacher was returning after performing election duty in Vijayraghavgarh, under the Khajuraho Lok Sabha seat, when she and her brother met with the accident. Her husband, who was also in the car, suffered injuries and is undergoing treatment, the official said, adding that a search is on for the truck.

In Rajgarh, a 30-year-old woman, her 5-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter were killed and two injured when an unidentified vehicle hit a two-wheeler on the national highway near Khanpura village late on Friday night, said Bairoa police station in-charge Virendra Singh Dhakad.

In Mandla district, a 50-year-old woman was killed and 19 others injured when a bus carrying a marriage party overturned near a bridge on the Mandla-Jabalpur national highway late on Friday night, said Mandla Kotwali police station in-charge Shafiq Khan.

The district hospital's civil surgeon Vijay Dhurve said that nine of the injured were discharged, while the treatment of ten others is underway. (PTI)

## Mughal Road shut after fresh snowfall in J&K

**JAMMU, April 27:** The Mughal Road was closed for vehicular traffic on Saturday following fresh snowfall in the higher reaches, including Peer Ki Gali, along the alternative route connecting Jammu's Poonch and Rajouri districts to south Kashmir's Shopian district, officials said.

More than six inches of fresh snow has been recorded at the 11,433-feet high Peer Ki Gali, also known as the Pir Panjal pass, on the Mughal Road, prompting authorities to suspend vehicular traffic as a precautionary measure, they said.

It is still snowing from Dubjan to Peer Ki Gali, a distance of 45 kilometres, and there is apprehension of landslides and shooting

stones from the hillock overlooking the road, they said.

No vehicular traffic will be allowed on the road till the weather improves and the road is cleared, the officials said.

The weather office has predicted wet weather till April 30, with moderate to heavy rainfall in the plains and light snowfall in high-altitude areas.

A Traffic department official said the 270-kilometre Jammu-Srinagar National Highway - the only all weather-road connecting Kashmir with rest of the country - was washed by moderate to heavy rain, resulting in mudslides at several places, including Dalwas, Mahar, Gangroo and Hingani in Ramban district. (PTI)

## Drug labs unearthed in Raj, Gujarat; 7 arrested; NCB

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** The NCB and Gujarat Police ATS Saturday busted three "clandestine" drug manufacturing labs in Rajasthan and Gujarat leading to the seizure of 300 kgs of narcotics and arrest of seven persons.

Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Deputy Director General (Operations) Gyaneshwar Singh in a statement said that the labs were unearthed after about three months of "intensive" technical and ground surveillance that was mounted by the two agencies to identify the people involved in the network as well as the locations of the labs.

A total of 149 kgs of mephedrone or 'meow meow' (both in powder and liquid form), 50 kg ephedrine, and 200 litres of acetone was recovered from the three labs located in Bhimnal of Jalore district and Osian in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan and Gandhinagar in Gujarat, the officer said. Seven people have been arrested till now in the crackdown, he said. The teams of the two agencies were also raiding a similar lab in Amreli district of Gujarat and more recoveries are expected, Singh said. (PTI)

## Bhubaneswar records 44.6 degrees Celsius

**BHUBANESWAR, April 27:** With heatwave sweeping across Odisha, the mercury touched 44.6 degrees Celsius in the state capital on Saturday, the highest during this summer. Bhubaneswar day temperature touched 44.6 degrees Celsius during the day at 2.30 pm, weather scientist Umashankar Dash told reporters here.

He said the temperature in Bhubaneswar crossed 44 degrees Celsius for the first time this season.

Dash said the IMD has urged people not to come out of their houses between 11 am to 3 pm as hot and intense humid condition prevails in most parts of the state. The IMD said that Bhubaneswar was followed by Jharsuguda which recorded 43.6 degrees Celsius, Rourkela at 42.5, Chandbali 42.4 and Sambalpur 42.1 degrees Celsius. In its mid-day weather bulletin, the Meteorological Centre in Bhubaneswar said that due to prevailing northwesterly/westerly dry air and high solar insolation, day temperature is likely to further increase slightly by two degrees Celsius at many places in Odisha during the next 24 hours.

Thereafter, maximum temperature (day temperature) is likely to be above normal by four to six degrees Celsius in some parts of the state during the next four to five days, it said.

Meanwhile, the IMD issued a red warning (be alert) for different areas for Saturday and said heatwave to severe heatwave conditions may prevail in Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Keonjhar, Angul, Dhenkanal, Boudh, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Khurda, and Cuttack districts. Similarly, heatwave conditions will prevail in Deogarh, Sambalpur, Sonepur, Balangir, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Nayagarh, Rayagada, Bhadra, Balasore, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapada, Malkangiri, Ganjam, and Gajapati districts, where the orange alert was sounded. (PTI)

## LGBTQ members call for inclusion, recognition



**KOLKATA, April 27:** People known as LGBTQ members usually face discrimination in their growing up phase from childhood facing acceptance problems from family, parents, siblings, neighbours, even friends and teachers, participants at a conclave here revealed.

Seventy-five members of the LGBTQ community from different parts of the state, shared their experiences at the conclave - "Rainbow Dialogues - All in this Together" - a project of US Consulate held across seven states in east and north-eastern India, held

in collaboration with US-based organisation StoryCenter and BRIDGE early this week.

The participants called for inclusion, equity and accessibility for the LGBTQ community, a spokesperson from BRIDGE told PTI.

Director of the American Center Kolkata, Elizabeth Lee, said "As we reflect on the importance of human rights, we recognize that the struggle of LGBTQ people to obtain rights and recognition is inseparable from the broader fight for universal human rights.

An LGBTQ member from

Kalyani in Nadia district told PTI, that though the attitude of people to the community is slowly changing he still faces harassment in public transport.

He recalled when he was a class seven student in a boys' school, his classmates often would ask him to prove he was male by undressing.

"However, in my workplace, my colleagues and seniors are very helpful and cooperative," he said emphasizing that attitude and perception have undergone a change in the past two to three years.

The 24-year-old youth was attending the meet at the American Center to share experiences with other community members.

Prithiraj Nag, one of the speakers and LGBTQ advocacy right activists said, "People known as LGBTQ members usually face discrimination since their growing up phase from childhood facing acceptance problem from family, parents, siblings, neighbours, even friends and teachers."

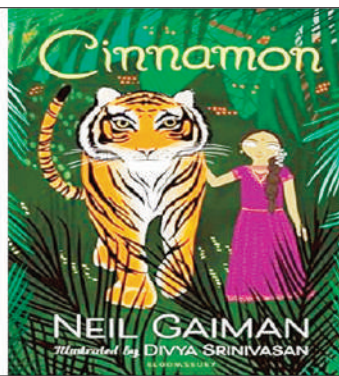
The 75 participants were mostly from West Bengal including transmen, transwomen, bisexuals, lesbians and other queer group members. (PTI)

## Neil Gaiman partners with Sharad Devarajan's Graphic India for adaptation of short story 'Cinnamon'



**MUMBAI, April 27:** Noted author Neil Gaiman on Saturday announced that his widely-loved short story "Cinnamon" has been turned into an animated film.

For the upcoming English-language film, which is about an Indian Princess and a talking tiger, the author has partnered with Sharad Devarajan and Graphic India, which has an expertise in original Indian-themed character entertainment. Gaiman, the NYT best-selling author and creator of films and series including, "Coraline", "The Sandman", "American Gods" and "Good Omens", said he aims to transport audiences into the magical world of "Cinnamon" through the film.



"I am thrilled to be collaborating with Sharad Devarajan and his exceptional team on 'Cinnamon'. Sharad's passion for storytelling and his deep understanding of Indian culture and mythology makes him the perfect partner to bring this tale to life.

"Together, we are crafting a film that will transport audiences to a world of magic, wonder, and eternal truths, a story that celebrates the transformative power of compassion and the resilience of the human spirit. I cannot wait to share this incredible journey with animation fans around the world, old and new," the 63-year-old author said in a statement.

Gaiman has adapted the screenplay

for the animated movie with Devarajan, Sarena Khan and Sujatha SV. The film is directed by acclaimed Indian animator, Jeevan J Kang. Devarajan said he is thrilled to partner with Gaiman and called him "one of the greatest storytellers".

"I am honoured to bring his enchanting story of 'Cinnamon' to audiences around the world. Inspired by Indian fables, 'Cinnamon' weaves together the timeless theme of dharma as a young princess embarks on a journey of courage and self-discovery. At its core, it explores the universal human experience of the eternal struggle between light and darkness," Devarajan added.

Born with pearl eyes that render her blind to the physical world, Cinnamon's destiny is shaped forever when a mysterious talking tiger appears. Offering to lead her through the wonders and trials of the wild, Cinnamon begins a perilous adventure that will shape her path and test her resolve, according to the official synopsis.

She enters a hidden realm where the line between the mundane and the mystical is as thin as a whisper and where the ancient wisdom of India breathes life into a jungle thrumming with secrets, it added. (PTI)





## Lily Gladstone, Bowen Yang team up for 'The Wedding Banquet' remake

**LOS ANGELES, April 27:** "Killers of the Flower Moon" star Lily Gladstone is set to star alongside Bowen Yang in Andrew Ahn's upcoming directorial.

The project will be a remake of the Ang Lee's 1993 rom-com "The Wedding Banquet" and will also have Kelly Marie Tran, Yuh-jung Youn and Joan Chen to round off the cast, reported entertainment news outlet Variety.

The filming will begin in Vancouver in May and will follow the story of a couple who decide to get married for their own benefits but things turn upside down when the

woman's grandmother pays a surprise visit. "It warms my heart to see how my film from so many years ago has inspired a new generation to reimagine a new and different version," Lee said in a statement Thursday. "I look forward to seeing what Andrew Ahn and his wonderful cast create."

Schamus is producing with partner Joe Pirro under their Symbolic Exchange banner alongside Anita Gou and Caroline Clark for Kindred Spirit. Jordan Hart is set to co-produce. Bleecker Street and ShivHans Pictures have co-acquired the North American rights

with plans to release the film theatrically in 2025. Andrew Karpen, Shivani Rawat, Kent Sanderson, Julie Goldstein, Sam Intili and Daniel Bekerman will executive produce. Jenny Jue is serving as the casting director.

"I'm delighted to re-team with my longtime friend and colleague, James Schamus, on this inspired reimaging of a classic rom-com for the modern era," said Karpen, founder and CEO of Bleecker Street. "Andrew Ahn is a force to be reckoned with and I'm very excited to see the new heights that he and James will take this story to."

Gladstone is represented by IAG, Authentic Talent and Literary Management and McQuin Frankel Whitehead. Yang is repped by UTA, 3 Arts Entertainment and Schreck Rose Dapello Adams Berlin & Dunham. Tran is repped by CAA, M88, and Goodman, Genow, Schenkman, Smelkinson & Christopher. Youn by CAA and Echelon Talent Management. Chen by Inphenate and Goodman, Genow, Schenkman, Smelkinson & Christopher. Ahn is repped by CAA, Anonymous Content and Jerry Dasti at Sloss Eckhouse. (AGENCIÉS)

## Eminem to soon release 12th studio album 'The Death of Slim Shady'

**LOS ANGELES, April 27:** American rapper Eminem has announced that he will be releasing his 12th studio album this year.

Titled The Death of Slim Shady (Coup de Grâce), the new album comes four years after he released Music to Be Murdered By, according to entertainment news outlet Variety. The 51-year-old rapper, whose real name is Marshall Bruce Mathers, shared the news on his social media handles on Friday evening.

"THE DEATH OF SLIM SHADY (COUP DE GRACE). Summer 2024," Eminem posted on social media platform X, along with a teaser for the album. The teaser opens with a true crime reporter discussing the death of Slim Shady, who has long been Eminem's alter ego, dating back to 1997's Slim Shady EP and The Slim Shady LP, which arrived two years later.

The character is known for delivering more aggressive and violent lyrics, which branded him as a controversial rapper from the start of his career. (PTI)

## Malayalam hit 'Manjummel Boys' to stream on Disney+ Hotstar from May 5

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** Malayalam survival thriller "Manjummel Boys" will be available for streaming on Disney+ Hotstar from May 5, the streamer announced on Saturday.

The hit movie, written and directed by Chidambaram, hit the theatres on February 22 in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and received widespread acclaim from audience and critics.

"Manjummel Boys" also became the highest grossing Malayalam film by earning over Rs 200 crore and surpassing the record set by "2018", India's official entry to 2024 Academy Awards.

In a press release, Disney+ Hotstar said the film will be available on its platform in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada languages.

Based on a true incident and produced by Parava Films, "Manjummel Boys" revolves around a group of friends from a small town called Manjummel near Kochi who decide to have a vacation in Kodaikanal.

Soubin Shahir, Sreenath Bhasi, Balu Varghese, Ganapathi S. Poduval, Lal Jr, Deepak Parambol, Abhiram Radhakrishnan, Arun Kurian, Khalid Rahman, Chandu Salimkumar, Shebin Benson, and Vishnu Reghu round out the cast of the film. (PTI)

## Akshay Kumar's 'Khel Khel Mein' to release in September

**MUMBAI, April 27:** Superstar Akshay Kumar-starrer "Khel Khel Mein" will be released in theatres across the country on September 6, the makers announced Saturday.

Featuring an ensemble cast that also includes Taapsee Pannu, Vaani Kapoor, Fardeen Khan, Ammy Virk, Aditya Seal and Pragya Jaiswal, the comedy-drama is written and directed by Mudassar Aziz of "Happy Bhag Jayegi" and "Pati Patni Aur Woh" fame.

Production house T-Series shared the release date of the film on its official social media handles.

"Get ready for a rollercoaster ride of laughter, drama & loads of fun! Mark your calendars for September 06, 2024 when #KhelKhelMein hits the theatres," the post read.

"Khel Khel Mein" aims to redefine the comedy-drama genre, offering a rollercoaster ride of emotions that transcends the ordinary, the makers said in a statement.

The film is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Vipul D Shah, Ashwin Varde, Rajesh Bahl, Shashikant Sinha and Ajay Rai. (PTI)



## Prabhas, Deepika's 'Kalki 2898-AD' gets new release date of June 27

**MUMBAI, April 27:** Filmmaker Nag Ashwin's sci-fi film "Kalki 2898-AD", starring

Prabhas and

Deepika Padukone, is now scheduled to release in the theatres on June 27, 2024, the makers announced on Saturday.

Production banner Vyjayanthi Movies shared the news of the multilingual big-budget movie's new release date on its social media pages along with a poster.

"All the forces come together for a better tomorrow on 27-06-2024 #Kalki2898AD," the studio posted.

Also starring Amitabh Bachchan, Kamal Haasan and Disha

Patani, the movie has been delayed on multiple occasions.

It was earlier scheduled for release on May 9 after being moved from January 12.

The magnum opus, which was greenlit as "Project K" in 2020, promises to transport audiences to a world never seen before in Indian cinema, according to the makers.

The film's official title, "Kalki 2898-AD", was announced by the makers at the San Diego Comic-Con (SDCC) in July 2023. It is produced by Aswini Dutt, the founder of Vyjayanthi Movies. (PTI)

## Priority is to do better and work with great directors, says actor Akshay Oberoi

**MUMBAI, April 27:** Actor Akshay Oberoi says he has a straightforward approach to his career -- getting better at his craft with each day and believing that opportunities will follow.

Oberoi, who has appeared in supporting parts films like "Gurgaon", "Thar", "Kaalakaandi" and most recently Hrithik Roshan's "Fighter", said he has never been to get noticed at parties or airports.

"My entire approach has been, 'I want to get better every day and I want to work with great people'. I've kept it very simple for myself, and haven't tried to do anything beyond that. I'm not the guy that shows up in pap (videos), or with new looks at the airport, my priority was never that," the actor told PTI.

Oberoi said it took him a lot of time to find a film like "Fighter", which also featured Deepika Padukone and Anil Kapoor. The movie was released in theatres in January.

"Fighter" happened on the back of a lot of work that people haven't watched mostly... It took me over a decade in the business to have a film like 'Fighter' that the world watches," said the actor, who

played the role of Squadron Leader Basheer "Bash" Khan in the movie.

The 39-year-old actor will be next seen in the sophomore season of "The Broken News", a project he chose because he got the opportunity to play an interesting character.

An adaptation of the popular 2018 British series "Press", "The Broken News" is led by Sonali Bendre, Jaideep Ahlawat and Shriya Pilgaonkar. It is directed by Vinay Waikul.

"There have been people who have asked me, 'You are coming to an established show like 'The Broken News', (but) the focus is on the other actors.' I was like, 'I don't think about it'. I found the director interesting and wanted to do a good role, and that's the way I've aligned myself," he said.

"I've worked with Vinay sir on 'The Test Case' (the 2017 series), so we had that comfort level. He is the only director in Bombay, who has used me for my American accent, and he said, 'Why don't we try this way?' I felt it was unique," said Oberoi, who was born in New Jersey, U.S.

According to Oberoi, "The

Broken News" exposes the agenda-driven nature of the media and the movie industry.

"Unfortunately, we live in a capitalistic world; money is the thing that runs everything, so nothing can be organic or pure. The show does a good job of highlighting these kinds of things because in 2024, the audience is aware that all the information that we are getting from news is not exactly accurate. There's an agenda behind it. There's a reason why an article is put out."

With the new season, Waikul said the team went deep into exploring the characters.

"While working on season one, we felt there was so much that we

haven't told.

The characters are so interesting; we always felt it would be unfair if we had only one season, we had to write season two," the director said.

"The Broken News" season two, which also stars Indraneil Sengupta and Kiran Kumar, will premiere on ZEE5 on May 3. (PTI)





# KKR ASSISTANT COACH DOESCHATE URGES 'ANTI-SKILL INNOVATIONS' TO COUNTER RUTHLESS BATTERS

**KOLKATA, April 27:** Bowlers need to find "innovative ways to execute deliveries with a touch of 'anti-skill' to challenge the range-hitting batsmen in the on-going IPL, reckoned Kolkata Knight Riders assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate.

Punjab Kings successfully mounted the highest run-chase in T20s when they surpassed Kolkata Knight Riders imposing 261/6 with eight balls and eight wickets to spare in their IPL match at Eden Gardens on Friday. "The game is almost unrecognisable from 10 years ago when you get past 160 you can almost pack your bag and feel you're going to win the game. Now, you need 160 before the

13th over to have a chance to get a big score," Doeschate said during the post-match media interaction. Jonny Bairstow led the chase with a scintillating 108 off just 48 deliveries after Impact Player Prabhsimran Singh set the tone with a blistering 54 off 20 balls. After Prabhsimran's exit, Shashank Singh provided a helping hand with an unbeaten 28-ball 68 in a match that witnessed a record 42 sixes in total.

The former Dutch allrounder, who was part of KKR's 2014 title winning side, emphasised the need for bowlers to adopt unconventional tactics by bowling "anti-skill," in order to be successful in the face of aggressive batting strategies.

"You want to bowl with anti-skill. I think, you know, short and wide really works, dragging guys wide and then going straight."

Citing the example of Sam Curran dismissing Phil Salt, he said: "You almost need to catch guys off-guard a little bit like Sam Curran caught Phil Salt off-guard. Set off-side field, he dragged him across and then fire one at leg stump."

"We have to come up with innovative ways. We have to keep changing literally ball by ball. I don't think you can bowl two balls the same. I don't think you can bowl bowlers back-to-back anymore unless they really have a grip on the game."

"It's all in the batter's favour.

The challenge and the upside for bowlers to not punch back is really there," he added.

The previous record chase in T20 was by South Africa against the West Indies in Centurion in 2023 when they overhauled 259 in 18.5 overs. In IPL, both the record chases now have come against KKR in the space of 10 days at the same venue of Eden Gardens. KKR had failed to defend 223/6 with Jos Buttler smashing a 55-ball century to pull off the heist on April 16.

Dismissing any bowling concern, the KKR assistant coach said there was no point in crying about it as they would have to quickly recover.

"We're not concerned, but

bowling with the new ball and bowling seam, and everything in Kolkata is really tough, and we need to find a way to do better."

"There's two ways you can look at it. You can step back and say, oh, it's unfair, we're bowling machines, or you can say, we are going to find a way and try new things and embrace the challenge."

"It's going to be tough, we're going to get panned all over the show, but you have to find innovative ways. We've got four weeks left, it's going to be around for at least that long, there's no point crying about it."

"I feel sorry for the bowlers. I think it's gone even more towards that (batting) side, but those are the realities, and my

way of going about it would be to find a way to land a punch back to the batter as quick as possible." Giving an update on their premier pacer Mitchell Starc, Doeschate said the Aussie left-arm quick may need one or two games to return.

KKR next face Delhi Capitals here on Monday, before taking on Mumbai Indians and Lucknow Super Giants in two successive away games.

"As far as I know, he's very close to being back, which will either be the next game or the game after," he said.

Impact Sub an opportunity: Prabhsimran Punjab Kings opener Prabhsimran, who came in as an Impact substitute for Ar-

shdeep Singh and blazed his way to his maiden fifty of the season, termed the rule as an opportunity for him. "I see this as an opportunity for younger," said the diminutive opener.

On the record chase, he said: "We just wanted to cash in on the power play and carry the momentum forward."

For PBKS, the inclusion of Bairstow paid off as he returned to form in style.

"He is such a big player, we all know what he's capable of. In cricket, you just take one match to recover from your bad form and you saw that today how he dominated the bowlers and struck a century," added Prabhsimran. (PTI)

## Jyothi shoots hat-trick of Gold as compound archers bag five medals in World Cup

**SHANGHAI, April 27:** Asian Games champion Jyothi Surekha Vennam spearheaded India's dominance with a rare hat-trick of gold as compound archers lapped up five medals at the ongoing Archery World Cup Stage 1 here on Saturday.

The world No. 3 Jyothi fought past tournament top seed Andrea Becerra of Mexico in a tight shoot-off finish 146-146 (9\*-9) to become the second Indian after Deepika Kumari to secure triple gold medals in the World Cup.

Three-time Olympian and former world No. 1 Deepika had achieved the incredible feat at Paris World Cup Stage 3 in June 2021. For Jyothi, it also matched her feat at the last year's Hangzhou Asian Games where the 27-year-old Vijayawada archer returned with three gold medals, winning individual, women's team and mixed team events.

Youngster Priyansh capped India's spectacular outing in the compound section, by bagging his maiden World Cup medal in the form of a silver in the men's individual section.

In his second Cup appearance, the 21-year-old found himself up against a formidable opponent in 2021 world cham-



pion Nico Wiener, who delivered a flawless performance, scoring a perfect 150 out of a maximum 150.

The 27-year-old Austrian shot all 10s from 15 arrows to edge out the spirited Indian by three points. In the morning session,

India underlined their supremacy in the non-Olympic compound category to make a clean sweep of team events, winning men's team, women's team and mixed team events with Jyothi featuring in two of them.

Jyothi, Aditi Swami and Parneet Kaur dropped just four points to trounce Italy 236-225 in the women's compound team event to open their account with a gold medal.

The men's team of Abhishek Verma, Priyansh and

Prathamesh Fuge then went one step better as they missed just two points en route to defeating Netherlands' Mike Schloesser, Sil Pater and Stef Willems 238-231. The mixed team completed the sweep when the second-seeded Jyothi and Verma warded off a late resurgence from their Estonian rivals -- Lisell Jaatma and Robin Jaatma -- to win 158-157 in a thrilling finish. The top seeded women's compound team dropped just four points from 24 arrows to down sixth seeded Italy in the first match of the day.

In the first three ends of six arrows each, Jyothi, Aditi and Parneet missed the perfect 10 only twice to take a handsome 178-171 lead over Marcella Tonioli, Irene Franchini and Elisa Roner. In the fourth end, the Indians dropped two points but it did not matter much as they nailed the gold with an 11-point margin. The men's team, who qualified as the fourth seed, put up a near flawless show to defeat their Dutch opponents.

They began with a perfect round of 60 and dropped just two points in the next two ends, before sealing the win with another perfect 60 in the final set of six arrows. (PTI)

## Indian spinners are not spinning the ball in shorter formats: Muralitharan

**CHENNAI, April 27:** In their bid to restrict big hits, young Indian spinners are gradually losing the art of getting drift in the air and turn off the pitch, feels Sri Lankan legend Muttiah Muralitharan, who is also a strategic coach of Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL.

Analysing the disappointing trend of spinners not spinning the ball, he felt that young tweekers had been bowling somewhat quicker, leading to the ball coming straight and making the batters go after them.

"The problem in India is that most spinners are not spinning the ball because they are bowling a little quicker. If there is no spin, there is no deviation (drift)," said Muralitharan during the pre-match press conference ahead of SRH's Sunday meet against defending champion Chennai Super Kings here.

"The batters face throw-downs at the nets, and most of the balls come in straight. So, the batters have made up their mind accordingly, and they look to hit it. But, when the ball deviates, the batters' brains don't know how to react. So, the spinners need to learn how to spin the ball to have a better chance."

CSK has lost two successive matches and will be hungry for a win at home, while SRH, too, went down to Royal Challengers Bangalore in its last game.

While dew played a heavy factor in CSK's last home fixture, Murali feels another high-scoring contest is on the cards, while they will be aiming to play a good brand of cricket.

"It's going to be a high-scoring contest because the game has changed and scored over 200 being chased. The coaches and players are also using the Impact Player rule very well," he reckoned.

Murali said if Chepauk is on drier side then there will be turn on offer. "Haven't seen the wicket yet. If it's dry, there's more chance for spin, and it

will be a different ball game."

"It is an ever-changing deal. This pitch has a huge bearing on it, and the teams have been preparing rather flat wickets. Teams are also looking into strike rates a lot as they want to maximize the 120 deliveries available."

Murali said he is happy with the brand of cricket that his team is playing in this edition.

"We are looking to play a particular brand of cricket. We have lost a couple of games along the way, but despite the results, if the team plays according to the style of cricket we want to, the coaches will be happy."

"A team can't win all the games, and there are going to be defeats. If we can win 60% of our games, we have a great chance to make the playoffs." IPL 2024 has seen 200-plus total being posted quite frequently, while some of them are also being chased down.

With the Impact Player rule having made a significant impact this season compared to the last one, Murali felt that the bowlers, too, will come up with a counter-attack plan shortly.

"For any new rule, it takes one or two years to fully understand it. This year, the teams have adapted to the Impact Player rule well, resulting in an extra 20-30 runs," he explained.

"It's more advantageous for the batter than the bowler because they are not afraid to get out, as they have an extra man to make up for it."

"Also this year, the wickets have been very flat, and the outfielders are very fast, which has also been resulting in those extra runs. As a result, once a good total of 170-180 is now 220-230."

"But, the bowlers will come up with something. We don't know when and what, but they will as they won't stand back and accept it as the batters' game."

While SRH has used five pacers in the event so far, Umran Malik is yet to be introduced this season. (PTI)

## Madrid replacements too good for Sociedad and take step closer to La Liga title



**SAN SEBASTIAN, SPAIN, April 27:** Real Madrid moved another step closer to a 36th Spanish league title after beating Real Sociedad 1-0 and extending its lead in the standings to 14 points on Friday.

Carlo Ancelotti's men need just five points from their last five games to ensure the title will return to the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

"We are very close to winning La Liga," the coach acknowledged after a hard-fought win in the Basque country.

On a rainy night in San Sebastian, Madrid put out a second-string team to rest Jude Bellingham, Vinicius Junior and other regulars.

The new faces struggled for large parts of the game, with Sociedad having much of the play and plenty of scoring chances.

But one of Madrid's new faces proved the difference between the sides.

Arda Güler, the young Turkish attacker, made his first start in the league, and when the Sociedad defense failed to

clear Dani Carvajal's low cross, Güler drifted in at the back post to slot the ball home with 29 minutes gone.

Ancelotti paid tribute to the 19-year-old Güler, calling him "a very important player for our future."

"Güler has extraordinary quality, he has great talent. Little by little he will take center stage."

Takakura Kubo equalized three minutes later for Sociedad only to see his goal disallowed after a video review.

Ancelotti introduced Vinicius, Antonio Rudiger and Eduardo Camavinga in a busy second half as Madrid held on to extend its unbeaten run in La Liga to 27 games.

Another satisfying note for the champion-elect was the return of Eder Militao. The Brazilian defender made his first start since tearing his cruciate ligament eight months ago, and played the entire game.

"I am very happy, after eight months out," Militao said. "Very happy to return and play 90 minutes and feel like a player again." (AP)

## Chaliha stuns Li, Indian women beat Canada 4-1 in Uber Cup

**CHENGDU (CHINA), April 27:** Ashmita Chaliha produced an inspired show to stun higher-ranked Michelle Li as the Indian women's team notched up a clinical 4-1 win over Canada to make a positive start in the Uber Cup tournament here on Saturday.

The left-handed Chaliha, ranked 53rd, showed great mental resolve and tenacity as she outwitted world no. 25 Li, a gold and silver medalist at the 2014 and 2022 Commonwealth Games, 26-24 24-22 in a 42-minute opening singles clash.

Chaliha, who was part of India's maiden Asia Team Championships win in February, took over the leadership role in the absence of the top guns including P V Sindhu and



delivered against Li, who is on a comeback trail after undergoing surgery for a meniscus tear on her right knee last August.

Young women's doubles pair of Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra, who had claimed the senior national championships title last December, then beat

Catherine Choi and Jeslyn Chow 21-12 21-10 to put India 2-0 ahead.

Isharani Banu defeated Wen Yu Zhang 21-13 21-12 to help India take an unassailable 3-0 lead.

In the second women's doubles, Simran Singhi and Ritika Thaker went down 19-21 15-21 to Canada's Jackie Dent and Crystal before national champion Anmol Kharb beat Eliana Zhang 21-15 21-11 in the fifth and final match to complete the comfortable win.

Bigger clashes lie ahead for the young Indian side as it will face Singapore and China on Sunday and Tuesday respectively in Group A.

In Thomas Cup, India will begin their title defence against Thailand later in the day. (PTI)

## Plan to take inspiration out of ODI series success against India: Nigar Sultana

**SYLHET, April 27:** A rejuvenated Bangladesh will take inspiration from last year's ODI series success against India when they host the visitors in a women's T20I series here starting Sunday, said home skipper Nigar Sultana.

Bangladesh will play a five-match T20I series against India with all the games set to be played at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium here.

India had toured Bangladesh last year for a white-ball series and although the hosts lost the T20 format (1-2), they managed to end the three-game ODI rubber 1-1. Nigar said the team is coming from a break and expects the series to be a 'cracker'.

"We failed to fare well against Australia and it was a tough phase for us. But we went on a break then, spent time with our families

and are back fresh, both physically and mentally," she replied to a PTI query during a media session on Friday.

Bangladesh had lost both the WODI and WT20I series against Australia 3-0 at home in March-April this year.

"We have prepared well so far, including quality practice sessions and match scenario practice as well. There's a positive vibe within the team. We plan to take inspiration out of the ODI series win against India last year, and if we play our best cricket, it's going to be a cracker of a series."

Last year, Bangladesh had won the first ODI before India levelled the series after securing a win in the second game but the third and final ODI ended in a tie as both the team shared the trophy.

A controversy had erupted in

the final ODI when skipper Harmanpreet Kaur slammed the umpires for the decisions, terming them 'pathetic'. During the trophy photo session, she had also asked the umpires to join them, deeming them responsible for helping Bangladesh draw the series.

Nigar, who was the Bangladesh captain in that series, later had slammed Harmanpreet for being unprofessional.

"I believe we should let bygones be bygones. None of the sides hold any grudges against it, and we have moved on as well," the skipper said on Friday.

"All we are focused on is this opportunity ahead of the T20 World Cup. And, to prepare in the best way possible against a quality side like India will be highly beneficial for us."

Bangladesh are yet to win a

T20I series against India. While there could be pressure on the hosts, Nigar said they would be taking it on a match-by-match basis in this series which will be streamed live on FanCode.

"We are taking it match-by-match. Although the team was lagging some time back, we have managed to regroup," she continued. "As for our practice so far, the players have been executing things properly, which is a positive for us. Therefore, I am satisfied with how things are shaping up."

"Playing against India is always challenging as they are a better side. But, since cricket is a game of glorious uncertainties, we are aiming to perform to our fullest on that given day."

Asked about the Indian players who are likely to pose the biggest challenge, Nigar said: "The world

knows that the Indian players are very good in the T20 format. Smriti Mandhana is going to be one of the key players along with Shafali.

"Also, some young players like Richa Ghosh, whereas Harmanpreet Kaur is the backbone of their batting."

Following the India series, Bangladesh will also participate in the upcoming T20 Asia Cup, slated to be held in Sri Lanka in July, before it hosts the T20 World Cup in September.

Nigar said playing back-to-back major series would only help her side prepare for the global event.

"I felt it would be tough for all the teams involved since Asia Cup is a big tournament. But it's a great opportunity since we would be playing against some of the same sides during the World Cup. (PTI)



# McGurk, Stubbs rock as DC beat MI by 10 runs

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** Jake Fraser-McGurk produced a power-hitting master class as Delhi Capitals kept themselves in the race for IPL play-offs with a 10-run win over Mumbai Indians here on Saturday.

Bringing his big-hitting prowess to the fore, young McGurk gave the scorching Delhi heat competition with a sizzling 27-ball 84, powering DC to a massive 257 for four after being asked to bat.

Tilak Varma (63) and Hardik Pandya (46) played some lofty shots to give MI a glimmer of hope but Delhi bowlers, led by Rishabh Pant (3/34), kept striking at regular intervals to stop MI at 247 for 9. The win elevated DC to the fifth spot while MI continued to occupy the penultimate place.

While McGurk sparked upfront, Tristan Stubbs dazzled with an unbeaten 48 off 25 balls at the death overs as DC put up a superlative batting effort to reg-

ister their highest-ever score in IPL.

In reply, MI's script didn't go as per plan as Khaleel Ahmed drew first blood in the form of Rohit Sharma (8).

With more than 250 runs to score, MI batters had to go from the word go and that led to Ishan Kishan (20) and Suryakumar Yadav's (26) wickets.

Three wickets down and the required run rate increasing, Pandya took things in his own hands, plundering 19 runs of the ninth over by DC's star spinner Kuldeep Yadav.

He punched three fours before launching the ball for a towering six over long on. Tilak Varma joined in with a boundary and a six off Axar Patel as the duo stitched a 71-run stand.

But 'Impact Player' Salam not only broke the partnership, claiming Pandya's wicket but also got rid of Nehal Wadhwa in the same over.

Varma then found an ally in Tim David but he was run out in the final



over. Earlier, opening for DC for the second time this season, the 22-year-old Fraser-McGurk equalled his own record

for the fastest fifty this season, getting the milestone off just 15 balls after the hosts were put in to bat by MI.

With McGurk in the middle, it was

raining boundaries and sixes at the rather small Arun Jaitley Stadium. He hit 11 fours and six maximums. He got 19 runs off the first over bowled by Luke Wood, setting the tone as he skillfully exploited the field restrictions in the powerplay to nab 92 runs.

Facing arguably the best bowler in the world, the Australian greeted Jasprit Bumrah with a six over log on, followed by a four in the second over.

Replacing Wood, Nuwan Thushara also couldn't stop McGurk, who displayed his brute force, smashing three fours.

With his pacers being carted all over the park, MI skipper Pandya decided to introduce spin in the form of Piyush Chawla but it hardly mattered to McGurk, who struck a maximum over long-on to get his third IPL fifty.

McGurk then took a special liking for Pandya as he clobbered the ball out of the park before sending one over

deep mid-wicket as Abhishek Porel (36) had the best seat to enjoy the stroke-making, standing at the other end.

Chawla finally managed to put an end to the carnage with a googly. MI dominated for a couple of overs, with Mohammad Nabi picking up Porel in the 10th over.

But Shai Hope (41) swung into action, hitting five sixes while Rishabh Pant (29) unleashed the helicopter shot. The DC skipper whipped the ball, which soared over deep mid-wicket.

Stubbs took DC past the 200-run mark. The South African continued his menacing form as he took Wood to the cleaners in the 18th over where he only dealt in boundaries. The over read 4, 4, 6, 4, 4, 4.

However, Bumrah displayed his class as he came in with a bouncer in the next over to get Pant, who attempted a pull only to find Rohit at deep backward square leg. (PTI)

## GT eye collective improvement against refreshed RCB



**AHMEDABAD, April 27:** In need of a total reboot, Gujarat Titans will be wary of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's new-found firepower in the middle-order when the two teams clash in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

The Titans are now seventh on the table with eight points from nine matches, and they require a victory to float above the growing pile, constituted by Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals who are also on eight points.

To begin with, the Gujarat side needs their pacers to step up. Their pace bowling unit has been underwhelming throughout this IPL.

Mohit Sharma (10 wickets, economy: 10.35), Umesh Yadav (7 wickets, 10.55), Sandeep Warrier (5 wickets, 10.85) have leaked runs in plenty while backup quicks such as Spencer Johnson and Azmatullah Omarzai too have not inspired much confidence.

Their spinners - Rashid Khan (8 wickets), R Sai Kishore and Noor Ahmad (6 wickets each) - have been steady without being spectacular.

The troika's task will be even harder now considering RCB have found a flicker of hope in their middle-order consisting of Rajat Patidar and Cameron Green.

They can take consolation from the fact that dew will not be

a significant factor in a day game, but tackling Patidar, in particular, and Green need much more than help from conditions.

After a modest beginning to the season, Patidar has shown smidgens of his batting skills, especially against the spinners.

He made forceful fifties while tackling Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy (KKR) and Mayank Markande (SRH) in the last two matches while batting through the middle phase.

While his 23-ball 52 carried RCB nearly home against Kolkata, Patidar's 20-ball 50 came in a winning cause against Hyderabad.

The right-hander, whose strength is his excellent eye-hand coordination rather than innovation, will be eager to make a similar impact against the GT spinners. Green too was impressive during his 20-ball 37 against the Sunrisers that took RCB past the 200-run mark.

It has also helped RCB reduce their dependency on Dinesh Karthik and Mahipal Lomror down the order for a late thrust, besides freeing opener Virat Kohli and Faf du Plessis of the burden of scoring in almost every match.

The GT batters would also like to take a cue from their RCB counterparts.

Sai Sudharsan and skipper Shubman Gill have scored up-

wards of 300 runs in this IPL, making three combined fifties, but the GT middle-order has not really been able to do a follow-up act.

The likes of David Miller (138 runs), Shahrukh Khan (30), Vijay Shankar (73) and Rahul Tewatia (153) have had fleeting moments but failed to carry on.

The home side will require a heftier contribution from them against the RCB bowlers, who were on the money against SRH while defending 207.

Their frontline pacers Mohammed Siraj (4-0-20-0) and Yash Dayal (3-0-18-1) were exceptional against a heavy-duty batting line-up, keeping it guessing with clever variations even on a smooth HCA Stadium surface.

Leg-spinner Karn Sharma and part-time pacer Green picked up four wickets equally among them to support their lead bowlers.

So, in a day-game they might be hoping for an even more improved show against a vacillating batting unit of GT.

**Teams:**  
**RCB:** Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudesai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan.

**GT:** Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Manohar, B. Sai Sudharsan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma, Azmatullah Omarzai, Umesh Yadav, Shahrukh Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Suthar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier, BR Sharath.

Match starts at 3.30 PM. (PTI)

## Pakistan to tour NZ next year for 3 ODIs, 5 T20Is



**LAHORE, April 27:** The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed that its national side will tour New Zealand next year to play three ODIs and five T20 Internationals.

The series, sixth between the two nations since 2023, was finalised during a meeting between PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi and New Zealand Cricket (NZC) CEO Scott Weenink in Lahore on the sidelines of the on-going five-match T20I rubber.

During the meeting it was in principle decided to conduct the tour after the 2025 Champions Trophy, which is scheduled to be hosted by Pakistan.

The meeting was also attended by PCB COO Salman Naseer and Director International Cricket Usman Wahla.

As per the existing ICC FTP, New Zealand are also scheduled to tour Pakistan for a tri-nation series before the Champions Trophy.

New Zealand visited Pakistan twice in 2022/23 for a Test and white ball series and Pakistan went to New Zealand this January for a five-match T20 match rubber.

PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi, who is the country's interior minister, also asked the NZC official to convey the position and the secure environment in Pakistan to stage for international cricket to other ICC members.

"The PCB chief spoke in reference to Pakistan hosting the Champions Trophy early next year and the need for all participating nations to play in Pakistan without any concerns at all," the source said. (PTI)

## Inconsistent CSK face bruised SRH in IPL

**CHENNAI, April 27:** Smarting from back-to-back losses, defending champion Chennai Super Kings will be desperate to return to winning ways when they face a formidable but bruised Sunrisers Hyderabad in their IPL match here on Sunday.

CSK had a good start to the season under new skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad but they have been toppled by the Lucknow Super Giants twice in the last two games.

It was an unfamiliar sight for the Yellow Brigade fans to see the Chepauk fortress being breached as LSG knocked down a target of 210 with ease, thanks to Marcus Stoinis' stunning hundred.

With four wins and as many losses in eight games, CSK are currently at fifth spot, tied with eight points with Delhi Capitals and Gujarat Titans and will be keen to find their mojo back as things can quickly go south as the race to playoffs get heated up.

Come Sunday, CSK will be up against third-ranked Sunrisers Hyderabad, who have twice broken the record of the highest IPL total this season but are coming into the game following a failure of their ultra-aggressive batting approach against RCB.

CSK's batting has hovered around skipper Gaikwad, who pulled off only his second IPL century the other day, and the in-form Shivam Dube, who once again impressed with yet another fifty.

While Ravindra Jadeja too chipped in with the bat, the inconsistent form of top-order is a problem. Both Rachin Ravindra and Daryl Mitchell's lack of runs is a concern and it has forced CSK to shuffle their batting order.

Considering their bowling, the hosts had to toil hard against LSG, given the unexpectedly huge amount of dew at Chepauk that took their spinners out of the game and the visitors made full advantage of it during their 213-run chase.

While the CSK pacers managed to capture the four LSG wickets to fell, the spinners



struggled to grip the ball, whereas the constant misfields did not help them either.

A high-flying SRH, on the other hand, were brought to the ground by RCB when they suffered only their third defeat of the season at home by 35 runs on Thursday.

However, it is unlikely to deter the SRH batters who would fancy their chances against an inconsistent CSK.

Against RCB, SRH's top and middle-order failed collectively while chasing, forcing head coach Daniel Vettori to admit that the idea of going all out with the bat in the second innings might not be the right thing to do.

There is unlikely to be any shuffling in the visiting batting order, but Aiden Markram might need to step up, having been dismissed in singles figures in the last two contests.

In bowling, senior seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar is the only one who could be at the receiving end, having managed to claim just a wicket in the last three fixtures.

With the likes of Umran Malik, Fazalhaq Farooqi and Akash Singh waiting in the wings, SRH may think of giving a chance to the Jammu pacer, who has the ability to bowl above 150 kmph.

Given that SRH won four of

their last five games this season while defending, they would love to bat first but both teams will also keep an eye on the unpredictable dew factor.

**Squads:**

**Chennai Super Kings:** MS Dhoni (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Devon Conway, Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), Ajinkya Rahane, Moeen Ali, Shivam Dube, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Mitchell Santner, Tushar Deshpande, Matheesha Pathirana, Simarjeet Singh, Prashant Solanki, Maheesh Theekshana, Shaik Rasheed, Nishant Sindhu, Ajay Mandal, Mukesh Choudhary, Rachin Ravindra, Shardul Thakur, Daryl Mitchell, Sameer Rizvi, Mustafizur Rahman and Avinash Rao Aravelly.

**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shahbaz Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upen-dra Yadav, Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijaykumar Vijaykumar, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaaj Singh and Mayank Agarwal. (PTI)

## Zaheer picks Pant as sole wicket-keeper for T20 WC, wants India debut for Yash Dayal



**NEW DELHI, April 27:** Former India pace spearhead Zaheer Khan has picked Rishabh Pant as the sole wicketkeeper in his team for the T20 World Cup while handing out international debut to left-arm seamer Yash Dayal to add a new dimension to the attack.

One of Zaheer's most interesting selections was the 26-year-old Dayal, who represents Uttar Pradesh in domestic cricket and Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League. He has taken into account Mohammed Shami's injury layoff while picking his squad.

"When I talk about Yash Dayal, it's a floating spot when the 15 are announced because Mohammed Shami will not be available for the tournament. "He's one bowler that if you need someone to bowl up, you have Yash Dayal. If you want a back-end bowler and if Siraj's form is spotty, he can be used there as well," Zaheer told Jio Cinema.

Zaheer also selected Delhi Capitals' captain Pant as the only wicket-keeper in his squad, overlooking others such as Sanju Samson, KL Rahul and Ishan Kishan.

"Rishabh Pant is my only wicket-keeper. I have given more importance to bringing four pace bowlers. You don't want to sacrifice a fast bowler for another wicketkeeper. You have options like KL Rahul, Sanju Samson, and many want to see Dinesh Karthik.

"At this point, we can consider Mahendra Singh Dhoni as well because of his strike rate! I think they'll focus on current players like Samson, KL Rahul, and maybe even Jitesh Sharma. "If you're building a team for a month-long tournament, your travelling reserve can be your wicketkeeper."

Zaheer named 16 players in his squad, with the caveat that only one player between Gujarat Titans' captain Shubman Gill and Rajasthan Royals' opener Yashasvi Jaiswal will be selected as Rohit Sharma's opening partner.

"The toughest decision the selectors will have to make will be choosing one opener out of two terrific options. Shubman Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal, I think only one of them will make it because the think-tank will want flexibility in the team.

"A player can't be limited to just one role, they might need to move around the batting order." Zaheer Khan's India squad for T20 World Cup:

**Batters:** Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill/Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rinku Singh

**All-Rounders:** Shivam Dube, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja

**Wicket-Keeper:** Rishabh Pant  
**Bowlers:** Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Arshdeep Singh, Yash Dayal, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal. (PTI)

## Indian cricket should not give Hardik Pandya so much priority: Irfan Pathan

**NEW DELHI, April 27:** Former seamer Irfan Pathan has insisted that Indian cricket must stop obsessing over Hardik Pandya's worth as an all-rounder at international level, saying he has failed to create an impact in ICC tournaments.

The Mumbai Indians all-rounder is battling poor form this IPL season, raising questions about his inclusion in India's T20 World Cup squad, which is to be announced soon.

"What I feel about Hardik Pandya is that Indian cricket needs to make it clear that they should not give him that much priority as they have given him so far, because we still haven't won the World Cup," Pathan said on Star Sports Press Room Show, Ticket to World Cup.

"If you think you are a primary all-rounder, you need to make that kind of an impact at the international level. As far as the all-rounder is concerned he hasn't made that impact at the international level, we are only thinking about the potential."

The former India left-arm seamer observed that there is a



"big difference" between performance in the IPL and international cricket, and advised Pandya to play throughout the year instead of "picking" tournaments.

"We are getting confused between the IPL performances and the international performances. That's a big difference. First of all, he needs to play throughout the year. He cannot pick and

choose.

"Indian cricket needs to stop doing that. Stop giving preferences to individuals, if you do that, you will not be winning major tournaments.

"What Australia has been doing for many years is that they are actually preferring the team game. Making everyone a superstar. Not one superstar, everybody is a superstar in the squad. If you don't

do that, you will not win big tournaments."

Pathan also opined on problems around finishers and the team's pace bowling unit.

"This is what I'm really scared about when it comes to the World Cup. Look, my worry is with the T20 World Cup, we are pretty much sorted as far as the top-order batting is concerned. We are pretty much sorted in the middle-overs as well.

"If we're thinking Ravindra Jadeja is a number seven batter, you need a good finisher. His numbers are not that great as far as the strike-rate is concerned at the international level. So, there is a worry for me there and the fast bowling.

"Apart from Bumrah, if I look at the guys playing in IPL, played before the IPL in the South Africa series, their numbers are not that great -- be that it's Arshdeep, be that it's Mohammed Siraj, you know, the guys who played last.

"So these two departments, it really makes me worry. These are the departments that are going to be very, very crucial," Pathan said. (PTI)