

6 WORLD Israel threatens to strike Iran directly if Iran launches attack from its territory Chinese Prez Xi meets former Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou on pro-unification visit 8 NATION BJP changed public perception towards politicians, politics: Rajnath Distracted by own horse-trading agendas, BJP neglected Maha people: Cong

CM's Rs 10,000 promise to ration card holders a clear violation poll code: Cong candidate Pradyut moves EC against Himanta

NE has made rapid progress in last 10 yrs: JP Nadda

GUWAHATI, April 10: Congress MP and Lok Sabha poll candidate from Nagaon constituency, Pradyut Bordoloi, has filed a complaint against chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleging that he violated the model code of conduct by offering money to all ration cardholders during the ongoing election campaign.



Bordoloi filed the complaint to the chief election commissioner on Tuesday night, alleging that Sarma, in a public meeting in Lakhimpur during the day, made a promise to transfer Rs 10,000 to the bank accounts of every ration cardholder after the election.

promising to include beneficiaries under the 'Orunodoi' cash direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme," the Congress MP said. Bordoloi claimed that such forms were being distributed in Ward No 1 of Matharboi of Barapujia Gaon Panchayat in Morigaon district on Tuesday.

ITANAGAR, April 10: BJP president JP Nadda on Wednesday claimed that the Northeast, which was earlier known for bandh culture, insurgency and targeted killings, has made rapid progress in the last ten years of the Modi government.

st infrastructure, women empowerment, employment and accountable governance. Nadda said the BJP government would launch the Arunachal Pradesh Gati Shakti master plan for the next five years to boost multi-modal connectivity and integrated infrastructure development in the state by implementing projects in roadways, railways and airways sectors.



HT BRIEFS Public holiday

IMPHAL: Manipur government has declared public holiday on April 19 and April 26, when voting will take place for all two Lok Sabha seats in the state, as public holidays. An order regarding the declaration of public holiday on these poll days was issued by the General Administration Department (GAD) on Wednesday.

Election Commission

SHILLONG: The Election Commission on Wednesday issued show cause notices to Voice of the People Party (VPP) for disrupting an election campaign and for using social media to create fake news against the candidate of the National People Party (NPP).

It is Anyaykaal not Amritkaal: Jairam

Jairam Ramesh vows to uphold democracy and unity HT Correspondent JORHAT, April 10: Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Wednesday reiterated the party's unwavering commitment to safeguarding democracy, upholding the Constitution, and fostering unity among the people.

CEM Tuliram Ronghang leads BJP's campaign for 6- Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency

DIPHU, April 10: Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), has emerged as a key figure in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) campaign strategy for the 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency.



Nihang Langso Karbi Cultural Society Playground, Langloksa, where he addressed a large gathering (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Record created after 40 lakh women pledge to vote

GUWAHATI, April 10: In a remarkable achievement, the Assam chief electoral officer (CEO) and Assam's Rural and Urban Livelihood Missions have made their mark in the India Book of Records by orchestrating a historic pledge-taking event involving 40 lakh women across the state.

Tribal outfits like Tipra Motha formed to defeat CPI(M), not BJP: Biplab Deb

AGARTALA, April 10: Tribal outfits such as the Tipra Motha were formed not to defeat the BJP but to "uproot" the CPI(M), senior BJP leader Biplab Kumar Deb said on Wednesday.



istence to uproot the communists from the state as they used indigenous people as their vote bank for 30 years," he added.

tor when he met PM Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for the welfare of the indigenous people," he said.

APHLC woos voters with 'Save Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao' manifesto

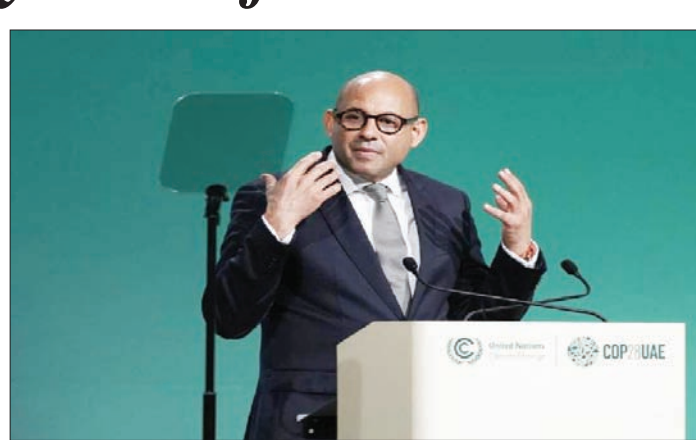
DIPHU, April 10: The All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) on Wednesday unveiled its election manifesto, titled 'Save Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao,' emphasising key priorities and commitments aimed at addressing the pressing issues faced by the hill districts of Assam.



and enhancing the quality of education. Kathar emphasized the party's dedication to using various means, including awareness campaigns and legal action, to uphold tribal rights and combat electoral malpractices.

Officials said the climate finance problem needs to be fixed by the end of the year UN climate chief presses for faster action, says 2 years left 'to save the world'

OXFORD, April 10: Humanity has only two years left "to save the world" by making dramatic changes in the way it spews heat-trapping emissions and it has even less time to act to get the finances behind such a massive shift, the head of the United Nations climate agency said on Wednesday.



speech at the Chatham House think tank in London. He suggested that climate action is not just for powerful people to address — in a not-so-veiled reference to the electoral calendar this year.

ity and lessen hunger, he said. "Cutting fossil fuel pollution will mean better health and huge savings for governments and households alike," Stiell said.

Wild mushroom consumption claims five lives

DIPHU, April 10: A devastating incident has rocked the Borjuri Kleng Bey village of Rongmongve under Angjokpami Police Station in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, as five individuals, including three minors, tragically lost their lives after consuming wild mushrooms.

Home Poll Visit ensures voting accessibility for senior citizens and PwDs

HAFLONG, April 10: Absentee voters falling under the categories of senior citizens aged 85 and above (AVSC) and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) during the upcoming Lok Sabha Parliamentary Election, 2024 will have the option to exercise their franchise through a unique initiative called Home Poll Visit, said an official on Wednesday.

polling stations across the Dima Hasao district. A team comprising 48 Polling Officers, along with booth level officers (BLO), police personnel, and videographers, will visit the homes of eligible voters on these designated days.



Sensex closes above record 75K mark, Nifty hits new peak as metal, FMCG shares shine

MUMBAI, April 10: Benchmark Sensex climbed 354 points to close above the record 75,000 mark for the first time while broader Nifty scaled a fresh lifetime high on Wednesday on gains in FMCG, energy and metal shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 354.45 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at an all-time high of 75,038.15. During the day, the index spurted 421.44 points or 0.56 per cent to hit a high of 75,105.14.

Broader Nifty of the NSE advanced by 111.05 points or 0.49 per cent to close at a record peak of 22,753.80. During the day, it jumped 132.95 points or 0.58 per cent to reach a lifetime intra-day peak of 22,775.70.

Key indices hit intra-day lifetime high levels on Tuesday with Sensex scaling the historic 75,000 mark for the first time but closed in the red following profit booking in index major Reliance Industries.

"Indian markets sustained their upward momentum, buoyed by a robust performance in the broader market, albeit slightly lagging behind its Asian and European coun-



terparts," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Investors' attention remains fixated on the release of the FOMC minutes and US inflation data later on Wednesday, Nair added.

From the Sensex basket, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Asian Paints, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries and Nestle were the major gainers.

Maruti, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Mahindra & Mahindra

were among the laggards.

The majority of sectors were aligned with the move wherein FMCG, metal and energy were among the top gainers. The broader indices also edged higher after two days of pause and gained in the range of 0.7-0.9 per cent.

Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.89 per cent and smallcap index advanced 0.46 per cent.

Among the indices, oil & gas

jumped 1.74 per cent, energy by 1.71 per cent, metal by 1.66 per cent, commodities by 1.30 per cent and services by 1.15 per cent.

Utilities and auto were the laggards.

As many as 1,961 stocks advanced while 1,869 declined and 103 remained unchanged.

In Asian markets, Tokyo and Shanghai settled lower while Hong Kong ended in the positive territory. Markets in South Korea were closed for elections.

European markets were trading in the green. Wall Street ended mostly with gains on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.18 per cent to USD 89.58 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 593.20 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark declined 58.80 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at 74,683.70 on Tuesday. The NSE Nifty dipped 23.55 points or 0.10 per cent to 22,642.75.

Stock and money markets will remain closed on Thursday on account of Ramzan Id. (PTI)

Sugar mills paid ₹ 78,000 cr to cane farmers in H1 of 2023-24 season

NEW DELHI, April 10: Sugar mills have paid ₹ 78,000 crore to sugarcane farmers in the first six months (October-March) of the current marketing season, a food ministry official said on Wednesday.

Sugar marketing season runs from October to September.

While the season is still on, the mills have cleared 87 per cent of the total cane payment of ₹ 90,000 crore till March 31 of the 2023-24 season, the official said.

Mills have produced more than 300 lakh tonne of sugar so far this season.

"Against the total cane payment of ₹ 90,000 crore



for October-March period of 2023-24 season, mills have already cleared ₹ 78,000 crore," the official told PTI.

Cane payments are made as per the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of ₹ 315 per quintal fixed by the Centre for the 2023-24 marketing season, depending on the recovery rate.

The official also said that sugar mills have cleared 99.7 per cent of the total ₹ 1.15 lakh crore cane dues of the 2022-23 season.

Cane dues prior to 2022-23 seasons have been almost cleared barring those held up in courts. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Pradyut moves EC against

The notice, signed by the secretary of the Election Department, was issued to the president of the state BJP unit, seeking a response within 10 am of April 8.

The CEO's office said that while generic electoral promises are allowed, "specific surveys, form distribution and data collection make the design transactional and are in the nature of inducement of the electors", which is a prohibited activity. (PTI)

NE has made rapid progress

chief said the country will only grow if the region develops.

"PM Modi always attaches priority to the Northeast. In the last 10 years, he initiated several initiatives to bring the region at par with other areas," Nadda added. (PTI)

It is Anyaykaal not

guarantees, with 31 lakh such cards already distributed in Assam alone, benefiting 8 crore households nationwide.

Taking a dig at Modi, Ramesh likened the last 10 years under his leadership to a trailer, with Manipur serving as a prime example where the Prime Minister hasn't visited in the past 11 years due to ongoing troubles.

He further warned that similar scenarios could unfold in other northeastern states if the BJP persists in its divisive tactics based on communal, caste, and linguistic lines.

"The trailer is Manipur, where the Prime Minister has not been able to visit in the past 11 months after trouble erupted and this is soon going to be the trailer in other states of the North East as the BJP is bent on dividing the country on communal, caste, language and other lines," he added.

Responding to claims by Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma regarding Congress members leaving the party after Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Ramesh reminded that even Sarma and others were once associated with the Congress.

Later, he hailed the legacy of former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi, praising his transformative leadership in 2001, and expressed confidence in Gogoi's son, Gaurav Gogoi, as a torchbearer of progress and youth icon who would steer the state towards a new trajectory.

CEM Tuliram Ronghang leads BJP's

enthusiastic supporters. Promising a slew of developmental projects for the Langloksa valley, Ronghang assured voters of timely execution post-election.

"People have urged to construct a guest house, Sainik School, boulder pitching for KCS playground, culvert and many more in the memorandum. I assure you that soon after the election is over the work will start. The schemes will be completed before the MLA election," he added.

Among the pledges made by CEM Ronghang include the construction of a guest house, establishment of a Sainik School with 80 per cent local admissions, infrastructure improvements for KCS Playground, and provision of essential services such as ration cards and Arunodoi scheme for eligible families.

Addressing the crowd, Ronghang emphasised the importance of supporting BJP to ensure continued development under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Accompanied by MP Horensing Bey, BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso, and other party dignitaries, Ronghang's campaign trail showcased the party's concerted efforts to secure victory in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

As the election fervor intensifies, CEM Ronghang's rigorous campaign schedule underscores the BJP's determination to consolidate support and emerge victorious in the 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency.

Record created after 40 lakh

verified the event's proceedings and officially declared it a success, thereby establishing a new record.

Assam CEO Anurag Goel received the certificate of recognition on behalf of the organisers. Also in attendance were mission director Masanda Pertin of Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission, joint CEO Pankaj Chakravarty, and Emily Baruah, among others.

The initiative, which aimed to bolster voter engagement and participation in Assam, aligned with the Election Commission of India's (ECI) Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme.

APHLC woos voters with 'Save

ensuring that the benefits of development reach all sections of society. Moreover, the manifesto pledges to combat dictatorship and promote decentralization of power in Karbi Anglong, aiming to empower local communities and promote participatory governance.

The APHLC's manifesto also includes provisions for promoting local businesses, supporting indigenous women, farmers, and strengthening customary laws. It also advocates for the reservation of seats for women in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), establishment of educational institutions, and measures to protect and conserve forests.

Home Poll Visit ensures voting

i.e., 13th and 16th April, to avail themselves of the Home Poll Visit facility and exercise their voting rights.

This initiative underscores the commitment of the election authorities in Dima Hasao to uphold the principles of democracy by making the electoral process more accessible and inclusive for all segments of society.

Wild mushroom consumption claims

and stomach pain. Tragically, before they could receive medical assistance, Malong Bey (10) and Sarlong Bey (15), two sons of Mensing Bey, along with his daughter Lokhi Beypi (18), succumbed to the poisoning at home.

Despite efforts to rush the remaining affected family members to Nagaon Medical College & Hospital, Monisha Lekhepi (20), wife of Waisong Bey, and Durga Beypi (12), daughter of Mensing Bey, were pronounced dead upon arrival.

Currently, Waisong Bey, his mother Kache Singnar, and daughter Gongga Beypi are undergoing treatment at Nagaon Medical College and Hospital. However, Mensing Bey, who remains in critical condition, has been referred to Guwahati for further medical intervention.

UN climate chief presses for faster

natural gas continue to rise or don't start a sharp decline, Stiell said it "will further entrench the gross inequalities between the world's richest and poorest countries and communities" that are being worsened by climate change.

And behind it all is money.

Stiell's speech comes just ahead of meetings of The World Bank and other big multinational development institutions, where poorer nations, led by Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley and Kenyan President William Ruto, are pushing for major reforms in the systems that loan money to poor nations, especially those hit by climate-related disasters.

In conjunction with that push, Stiell called for "a quantum leap this year in climate finance." He called for debt relief for the countries that need it the most, saying they are spending USD 400 billion on debt financing instead of preparing for and preventing future climate change.

He called for more financial aid, not just loans, and more money from different groups like banks, the International Maritime Organization, and the G20, the world's 20 most powerful economies. Those countries are responsible for 80 per cent of the world's heat-trapping emissions, he said.

"G20 leadership must be at the core of the solution, as it was during the great financial crisis," Stiell said.

"Every day, finance ministers, CEOs, investors, and development bankers direct trillions of dollars. It's time to shift those dollars from the energy and infrastructure of the past, towards that of a cleaner, more resilient future," Stiell said. "And to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable countries benefit."

Officials said the climate finance problem needs to be fixed by the end of the year with November's climate negotiations in Baku, Azerbaijan, a crucial point.

Stiell is "absolutely right" that timing and finance are the heart of the matter, said longtime climate analyst Alden Meyer of European think tank E3G. The carbon action plans submitted by next year will "determine whether we can get on the trajectory of sharp emissions reductions needed to avoid much worse climate impacts than those we are already suffering today," he said.

With so many elections and places where democracies are on the brink, "climate finance related to carbon policy is on the line," said Nancy Lindborg, president of the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, at the Skoll World Forum, an ideas conference in Oxford, England.

Climate Analytics CEO Bill Hare said Stiell was "listening to the science" — namely that global emissions must be halved by the end of the decade to meet the Paris climate accord's ambition of capping global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit). "Governments are nowhere near that, and disastrously many are still supporting new fossil fuel development," Hare said. "We need to see a massive strengthening of action now - faster ramping up of renewables, electric vehicles and batteries - if we're to get serious reductions by 2030. The longer we wait, the more it will cost." (AP)

Gold, silver scale record high for 3rd straight session in Delhi

NEW DELHI, April 10: Gold and silver prices hit fresh lifetime high levels for the third straight session on Wednesday, with the yellow metal breaching ₹ 72,000 per 10 grams level in the national capital, amid strong cues in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.

Gold prices rose ₹ 160 to hit its lifetime high of ₹ 72,000 per 10 grams in the national capital. It had settled at a record ₹ 71,840 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Similarly, silver prices climbed ₹ 200 to hit a record ₹ 84,700 per kg.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 72,000 per 10 grams, up by ₹ 160, amid a bullish trend in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold was trading at USD 2,356 per ounce, up USD 6 from the previous close.

Gold prices extended gains in the European trading hours on Wednesday, Gandhi said. Navneet Damani, Senior VP of Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said, "Gold and silver continue to hover around the all-time high mark, as safe-haven demand for the metals remained upbeat amidst the geo-political tensions and in anticipation of more cues on US CPI inflation for March and interest rates".

"Along with the US Consumer Price Index (CPI), the minutes of the Fed's March meeting is also due later on Wednesday, while the bank had offered up some dovish signals on interest rate cuts during the meeting, a string of Fed officials will be speaking after warned regarding sticky inflation, that could delay the interest rate cut." (PTI)

LG Electronics introduces innovative MoodUP™ refrigerator

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 10: LG Electronics, a leading consumer durable brand in India, has unveiled a groundbreaking product in collaboration with renowned fashion designers Gauri and Nainika at the prestigious Lakme Fashion Week. The LG MoodUP™ Refrigerator combines cutting-edge technology with exquisite design, offering consumers a unique blend of luxury and functionality. The MoodUP™ Refrigerator features LED panels on its doors, allowing users to customize the refrigerator's exterior lighting according to their mood or personality. With over 1.7 lakh color combinations, this innovative appliance adds a touch of personalization to any kitchen space, creating a vibrant ambience.

Hwang Youngmin, Director of Home Appliances & Air Conditioner, LG Electronics India, expressed excitement about the launch, stating that the MoodUP™



Refrigerator reflects LG's commitment to blending style with cutting-edge technology. The collaboration with Gauri and Nainika underscores a shared vision of vibrant, bold, and optimistic living, encapsulating the essence of 'Life's Good.' Gauri and Nainika echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing the seamless integration of innovation and sophistication in both the refrigerator and their Fall Winter 2024 collection. The collaboration signifies a commitment to merging design with timeless elegance, offering consumers a unique

and luxurious experience. Bollywood actress Taapsee Pannu, the showstopper at Gauri and Nainika's fashion showcase, praised the LG MoodUP™ Refrigerator for its innovative features and vibrant color palette. She highlighted the synergy between fashion and technology, emphasizing the refrigerator's celebration of style and innovation. The LG MoodUP™ Refrigerator boasts a range of intelligent features, including InstaView technology for quick access, retractable shelves for flexible storage, and advanced temperature management for optimal food preservation. Additionally, the refrigerator comes equipped with a built-in Bluetooth speaker, allowing users to connect external devices and play music of their choice. With its sleek design and advanced functionalities, the LG MoodUP™ Refrigerator redefines the kitchen experience, offering unparalleled convenience and performance for modern households.

HDFC Bank expands reach to lakshadweep

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 10: In a strategic move aimed at bolstering banking accessibility in remote regions, HDFC Bank inaugurated a new branch at Kavaratti Island in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep. This milestone solidifies HDFC's position as the sole private sector bank with a physical presence in the region. The branch inauguration ceremony, graced by Captain Lovekesh Thakur of the Indian Navy and Dr. K P Muthukoya, a prominent local figure, marked a significant step towards enhancing banking infrastructure and services in Lakshadweep. S Sampathkumar, Group Head of Retail Branch Banking at HDFC Bank, along with other dignitaries, emphasized the institution's commitment to providing comprehensive banking solutions tailored to the needs of the island's residents. With a focus on personal and digital banking, including innovative QR-based transactions for retailers, the new branch underscores HDFC Bank's dedication to serving customers across diverse geographies. Sampathkumar highlighted the bank's ethos



of convenience and inclusivity, citing existing branches in regions spanning from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, and now extending to Lakshadweep. As of December 31, 2023, HDFC Bank boasted a robust distribution network of 8,091 branches and 20,688 ATMs across 3,872 cities/towns, reinforcing its commitment to financial inclusion and accessibility. With over half of its branches located in semi-urban and rural areas, coupled with an extensive network of business correspondents, HDFC Bank continues to drive economic empowerment and growth nationwide.

Pakistan set to seek fresh IMF bailout package in Spring meeting, focus on climate finance: Report

NAME CORRECTION

I, Bhuvan Chandra Basumatari, S/o Late Bhabu Ram Basumatari, resident of Bordial Boro Gaon, PO- Pudumoni, PS- Samuguri, district Nagaon, Assam, by an affidavit before Diphu Judicial Court dated 10/04/2024 declare that in my FSD report my son's name has been recorded as Ganesh Basumatari instead of Ganesh Basumatari, whereas in my elder daughter's Aadhaar Card bearing No.77935717 her name has been recorded as Prabita Basumatari instead of her actual name Prabita Basumatari and her date of birth has also been recorded as 07/05/1992 instead of 13/05/1992. In her PAN Card has also been recorded as Probita Basumatari instead of Prabita Basumatari.

Also in my younger daughter's PAN Card bearing No. CGQP9640D my name has been recorded as Bhuvan Basumatari instead of my actual name Bhuvan Chandra Basumatari and in her Aadhaar Card has also been recorded as Henamai Basumatari instead of Henamai Basumatari. This is intended for all purposes.



ISLAMABAD, April 10: In its efforts to put the cash-strapped economy back on track, the Pakistan government has decided to formally approach the IMF for a medium-term Extended Fund Facility during the upcoming Annual Spring Meetings of Bretton Woods Institutions next week, a media report said on Wednesday.

Islamabad will make a request for the medium-term Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with the possibility of augmenting through climate finance as Pakistan's delegation led by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb will attend the meetings to be held from April 15 to 20 in Washington DC. The News International reported.

The Bretton Woods Institutions are the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) called so as both were set up at a

meeting of 43 countries in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA in July 1944.

In mid-March, IMF's global team reached a staff-level agreement with the Pakistani authorities on the second and final review of Pakistan's stabilisation programme supported by the global lender's USD 3 billion standby arrangement approved in July last year.

On March 26, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif too had indicated that his government is planning to approach the IMF for another programme, days after the economic crisis-ridden country struck a staff-level agreement with the global lender regarding the disbursement of the final tranche of USD 1.1 billion. Without the augmentation of the next bailout package through climate finance, Pakistan is all set to make a formal request to IMF dur-

ing the upcoming annual spring meetings, the report said, quoting top official sources. The size and duration of the upcoming bailout package will be worked out by the IMF's review mission expected to hold talks, probably from the first week of May 2024, to finalise major contours of the upcoming bailout package, it said.

The sources said Pakistan decided to request augmenting the EFF through climate finance, so there was a possibility for securing USD 6 billion to USD 8 billion size of the upcoming programme.

We are going to present our argument before the IMF management that Pakistan faced severe consequences of climate degradation and deserved support from the international community and donor agencies, the report quoted sources as saying.

The sources said there was one IMF instrument under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) which provided affordable long-term financing to countries undertaking reforms to reduce risks to prospective balance of payments stability, including those related to climate change and pandemic preparedness.

By reducing prospective balance of payment risks, an RSF arrangement aims to contribute to longer-term Balance of Payment (BoP) stability. (PTI)

Political leaders ramp up efforts with varied agendas, historical legacies, and contemporary issues Intense campaigning marks Sonitpur as LS elections approach



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, April 10: As the whole country prepares for the upcoming 18th General Lok Sabha Elections, anticipation and excitement continue to build among both candidates and voters in the 11-Sonitpur Constituency, erstwhile 9-Tezpur HPC. In a bid to secure voter support, candidates from various political parties have been conducting rallies, road shows, and door-to-door campaigns to win the first phase of the election game slated for April 19. Leaders of different political parties including state chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, former central minister and Congress leader Pawan Singh Ghatowar, AAP leader Atishi Marlena, and many others have kept up their pace in the constituency to accelerate the poll campaign.

New joining and shifting of members from one political party to another are also continuing during the poll campaigns in the Sonitpur Lok Sabha constituency, which includes nine LACs comprising Bihpuria, Biswanath, Gohpur, Bihali, Tezpur, Naduar, Borchala, Rangapara, and Dhekiajuli, having a total of 16,25,364 voters, including 8,10,112 male voters, 8,15,222 female voters, and 30 transgender voters. Various contenders have been addressing crowds, highlighting their respective agendas and promising development and progress for the constituency. While a triangular contest is anticipated among Premal Ganju from the Indian National Congress, Ranjit Dutta from

the Bharatiya Janata Party, and Rishiraj Kaundinya from the Aam Aadmi Party, the competition cannot overlook the presence of five other candidates including BPF's Raju Deuri, Alam Ali from Bahujan Maha Party, Kameswar Swargiary from Voters Party International, the sole female contender of the constituency Rinku Roy from Gana Suraksha Party, and Pradip Bhandari, who is independently vying for attention and support from the electorate.

If we peep through the lens of the last Lok Sabha Election, we find the sharing of votes in the last Lok Sabha poll against BJP were 58.21 percent (Pallab Lochan Das-6,81,437), Indian National Congress (MGVK Bhanu- 4,40,461) 37.62 percent, Independent (Bijay Kumar Tiru- 23,626) 2.02 percent, Voters Party International (Mahendra Orang- 7,950) 0.68 percent, Nationalist Congress Party (Mahendra Bhuyana-6,398) 0.55 percent. Among the nine LAC constituencies, Dhekiajuli contributed 98,152 votes to the winner and 48,315 to the Runners-up making a difference of 49,837 votes, Barchala contributed 71,689 and 51,066 with a difference of 20,623 votes, Tezpur contributed 74,055 and 66,696 with a difference of 7,359 votes, Rangpara contributed 73,992 and 43,332 with a difference of 30,660 votes, Sootea contributed 78,404 and 50,737 with a difference of 27,667 votes, Biswanath contributed 69,017 and 54,686 with a difference of 14,331 votes,

Behali contributed 55,339 and 36,965 with a difference of 18,374 votes, Gohpur contributed 95,447 and 49,264 with a difference of 46,183 votes and Bihpuria contributed 65,342 and 39,400 with a difference of 25,942 votes, respectively.

Historically, the constituency has a great legacy as it had been represented by many distinguished MPs like Kamakhya Prasad Tripathy in 1952 from Indian National Congress, Padmabhusan Bijay Chandra Bhagwati, a known companion of Mahatma Gandhi, writer, and journalist, playing on the Indian National Congress card, had been represented the Tezpur constituency three times in 1957, 1962, and 1967 and played a significant role in the politics of the country. On the other hand, the brother of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Kamala Prasad Agarwala was elected as an MP from Tezpur representing Indian National Congress in 1971. Dr Purna Narayan Singha, a vocal leader from the constituency, was elected as an MP representing the Janata Dal in 1977. The later MPs representing Indian National Congress from the constituency were Bipinpal Das (1984), Swarup Upadhyay (1991), Iswar Prasanna Hazarika (1996), and Monti Kumar Subba (1999, 2004), Assam Gana Parishad candidate Joseph Toppo (2009), BJP candidate Ram Prasad Sarmah (2014), and Pallab Lochan Das (2019).

During the election campaign, BJP's Ranjit Dutta has tried to reach the people by fo-

cus on various government schemes including Lakhpati Baideo, Arunodoi, and other promises regarding job opportunities and good governance. While BJP is relying on the overall development witnessed in the constituency under its regime, the major Oppositions - Congress and AAP are emphasising the forceful implementation of the CAA by the BJP government and the skyrocketing price hike of essential commodities to attract voters. It is to be mentioned here that BJP workers under each booth of the Sonitpur LS seat are trying to reach every household with its election agenda and to hang party flags at every house. Significantly, BJP's candidate Ranjit Dutta expressed full confidence in winning the seat by a significant margin commenting that voters in the constituency see no alternative to the BJP. He carried out his door-to-door campaign at various parts of all the assembly constituencies.

Meanwhile, Congress candidate Premal Ganju has highlighted the skyrocketing price hike of the LPGs, implementation of CAA, petrol, and other basic amenities of the people. He has also expressed confidence in winning the battle. AAP candidate Rishiraj Kaundinya, amidst a busy campaign schedule, is focusing on addressing critical concerns including the problems facing by the netizens due to the Assam-Arunachal border disputes, flood and erosion mitigation, challenges faced by small tea growers, education, healthcare, and ensuring access to water and electricity, etc.

While interacting, various young and first-time voters in the constituency expressed their views with tremendous excitement, showing their eagerness to cast their first vote of life. Among them, a part of the voters expressed their deep concerns over several issues and several others showed their support to the ruling BJP government for their student-friendly initiatives. Overall, the views of first-time voters reflect a complex understanding of governance challenges and a resolute determination to hold leaders accountable for their actions.

Himanta boosts BJP campaign in Patsaku



HT Correspondent
DEMOW, April 10: With the first phase of the Lok Sabha Poll scheduled for April 19 and only a few days left, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attended a 'Bijoy Sankalpa Samabesh' and campaigned in Patsaku High School Playground near Demow under Mahmara Constituency on Wednesday for Topon Kumar Gogoi, BJP candidate for Jorhat Lok Sabha Constituency.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma paid tribute to the statue of Lachit Borpuhan, located in front of the Patsaku High School Playground, and then installed the laikhuta of Patsaku Kendriya Rongga Bihu Sammilan. Jogen Mohan, Mahmara MLA as well as state revenue minister, delivered the welcome speech. During the 'Bijoy Sankalpa Samabesh' program, a couple of Congress workers joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister expressed his grati-

tude for the opportunity to visit Patsaku for the election campaign. He appealed to the people to cast their valuable votes for Topon Kumar Gogoi, BJP candidate for Jorhat Lok Sabha Constituency. He recalled the legacy of Mahabir Lachit Borpuhan and highlighted the peace and prosperity witnessed by Assam under the leadership of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister. CM Sarma emphasised the achievements of the government, including the creation of government jobs and the resolution of land-related issues through schemes like Mission Basundhara. He also promised further initiatives such as the expansion of the Orunodoi scheme and financial assistance for girls' education.

Thowra MLA Sushanta Borgohain, state revenue minister Jogen Mohan, Hiranjit Bireswar Deori, Executive Member of Deori Autonomous Council, along with BJP and AGP leaders were also present at the 'Bijoy Sankalpa Samabesh'.

Governor extends greetings

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 10: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria greeted the people of the state on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. In his message to the people, the Governor said, "I extend my heartiest greetings on this holy occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. It is a 'festival of breaking the fast'. May this special day fortify the spirit of universal brotherhood among us. The celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr is synonymous with discipline and delight, wherein offering of religious devotion and charity to the needy make the observation more special. May the Almighty shower his choicest blessings upon us all on this auspicious day."

Governor Kataria said that the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr is also an occasion for charity wherein people share their happiness with others to strengthen the bond of friendship and unity. "On this occasion, let us all take resolute steps to make society better where everybody cares for the love and compassion of fellow humans," the Governor added.

Yogotsav 2024 showcases vibrant celebration



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 10: Yogesvara Sansthan, in collaboration with the Moraji Desai National Institute of Yoga and the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, hosted the vibrant Yogotsav 2024 at the Serene Yoga Tirtha, Central Gotanagar, Maligaon.

The event commenced with the lighting of the lamp symbolising the illumination of knowledge and well-being. This auspicious occasion was inaugurated by Gaurahari Das, an ISKCON devotee from Denmark, Europe, along with notable figures including Sasanka Sarma, chief public officer of NF Railway, Bhagawat Pritam Dutta, Indian actor, Ashok Saikia, social worker, Yogacharya Subhasish,

founder president of IYC&YTC, and Dr Shantanu Roy Chowdhury, associate professor at Pandu College and academic secretary of IYC&YTC. The program continued with a common yoga protocol hosted by Dibya Jyoti Deka, chairman of Yogesvara Sansthan featuring demonstrations by skilled practitioners including Biman Kumar Nath, Smriti Rekha Saikia, Debapriyam Kar, Suman Rajbongshi, and Aishwarya Rani Padun.

Yoga enthusiasts were treated to captivating yoga demonstrations by prominent institutions and centers such as IIT Guwahati, Krishna Kanta Handique Government Sanskrit College, Indian Yoga Culture & Yoga Therapy Centre, Yoga Sadhana Centre, Purbanchal Yoga Ma-

havidyalaya, and Pratishruti Yoga and Center Darrang & Guwahati.

A segment dedicated to felicitations honoured individuals who have made significant contributions to the field of yoga, including Yogabid Bikash Narayan Sarma, Sunita Agarwala, Suresh Poddar, Anil Sarma, Sikta Dev Kar, Hridayamanda Tamuli Phukan, Bishnu Rai Rajbongshi, Manashree Prakash, Digenta Nath Das, Warsha Jagati, Binay Kumar Tiwari, Rup Jyoti Kar, Anil Hazarika, Bhargab Kalita, Mahitosh Sen, and Dr Arundhuti Kar.

The event also featured certificate distribution for yoga demonstrators and free book distribution on yoga topics, followed by a communal breakfast for all attendees, fostering a sense of unity and well-being among participants.

Yogotsav 2024 served as a platform for individuals to celebrate the timeless practice of yoga and promote holistic well-being, bringing together practitioners, enthusiasts, and experts from various backgrounds to share knowledge and experiences in the pursuit of a healthier and harmonious life. Over 550 individuals participated in this event, contributing to its vibrant atmosphere and enriching exchange of ideas and practices aimed at fostering well-being and unity, said an official press note.

Complaint filed against APHLC organising secretary

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 10: A resident of Hamren has filed a complaint with the returning officer of the 6-Diphu (ST) parliamentary constituency, Diphu, Lok Sabha Election, 2024.

The complaint was filed on Tuesday against Kursing Timung, organising secretary of All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), by Sarim Teron, a resident of Umrenti, Hamren, West Karbi Anglong, accusing him of violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

The complaint states that Kursing Timung has manipulated the Facebook 'profile name' of the chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, to promote the Opposition agenda. The social media post said that the CEM is supporting JI Kathar and urged the people to vote for him.

It is to be mentioned here that KAAC is under the rule of BJP, and JI Kathar is an Independent candidate supported by APHLC, contesting from the 6-Diphu (ST) parliamentary constituency.

Flying squad seizes cash

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, April 10: A flying squad seized ₹ 5,88,000 in cash from a man in Barangabari under Morigaon Police Station on Tuesday night. As per the Election Commission's directives, if a candidate, any agent of the candidate, or a party worker is seized with a vehicle worth more than ₹ 50,000 in cash or carrying drugs, liquor, weapons, or gifts worth more than ₹ 10,000, such items will be confiscated. The public is also required to carry appropriate documents to carry amounts exceeding ₹ 50,000.

ATASU renews call for 'Tai Ahoms' inclusion in Sixth Schedule

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, April 10: Like a number of other organisations, ATASU reiterates its demand for including the Tai Ahoms in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India on the eve of the elections to the Parliament. Basanta Gogoi, president of the student body, addressed a meeting here and said that consecutive governments in the Centre have been depriving the community of their rights and privileges. Even those MPs who have represented the 55 lakh 20 thousand Ahoms so far are shy of speaking about the development of the community. Hence, they have decided not to vote for the candidates nominated by Delhi, Basanta Gogoi said.

Demise of ATASU leader

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, April 10: Hemanga Barua (28), son of Bichitra Barua, a resident of Demow Kusal Path and an ATASU leader, passed away at a hospital in Dibrugarh on Tuesday early morning. Hemanga Barua was suffering from jaundice. The ATASU, Demow Regional Committee deeply condoned his demise and extended their deepest condolences to the bereaved family.

Tezpur's Government College of Teacher Education organises ICT workshop

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, April 10: The special ICT workshop organised by the Government College of Teacher Education (CTE), Tezpur, with a 2-day program concluded on Tuesday. The program, held within its college campus aiming towards the technological advancement of the learners, was inaugurated on Monday by Prof Ajay Kandulna, principal, CTE, Tezpur, in the presence of Surajit Mahanta, professor, CTE, Tezpur, several members of the college, and students.

The program was conducted with the primary objective of broadening the knowledge of the participants, exposing them to the field of tech-

nical breakthroughs, and raising their awareness of the use of ICT resources in the teaching-learning process. Assistant professor and head, department of Computer Science, Kaliabor College, Amit Dutta, was invited to serve as the event's resource person and impart his knowledge to the students. The expert spoke extensively about how ICT resources are used in today's teaching and learning processes. Additionally, he gave a hands-on training session for the participants on a number of fundamental and sophisticated ICT tools essential for modern-day teaching, as well as advanced issues in the fields of software, hardware, and artificial intelligence (AI).

Apart from that, the expert also highlighted the constructive use of social media and discussed means of using them for the diversification of their careers. The feedback collected from the participants revealed their satisfaction and deep interest in participating in any such event to be held in the future.

During the valedictory session, Prof Ajay Kandulna, Principal, lauded the persons concerned for such an initiative in taking forward the students and making them aware of the use of technology in the field of education. He also expressed his keen interest in conducting similar programs in the near future too.

SVEEP programme in Tezpur



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, April 10: Renowned actors Siddhartha Sharma and Deepjyoti Keot, the state election icons for the upcoming general election to Lok Sabha 2024, participated in a Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme organised on Wednesday at Church Field by the SVEEP team of Sonitpur election district. The event, attended by around 600 people, highlighted the importance of voting rights and the significance of exercising them through the quiz programme.

The duo entertained the audi-

ence with Bihu songs centered around voting rights and commended the SVEEP activities conducted by Sonitpur election district. Additionally, a team of dancers from Jyoti Kala Kendra Sangeet Mahavidyalay of Tezpur presented a patriotic dance during the event.

Among others present at the program were district cultural development officer Saurav Pani Phukan, district project manager ASRLM Mahbulul Alom, along with SVEEP team officials and concerned members of Sonitpur election district.

Congress supporters join BJP in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 10: In another setback for the Congress of Karbi Anglong in the run-up to the second phase of parliamentary elections, supporters of Congress from Daur-Amla Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency of West Karbi Anglong and from Diphu town merged with the BJP in a joining ceremony held at the BJP Election Management Committee office Rongnihang here.

Under the leadership of Bijoy Teron, vice president of the West Karbi Anglong Congress Committee (WKADCC), and member Joyram Khorai, seven members from Congress in total have joined the BJP. Additionally, another 45 strong supporters of Congress from Rongnihang polling station under Lumbajong MAC constituency and Chandrasing HS School (RAW) polling stations have also joined the BJP.

The 52 members from Congress joining the BJP were welcomed by

the chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, in the presence of MP Horensing Bey; MLA Dorsing Ronghang; BJP MP candidate Amarsing Tisso, and other leaders of the party.

CEM Ronghang welcomed the newly joined BJP members and said it is the right decision and the right time taken to join the BJP. He emphasised that in BJP, everyone is treated equally and urged the newly joined members to work together wholeheartedly with other party members for the BJP to win the election.

Vice president of WKADCC, Teron, who joined the BJP on Wednesday, said, "Seeing the efficiency, dedication, and tireless effort of the work done by CEM Ronghang, I have joined the BJP. In today's Congress in Karbi Anglong, there is a leadership crisis. Good and efficient leaders are leaving the Congress and joining the BJP."

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 10: In a bid to clear the extra rush of passengers, it has been decided to run two fortnightly summer special trains between Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn. The summer special trains bearing no 06103/06104 (Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn) & 06105/06106 (Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn) together will run for eight trips each in both directions. Also, the Railway has decided to run a one-way special train that will operate between Shri Ganganagar - Guwahati on April 21, 2024, for a single trip. These trains will be run for the benefit of waitlisted passengers of Northeast and North Bengal areas who are in need of traveling towards Southern India. Special train no 06103 (Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh) summer special will leave from Nagercoil Jn at 17:45 hours on April 12, 26, and May 10 & 24, 2024, on Friday to reach Dibrugarh at 20:50 hours on Monday. In the return direction, train no 06104 (Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn) summer special will leave from Dibrugarh at 19:55 hours on April 17, May 1, 15 & 29, 2024, on Wednesday to reach Nagercoil Jn at 21:30 hours on Saturday. These trains will have AC-3 tier, AC-3

NFR announces summer special trains to ease passenger rush



tier economy class, sleeper class, and general second-class accommodation for passengers. Special train no 06105 (Nagercoil Jn - Dibrugarh) summer special will leave from Nagercoil Jn at 17:45 hours on April 19, May 3, 17 & 31, 2024, on Friday to reach Dibrugarh at 20:50 hours on Monday.

In the return direction, train no 06106 (Dibrugarh - Nagercoil Jn) summer special will leave from Dibrugarh at 19:55 hours on April 24, May 8 & 22, and June 5, 2024, on Wednesday to reach Nagercoil Jn at 21:30 hours on Saturday.

These trains will have AC-2 tier, AC-3

tier, sleeper class, and general second-class accommodation for passengers. These trains will travel via Mariani Jn, Dimapur, Lumding Jn, Goalpara Town, Kokrajhar, New Cooch Behar, New Jalpaiguri, Malda Town, Bardhaman Jn, Kharagpur Jn, Bhubaneswar, Vizianagaram Jn, Vijayawada Jn, Nellore, Coimbatore Jn, Ernakulam Town, and Thiruvananthapuram Central, etc. Another, one-way special train no 04717 (Shri Ganganagar - Guwahati) will depart from Shri Ganganagar at 13:55 hours on April 21, 2024 (Sunday) to reach Guwahati at 04:50 hours on April 24, 2024 (Wednesday).

The special train will run via Shri Karanpur, Bikaner, Ratangarh, Jaipur, Agra Cantt, Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Muzaffarpur, Begusarai, Katihar, Kishanganj, New Jalpaiguri, New Bongaigaon, Goalpara Town, and Kamakhya, etc. Waitlisted passengers of other trains traveling on this route can avail the opportunity to travel with comfort. The details of the special trains are notified on the social media platforms of NF Railway. Passengers are requested to verify the details before undertaking their journey.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg
- Samuel Butler

Beleaguered Kejriwal

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal knocked on the Supreme Court's door Wednesday and sought "urgent listening". Senior Advocate AM Singhvi, Kejriwal's counsel, asserted that the Delhi chief minister's arrest was based on an "unreliable document" and "suppressed from us". Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud told Singhvi to "please send an email". The problem is, evidence against Kejriwal is overwhelming and the apex court might be constrained to come to a decision that the "only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past and every sinner has a future". That way, Kejriwal and the future of the current Delhi government will be assured. AAP leaders believe Delhi's future is linked intrinsically to Kejriwal remaining chief minister.

AAP guys are simple, and straightforward. They think linearly. They say they care for Delhi and that Delhi needs the firm hand of Kejriwal's leadership to survive Modi rule. They expected the apex court to act immediately, but it might take longer. AAP spokespersons Reena Gupta, Priyanka Kakkar and AAP cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj cited AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh's release on bail by the Supreme Court as a precedent. They were predicting chief minister Arvind Kejriwal would walk free much like Sanjay Singh did, "just you wait and see." They deny AAP's involvement in the liquor policy scam. "It is the BJP's ghotala, not AAP's. Where is the money trail? AAP is being targeted because the AAP government of Kejriwal built schools and mohalla clinics." But it is not easy to defend Kejriwal. Those fasting and demonstrating in London and Washington DC should see the writing on the wall. Arvind Kejriwal is in judicial custody because of a bunch of damning evidence. There's no evident money trail because the money was in cash and was spent in AAP's Goa election campaign.

But those who received the cash for electioneering in Goa have spoken on sworn affidavits. Kejriwal thought he was smarter with his "Beautiful Mind". Overconfidence did Kejriwal in. He is now on thin ice. Unless the Supreme Court rules in his favour Kejriwal's career is in the hands of the Supreme Court. Even the future of the AAP is in jeopardy. The High Court on April 9 pretty much closed the door on both Kejriwal and Aam Aadmi Party. Whoever was advising Kejriwal was doing it all wrong. Perhaps Kejriwal thought it up all by himself. Even after all this, AAP spokespersons are talking like they're miles better than other parties' spokespersons. Then again, turning the tables is an AAP specialty. Kejriwal had termed all the ED summons "illegal". The Delhi Court on April 9 overruled and ruled them and his arrest "legal". What we now know is that Kejriwal "conspired with others" to change Delhi's excise policy and it is not just an observation, it is in the order. It is like Arvind Kejriwal went for his own execution.

The High Court also mentioned "kickbacks" that went straight into AAP's safe. But hope springs, wasn't Sanjay Singh let off on bail by the Supreme Court? Sanjay Singh is now a believer and he is confident the Supreme Court will view the "facts" laid out by the High Court and rule fairly. Does it look like two courts are fighting each other and will the Supreme Court overturn judge Swarasa Kanta Sharma's ruling once again like it did in the Sanjay Singh case?

For now, the 'Kingpin' of liquor-gate will remain in Tihar till April 15 unless the Supreme Court acts before that and rules in his favour. It looks tough though as the High Court's April 9 verdict had plainly and squarely ruled that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had "conspired with others" and was "actively involved in using proceeds of crime".

Aitikaaf: A sacred journey towards spiritual refinement and divine grace

By: Aubaid Akhoun

In the serene ambience of the last ten days of Ramadan, Muslims worldwide immerse themselves in an ancient and deeply spiritual practice known as Aitikaaf. This period of seclusion and intense devotion offers a unique opportunity for believers to strengthen their faith, seek divine forgiveness, and reconnect with their Creator away from the distractions of daily life.

"The one who secludes himself for worship in the mosque during Ramadan with sincere faith and hope for a reward from Allah, all of his previous sins will be forgiven." - Sahih Bukhari

Origins and significance of Aitikaaf: Aitikaaf is highly recommended, during the last ten days of Ramadan, which are considered the most blessed and spiritually charged days of the month. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to observe Aitikaaf every year during the last ten days of Ramadan, and it is recommended for Muslims to follow beloved Prophet's Sunnah (way of life).

Aitikaaf, rooted in the Islamic tradition, finds its significance in both the Quran and Hadith. It is a time-honoured spiritual retreat aimed at fostering a closer relationship with Allah through dedicated worship, contemplation, and the recitation of the Quran. This practice exemplifies the profound commitment to faith and the pursuit of spiritual purity.

The essence of Aitikaaf: At its core, Aitikaaf is more than just physical seclusion; it is a journey of the heart and soul towards divine presence. By withdrawing from the chaos of worldly engagements, believers embark on a spiritual voyage to purify their hearts, reflect on their lives, and seek the mercy and blessings of Allah. It is an opportunity to transcend earthly desires and attain a state of peace and contentment.

Enhanced spiritual connection: Aitikaaf serves as a conduit for deepening one's connection with Allah. In the tranquility of the mosque, away from worldly distractions, worshippers can engage in sincere supplication, meditate on the meanings of the Quran, and perform additional prayers. This uninterrupted devotion allows for a profound spiritual awakening and reinvigoration of faith.

A means of divine forgive-

ness: One of the most cherished outcomes of Aitikaaf is the opportunity for forgiveness. The Hadiths promise immense rewards for those who dedicate these days to worship with pure intentions, highlighting that even previous sins can be forgiven. This prospect of spiritual cleansing and renewal underscores the mercy and compassion of Allah towards His servants.

The social and community aspect of Aitikaaf: While Aitikaaf is a personal journey, it also reinforces the sense of community and brotherhood among Muslims. Observing Aitikaaf together in a mosque creates a powerful sense of unity and shared purpose, as all participants are seeking by their common goal of being Allah's favor. It is a reminder of the Ummah's collective spiritual aspirations and the strength found in unity.

Updated guidelines and considerations: In observing Aitikaaf, it is essential to approach with sincerity and adheres to its traditional practices while remaining open to contemporary interpretations that respect the essence of this spiritual retreat. Participants should ensure that their seclusion does not hinder their responsibilities towards their families and communities. It's crucial to maintain a balance, ensuring that the spirit of Aitikaaf is upheld without causing undue hardship.

Conclusion: A journey of spiritual renewal- Aitikaaf remains a profound spiritual practice that offers Muslims a pathway to divine closeness, introspection, and spiritual growth. It is a testament to the timeless nature of Islamic worship practices and their relevance in guiding the faithful towards moral and spiritual excellence. As we observe Aitikaaf, let us embrace the opportunity to renew our faith, purify our hearts, and contribute positively to our communities, holding firm to the rope of Allah. By embracing the spirit and practice of Aitikaaf, we not only follow in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) but also partake in a transformative experience that elevates our spirituality and brings us closer to achieving inner peace and divine favor. (The author is a fervent educational columnist, motivational speaker who can be reached at content.akhoun.aubaid@gmail.com)

2024 Lok Sabha polls in Bengal mainly bipolar between TMC and BJP



The ever volatile Lok Sabha poll campaign in West Bengal is in full swing now as the main opposition in the state BJP and the other combine Left Front-Congress have announced most of their candidates. There is a fourth contestant Indian Secular Front (ISF) which broke its alliance with the CPI(M) and decided to fight separately putting its own candidates in most of the seats.

That way in name, there will be a four- cornered contest in Bengal, but in reality, it will be a bipolar contest between the Trinamool Congress and the BJP with the third combination of the Congress-Left making its presence felt in less than ten out of the total of 42 seats.

The BJP is making all efforts to increase its tally in 2024 Lok Sabha elections, it has the advantage of getting political gains from the latest series of corruptions resorted to by the TMC leaders, but the organizational infighting and sloppy response to the TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee's spirited allegations against the central agencies acting as the wing of the BJP, have not been helpful to the party.

It was Dilip Ghosh, former state president of BJP and presently Lok Sabha candidate for Durgapur/Burdwan constituency who was one of the principal architects of BJP bagging 18 constituencies in 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Even after Sukanta Majumdar replaced him as the chief of the state unit, he kept himself in the news with his takes on the functioning of the TMC government during his morning walks.

Things have come to such a pass that a peeved Ghosh after being shifted to Durgapur Burdwan did

not have second thoughts in criticizing Narendra Modi's 2014 Lok Sabha poll promise of depositing a sum of Rs 15 lakhs in the bank account of every Indian subject to certain conditions. Indeed the man who led the saffron camp's triumphant poll campaign five years ago seems to have come at the end of his tether.

Some other victorious Lok Sabha candidates of the BJP are unhappy at the party's interaction with them. Debasree Chowdhury who had won from Raigunj in north Bengal and secured a ministerial berth found herself shunted to Kolkata (South). She does not know the area, the local BJP workers also are unhappy. Sulking Chowdhury does not know what to do.

Pitted against sitting TMC MP Mala Roy in a constituency once chief minister, Mamata Banerjee represented, the BJP candidate seems to have given up without a fight. Indeed the lack of enthusiasm of the BJP activists seems to be manifest in the absence of their processions and graffiti while the TMC campaigns and road shows are on.

Some of the saffron camp insiders are of the view that a combination of caucus and dynastic politics seems to be corroding the party. Underscoring their point, they cite the example of state unit chief

Sukanta Majumdar retaining his old constituency Balurghat while Dibyendu Adhikari who is the brother of leader of the Opposition Subhendu Adhikari contesting from Kanthi which their father Sisir Adhikari who once represented.

Kanthi apart, Tamruk is another constituency of the Adhikari fiefdom in which former judge of Calcutta High Court Abhijit Gangopadhyay is contesting as a BJP nominee. He is pitted against TMC spokesperson, Debangshu Bhattacharya.

In the hurly burly of campaigning, the halo around the BJP candidate of Tamruk when he passed judgments accompanied with stinging observations seems to have somewhat dimmed. Even with years and experience on his side, some of his recent utterances have been "politically unacceptable" unlike his younger political opponent from Trinamool.

Even Darjeeling Lok Sabha constituency, a pocket borough of the saffron camp has party nominee Raju Bista contending with former BJP legislator B P Sharma. Contesting as an independent, Sharma has resigned as the Kurseong MLA claiming his act as protests against a son of the soil not being made a candidate.

The BJP has nominated "Rajmata" Amrita Roy from the once ruling family of Krishnanagar against TMC's Mahua Moitra who has been expelled from the Lok Sabha on "cash for questions" charge.

Moitra has taken an upper hand in the poll campaign having seized upon the role of the BJP nominee's ancestor Krishna Chandra Roy in the conspiracy with the English to defeat Bengal's last sovereign n a w a b Siraj-ud-aula in the battle of Plassey.

If the charges of exploitation of women at Sandeshkhali within Basirhat constituency have shocked the state, the fact remains it is a small part of this sprawling Lok Sabha seat. While the BJP having nominated Rekha Patra one of the complainants is yet to send its activists all over Basirhat even as TMC has fielded old faithful Haji Nurul who won from this seat in the 2009 Lok Sabha polls.

Truth to tell, unlike 2019 and 2021 elections, the wind seems to be missing from the saffron camp's sails. The blame for the unenthusiastic campaigning may be ascribed to the saffron camp not yet going hammer and tongs at the charge of cash for teaching jobs and the horrendous incidents of Sandeshkhali and fewer trips of Prime Minister Modi and Union home minister Shah whose frequency of visits in two previous elections galvanised the state BJP.

The ruling dispensation of Trinamool Congress seems to have emerged from its shell shocked state after charges of cash for teaching jobs, allegation of ration discrepancy

and last and not the least exploitation of some women at Sandeshkhali rained on it. Arguably it is owing to the combined Opposition of BJP, Left and Congress slackening its agitation on these issues in the wake of scathing observations from Calcutta High Court.

In the breather, just as TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee was kicking off the poll campaign, north Bengal was struck by a violent storm. Canny campaigner that she is, the chief minister rushed to the spot overseeing the relief work in a saffron stronghold and earning brownie points by displaying her lack of bias on the election eve.

In constituencies in which Banerjee is yet to address a rally, the poll campaign has been kicked off all the same. Be it Burdwan or Arambag, Diamond Harbour or Kolkata (north), the TMC candidates and their followers have hit the ground running.

Instead of replying to charges against the ruling dispensation, these campaigners are shouting the achievements of the state government from the rooftops. Keeping in mind the large number of women voters, the TMC campaigners are stressing the success of women centric schemes like Lakshmir Bhandar and Kanyasree.

Two defections from the TMC ranks into the saffron camp sent initial tremors which have since been stabilized. Trinamool MP of Barrackpore Arjun Singh is contesting as the BJP candidate after being denied nomination while TMC's Baranagar MLA Tapas Roy joined BJP after resigning and has taken on sitting MP of TMC Sudip Bandopadhyay in North Kolkata constituency.

Not being on the same board with the Left and Congress in INDIA coalition has served TMC well. While it has fielded candidates in all the 42 seats, the Left and Congress are at loggerheads in at least three seats of Purulia, Coochbehar and Ghatal.

CPI(M) state secretary Md Salim is contesting from Murshidabad with Congress cooperation. Given the electoral arithmetic and organisational muscle of Congress, he has a fair chance. Fielding several young faces, the CPI(M) seems to have dispensed with its image of an old fellows' outfit. Even if they fail to win, their presence will rejuvenate the party for the 2026 assembly polls.

Of the Congress strongholds Behrampur and a seat in Malda, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is sitting pretty in the former while Isha Khan Chowdhury is on thin ice in the latter. Apparently not a major player, Indian Secular Front candidates pose a threat of turning out to be "spoilers" by reducing a lead which could have been enlarged into a victory margin especially in minority dominated constituencies.

However, ISF leader Naushad Siddiqui not contesting against TMC national general secretary and the chief minister's nephew Abhishek Banerjee from Diamond Harbour seems to have relieved the latter.

West Bengal is going to polls in seven phases till June 1. The campaign will further pick up and new issues might come up. Senior leaders including the Prime Minister will be visiting the state many times during the polling period. It is to be seen how the last minute swings work and which party gets the benefit. (IPA Service)

Indian Army is cranking up efforts to boost infrastructure, connectivity along LAC in Arunachal

By: Kanchan Basu

Denwa Meyor, 40, and Kunchook Dolma Meyor, 29, are residents of Kibithoo, one of the easternmost villages in Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh. Inhabited by the Meyor tribe, it is located about 7-8 km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the contested line that separates India and China. Their husbands work as porters with the Indian Army, like many men here.

Demwa has two children, a 13-year-old daughter and a four-year-old son. Her daughter is in a hostel in Hauiyung, about 135 km away; as Kibithoo's school runs only until Class 8 and English-medium education is limited in the area.

"We want better education (closer home), and in English," says Denwa. The State-run hostel costs ₹ 60,000-70,000 a year and making the monthly trip to see her daughter is expensive.

Over the past year, the village of about 130 residents has witnessed its Primary Health Centre and residences of the school teachers being upgraded and concrete tracks being laid under the Central government's Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP).

Nijum Manyu, 32, who came to Kibithoo three years ago as a contractual government teacher, says now, there are four teachers, and the school is being renovated, with a new badminton court as well.

Army's demarcation: For administrative purposes, the Army classifies Arunachal as Kameng, derived from the name of the river that flows through the State.

Tawang district is part of the Kameng area, while the remaining part of the State is considered separate and was earlier referred to as the Rest of Arunachal Pradesh (RALP).

Of the 3,488-km-long LAC, 1,346 km falls in the eastern sector, comprising Sikkim and Arunachal. While the Tawang and Kameng areas are under the Army's IV Corps, headquartered at Tezpur, RALP is under the III

Corps, which is based at Dimapur. Kameng and Tawang have seen development in the last 10-15 years, with the remaining areas only now catching up with the kind of infrastructure that China possesses.

The VVP was approved as a Centrally-sponsored scheme on February 15, 2023, with an outlay of ₹ 4,800 crore for the financial years 2022-23 to 2025-26 for the development of 2,967 villages in the Border States of Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and the Union Territory of Ladakh.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah formally launched the VVP in Kibithoo on April 10, 2023. He also inaugurated nine micro hydel projects of the State government and 14 infrastructure projects for the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

"Captured the beautiful landscapes during my visit to Kibithoo, India's first village. Arunachal Pradesh is blessed with immense natural beauty. I urge all to visit Arunachal Pradesh, especially Kibithoo, to be inspired by its history and stunned by nature's marvels," the Union Minister said in a post on social media platform X (formerly Twitter), after his visit, along with a video of the mountainous landscape.

Just a few metres from where Denwa and Kunchook live, is Kibithoo Bakery, staffed with four 20-27-year-old women, who draw a monthly salary of ₹ 7,500. It was established in 2022 by the Army with the help of the Pune-based Aseem Foundation, through funds under Operation Sadbhavna, a social welfare scheme spanning the areas of environment, education, and skillling.

Breaking bread: The bakery sells nankhatai (a type of shortbread), coconut and butter cookies, and cake. With tourists trickling in, the Indian Army has lined up a renovation plan that will see new decor, lighting, and seating, estimated to cost between ₹ 30 lakh and ₹ 35 lakh.

Once there is decent mobile

connectivity expected in the next few months-UPI payments will also be made available, improving ease of payments, officials say.

Civil-military coordination is a prerequisite for the programme in border areas, says Lt. Col. R.S. Manhas, from a unit of the Punjab Regiment deployed in the area.

"Our works through Operation Sadbhavna function as a feeder to the VVP," he says. The Army has allocated ₹ 15 crore under Operation Sadbhavna for developmental projects and outreach activities in the forward areas in III Corps area for 2022-23.

The topography of Arunachal is like a wheel, the flat plateau as the hub with mountains and valleys jutting outwards like spokes. It means for travel between valleys, one must come back to the plains.

Work on the 2,400-km trans-Arunachal highway, which goes along the length of the border, is about 92% complete and the rest is expected to be completed this year (2024), another official says.

The new, almost 1,800 km-long frontier highway, on which work has commenced, will fill a critical void facilitating inter-valley movement. It will start

from Bomdila in Arunachal's west, pass through Nafru, Huri and Monigong villages, and end in Vijaynagar, near the Indo-Myanmar border. The roads cut through eastern Arunachal's thick forests.

Another infrastructure input is the connectivity across the Lohit river, which, for India, starts from Kibithoo and flows to Tezu, and then joins the Brahmaputra in Assam, a distance of almost 350 km, dividing the stretch into east and west banks. Three key bridges across the river, to be ready by next year (2025), can handle 80 tonnes of load.

The Army's artillery guns-M777 Ultra-Light Howitzers and 105mm Indian Field Guns - are deployed close to the LAC.

The M777s, with a range of over 30 km, weigh just four tonnes and can be airlifted under slung on Chinooks, giving significant manoeuvrability in terms of long-range firepower between the valleys.

Over the last few years, a range of new generation equipment ranging from SIG-716 rifles, Negev light machine guns, Sako TRG-42 sniper rifles, tactical drones, sensors and other weapons and equipment have been inducted here.

Reaching out:

POST BAG

Heed the warnings

Sir/Ma'am

As most part of the country braces for a scorching summer, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warns of above-normal temperatures and looming heatwaves in coming months. It's crucial for state governments to heed these warnings, prepare for heatwaves, and address long-term climate change impacts. Sustainable solutions like improved water management and increased green cover are essential.

Additionally, awareness about heatwave preparedness and access to cooling shelters must be prioritised, especially for vulnerable populations. Beyond discomfort, heatwaves pose significant risks to public health, agriculture, and the economy, exacerbating existing health conditions and straining healthcare systems. To tackle these challenges, proactive climate adaptation and mitigation measures are essential, including investment in sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy sources.

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The limits of ice: What a 19th century expedition trapped in sea ice for a year tells us about Antarctica's future

By: Edward Doddridge, Annie Foppert & Stuart Corney

In 1897, the former whaling ship RV Belgica left Antwerp in Belgium and set sail due south. It was the first voyage of what would become known as the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration. It did not go to plan.

After a six-month voyage, they begin encountering sea ice. Several times the ship is caught in the ice for a day or two. A crew member falls overboard and is lost to the icy waters. But the crew presses on, making measurements as they go. Expedition leader Adrien de Gerlache records the process:

At noon we made a deep sea sounding, with a long series of temperatures at various depths. We lowered five hundred and sixty metres of wire, and brought up a cup of blue clay. The temperature at the surface was at the freezing point, and at the bottom slightly warmer.

Their discovery of deep warmer water was important. It's since been named Circumpolar Deep Water. In our time, this water is getting warmer and warmer, as oceans absorb nearly all the extra heat trapped by burning fossil fuels. Antarctica's seemingly impenetrable ice is now melting from beneath.

But in 1898, the ice is strong. On March 4, the crew find themselves unable to move. As the southern winter looms, the ice thickens on the surface of the Bellingshausen Sea, to the west of the Antarctic Peninsula. The RV Belgica is trapped.

A winter of permanent night

The crew were about to become the first people to spend a winter south of the Antarctic Circle, enduring months of constant night. The expedition was largely unprepared for the bitter cold and darkness. But the first mate, a 25-year-old Norwegian named Roald Amundsen, felt differently. He had joined the expedition in search of adventure. He was not disappointed. "We must not doubt spend the winter here, and that is fine with me," he wrote in his journal. Five days in, he writes:

One starts to get familiar with the idea of wintering. The cold has begun sharply. The ice is firm around us and without ridges. This is starting to get interesting.



As time drags on, the crew suffer from scurvy. The expedition leader and his second in command both become so ill they write their wills and retire to bed. Amundsen and the American surgeon Frederick Cook take over leadership.

Of this time, Cook writes in his journal: we jog along day after day, through the unbroken sameness [...] the darkness grows daily a little deeper, and the night soaks hourly a little more colour from our blood

When pale sunlight returns in spring, it's not enough to free the ship. By January 1899, the crew become desperate. Facing a second winter on the ice, they cut a channel through the sea ice and use explosives to widen it. After a month's brutal labour, they free the ship and sail for home.

They had been in the ice for just over a year, and had drifted more than 2,000 kilometres as the sea ice moved with the currents.

A little over a decade later, an expedition led by Amundsen would be the first to reach the South Pole.

And the RV Belgica? The ship spent its later years transporting coal, as demand for fossil fuels grew and grew.

What could assail the ice continent?

The scientists and explorers aboard the Belgica did not waste their time. They meticulously recorded their location, the thickness of the sea ice and the weather. In our time, the data gathered by the scientists and crew of the Belgica is proving invaluable.

Working with the team from the Australian Earth System Simulator, we used data from the Belgica's crew and satellite imagery

to recreate the ship's path and compare it to what's happening now.

If the RV Belgica had been in the same location in the Bellingshausen Sea off the Antarctic Peninsula in 2023, rather than 1897, the story would have been very different.

In the intervening 126 years, we set about changing the Earth's climate in earnest. Fossil fuels gave us vastly more energy. But they came with a sting in the tail – burning them released long-buried carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere, where they magnify the natural greenhouse effect which keeps the Earth from icing over. Almost all of the heat trapped by our activities has gone into the oceans.

In the north, the Arctic sea ice began to disappear from the 1970s onwards, shrinking by about 12% per decade.

Antarctica's sea ice has held out for longer. A ship like the Belgica could have been stuck in sea ice as late as 2015. No longer. The heat is on. In the last eight years, Antarctic sea ice has begun to melt in earnest. In the last three years, the melt has accelerated. Now, new research suggests Antarctic sea ice has undergone an "abrupt transition".

In March 2023, the RV Belgica would have sailed through open waters where pack ice once groaned and cracked. There was almost no sea ice in the Bellingshausen Sea from February to April.

At the beginning of 2024, Australia's marine research vessel, RV Investigator travelled 12,000km from Hobart down to the Antarctic coastline and back to Fremantle. What was shocking was how easy it was.

When sea ice is at its thickest, even modern vessels can struggle to navigate it. But on this voyage, scientists aboard collected vast amounts of data from dark oceans that should have been covered by thick sea ice.

The years of melting
In the ice continent, climate change is beginning to cause long-feared changes.

The Antarctic Peninsula – the long, trailing tail closest to South America where most tourist ships land – is starting to green. Algae is carpeting more snow, while the two native species of flowering plant, Antarctic pearlwort and Antarctic hair grass, are expanding their range on islands near the peninsula.

In the 19th century, going to Antarctica was a perilous journey, pushing the limits of human endurance. But as the sea ice retreats, it becomes easier and easier for tourist cruise ships to make the journey from ports in Argentina and Chile. Tourist numbers have increased tenfold since the 1990s, rising especially fast in the last two years.

The ice continent has long been defended by the fast, cold water currents in its oceans. But now the heat is getting in – through the water, not the air. The Antarctic Circumpolar Current is speeding up and warmer water is getting into these icy seas. Antarctica's sea ice is being eaten from below.

That means the so-called Domesday Glacier is now at risk. The Thwaites Glacier is the size of Great Britain, and holds enough water to singlehandedly raise sea levels 60 centimetres. But the real threat is what's behind Thwaites. The glacier is a plug, blocking much larger ice rivers from reaching the ocean. If it goes, sea level rise will accelerate. Antarctica was once a place where humans found their limits. Enduring endless cold and dark and drifting helplessly in the ice, the crew of the Belgica found theirs. As Frederick Cook wrote, the Antarctic night had: a naked fierceness in the scenes, a boisterous wildness in the storms, a sublimity and silence in the still, cold dayless nights, which were too impressive to be entirely overshadowed by the soul-despairing depression. A little over a century later, we are finding the ice, too, has limits. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Collective action against plastic pollution: A global priority agenda



By: Kiran Bhatt, Aniruddha Inamdar, Sanjay Patashetty and Helmut Brand

Pollution from plastic is a growing concern due to the increased production of disposable and single-use plastics, making them a ubiquitous issue and prompting widespread action plans for mitigation. The rapid growth in the usage of plastics is attributed to their physical properties, such as ease of moulding and impermeable nature to liquids and gases. Global plastic production has grown continuously, doubling from around 230 million tons at the turn of the century to more than 450 million tons just before the COVID-19 outbreak. While the pandemic had short- and long-run impacts on output across sectors due to reduced economic activities, the consequences for plastics differed.

During the pandemic, plastic was increasingly used to produce protective gear and masks. The use of plastics in medical applications was seen as a major contribution towards public safety and the healthcare sector. The face mask mandate by governments across the globe resulted in a spike in the supply of masks.

Further, the demand for polymers rose due to an increase in the production of PPE kits; the demand for polycarbonate for face shields also grew, along with other medical equipment required during the pandemic such as propionate, acetate, PVC or polyethylene terephthalate glycol. In contrast, heavy plastics used for construction and manufacturing decreased, leading to a net reduction in plastic production compared to 2019 levels.

Although plastics proved to be an essential element during the health crisis, their harmful effects, particularly their usage of nano- and micro-plastics have not been ignored. Exposure to microplastics and toxic chemicals through inhalation and skin contact has proven to be carcinogenic, capable of inducing brain damage and being potentially fatal. Humans and animals are exposed to the harmful effects of plastic during its production, consumption, and disposal.

Although the exact amount of plastic ingestion by humans is not clear, according to a report by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), it is estimated that an average human could be ingesting around five grams of plastic weekly. According to a 2019 estimate, plastic pollution-induced diseases have killed 400,000 to one million people in developing countries annually. Thus, there is a need for regulatory intervention to address plastic pollution to protect both human health and the environment.

In this regard, the United Nations Environment Assembly passed a resolution in March 2022 to develop a legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution. It formed the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on plastic pollution, which aims to complete the agreement draft by 2024 that would cover critical aspects of the lifecycles of plastics and design recyclable and reusable products and materials.

Thus, aiming towards plastic diplomacy based on enhanced international cooperation enables countries to access technologies and scientific knowledge-sharing for a collaborative approach

to tackle plastic pollution. According to the recent United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, global plastic pollution can be reduced by 80 percent by 2040, provided countries and companies commit to systemic changes.

While analysing data on plastic waste, per-capita waste generation is found to be greater in high-income countries, but it is found that lower- and middle-income countries have to marine plastic pollution. One of the reasons for this is that these economies have a higher percentage of mismanaged plastic waste.

At the same time, it is important to consider the waste trade wherein a few richer countries export their plastic waste to poorer countries. However, the importing countries are often unaware if these wastes can be recycled. As per a report by Basel Action Network, the waste trade has continued to grow rampantly despite the Basel Convention, which aimed to regulate the movement of hazardous wastes. Of the total disposed off plastic, data shows that less than 10 percent is recycled.

At the same time, the rest has either found its way to landfills or been released into the environment, particularly water bodies. This is a cause for concern due to its potential to alter natural processes and habitats, reducing the ecosystem's ability to adapt to climate change.

In global politics, the issue of climate change has been growing to be perceived as a security challenge. The increased involvement and discussions in the United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Security Council, G7, and G20 summits prove this.

The issues of climate change and plastic pollution have emerged as non-traditional security issues, providing an avenue for research using various theoretical and conceptual frameworks such as the Green Theory in International Relations (IR), Constructivism theory, and the Securitization theory of the Copenhagen School. Barry Buzan has emphasised environmental security as an essential support system for humans. The securitisation of the issue has catalysed the state to respond effectively, by making it an issue of high politics where political leaders become accountable and responsible for negotiating for human and health security.

With plastic pollution being a major threat to health and climate change, it necessitates a multilevel and collective action that can navigate through the geopolitical complexity of the issue. Issues such as microplastics in oceans are global and would require the consensus of diverse stakeholders along with the active participation of international organisations with the support of subnational entities.

The concern now is if and how the existing intellectual and structural international architecture can cooperate to address global issues like plastic pollution. There is a need for a tailored package—a mixture of policy interventions and legislative instruments, which clearly define the goals and commitments of the stakeholders, individuals, corporations, and states.

Therefore, the meetings, such as the second session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee between 29 May and 2 June 2023, play a vital role in developing regulatory instruments

while a continuum of existing norms are enabled with a degree of coercion to ensure compliance.

It is imperative to formulate interventions that promote behavioural changes to curb plastic pollution by encouraging citizens to conduct themselves responsibly by reusing, recycling, reorienting, and diversifying as promoted by the UNEP. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns by educating people about the effects of plastic pollution and incentivising responsible plastic-waste disposal.

On the policy front, local governments should increase investment in waste management infrastructure to ensure safe disposal and avoid plastic leakage. This basic initiative is critical in mitigating health and environmental hazards by reducing mismanaged plastics.

Roads, cycling lanes, and walking pathways using plastic waste have proved to perform better than traditionally asphalted roads. India, which has been involved in building plastic roads, can promote this efficient method of plastic waste management. Several countries have already implemented Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to curb plastic pollution as it decreases the cost associated with the disposal of packaging and waste material by the producers.

Under the EPR, charge for collecting and recycling plastic materials are levied on companies, incentivising them to reduce the usage of plastic and shift towards other environment-friendly materials. The EPR's implementation across Europe has contributed towards improved waste collection and increased recycling rates. In France, it helped in reducing public spending on waste management, as approximately 15 percent of the cost was collected by EPR schemes.

Companies could be incentivised to adhere to the EPR norms by tagging Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) ratings with compliance scores. ESG reporting has grown to become one of the crucial indicators for businesses to prove their commitment towards sustainability by providing intangible measures to manage environmental and social impacts.

Therefore, mandating companies on their compliance with EPR during ESG reporting might lead them to take more proactive actions towards reducing their plastic footprints. Viewing climate change through the lens of securitisation helps to focus on the associated risks such as triggering cross-boundary conflicts, causing instability to businesses, and affecting the livelihoods of vulnerable groups. Plastic pollution has far-reaching social and economic implications around the world. This year's World Environment Day, which also marks its 50th anniversary, has committed to focusing on "Solutions to Plastic Pollution".

It is a good platform for steering individuals, communities, corporations, and governments towards the shared vision of reducing plastic production, consumption, and waste mismanagement. The visible threat of plastic pollution calls for continuous deliberation to work towards gathering more data on the prevalence and effects of the presence of such materials in the long run, which could help in formulating adequate, efficient, and robust regulations. (Courtesy: ORF)

Climate change is driving up food inflation globally – with catastrophic health effects



By: Jessica Boxall & Michael Head

Climate change, and specifically rising temperatures, may cause food prices to increase by 3.2% per year, according to a new study by researchers in Germany. As climate change continues to worsen, this price inflation will mean more and more people around the world don't have a varied and healthy diet, or simply don't have enough food.

The new analysis shows that global warming could cause food price inflation to increase by between 0.9 and 3.2 percentage points per year by 2035. The same warming will cause a smaller rise in overall inflation (between 0.3 and 1.2 percentage points), so a greater proportion of household income would need to be spent on buying food.

This effect will be felt worldwide, by high and low-income countries alike, but nowhere more

so than in the global south. As with various other consequences of climate change, African countries will be worst affected despite contributing little to its causes.

Our own research on food security in Ghana, west Africa, gives a sense of what price inflation might mean in practice. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change describes west Africa as a "hotspot" of climate change, with models predicting extreme rising temperatures and reduced rainfall. With more than half of the population being directly dependent on rain-fed agriculture, Ghana is particularly vulnerable to climate change.

We recently carried out a study in Mion, a rural district in the north of the country. We spoke to almost 400 people, and very single one of them told us they had experienced some level of food insecurity in the previous 12 months. Some 99% said climate change was

at least partly to blame.

Additionally, 62% were moderately or severely food insecure, with 26% experiencing severe food insecurity (going without food for an entire day). These percentages are much worse than Ghana's national averages (39% and 6% respectively), but similar to some of the poorest countries in west Africa such as Togo, Burkina Faso and Benin.

We also carried out a similar study among refugees from neighbouring Burkina Faso who fled across the border to the upper east region of Ghana. Again, 100% had experienced food insecurity.

Mion isn't suffering from a sudden famine, and nothing particularly unusual has happened to cause this food insecurity. This situation is considered to be a "normal phenomenon" due to the effects of climate change.

Shifting seasons, pests and diseases

The first is that the same climate change ef-

fects that are causing the inflation are already making food harder to get hold of. For instance, higher temperatures can cause long-established and predictable farming seasons to shift and so may hinder crop production.

Other consequences can include more pest and disease outbreaks that deplete livestock and food reserves, and heat stress to already-poor roads which makes it harder to access rural communities.

All of these factors push prices higher and reduce the purchasing power of affected households. The drivers of food inflation are already worsening food insecurity.

The second part of this problem is the rise in inflation itself. A 3% annual price increase would mean households are less able to purchase what they need.

They would likely need to compromise on quality or perhaps even culturally important foods. This in turn makes people more vulnerable to disease and other health issues. Malnutrition is the leading cause of immunodeficiency globally.

In Ghana, we found that those who reported more knowledge of climate change were more likely to be food secure. This is despite few people having any formal education. This is evidence that affected popu-

lations are very aware of the changing temperatures and unpredictability of the climate, and are perhaps engaging in proactive mitigation practices.

Those without any schooling are more likely to engage in a climate-sensitive occupations such as farming, and so would be more immediately exposed. Teaching people about climate change might provide some capacity to adapt to it, and therefore increase food security.

Alterations in the climate are a hunger-risk multiplier for those populations with entrenched vulnerability. In light of this, 134 countries at COP28 signed a declaration to incorporate food systems into their climate action, to ensure everyone has enough to eat in light of climate change.

The researchers behind the new study suggest that reducing greenhouse gas emissions could limit any impacts on the global economy. We also suggest that diversifying economies would serve as some protection for those communities reliant on agriculture for both their food and income.

Government intervention could also ensure financial protection and nutritional aid for those vulnerable to becoming trapped in the poverty cycle by inflation and diminished accessibility to food. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Khamenei spoke at a prayer ceremony celebrating the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, saying the airstrike was "wrongdoing" and akin to an attack on Iranian territory

Israel threatens to strike Iran directly if Iran launches attack from its territory

JERUSALEM, April 10: Israel's foreign minister threatened on Wednesday that its country's forces would strike Iran directly if the Islamic Republic launched an attack from its territory against Israel, as tensions between the rival powers flare following the killings of Iranian generals in a blast at the Iranian consulate in Syria.

"If Iran attacks from its territory, Israel will respond and attack in Iran," Israel Katz said in a post on X in both Farsi and Hebrew. The remarks came after Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reiterated early on Wednesday a promise to retaliate against Israel over the attack on its consulate in Damascus earlier this month.

Tehran holds Israel responsible for the strike

that leveled the building, killing 12 people. Israel has not acknowledged its involvement, though it has been bracing for an Iranian response to the attack, a significant escalation in their long-running shadow war.

Khamenei spoke at a prayer ceremony celebrating the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, saying the airstrike was "wrongdoing" and akin to an attack on Iranian territory.

"When they attacked our consulate area, it was like they attacked our territory," Khamenei said, in remarks broadcast by Iranian state TV. "The evil regime must be punished, and it will be punished."

Neither Katz nor the Ayatollah elaborated on the way they would retaliate. Among 12 killed in the



blast on Apr. 1 were seven Iranian Revolutionary Guard members, four Syrians and a Hezbollah militia member.

Khamenei also criticized the West, particularly the U.S. and Britain, for supporting Israel in its war against Hamas in Gaza.

"It was expected they (would) prevent (Israel) in this disaster. They did not. They did not fulfil their

duties, the Western governments," he said.

Iran supports anti-Israeli militant groups like Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah. It does not recognize Israel.

War erupted on October 7 when Hamas led a devastating cross-border attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people, amid numerous atrocities. Israel responded with a military campaign to destroy

Hamas and free the 253 hostages who were abducted during the attack and taken to Gaza.

According to the source, Iran assessed that Israel was trying to extract itself from complications in the Gaza campaign by trying to pull the US into a direct conflict with Tehran. Iran asked the US not to get involved if it responded against Israel while the US called on Tehran to not exact its revenge by attacking US targets in the region, the source said.

Iran is seeking conditions aimed at "limiting the expansion of the scope of the war in the region" and to keep the US out of the conflict, said the source. So far, there has been no response to the proposal, the source said. (AP)

Biden says Netanyahu's approach to the war is a mistake, deepening a rift between the two allies

TEL AVIV, April 10: US President Joe Biden called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza a mistake and called for his government to flood Gaza with aid, ramping up pressure on Israel to reach a cease-fire and widening a rift between the two staunch allies that has worsened as the war has dragged on.

Biden has been an outspoken supporter of Israel's war against Hamas since the militant group launched a deadly assault on October 7. But in recent weeks his patience with Netanyahu has appeared to be waning and his administration has taken a more stern line with Israel, rattling the countries' decades-old alliance and deepening Israel's international isolation over the war.

The most serious disagreement has been over Israel's plans for an offensive in the southernmost Gaza city of Rafah and the rift has spiraled since, worsened by an Israeli airstrike last week on an aid convoy, which killed seven workers with the food charity World Central Kitchen (WCK), most of them foreigners.

Israel said the deaths were unintentional but Biden was outraged.

Biden's comments, made in an interview that aired late Tuesday after being recorded two days after the WCK strike, highlight the differences between Israel and the US over humanitarian aid to people in Gaza, where a monthlong war has led to warnings of imminent famine.

"What he's doing is a mistake. I don't agree with his approach," Biden told Spanish-language broadcaster Univision.

He was responding to being asked if Netanyahu is prioritizing his political survival over the national interest.

Biden said Israel should agree to a cease-fire, flood beleaguered Gaza with aid for the next six to eight weeks and allow other countries in the region to help distribute the aid. "It should be done now," he said.

Hunger in Gaza is overshadowing the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, a typically joyous festival during which families celebrate the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Israel halted aid deliveries to Gaza in the early days of the war, but under US pressure has slowly increased trucks allowed to enter the territory. Still, aid groups have complained that supplies are not reaching desperate people quickly enough, blaming Israeli restrictions, and countries have attempted other ways to deliver them including air drops and by sea.

Israel says it has steadily ramped up aid throughout the war, opening up more entry points for trucks to enter and to reach especially hard-hit areas like northern Gaza, an early target of Israel's in the war.

Israel blames aid groups for being too slow to deliver aid once it's inside Gaza. Those groups say logistical issues and the precarious security situation — underscored



by the WCK strike — complicate aid deliveries.

Israel and Hamas are currently engaged in talks meant to bring about a cease-fire in exchange for the release of hostages captured by Hamas and others who stormed across the border on October 7. But the sides remain far apart on key issues, including the return of Palestinians to hard-hit northern Gaza.

Netanyahu has vowed to achieve "total victory" in the war, pledging to destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities to prevent a repeat of the October 7 attacks and to return the hostages. He says that victory must include an offensive in Rafah, which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold, but more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people are currently seeking shelter there.

Six months into the war, Israel is growing ever more isolated, with even its closest partner increasingly vocal about its discontent in the war's direction and longtime trading partners like Turkey taking potentially painful economic steps to express dismay.

Netanyahu is under pressure to decide on a postwar vision for Gaza but critics say he is delaying because he doesn't want to anger his ultranationalist governing partners, who support resettling the Gaza Strip, which Israel withdrew from in 2005 and an idea Netanyahu has ruled out.

Israel launched the war in response to Hamas' cross-border assault, where militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took roughly 250 people hostage, according to Israeli authorities.

More than 33,200 Palestinians have been killed in the relentless fighting, according to Gaza's Health Ministry which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says most of the dead are women and children. Israel says it has killed some 12,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has ignited a humanitarian catastrophe. Most of the territory's population has been displaced and with vast swaths of Gaza's urban landscape levelled in the fighting, many areas are uninhabitable. (AP)

Russia's second attempt to launch a heavy-lift rocket from Far East is aborted

MOSCOW, April 10: Russia's second attempt to test-launch a new heavy-lift rocket from its Far Eastern space complex was aborted on Wednesday. The launch of the Angara-A5 rocket from the Vostochny spaceport was cancelled about two minutes before its planned time of 0900 GMT. State news agency RIA-Novosti said the cause was failure of the pressurization system of the oxidizer tank of the central block of the rocket.

National space agency Roscosmos said another launch attempt will be postponed for at least one day. The first attempt on Tuesday also failed because the automatic safety system registered a flaw in the oxidizer tank pressurization system, said Roscosmos head Yuri Borisov.

The launch was to be the fourth for the Angara-A5, a heavy-lift version of the new Angara family of rockets that has been developed to replace the Soviet-designed Proton rockets. The previous three launches were carried out from the Plesetsk launchpad in northwestern Russia.

After the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia leased the Baikonur Cosmodrome from Kazakhstan and continued to use it for most of its space launches. The agreement with Kazakhstan allows Russia to keep leasing Baikonur for \$115 million a year through 2050.

While Roscosmos has continued to rely on Baikonur, Russian authorities have developed Vostochny as the facility of choice for Angara launches.

The construction of the new spaceport has dragged on for longer than planned and it has seen only limited use so far. (AP)

Chinese President Xi meets former Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou on pro-unification visit

BEIJING, April 10: Chinese President Xi Jinping met with former Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou in Beijing on Wednesday in a bid to promote unification between the sides that separated amid civil war in 1949.

Ma left office almost two decades ago and was largely excluded from the opposition Nationalist Party's failed campaign to retake the presidency in January, a concession to the electorate's strong opposition to political unification with China and politicians seen as willing to compromise Taiwan's security.

He follows a long line of politicians from the Nationalists, also known as the KMT, who have been invited to China by its authoritarian one-party government and given VIP treatment on visits around the country.

China claims Taiwan as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary. Beijing sends navy ships and warplanes around the island on a daily basis in hopes of wearing down Taiwan's defenses and intimidating the population.

"The people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are all Chinese. There is no dispute that cannot be resolved, there is no problem that cannot be discussed, and no force can separate us," Xi told Ma.

"Differences in systems can-



not change the fact that both sides of the Taiwan Straits belong to the same country and nation," he added. Ma responded that a new war between the sides would be "an unbearable burden for the Chinese nation."

"The Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait will definitely have enough wisdom to handle cross-strait disputes peacefully and avoid conflicts," Ma said.

Independence leaning president-elect Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party won the January election handily and his vice president-elect Bi-khim Hsiao has been visiting nations friendly to Taiwan in Europe and elsewhere ahead of taking office.

Ma's 11-day trip, ostensibly at the head of a student delegation, underlines continued interactions in education, business and culture despite Beijing's threat to use military force against the

self-governing island democracy to achieve unification.

Toward the end of his second term in 2015, Ma held a historic meeting with Xi in Singapore, which has close contacts with both sides.

The meeting — the first between the leaders of China and Taiwan in more than half a century — produced few tangible outcomes, and Ma's Nationalist Party lost the next presidential election to Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP.

Lai Ching-te, currently vice president, is despised by Beijing for his opposition to unification. The Nationalists recovered a narrow majority in the legislature but their influence on foreign policy and other national issues remains limited.

Taiwan has been boosting military relations with allies such as the U.S. and Japan while maintaining close economic ties with the Chinese mainland. (AP)

Exit polls suggest a big win by SKorea's liberal opposition parties in parliamentary election

SEOUL, April 10: South Korea's liberal opposition parties were expected to win a landslide victory in Wednesday's parliamentary election, initial exit polls suggested, a result that if confirmed would make conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol a lame duck for his remaining three years in office.

The joint exit polls by South Korea's three major TV stations — KBS, MBC and SBS — showed the main opposition Democratic Party and its satellite party were forecast to win combined 178-197 seats in the 300-member National Assembly. They expected another liberal opposition party to win 12-14 seats.

The polls suggested the ruling People Power Party and its satellite party were projected to win 85-105 seats. Wednesday's election was widely seen as a mid-term confidence vote on President Yoon, a former top prosecutor who took office in 2022 for a single five-year term. He has been grappling with low approval ratings and a liberal opposition-controlled parliament that has limited his major policy platforms.

Regardless of the results, Yoon will stay in power, but if his party fails to regain a parliamentary majority it could set back Yoon's agenda and further intensify conservative-liberal fighting.

"What would matter to the People Power Party is whether it can become the biggest party or the second biggest party," said Choi



Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership. "If his party loses the election, Yoon will find it difficult to move forward even a single step on state affairs."

Of the 300 seats, 254 will be elected through direct votes in local districts, and the other 46 to the parties according to their proportion of the vote. Election observers say candidates in about 50 to 55 local districts are in neck-and-neck races.

In the months ahead of the election, the conservatives supporting Yoon and their liberal rivals exchanged toxic rhetoric and mudslinging. The conservative-liberal division deepened during the 2022 presidential election, during which Yoon and his main rival Lee Jae-myung spent months demonizing each other. Yoon eventually beat Lee by the narrowest margin ever for a Korean presidential candidate.

Lee, now the chairman of the opposition Democratic Party, is a harsh critic of Yoon's policies and is eyeing another presidential bid. He faces an array of corruption in-

vestigations that he argues are politically motivated and pushed by Yoon's government.

There was a brief soul-searching about South Korea's divisive politics after Lee was stabbed in the neck in January by a man who, according to police, tried to kill Lee to prevent him from becoming president. But as the parliamentary election approached, the rival parties began churning out abusive rhetoric and crude insults against each other.

Ruling party leader Han Dong-hoon called Lee "a criminal" and labeled his past comments as "trash." Lee's party spokesperson described Han's mouth as a "trash bin." Han accused Lee of using a sexist remark against a female ruling party candidate.

During one of his final campaign events on Tuesday, Han argued that giving too many seats to Lee's Democratic Party will throw South Korea into political turmoil. "Tomorrow's 12 hours will determine whether the Republic of Korea will plunge into shocking chaos and despair or overcome a crisis," Han said, using South Korea's official name.

Speaking ahead of his corruption trial at a Seoul court, Lee urged voters to punish the Yoon government, which he said has used prosecutors to suppress opponents. "I earnestly ask you to hand out your judgement on a government that betrays and goes against the people," Lee said. (AP)

EU lawmakers will decide on migration law overhaul, hoping to deprive the far-right of votes

BRUSSELS, April 10: Lawmakers are to vote later on Wednesday on a major revamp of the European Union's migration laws, aiming to end years of division over how to manage the entry of thousands of people without authorization and deprive the far-right of a vote-winning campaign issue ahead of June elections.

Members of the European Parliament will vote on 10 reform topics that make up the Pact on Migration and Asylum. The regulations and policies lay out who should take responsibility for migrants when they arrive and whether other EU member states should be obliged to help. The plan was drawn up after 1.3 million people, mostly those fleeing war in Syria and Iraq, sought refuge in Europe in 2015. The 27-nation bloc's asylum system collapsed, reception centers were overwhelmed in Greece and Italy, and countries further north built barriers to stop people entering.

But few say they're happy with the new policy response to one of Europe's biggest political crises, and even the lawmakers who drafted parts of the new regulations are not willing to support the entire reform package. "I'm not going to open a bottle of champagne after this," Dutch lawmaker Sophie 't Veld, who drew up the assembly's position on migrant reception conditions, told reporters on the eve of the plenary session in Brussels. She plans to abstain from some of the 10 votes. In 't Veld described the pact as "the bare minimum" in terms of a policy response, but she does not want to torpedo it by voting against. "We will not have another opportunity to come to an agreement," she

said. Swedish parliamentarian Malin Bjork, who worked on refugee resettlement, said that the pact does not respond to "any of the questions it was set to solve." She said the reform package "undermines the individual right to seek asylum" in Europe because it would build on plans that some EU countries already have to process migrants abroad. Italy has concluded one such deal with Albania.

"We cannot have a situation where people systematically, in their thousands, die on their way seeking protection and refuge in Europe. This doesn't do anything about that," Bjork told reporters.

Spanish lawmaker Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar agreed he wasn't satisfied by the negotiations, but said they were an improvement to existing policies. The lawmaker did not say if he might vote against part of the new plan. The new rules include controversial measures: Facial images and fingerprints could be taken from children from the age of 6, and people may be detained during screening. Fast-track deportation could be used on those not permitted to stay.

"The pact will lead to more detention and de facto detention at the EU's external borders, including for families with children, which is in clear violation of international law," said Marta Goncalo from Picum, a network of migrant rights defense organizations.

It remains unclear what will happen to the reform package if lawmakers reject parts of it. The EU's 27 member states would need to endorse the parliamentary vote before the regulations could start to enter force. That could happen by the end of the month. (AP)

Muslims joined communal prayers shoulder-to-shoulder on the streets and inside mosques

Muslims worldwide celebrate Eid al-Fitr, but the festivities are marred by the war in Gaza

JAKARTA, April 10: Muslims around the world celebrated the Eid al-Fitr holiday on Wednesday, marking the end of the Islamic holy month with family reunions, new clothes and sweet treats.

But the celebrations were overshadowed by the worsening humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and Israel's expected offensive in the city of Rafah despite efforts from its Western allies to halt the fighting after six months of war.

In Istanbul, thousands of worshippers gathered at the Aya Sofya Mosque for morning Eid prayers, some carrying Palestinian flags and chanting slogans in support of people in Gaza.

Many laid their prayer rugs in the square in front of the former Byzantine cathedral, which was re-converted to a mosque four years ago, as space inside quickly filled.

In a holiday message, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sent support to Gaza, which he called a "bleeding wound on the conscience of humanity."

"I hope that the Eid will lead to peace, tranquility and wellbeing for our country, our nation, the Islamic world and all humanity," he added.

The war in Gaza was also the focus of prayers at the Rahma Mosque in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi.

"We should not forget our brothers and sisters in Palestine," Imam Abdulrahman Musa said. "They have been subjected to unjustified aggression and a lot of violence (as) the world is watching in silence."

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, nearly three-quarters of the population were traveling for the annual homecoming known locally as "mudik" that is always welcomed with excitement.

"Mudik is not just an annual ritual or tradition for us," said civil servant Ridho Alfian, who lives in the Jakarta area and was traveling to Lampung province at the southern tip of Sumatra island.

"This is a right moment to reconnect, like recharging energy that has been drained almost a year away from home."

Before the Eid al-Fitr holiday, markets teemed with shoppers buying clothes, shoes, cookies and sweets. People poured out of major cities to return to villages to celebrate the holiday with their loved ones. Flights were overbooked and anxious relatives weighed down with boxes of gifts formed long lines at bus and train stations for the journey.

For Arini Dewi, Eid al-Fitr is a day of victory from economic difficulties during Ramadan. "I'm happy in celebrating Eid holiday despite the surge of food prices," said the mother of two.

Former Vice President Jusuf Kalla was among Jakarta residents offering prayers at the Al Azhar mosque yard. "Let's celebrate Eid al-Fitr as a day of victory from many difficulties... of course there are many social problems during fasting month of Ramadan, but we can overcome it with faith and piety," Kalla said.

On the eve of Eid al-Fitr, Jakarta residents set off firecrack-



ers on streets that were mostly empty after city residents traveled home.

On Wednesday morning, Muslims joined communal prayers shoulder-to-shoulder on the streets and inside mosques. Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia, was flooded with devotees offering morning prayers.

Preachers in their sermons called on people to pray for Muslims in Gaza who were suffering after six months of war.

"This is the time for Muslims and non-Muslims to show humanitarian solidarity, because the conflict in Gaza is not a religious war, but a humanitarian problem," said Jimly Asshiddiqie, who chairs the advisory board of the Indonesian Mosque Council.

In Pakistan, authorities deployed more than 100,000 police and paramilitary forces to maintain security at mosques and marketplaces. People were shopping as usual Tuesday, with women buying bangles, jewelry and clothes for themselves and their children.

In Malaysia, ethnic Malay

Muslims performed morning prayers at mosques nationwide just weeks after socks printed with the word "Allah" at a convenience store chain sparked a furor. Many found it offensive to associate the word with feet or for it to be used inappropriately.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim called for unity and reconciliation in his message on the eve of Eid, saying no groups should be sidelined based on religion or any other reason.

"We must be firm, resolute and unwavering in our commitment to foster values and build a dignified nation," he said. "However, let us not take this as a license or opportunity to insult, undermine, or damage the cultural practices and way of life of others."

The owners of the KK Mart chain and representatives from one of its suppliers were charged with offending the religious feelings of Muslims. KK Mart Group said the supplier sent items the company had not agreed to stock. The supply company founder apologized for being careless in the inspection of the imported items. (AP)

Home voting for elderly begins in West Tripura Lok Sabha seat



AGARTALA, April 10: Home voting for people above 85 years and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) started for residents of Tripura West Parliamentary constituency and Ramnagar assembly seat on Wednesday, an official said.

Among the 14.61 lakh eligible voters in Tripura West, 4,581 PwDs and elderly individuals have requested home voting assistance.

Ramnagar assembly seat falls under Tripura West Lok Sabha seat

CEO Puneet Agarwal emphasised the Election Commission's commitment to inclusive elections, highlighting the availability of home voting for those unable to visit polling stations.

Under the facility, a polling party will visit the homes of eligible voters to facilitate their voting rights. It will be available for two days, April 10 and 12.

Home voting in Tripura East Lok Sabha constituency will be held on April 17 and 18 for 4,720 elderly voters and PwDs. (PTI)

Nagaland CEO issues show cause notice to Dy CM Patton

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 10: Nagaland chief electoral officer (CEO) Vysan R on Tuesday issued a show-cause notice to deputy chief minister Y Patton relating to his recent speech at an election rally in Wokha.

The CEO issued the notice after viewing a video of Patton, star campaigner for the BJP in the Lok Sabha for the Nagaland parliamentary constituency, on social media platform, Facebook, posted by the account, Naga Hills, at around 7 am on Apr 7.

He said as per report received from the Wokha district election officer and deputy commissioner, the said video is part of the campaign speech made by Patton in favour of the People's Democratic Alliance (PDA)

consensus candidate Dr Chumben Murry of the National Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) during the meeting at LTC conference hall in Wokha town at 1 pm on April 5.

The notice said in the said video, Patton is seen to be inciting village functionaries such as council chairmen, gaon buras (village heads) and polling agents to cast multiple votes that interfere with the free exercise of electoral rights of the villagers.

It said such interference is violative of Section 171C of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and that impersonation is an offence under Section 171D of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. The CEO asked him to show cause at the earliest why action should not be taken against him.

MPCC demands whitepaper on accusation of video circulation

IMPHAL, April 10: Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) recently demanded a whitepaper on the accusation that the Congress circulated the video of parading two Kuki women naked by a mob during the initial stage of the ethnic violence in the state last year.

In a recent election rally of the BJP candidate in the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency, chief minister Biren Singh, who also holds the Home portfolio, accused the Congress of circulating the video to tarnish Prime Minister Narendra Modi's image.

Biren further alleged that the video was strategically circulated just before the parliamentary session last June.

Strongly reacting to this allegation, MPCC president K Meghachandra today demanded that the chief minister must produce a whitepaper regarding the viral video.

"It is very unfortunate that the chief minister brought up the issue once again to use as election propaganda for the BJP," the MPCC president said. Meghachandra further said that being in-charge of the Home department which the intelligence wing is also a part of, the chief minister must put the detailed report of the viral video in the public domain. (NNN)

LITTLE JOYS OF RELIEF CAMPS

Over 180 babies born in shelters for displaced in Manipur

IMPHAL/CHURACHANDPUR, April 10: Cradling her newborn, Hatneu says she has named her baby, born in a shelter for the displaced in Manipur, Ngantheoi which means shining light.

Amid the trauma of 11 months of conflict, violence and continuing uncertainty, for nearly 200 displaced women like Hatneu, who is from the Kuki tribe, who have taken shelter in different relief camps across the state, the period is unforgettable for a different reason -- they welcomed their newborns.

"When I held my twins in my arms, all my miseries melted away," a 26-year-old woman at a relief camp in Kakching district told PTI, requesting not to be identified or photographed.

Her twin boys are now four months old. "When they grow up, I will tell them these stories."

"This is an unforgettable period for me for a different reason and I want to remember it that way years later. I don't want any memory of this period to haunt my children when they grow up," she said.

When she landed at the relief camp, she knew it was going to be very tough. "Pregnancy is a period when we are suggested to take extra care of ourselves, not do any heavy-lifting, not take stress, and eat well. However, for me this period was all about survival."

The hill state has witnessed sporadic, sometimes intense, ethnic clashes since May 3 last year between the majority Meitei community and Kukis, resulting in loss of over 200 lives. While Meiteis population is concentrated in Imphal city, Kukis have shifted to the hills.



The violence displaced thousands of people, with officials saying more than 50,000 people are living in camps following the unrest. Lu Lamva Ngahjemkim, a Kuki-zo woman, was eight-month pregnant when the clashes broke out in May 2023. She and her family landed at a relief camp in Churachandpur, the epicentre of the violence then.

A month later, she gave birth to her daughter Christy who became the "silver lining in these grim times".

"We were having dinner at home when the clashes broke out and everybody started rushing out... We had to hide in the nearby hills for several hours until the forces rescued us. For once, it felt our world was crashing down... bit by bit we had built our house and livelihood and within a day all was gone," she told PTI.

Nine-month-old Christy has now begun

crawling and is a centre of attention at the relief camp.

PTI visited six relief camps in the Meitei-dominated Imphal Valley and Kuki-zo dominated Churachandpur district.

Among the women who are counting their blessings in form of their newborns at the relief camps are four who gave birth to twins. Hatneu, who has found shelter at a different camp in Churachandpur, used to run a bamboo goods shop in Imphal valley earlier. She is in an alien set up, but is loving her motherhood.

"I am a Kuki but I have always lived in the Valley only. Now we were forced to relocate here due to circumstances. Last month I gave birth to my baby at a nearby health facility. I have named my baby girl -- Ngantheoi which means shining light," she said.

Hatneu said at least 15 babies have been born in that camp.

INDIA bloc an arrogant alliance full of corrupt leaders: Nadda

'This is a coalition that only thinks of vested interests instead of working for the welfare of the people'

DOIMUKH (ARUNACHAL PRADESH), April 10: Taking a dig at the opposition INDIA bloc, BJP president J P Nadda on Wednesday termed it a "ghamandiya (arrogant) alliance full of corrupt leaders".

Nadda, who earlier in the day released the BJP's manifesto for the April 19 simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh, also alleged that the opposition alliance was giving refuge to corrupt leaders.

Addressing an election rally here, Nadda said, "The INDIA bloc is an alliance of arrogant people who indulge in corruption and dynasty politics. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi is against corruption, many of the opposition grouping's leaders are involved in scams."

The BJP chief claimed that Modi has taken action against corruption, and the PM's fight against it would intensify.

On one hand, the prime minister is waging a war against corruption, and on the other, the opposition alliance is protecting corrupt



leaders. This is a coalition that only thinks of vested interests instead of working for the welfare of the people, Nadda alleged.

Rubbishing charges about the BJP-led central government targeting opposition leaders, he said the law will take its own course against all corrupt politicians.

The BJP chief said that the government is moving ahead with the resolution 'Devel-

oped Arunachal, Developed India'.

"PM Modi always says that neither Delhi nor the government is far from the people of Arunachal Pradesh, which is reflected in the world-class infrastructure being created in the state. Now, it takes only two hours to travel from Delhi to Itanagar, which was impossible earlier," he said, while referring to the Donyi Polo Airport opened at Hollongi in 2022.

Keeping in view the importance of Northeast, Modi has started working on Act East and "act fast" policies to develop the region which is the gateway to Southeast Asia, he said.

Nadda said the region, which was once a hub of militancy, has witnessed a massive change after the BJP-led NDA government came to power.

As a result of constant efforts of the Centre, as many as 11 agreements have been signed with various insurgent outfits in the region, following which 9,500 militants have laid down arms and joined the mainstream,

he added.

"The Northeast has witnessed a 70 per cent dip in insurgency-related activities, which clearly indicates that the people of the region want peace, progress and development," Nadda said.

A total of 50,000 crore has been spent on creating railway infrastructure in the region while another ₹ 18,000 crore has been earmarked for it, he said.

He claimed that the "fragile" economy of India improved after Modi became the Prime Minister, and now India is the fifth-largest economy in the world superseding Great Britain, which ruled the country for centuries.

"In three years time, Modi is going to make India the third-largest economy of the world. In automobile manufacturing, India has taken the third spot by replacing Japan," Nadda claimed.

The BJP chief said that the central government has enhanced grant-in-aid to Arunachal Pradesh by 38 per cent. (PTI)

45-year-old man, arrested with heroin, sentenced to 10 years in jail

AIZAWL, April 10: A 45-year-old man, arrested with heroin, was sentenced to 10 years in jail by a court in Mizoram's Kolasib district.

The fast-track court of Judge R Vanlalena on Tuesday also imposed a fine of Rs 1 lakh on him. In case he fails to pay the fine, he will have to undergo an additional one year in jail.

Zarzoza, the convict, was arrested along with Lalduhawma, 25, near Bukpui village in Kolasib district on March 20, 2021, when he was trying to sell 324 gram of heroin to another person.

Lalduhawma was hired by Zarzoza so that he could ride his motorbike to sell the drugs. The court exonerated Lalduhawma as he claimed that he did not know what Zarzoza was carrying. (PTI)

Cash seized in Arunachal does not belong to Meghalaya CM's: Deputy CM

SHILLONG, April 10: Meghalaya unit president of National People's Party (NPP) and deputy chief minister Prestone Tynsong has said that the cash of ₹ 1 crore seized in Arunachal Pradesh does not belong to Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma.

Speaking to the media on Tuesday, Tynsong said, "The seizure made by the officials of the Election Commission of India does not belong to the chief minister Conrad K Sangma, who is also our national president of NPP."

He said the vehicle which the ECI had detained was not at a part of the chief minister's convoy and the cash worth Rs 1.2 crore recovered from the vehicle also does not belong to the NPP.

Stating that the matter is under investigation, the NPP state president said, "Let the ECI take due course of legal action." (NNN)

RDA releases election manifesto highlighting ILP

SHILLONG, April 10: The United Democratic Party (UDP) and Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP) under the banner of the Regional Democratic Party (RDA) recently released its election manifesto and pledged to aggressively pursue with the Centre for immediate implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP), inclusion of Khasi and Garo languages in Eighth Schedule and resolving age old boundary dispute with Assam.

The 25-point manifesto released by UDP chief Metbah Lyngdoh also assured to strengthen the autonomous district councils (ADCs) and bats for a meaningful peace talks with the proscribed Hyniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC). The RDA has fielded former HNC president Roberjtune Kharjahnin as its candidate for Shillong parliamentary seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, to be held on April 19.

The manifesto said the RDA voted to the parliament seek to pursue the proposed amendment to the Sixth Schedule to include amendment to paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule to ensure the word "President" should be replaced with the word "Governor" in paragraph 12 A (b) of the Sixth Schedule, stating that laws passed by the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies shall not be applied in tribal areas regarding social practices, customary laws, religious practices, civil and criminal courts, traditional institutions, land, forests, and minerals. It also seeks to advocate for changes that would have the Governor acting on the advice of the District Councils, to envision the spirit of Sixth Schedule Article 200; to push for direct funding under Article 280; to increase fund allocation under Article 275; and to advocate for Anti-Defection Laws.

The RDA said it would also aggressively pursue the demand for implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) adding that efforts would be made to address issues of border fencing and setting up of a Police Border Wing.

It said that it would also vigorously pursue the inclusion of Khasi & Garo languages in the Eighth

Schedule to the Constitution of India and push for making 'Khasi' and 'Garo' as qualifying languages, apart from English and Hindi, for recruitment to Central Government institutions in Meghalaya.

On boundary issue, the manifesto said that the RDA will push to ensure fencing along the international border is done at the zero line and that due compensation be meted out to the people who lost their valuable land to Bangladesh.

It added that RDA will also take steps to urge the Government of India to settle the boundary dispute between Assam and Meghalaya as envisioned in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

Further, the manifesto said that the RDA bats for meaningful peace talks with the (HNLC) and

other militant group(s) of the state and will pursue the efforts for a multifaceted strategy to strengthen and modernize the police force to improve its effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, and capacity to handle contemporary challenges besides to impress upon the Central Government, the need for special efforts to counter the inflow of illicit narcotics in the state.

It also promised to take steps to tighten anti-corruption laws, implement policies for accountable and responsible governance, and set up processes for conducting social audits of all government projects and programs. Furthermore, an independent Monitoring Committee in each district, comprising of community leaders, religious leaders, and experts, to oversee the execution of the MP Schemes and other Central Schemes in the districts, it said. On employment issues, the RDA said it will ensure that the youths of the state are given due attention and that there is a need for an effective National Youth policy and National Sports Policy.

"The RDA feels strongly about setting up of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) to boost investments and the state's economy. Additionally, efforts will be made to persuade the Indian government to designate teachers and staff for the Eklavya Model Residential School in accordance with the State Reser-

vation Policy," it said.

It also said that the RDA will examine matters concerning the National Education Policy (NEP), the three-language formula, CUET, increase of reservation of seats in Technical and Higher Education, setting up of Engineering and Medical colleges, in Tachment of top-notch Coaching Institutes for competitive exams and Skill Development Centres in every district.

Furthermore, the manifesto said that the RDA stands to protect the rights of religious minorities and will oppose the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), anti-conversion laws, and to advocate for strong legislation that will punish those who commit crimes against Christians and other religious minorities.

"We shall make a significant effort to evaluate the arrangements for foreign funding to the Christian organizations and other religious minorities. We shall address with utmost seriousness the issues surrounding the exemption of religious institutions from income tax and the appointment of religious minority representatives to the National Minority Commission."

Also pledging to seek full exemption from CAA, the RDA said, "To protect the interest of minorities, steps will be taken to seek exemption of the application of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in the entire State of Meghalaya."

"Opposition will be to the imposition of Hindi language, one nation one culture, one nation one language, one nation one religion or any other anti-minority laws and policies. Beef ban will be vehemently opposed as part of the measures of protecting secular ideology & policy," it said.

Reiterating its opposition against uranium mining, it said, "Opposition to uranium mining in the State of Meghalaya is at the top list because it may affect the environment adversely. To review the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023 which de-reserves the forest for the use of land for non-forest purposes and which provides an exception to the Act within 100 km of the International Border for the so-called strategic projects." (NNN)

VPP members disrupting election campaigns in desperation: M'laya deputy CM



SHILLONG, April 10: Meghalaya deputy chief minister, Prestone Tynsong has termed the Voice of People's Party (VPP)'s attempt to disrupt the party's election campaigns as a "desperate act because they know they are losing the election".

"I don't know why these people look so desperate. Is it because they know that they are losing in the elections?" said Prestone Tynsong on Tuesday.

He was referring to the incidents, which took place at Umsning, Ri Bhoi, Jaiaw, Rynjah in Shillong and other places where the VPP supporters had attempted to disrupt almost every meeting organized by the NPP across the Khasi-Jaintia Hills region.

Tynsong said he was witnessing such things in Meghalaya for the first time because Lok Sabha elections were conducted in a peaceful manner in the state in the past.

"It is very unfortunate that the members of VPP look so desperate, the manner in which they create commotion wherever a public meeting is being held," he said.

The deputy chief minister said that the NPP will lodge a complaint before the Election Commission of India (ECI) to ensure peaceful campaigning during the elections.

Appealing to all political parties to refrain from such unacceptable activities, Tynsong said, "The dignity of the state is more important than anything else. Let the election campaign go peacefully. E should leave it to the wisdom of the voters, who will vote for the candidate of their choice in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections."

Meanwhile, Tynsong, who is also in charge of the home (police) department, has directed the director general of police (DGP) and SPs not to allow disruption of meetings by political parties. (NNN)

INC election agent lodges complaint against BLO in Manipur

IMPHAL, April 10: An election agent of Indian National Congress (INC) candidate in Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency has lodged a complaint accusing a Booth Level Officer (BLO) of giving undue influence on an elderly woman who cast her vote under the special provision for elderly citizens.

Electors who are above 85 years of age (AVSC) and those suffering from 40 percent disability (AVPD) have started voting for the 18th Lok Sabha election through postal ballots. The exercise commenced on Sunday in almost all the districts under the supervision of respective District Election Officers (DEOs).

In a complaint lodged to the Imphal East DEO by an election agent of the INC in the fray from the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency on April 7, it is alleged the BLO of Chingmeirong Mamang Leikai exerted undue influence while an elderly woman cast her vote under the special provision for aged senior citizens.

The agent alleged that the BLO insisted the 93-year-old woman cast her vote in favour of the candidate listed as sl. No. 2. The said BLO further told her that she would be rewarded with money to buy fish.

Pertinently, the candidate in the sl. no. 2 is Thounaojam Basanta Singh of Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP). The agent, in his complaint, drew the attention of the DEO to take up necessary action to ensure free and fair election.

Meanwhile, Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) has filed a formal complaint with the Election Commission of India as well as the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manipur on violation of election Model Code of Conduct by the incumbent government in the state. In the complaint, the MPCC despite the enforcement of the model code of conduct, the state government continued to issue notification for filling up vacant posts in the government departments.

It alleged that Bishnupur district employment exchange on March 28 issued a notice for sponsoring of filling 1140 posts of pre-primary teachers on contract basis under the Directorate of Education (S) Manipur government.

The Social Welfare department also issued a notice on April 1 regarding extension of last date for application form submission for availing financial assistance under "Ima Nongthangliema Yaipha Tumbang Scheme" for women, the MPCC pointed out.

The MPCC further alleged release of funds under Prime Minister Awas Yojana(G) despite the enforcement of the model code of conduct. (NNN)

BJP kept promise to revoke Article 370, abolish triple talaq after getting majority in Parl

BJP changed public perception towards politicians, politics: Rajnath Singh

SAHARANPUR/BULANDSHAHAR (UP), April 10: The BJP has changed the public's perception that politicians speak lies to seek votes, Union defence minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday and asserted "it is our character that we do what we say".

Speaking at a campaign rally for the BJP's Saharanpur candidate Raghav Lakhnani, he said, "A few years ago, there was a perception that politicians speak lies to seek votes and go away. They don't care about the public or the nation. This was the common perception towards politicians and political parties."

"We have changed this perception. It is our character that we do what we say. Earlier, it was the norm to think that a politician would lie but we changed this perception," Singh added.

The defence minister said political parties make big promises in their manifestos but forget those after assuming power.

"We have overcome the crisis of confidence in politics. We had promised to revoke Article 370 and we did it after assuming power. We had promised to abolish triple talaq and we did it after getting a majority in Parliament," he said.

Singh, a former Uttar Pradesh chief minister, said the perception of India has improved under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



He claimed that Modi "halted" the war between Russia and Ukraine to ensure safe passage for Indian students stuck in the war-torn country.

"In Qatar, retired Navy personnel awarded capital punishment were released after being pardoned by the government there. This shows the stature of India in the world," he added.

Qatar released eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel 46 days after their death sentences, handed out last October, were commuted to jail terms of varying duration.

Under Modi's leadership, India -- once an importer of defence technology -- is now exporting those, Singh

said. The defence minister also praised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for improving the state's law and order.

Hitting out at the Samajwadi Party and the Congress, the senior BJP leader said, "In 2017 (assembly elections), the Samajwadi Party and the Congress ran a narrative that the backward classes were angry with the BJP. In 2019 (Lok Sabha elections), they ran a narrative that the Brahmins were angry. During the 2022 assembly elections, they ran a narrative that the Jats were angry. Now, they are claiming that the Rajputs are angry."

"They are not ready to accept that be it the Congress or the Samajwadi Party, the entire Uttar Pradesh is angry with them," Singh claimed. The Samajwadi Party is in such a state that it is changing candidates every day and the Congress is not even getting people to contest the elections, he said. The Congress and the Samajwadi Party are contesting the Lok Sabha elections in an alliance in Uttar Pradesh. During another rally in Bulandshahr, Singh lashed out at the Congress, claiming the party and corruption are "made for each other". He alleged that terror attacks were common during Congress governments but "no one can dare to commit such an attack today". Campaigning for the BJP's Bulandshahr candidate Bhola Singh, the defence minister said the opposition parties used to ridicule the BJP for promising to construct a grand temple for Lord Ram in Ayodhya. "We fulfilled that promise on January 22," Singh said. The Lucknow MP also said the BJP cannot compromise on the rights of women. He further said, "Earlier, people around the world used to take India lightly but everyone today listens patiently to what India says." Both Saharanpur and Bulandshahr go to the polls during the first phase on April 19. (PTI)

BJP represents 103 Lok Sabha seats where forests rights is key issue, says report

NEW DELHI, April 10: BJP MPs represent 103 of the 153 Lok Sabha seats in the country where the implementation of the Forest Rights Act 2006 is a major issue, according to a recent report.

The Congress, which enacted the FRA, and the Biju Janata Dal represent 11 seats each, Shiv Sena 6, Telangana Rashtra Samithi and YSRCP 5 each, and the National Congress Party 4, the analysis by independent organisation Vasundhara found. Considered a milestone in redressing the historical injustice done to Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, the Forest Rights Act 2006 aims to recognise forest rights of such communities living in forests for generations.

According to the analysis, there are 86 Lok Sabha seats where people demanding forest rights account for over 30 per cent of the electorate.

Similarly, there are 45 seats where FRA eligible voters comprise over 40 per cent of the electorate. These include the Khunti Lok Sabha seat where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has repeated Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda as its candidate. Out of the 153 core FRA constituencies, the BJP and the Congress ran directly against each other in 74 constituencies in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, of which the Congress won only 5.

There are 47 ST reserved seats in India, out of which 42 are core FRA constituencies. The BJP won 31 ST seats in 2019 and the Congress only 3.

According to government data, the FRA claim disposal rate in the



last five years has come down from 87.72 per cent to 84.44 per cent.

While 7,88,948 new claims were filed in the last five years, 5,21,143 titles were distributed, and 5,827 claims were rejected during this period. A total of 50,26,801 claims (48,36,013 individual) have been filed until February 29, 2024. Of this, 24,85,191 titles (49.44 per cent), including 23,70,011 individual titles, have been distributed, the official data showed.

Five years ago, the total number of claims filed stood at 42,37,853 (40,89,035 individual), and the number of titles that had been already distributed stood at 19,64,048 (18,87,894 individual).

While officials say the Covid-19 pandemic hampered the implementation of the Forest Rights Act 2006, which recognises rights of forest-dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional communities, in 2020 and 2021, experts said lack of political will and corruption is the primary

obstacle. Over 50 per cent of the claims filed so far in eight states and Union territories, including Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, have been rejected, according to the official data.

At 97.23 per cent, the claim rejection rate is the highest in Uttarakhand, where a total of 6,678 claims have been filed so far but only 185 titles distributed. Chhattisgarh has rejected the highest number of claims -- 4,00,649 out of the total 9,41,977 received so far.

Karnataka has rejected 2,53,269 or 86.01 per cent of the 2,94,489 claims filed so far. A Delhi-based organisation which studied the implementation of FRA in five states in the country recently said even where individual forest rights have been recognised in Karnataka, the actual land allocated on average is 0.8 acres -- which is too small an area to eke out a livelihood. (PTI)

Delhi minister Raaj Kumar Anand resigns from cabinet, quits AAP

NEW DELHI, April 10: Delhi minister Raaj Kumar Anand on Wednesday resigned from the cabinet and quit the AAP, alleging Dalits were not given representation in the party.

Addressing a press conference here, Anand, who was holding various portfolios including Social Welfare, alleged that there was no Dalit among the top leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

"This party doesn't respect Dalit MLAs, councillors and ministers. In such circumstances, all Dalits feel cheated. We live in an inclusive society, but it is not wrong to talk about proportion. It is difficult for me to remain in the party with all these things, hence I am resigning from the post," Anand said.

He also took a swipe at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who is in Tihar jail after being remanded in judicial custody in an excise policy-linked money laundering case and has failed to get any relief from the Delhi High Court.

"From the Jantar Mantra, Arvind Kejriwal had said that the country will change once politics changes. The politics hasn't changed but the politician has changed," Anand, who is an MLA from the Patel Nagar constituency, said.

In response to a query on the timing of his resignation, Anand said, "It is not about timing. Till yesterday, we were under the impression that we are being framed, but after the High Court verdict, it seems that there is something wrong at our end."

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday upheld Kejriwal's arrest and subsequent remand, saying the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was left with "little option" after he skipped repeated summonses and refused to join the investigation. It also cited the ED's claim that Kejriwal conspired and was actively involved in use and concealment of the proceeds of crime to reject his petition against his arrest. (PTI)

Distracted by own horse-trading agendas, BJP neglected Maharashtra people: Cong

NEW DELHI, April 10: The Congress on Wednesday alleged that the BJP has neglected the people of Maharashtra as it was distracted by its own "horse-trading and deal-making" agendas, and asked how much donation did it take to engineer the collapse of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh attacked the BJP ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally in Maharashtra's Ramtek and posed questions on key issues affecting the state.

"Today, the PM heads to Ramtek in Maharashtra, a state that was rocked by hundreds of farmer suicides last year, and where corruption charges continue to pile up. Distracted by its own horse-trading and deal-making agendas, the BJP has neglected to serve the people," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Posing questions to the prime minister, the Congress leader said that on an average day in Maharashtra, seven farmers take their own lives, and this heartbreaking statistic comes from the state's Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation, who reported that 2,366 farmers died by suicide between January and October last year.

"He was quick to remind us that 'The state government gives 1 lakh rupees to the kin of farmers who die by suicide'. What the Minister did not reveal is the callousness from the government that compels farmers to take such drastic steps in the first place," he said.

Ramesh claimed that 60 per cent of districts faced drought conditions last year but no help arrived from the government.

"When crops were damaged by unseasonal rains in more than half of the state, farmers were extended loan waivers, but 6.56 lakh farmers were deprived of this relief due to software glitches. In the face of this state-sponsored callousness, the Congress Nyay Patra has guaranteed farmers MSP as per the Swaminathan Committee's recommendation, a farm loan waiver with a permanent commission set up to implement it smoothly, and settlement of all crop insurance claims within 30 days," he said.

What is the BJP's vision to support Maharashtra's and India's farmers, Ramesh asked. He said that on January 4, the Joint Director of Health Services (procurement cell) in Mumbai floated a "suspicious" tender for the state's ambulance services.

This tender was first floated in September 2023, and then mysteriously scrapped, he added. "The latest bid was floated with a notice period of just seven days, was a ten-year long contract, and carried a massive ₹ 8,000 crore price tag. Despite initial interest from over 30 companies, eventually only one bidder emerged, and the final contract is expected to exceed 10,000 crores by 2034," he said.

"Many questions have been raised about



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"Many questions have been raised about

this opaque process. Why wasn't the bidding process for the new contract started sooner than January 4th, given that the old contract was about to end on Jan 31st? Why was the state unable to carry out a forensic audit of the service's performance between 2014 and 2024?"

"Why is the operational cost for ambulances so high? If the government is willing to make such a large outlay, why are ambulance services being outsourced, unlike other states where the government owns the vehicles? Is this another tender that the BJP was planning to award to one of its cronies in return for some Electoral Bonds Chanda?" he said.

Ramesh said that Maharashtra's 2022 political crisis showed the nation that the BJP's "greed for power" is much greater than its regard for democratic values.

They did not hesitate to use their ill-gotten electoral bonds donation to buy Shiv Sena and NCP MLAs, and have destroyed Maharashtra's political culture in the process, he alleged.

"We now know that the electoral bonds scam cost Indian citizens ₹ 4 lakh crore. The question is how much chanda did it take to engineer the collapse of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) Sarkar? And what price did the people of India have to pay to keep the BJP's horse-trading coffers full?" Ramesh said and asked the prime minister to break his silence on these issues. The MVA came into being after the Uddhav Thackeray-led undivided Shiv Sena fell out with the BJP in 2019 and joined hands with the Congress and undivided NCP to form a government in the state. (PTI)

Rahul slams BJP, says history doesn't change by 'spewing lies' from political platforms



NEW DELHI, April 10: Amid the BJP's repeated "Muslim League imprint" barb over the Congress manifesto, Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said history is a witness as to who joined hands with the forces that wanted to divide the country and asserted that history does not change by "spewing lies" from political platforms.

Gandhi said that the 2024 Lok Sabha polls are a fight between two ideologies, with the Congress, which has always united India, on one side and those who have always tried to divide people on the other side. "This election is a fight between two ideologies! On one side there is the Congress, which has always united India, and on the other side there are those who have always tried to divide people," the former Congress chief said in a post in Hindi.

History is witness as to who joined hands with the forces that

wanted to divide the country and strengthened them and who fought for the unity and independence of the country, Gandhi said.

"Who stood with the British during the 'Quit India Movement'? When India's jails were filled with Congress leaders, then who was running the government in the states with the forces that divided the country?" he said. History does not change by "spewing lies" from political platforms, he added.

Gandhi's remarks come amid repeated attacks by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying that the Congress manifesto bears a 'Muslim League imprint'. The Congress has moved the Election Commission against his remarks while party chief Mallikarjun Kharge has said that "there is a stink of RSS" in Modi's speeches. The Congress has alleged that the prime minister is resorting to the "cliched Hindu-Muslim script" as he is scared that the BJP may struggle to even cross the 180-seat mark in the Lok Sabha polls.

The Congress has countered the BJP pointing out that Jan Sangha founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the president of the Hindu Mahasabha then, was himself part of the coalition government in Bengal with the Muslim League in the early 1940s. (PTI)

BJP: CPI(M) threatening Kerala MGNREGA workers to attend rallies

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, April 10: The BJP on Wednesday accused the ruling CPI(M) in Kerala of denying jobs to MGNREGA labourers for not attending party programmes. Senior BJP leader and former union minister Prakash Javadekar lashed out at the Marxist party, alleging that it was threatening the laborers that their jobs would be taken away if they didn't attend the party's rallies. "CPM politics in Kerala... It is threatening MGNREGA workers that their jobs would go if they don't attend the CPM rally. Such tactics won't work this time. Voters are awakened. They know what Modi is doing for them. Voters are King at the polling station," he posted on 'X'.

Javadekar's criticism came in the wake of reports in a section of the media that nearly 10 women, employed under the MGNREGA, had been denied jobs in Punnappra North village panchayat in Alappuzha. One of the women workers told a television channel that they were asked to attend a meeting held in a nearby house on Sunday.

"We were told that it was a labour meeting. When we reached there, we understood that it was a party programme of the CPI(M). So, nearly 10 of us, including me, didn't attend it," a woman labourer told a TV channel on Wednesday. She also alleged that she and others who didn't attend the meeting were asked by authorities not to come for the daily job, despite being enrolled for it. The woman said they lodged a complaint with the panchayat secretary. The link to the video of the news report was attached to by Javadekar on his post on X. The CPI(M) has not reacted to the allegations. (PTI)

Cong creating north-south divide to break India: Shah

GAYA (BIHAR), April 10: Launching a blistering attack on the opposition INDIA bloc, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday accused the Congress of creating a north-south divide to break the country. Addressing an election rally in Guraru block of Gaya district, he also accused the Congress and the RJD of indulging in the politics of appeasement. "The Congress party is creating a north-south divide to break the nation which the NDA-led Central government and people of

the country will not allow. Their leader Rahul Gandhi is maintaining a stoic silence on this," Shah said. People of this country have now made up their mind to give a befitting reply to such divisive forces in the Lok Sabha polls and will ensure 400 plus seats for the NDA, he added. "They (Congress and RJD) are indulging in politics of appeasement and that is the reason they are protesting the removal of Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir," said Shah. (PTI)

'India civilisation of antiquity, civilisation of continuity spanning thousands of years'

Nationhood comes from common sense of history, vision of future: Ajit Doval

NEW DELHI, April 10: Nationhood is constituted by people who share a "common sense of their history" and a "common vision of their future", National Security Advisor Ajit Doval said as he released an 11-volume book series that charts different phases of the history of ancient India and its accomplishments.

Addressing a gathering at the launch event here on Tuesday, the NSA said, "People who have got a different sense of history, 'if my hero is your villain', you and I cannot make a nation."

Describing India as a "civilisation of antiquity" and "civilisation of continuity" spanning thousands of years, Doval also said that it was a "paradox" that the narrative that has been brought is that probably, "the first chapter about Indian history in any western, this thing... is that it starts with Alexander".

After releasing the series 'History of Ancient India', published by Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) and Aryan Books, he said it consists of scholarly papers contributed by a "large body of scholars".

Vol I of the series, which covers a vast array of fields, is titled 'Prehistoric Roots' while Vol IX is on 'Science and Technology, Medicine'.

Doval said while discussing the project during its inception phase several years ago with S Gurusamurthy, VIF chairperson, he had

shared the "new idea and thinking" to contribute to something that would be able to give a "new sense of identity and pride, not only to our countrymen but also to our coming generations".

"Our self-image, our identity is deeply connected to your own perception of history, and... perception of what you are," the NSA said.

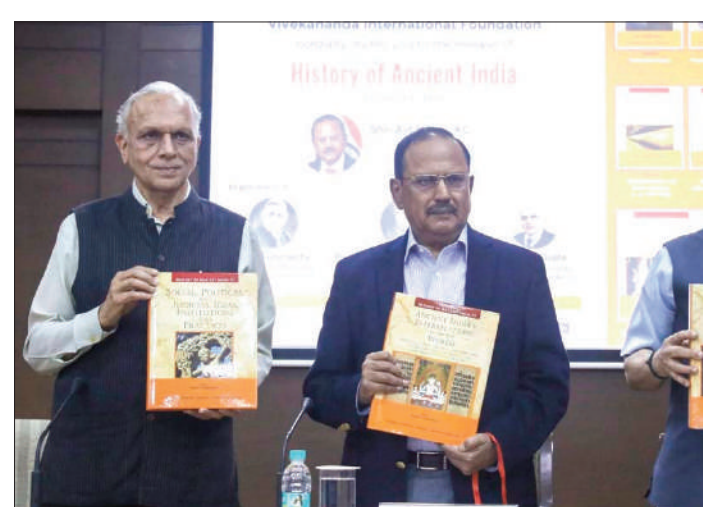
He described the series as not an end, but a "means to an end", and the end objective is to build "a nation on the basis of a sense of common heritage, of common background from which we come from, having pride in our ancestry and achievements of the past, and having a vision for the future".

Earlier in his speech, Doval said nations or members of nationhood are "those people who share a common sense of their history, common sense of our ancestors, common sense of their achievements of their past, and a common vision of their future. All those who believe in that they make one nation. People who have got a different sense of history, 'if my hero is your villain', you and I cannot make a nation".

He said the research papers are of "very high quality" and "great references" have been quoted.

There are a few aspects about Indian history that nobody questions, including "our detractors," he said.

"One is its antiquity, that it is one of the oldest civilisations, and probably a human life had evolved, and



society had perfected to a very high (level). Now, who did it? Were they the original people or they came from outside?"

"There may be a bias about that but they will all say that this is a civilisation of antiquity. The second is its continuity. It has been continuing for thousands of years without disruption. And, the third feature, its vast expanse, where the footprint of the civilisation was very visible," he added.

On Alexander's connection with India, Doval cited William Jones and said that was a big Sanskrit scholar who said that "nowhere in Sanskrit or Pali or Prakrit literature or local dialects, he could find any mention of Alexander". There is "no

mention", the NSA added. It was a "non-event, it was a very small event of history" where some raiders on horseback, probably wanted to plunder, but faced resistance and returned.

"But you make such a mountain of it as if the world history has changed with Alexander the great conqueror," he said.

Foreign domination was "responsible to some extent" for the feeling of nationhood not developing, he said.

Then, there was a deliberate attempt to "destroy" the vestiges of the proof of that. Now, it's not only the temple, the religious bigotry. But institutions like Nalanda or Taxila universities, or the libraries, etc., were

the "prime targets", they had to be destroyed and any sources from where Indians could connect themselves to their glorious past, he added.

But, there was another reason -- Indians' mindset. "For us events and personalities were very secondary," Doval said.

"Now, this combination of these factors deprived us of our own existence and identity. And history is important for your identity," he said.

Doval said anything that scholars have quoted or any inference drawn in this work is based on a "solid, scientific foundation".

"When we started the project, we said, let it be totally authentic, we don't want to generate propaganda material. The foundation of such kind of intellectualism does not have a long shelf life," he said.

The volume is "bulky and expensive" and so its dissemination is a bit constrained.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was presented this work and told about it, and it has found "a place of prominence in his library".

The prime minister suggested that these can be donated to libraries and that idea is still there.

The NSA further said "may be we probably will accomplish" it and send it to various western and eastern universities. The people associated with the upcoming maritime museum in Lothal, Gujarat have also shown interest in this, he said. (PTI)

India makes significant progress in QS World University Rankings, with 20 % improvement in Citations per Paper indicator

IIM-Ahmedabad among world's top 25 for management studies, JNU India's top university

NEW DELHI, April 10: IIM-Ahmedabad is among the top 25 institutions globally for business and management studies while IIM-Bangalore and IIM-Calcutta are among the top 50, according to the QS World University Rankings by Subject, announced on Wednesday.

Jawaharlal Nehru University is the highest-ranked university in India in the coveted rankings announced by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the London-based higher education analytics firm. The university is ranked at 20th position globally for development studies.

The Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences in Chennai is at 24th position globally for dentistry studies.

QS CEO Jessica Turner said, "One of the biggest challenges faced by India is educational -- providing high-quality tertiary education in the face of exploding demand: this much was recognised by 2020's NEP (National Education Policy), which set the ambitious target of a 50 per cent gross enrolment ratio by 2035. It should, therefore, provide some reassurance that the number of Indian programmes featuring across our 55



subject rankings and five broad faculty areas has increased this year -- from 355 to 454."

"QS also notes that several programmes at India's three privately-run Institutes of Eminence have made progress this year, demonstrating the positive role that well-regulated private provision can have in enhancing India's higher education sector. While there is still a lot of work to be done to improve standards, access to higher education, universities' digital readiness and global competitiveness, it is clear that India is taking significant steps in the right direction," Turner added.

In this year's QS World University Rankings by Subject, India has demonstrated significant progress, with a 20 per cent improvement in the Citations per Paper indicator, reflecting a strong research capability.

Additionally, there has been a 16 per cent growth in the International Research Network indicator, which measures the volume and diversity of research partnerships.

However, there was a decrease of 5 per cent in the H Index, which assesses the balance between research productivity and its impact.

According to QS, India stands as one of the world's most rapidly ex-

panding research centres. From 2017 to 2022, its research output surged by an impressive 54 per cent, based on data from Scopus/Elsevier, QS' bibliometric and research affiliate. This increase is not only more than double the global average but also significantly exceeds the output of its more traditionally recognised Western peers.

"In terms of volume, India is now the world's fourth-largest producer of research, generating 1.3 million academic papers in this period, trailing only behind China's 4.5 million, the United States' 4.4 million, and slightly less than the United Kingdom's 1.4 million," said Ben Sower, QS' senior vice-president.

"Given its current trajectory, India is on the brink of overtaking the United Kingdom in research productivity. However, in terms of research impact, measured by citation count, India ranks ninth globally for the 2017-2022 period. While it is an impressive result, prioritising high-quality, impactful research and its dissemination within the academic community is the essential next step," Sower added. (PTI)

CBSE to launch pilot for national credit framework for classes 6,9 and 11

NEW DELHI, April 10: The CBSE will launch a pilot of the National Credit Framework for classes 6, 9 and 11 from the 2024-25 academic session and has invited its affiliate schools to participate, officials said on Wednesday.

The government last year launched the National Credit Framework (NCrF) as part of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, to ensure seamless integration of school, higher and vocational education, and allow students to accumulate their credits from the pre-primary to the PhD level.

Subsequently, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) also developed its draft guidelines to implement the framework.

"The CBSE developed and circulated draft NCrF implementation guidelines, discussed them in multiple workshops, and received approval from the Union Ministry of Education. To further test, refine and assess their effectiveness in real-world contexts, a pilot implementation of these guidelines has been planned in schools affiliated to CBSE in classes 6, 9 and 11, with effect from session 2024-2025," the board said in a letter to school principals.

"Principals of interested schools for this pilot programme are requested to share their contact details through <https://forms.gle/5AB2iuxa1k62r2E3A>," it said.



Students can earn credits from classroom teaching learning, laboratory work, projects, sports, performing arts, NCC, social work, vocational education and experiential learning, including relevant experience and professional levels acquired, among others.

"This would close the gap in achievement of learning outcomes by shifting the classroom education to competency and learning outcome-based education and learning. The assessment is thus mandatory for earning credits for all types of learning," the board said.

"The credits earned shall be deposited in the Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) of a student which will be linked with the APAAR ID and Digilocker of the student, in future," the board added. (PTI)

About 15 % posts of train drivers vacant, says Railway Board

NEW DELHI, April 10: Out of total 1,27,644 sanctioned posts of both drivers and assistant drivers in all railway zones across the country, 18,766 (about 14.7 per cent) was lying vacant as on March 1, 2024, the Railway Board said in a response to an application under the Right to Information Act (RTI).

Further break-up of the data suggests that the number of vacant posts of drivers is much higher as compared to that of assistant drivers.

It shows that the sanctioned posts of loco pilots (drivers) is 70,093, out of which 14,429 (about 20.5 per cent) is vacant whereas for assistant loco pilots, out of total sanctioned posts of 57,551, only 4,337 (about 7.5 per cent) is vacant.

Madhya Pradesh-based Chandra Shekhar Gaur, who had filed the application, said that he had asked for zone-wise vacancy status but the board said that such data is not centrally maintained.

Various railway unions and drivers' associations say that the vacant posts result in an increase in duty hours of the existing strength of crew as they have to compensate for the vacant posts as well.

"This is increasing work pressure and stress on drivers which is not in the interest of safe train operations," Shiv Gopal Mishra, general secretary, All India Railwaymen's Federation, said. Drivers' union also says that the number of vacant posts could be more than what the data shows because about two to three per cent drivers do various office jobs without getting their job role changed in the official record.

"According to me, the overall vacancy of both drivers and assistant drivers should be about 17 to 18 per cent as two to three per cent loco pilots are such who work in different capacity in offices, but in Railway records, maintain their job category as loco pilot," Sanjay Pandhi, the working president of the Indian Railway Loco Runningmen Organisation (IRLRO), said.

He added that train drivers are under "stress" and the Railways should immediately take steps to



fill the vacant posts.

In January 2024, the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) started a recruitment drive to fill 5,696 posts of assistant loco pilots across all railway zones in the country and the process is on to shortlist the successful candidates.

According to Railway norms, a loco pilot has a nine-hour work duration but it can be extended up to 12 hours.

However, official communications within the railway divisions and zones suggest that these vacant posts are a "cause of serious concern" as a substantial segment of drivers have to work beyond the maximum shift timings of 12 hours.

In May 2023, an official note from the Ahmedabad division of Western Railway said that 23.5 per cent loco pilots worked more than 12 hours in April 2023 because of the shortage. It further shows that in the financial year of 2022-23, 24 per cent loco pilots worked for more than 12 hours.

Another official communication between the Railway Board and the zones regarding the implementation of 9-hour duty of running staff shows that in 2020-21, 5.8 per cent loco pilots worked for more than 12 hours.

The over 12 hours duty percentage of loco pilots varies from 1.2 per cent to 19 per cent in all 16 railway zones.

"Various fatal railway accidents have been found to be caused due to contributory factors of excessive duty hours, continuous night duties and inadequate rest provided to the engine crew," Pandhi said.

"It is quite obvious that such a huge shortage of drivers is not in the interest of safety of rail operations as well as the mental and physical well-being of the working drivers. Some immediate measures should be taken by the railways," Gaur said. (PTI)

Encouraging scientific rigor will further bolster people's confidence in homeopathy: Prez

NEW DELHI, April 10: President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said research and proficiency will play an important role in further increasing the acceptance and popularity of homeopathy.

Inaugurating a two-day symposium organised by the Central Council for Research in Homeopathy here on World Homeopathy Day, Murmu said homeopathy has been adopted in many countries as a simple and accessible treatment method.

All over the world, many institutions at international, national and local levels have been promoting homeopathy, she said while appreciating the Ministry of AYUSH, Central Council for Research in Homeopathy, National Commission for Homeopathy and other such institutions for their contribution in the promotion of homeopathy in India.

"The importance of research is continuously increasing in the 21st century. Therefore, the theme of this symposium 'Empowering Research, Enhancing Proficiency' is very relevant," she said emphasising that research and proficiency will play an important role in further increasing the acceptance and popularity of homeopathy. The President said many people share the experiences of those who have benefited from homeopathy after trying other treatment methods.

"But such experiences can be recognised in the scientific community only when presented with facts and analysis. Such factual analysis done on a large scale is called authentic medical research. Encouraging scientific rigour will further increase people's confidence in this medical system," Murmu said.

The President also said healthy people create a healthy society and a healthy nation is built on the foundation of a healthy society. "Scientific validity forms the basis of authenticity. Both acceptance and popularity will increase with authenticity. Your efforts to empower research and enhance proficiency will be beneficial in promoting homeopathy. This will benefit everyone involved in homeopathy, including doctors, patients, drug manufacturers, and researchers," she said. (PTI)

SC slams Uttarakhand State Licensing Authority over inaction in Patanjali ads case



NEW DELHI, April 10: "We will rip you apart," the Supreme Court warned the Uttarakhand State Licensing Authority on Wednesday slaming it for inaction over misleading advertisements issued by Patanjali Ayurved.

The apex court said the Authority remained in "deep slumber" and there was a clear attempt by it to "pass the buck" and somehow delay the matter despite it being informed about the misleading advertisements.

"Why should we not think that you were in cahoots with the contemnor respondents and you were keeping your eyes shut deliberately?" a bench of justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah told the counsel appearing for the Authority.

Coming down heavily on the state licensing body, the bench said it was "appalled to note that except for pushing the files", the Authority has done nothing.

"In all these four-five years, the State Licensing Authority has remained in deep slumber," the bench said. The bench asked why the officer of the licensing authority and district Ayurvedic and Unani officers should not be suspended for their inaction.

When the Authority's counsel referred to the bona fides of its officers, an anguished bench said, "Bona fide you say? We will rip you apart on bona fide. We will rip you apart!"

The counsel appearing for the Authority told the court that its incumbent joint director had taken over the post in June last year.

The top court said that in its opinion nine months is enough time for the officer to have acted in accordance with law.

The bench said it appeared that his predecessor

was "equally complicit" in light of the same inaction during his tenure.

It said the Authority has filed a detailed affidavit before the court trying to explain the action taken by it on the central government corresponding with the Authority regarding objectionable advertisements of AYUSH products manufactured by Divya Pharmacy.

"The disdain shown by Divya Pharmacy to the repeated notices of show cause issued by the State Licensing Authority is apparent from the tone and tenor of their reply..." it observed.

The bench said it appeared that if the court would not step in, the Authority would abdicate its duties under the statute and await an order from the apex court for implementation of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954.

"Besides the proposed contemnors, we are inclined to issue notices of contempt to the deponent of the affidavit (filed by the Authority) as also his predecessor. However, we are refraining from doing so in the present..." it said.

It said the Centre had clearly told the state Authority in 2020 to stop the objectionable advertisements.

It said the predecessor of the incumbent joint director of the authority shall file an affidavit explaining the inaction on his part during his tenure. The bench also directed that the district Ayurvedic and Unani officers, Haridwar, who were posted from 2018 till date shall also file affidavits explaining the inaction on their part.

It observed that the officer concerned with the Authority "remained quiet" and only forwarded the files.

"He is a post office. The person appointed subsequently also does the same," it said, adding, "If this is not dereliction of duty then what is?"

"Take it seriously. The matter is serious," the bench said.

It also refused to accept the affidavits of yoga guru Ramedev and Patanjali Ayurved managing director Balkrishna tendering unconditional apologies over publishing misleading advertisements, asserting the apologies were "on paper" and the court doesn't want to be "so generous".

The apex court is hearing a plea filed by the Indian Medical Association (IMA) alleging a smear campaign against the Covid vaccination drive and modern systems of medicine. (PTI)

Air India to send narrow body pilots on deputation to Vistara

NEW DELHI, April 10: Tata Group-owned Air India is planning to send a set of first officers who can operate the narrow body A320 family planes to Vistara, which is grappling with pilot woes, according to multiple sources.

The pilots will be sent to Vistara on deputation, subject to getting necessary regulatory approvals.

Air India and Vistara did not offer any comments.

The sources told PTI that some first officers who can operate A320 family planes will be sent to Vistara on deputation.

Two of the sources said the number of narrow body pilots likely to be deputed to Vistara could be a little over 30.

One of the sources said it will be the first time that pilots from Air India will be deputed to Vistara for operating narrow body aircraft.

For operating Vistara's wide body Boeing 787 planes, around 24 pilots are already on deputation from Air India. They include 16 commanders and eight first officers, the source said.

Vistara, a joint venture between the Tata Group and Singapore Airlines, has cut its operational capacity by 10 per cent or 25-30 flights daily due to pilot issues.

The full service carrier has around 6,500 staff, including 1,000 pilots and 2,500 cabin crew. The airline is in the process of merging with Air India.

Recently, the airline faced significant flight disruptions due to non-availability of crew. Many pilots had reported sick to protest against the new contract that will result in pay revisions and there were also roster issues.

Vistara has a fleet of 70 aircraft, including 53 Airbus A320 neos, 10 Airbus A321s, and 7 Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft.

On April 5, Vistara CEO Vinod Kannan told PTI that flight disruptions were mainly caused by a stretched roster for pilots and that the airline expects operations to normalise by May.

The carrier has also deployed larger aircraft like B787-9 Dreamliner and A321 neo on select domestic routes to combine flights or accommodate more customers, wherever possible. (PTI)

2 get life term in 1919 murder case in Gurugram

GURUGRAM, April 10: A court on Tuesday sentenced two accused to life imprisonment for killing a man in Dharampur village here five years ago, police said.

The court of additional district and sessions judge Sunil Kumar Diwan also imposed fines on both the convicts, the police said on Wednesday. The third accused in the case was acquitted due to lack of evidence, they added.

According to the police, the victim Sachin Tyagi was found dead near Dharampur chowk on February 25, 2019. Sachin's father, Ram Avtar Tyagi, had registered an FIR at Palam Vihar Police Station here accusing Amit Dalal, a resident of New Palam Vihar, of killing his son.

Police investigations had revealed that Sachin was shot dead over an altercation with Dalal and two other accused in the case -- Rahul and Gagan -- while they were drinking alcohol.

All three accused were arrested and later sent to judicial custody, the police said.

Senior advocate Narendar Kumar Jain said that after hearing both the sides, the court on Monday acquitted Gagan due to lack of evidence, while convicting Dalal and Rahul in the case.

On Tuesday, it sentenced both Dalal and Rahul to life imprisonment and imposed a fine of ₹ 60,000 and ₹ 50,000 on them, respectively.

Both the convicts have been sent to jail, the police said. (PTI)

A real 'Kerala story' of a Hindu temple, its bond with Muslims in Malappuram

Hindus, Muslims join hands for renovation of Sree Durga Bhagavathy Temple, a 400-year-old shrine located at Muthuvallur in Kondotty

MALAPPURAM (KERALA), April 10: A centuries-old Hindu temple, which has been waiting for the consecration of its new idol for years, and the Muslim community in the neighbourhood, who generously contribute to its renovation. It may sound filmy, but it is a real 'Kerala story' of communal harmony from a nondescript village in Muslim-dominated Malappuram district.

Amidst fictitious stories and hate campaigns -- including the film by Sudipto Sen named "The Kerala Story", which has been criticised as propaganda -- Hindus and Muslims have joined hands for the renovation of Sree Durga Bhagavathy Temple, a 400-year-old shrine located at Muthuvallur in Kondotty.

The temple authorities here said that half of the nearly Rs 50 lakh cost so far spent for the renovation was contributed by generous members of the Muslim community.

The first phase of the renovation was almost complete and the consecration of the 173-cm-tall idol of Goddess Durga would be held in a three-day-long ceremony beginning on May 7. Chandran P, president of the management committee of the temple, which comes under the state-run Malabar Devaswom Board, said the renovation of the shrine began in 2015.

"We have requested contributions from people beyond the religious and communal divide...Several people contributed immensely, and I am happy to say that Muslims have con-



tributed a major chunk of it," he told PTI.

Chandran happily recalled how Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) supremo Sadique Ali Shihab Thangal and senior party leaders like P K Kunhalikutty responded positively to their request for contributions and extended all support for the renovation of the shrine.

Thangal even visited the shrine during a function organised there last year to raise money.

Temple trustee Thekkiniyath Tharananellur Padmanabhan Unni Namboothiripad submitted a 'patrika', a message of love, to Kunhalikutty during a function held at the shrine in March this year.

As IUML MLA Kunhalikutty couldn't attend the function due to some other programmes, the temple committee members handed over the patrika to him at his residence later, Chandran said.

A Muslim man readily donated Rs two lakh while another person of the community contributed Rs one lakh for the renovation works, he said.

"This is the eighth year of the renovation works at the shrine. A huge idol of the goddess is installed as part of the consecration. The construction of the four sub-temples have already been completed at the temple which sprawls on an one and half acres of land," he said.

The brochure released by the temple authorities in connection with the consecration also stands as a unique example of communal harmony as it prominently features a photo of Thangal along with the tantris.

"It is a place where all communities, including Hindus, Muslims and Christians, live together happily and unitedly. No venomous propaganda or hate campaign can break this long tradition of harmony," the temple official said.

Even the temple organised "nombu thura" (breaking the fast) for Muslims on its premises during Ramzan and the Hindu community members also happily took part in it, he added. (PTI)

E-AUCTION PROGRAMME FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2024
E-Auction programme for sale of Railway Scrap materials under jurisdiction of Tinsukia Division is hereby fixed for the month of **MAY 2024 on 15-05-2024 & 29-05-2024.**
Interested bidders may participate in E-auction through IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in
Sr. Materials Manager, Dibrugarh
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

ZEENAT AMAN 'STRONGLY RECOMMENDS' LIVING TOGETHER BEFORE MARRIAGE

NEW DELHI, April 10: Veteran actor Zeenat Aman says it's only logical for couples to live-in together before tying the knot so that they find out if they are actually compatible with each other.

According to the 72-year-old actor, her sons Zahaan and Azaan have also received the same advice from her.

In an Instagram post on Tuesday, she described a live-in relationship as the "ultimate test".

"... One of you asked me about relationship advice in the comments section of my last post. Here's a personal opinion I haven't previously shared – if you're in a relationship, I strongly recommend that you LIVE TOGETHER before getting married! "This is the same advice I've always given my sons, both of whom have had, or are in, a live-in relationship. It just seems logical to me that before two people get their families and the government involved in their equation, they first put their relationship to the ultimate test," Aman wrote.

The actor said couples must figure out if they will be able to work through "million tiny conflicts" that will arise.

"It's easy to be the best version of yourself for a few hours a day. But can you share a bathroom? Weather the storm of a bad mood? Agree on what to eat for dinner every night? Keep the fire alive in the bedroom? "Work through the million tiny conflicts that inevitably arise between two people in close proximity? In short – are you actually compatible? I'm aware that Indian society is a little uptight about 'living in sin' but then again, society is uptight about so many things! Log kya kahenge? (What will people say?)" she added in the post.

Aman will return to screen after five years with Manish Malhotra's production "Bun Tikki". (PTI)



HAILEE STEINFELD BOARDS RYAN COOGLER'S UNTITLED SUPERNATURAL THRILLER

LOS ANGELES, April 10: Actor-singer Hailee Steinfeld is the latest addition to the cast of Ryan Coogler's untitled supernatural thriller film.

Steinfeld, known for starring in Disney+ series "Hawkeye" and voicing Gwen Stacy in the animated "Spider-Verse" movies, will feature opposite Michael B. Jordan in the Warner Bros. Pictures project.

While little is known about the plotline, sources told The Hollywood Reporter that the film is the era of the Jim Crow laws in the Southern USA where racial segregation was enforced. The story possibly involves both vampires and Southern supernatural traditions.

Coogler also serves as writer and producer on the movie through his production company Proximity Media.

Wunmi Mosaku, Delroy Lindo and Jack O'Connell also round out the cast. Zinzi Coogler and Sev Ohanian are also producing the film, set to be released on May 7, 2025. (PTI)



John Cena on Vin Diesel and Dwayne Johnson's feud: There can only be one alpha

LOS ANGELES, April 10: Wrestler-turned-actor John Cena has shared his opinion on the long-standing feud between "Fast and Furious" co-stars Vin Diesel and Dwayne Johnson, saying there can only be "one alpha" in the project at a time.

Johnson, who joined the action franchise with 2011's "Fast Five" as Luke Hobbs, had a fallout with lead star Diesel during the making of 2017's "The Fate of the Furious" that resulted in the actor dropping out of 2021's "F9: The Fast Saga".

Cena, 46, joined the cast of "F9: The Fast Saga" in the role of Jakob Toretto, the estranged brother of Diesel's character, Dom Toretto. Asked to comment about the very public quarrel between Johnson and Diesel, Cena told Dax Shephard on the "Armchair Expert" podcast: "There's certainly rumours about that. I can't deny that. You have two very alpha, driven people. You get two. There can only be one." Before their beef, Johnson had also starred in the sequels "Fast & Furious 6" (2013), and "Furious 7" (2015). His character's popularity led to a spin-off film titled "Hobbs & Shaw" (2019) co-starring Jason Statham. Diesel and Johnson seemed to have buried the hatchet as the latter had a cameo in a mid-credits scene in the 10th film in the franchise, "Fast X", which released last year. (PTI)

Joaquin Phoenix, Lady Gaga bring twisted tale of love in first teaser of 'Joker: Folie a Deux'

NEW DELHI, April 10: Joaquin Phoenix is back as Joker to unleash chaos in the first teaser trailer of "Joker: Folie a Deux", which also introduces viewers to the love of his life in Harley Quinn, played by Lady Gaga.

Hollywood studio Warner Bros unveiled the first look of the follow-up to the multiple Oscar-winning antihero saga "Joker", which was released in 2019.

Phoenix won the Academy Award for best actor for his turn as a failed, unhinged stand-up comedian who descends into chaos, taking the whole Gotham City along with him.

Often teased as a psychological thriller with elements of a musical, the sequel presents a twisted tale of love between Phoenix's Arthur Fleck aka Joker and Quinn, played by Gaga.

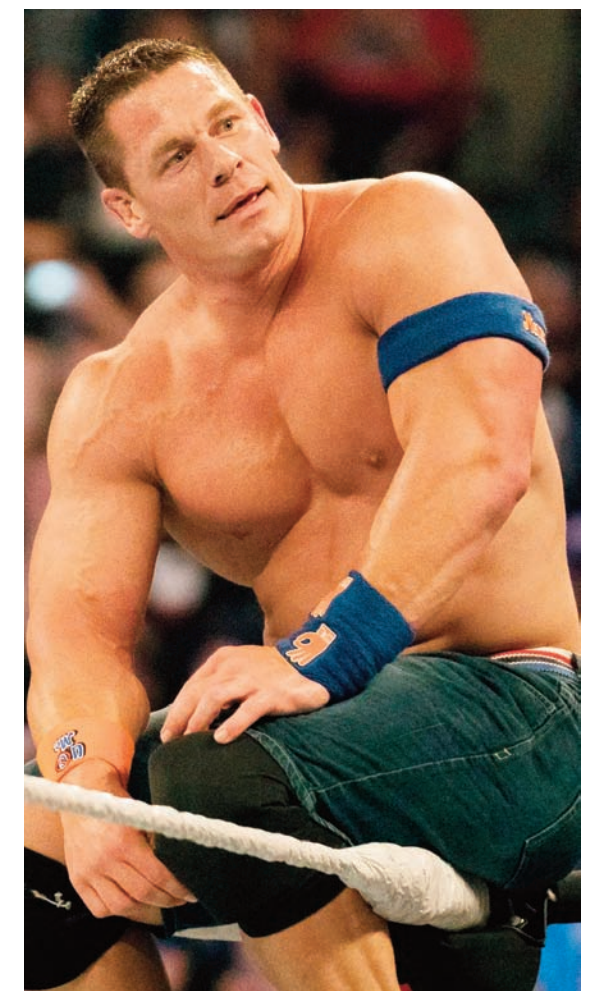
The trailer opens with Fleck still locked up in Arkham, the asylum in Gotham City where most of DC comics villains end up. He finds a glimmer of hope when he meets Quinn. The two are shown running through the streets, watching movies together and dancing against a moonlit sky. In one of the sequences, Fleck is dressed in the Joker avatar and performing at a nightclub.

Just like the first part, the trailer does not make it clear what is real and how much of it might just be happening in Fleck's head.

Todd Phillips returns to direct. He has also co-written the script for the sequel, which will feature Zazie Beetz coming back as Sophie Dumond, a single mother and Fleck's former neighbour.

The newcomers include Brendan Gleeson, Catherine Keener and Steve Coogan.

Warner Bros will release "Joker: Folie a Deux" in Indian theatres on October 4 in English, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu languages. (PTI)



KIT HARRINGTON SAYS 'GOT' SPINOFF ON JON SNOW IS 'OFF THE TABLE'

LOS ANGELES, April 10: British star Kit Harington has revealed that a spinoff series based around his "Game of Thrones" character Jon Snow is no longer in development as the team couldn't find the right story.

Harington rose to global stardom with his performance as Jon Snow, a brooding warrior and one of the pivotal characters, in the HBO epic fantasy show that ended in May 2019 after eight seasons.

It was reported in June 2022 that HBO was developing a Jon Snow spin-off with Harington in talks to reprise the role.

In a new interview with ScreenRant while promoting his movie "Blood for Dust", Kit Harington revealed that the spinoff centered around Jon Snow is "off the table" and no longer in development at HBO. Variety reported.

"I hadn't really ever spoken about it, because it was in development," Harington said. "I didn't want it leaked out that it was being developed. I didn't want the thing to happen where people kind of start theorizing, getting either excited about it or hating the idea of it, when it may never happen. Because in development, you look at every angle, and you see whether it's worth it," he said.

"And currently, it's not. Currently, it's off the table, because we all couldn't find the right story to tell that we were all excited about enough," he continued. "So, we decided to lay down tools with it for the time being. There may be a time in the future where we return to it, but at the moment, no. It's firmly on the shelf," Harington added.

News broke in June 2022 that Harington was set to return to his iconic "Thrones" role, which earned him two Emmy nominations (one for supporting actor and another for lead actor in a drama series).

"It was Kit Harington who brought the idea to us," author George R.R. Martin later confirmed in a blog post. "I cannot tell you the names of the writers/showrunners, since that has not been cleared for release yet but Kit brought them in too, his own team, and they are terrific."

"Game of Thrones" concluded with Jon Snow's exile from Westeros as he rides into the Haunted Forest with his direwolf Ghost and the Wildlings to begin a new life. Many fans assumed the spinoff series would pick up with Snow's adventures with the Wildlings. (AGENCIES)



Superb Sreejesh fails to save India from losing 1-2 against Australia

PERTH, April 10: Veteran goalkeeper PR Sreejesh's heroics went in vain as India squandered a goal lead to go down 1-2 against Australia in the third men's hockey Test to hand the home team an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series here on Wednesday.

The Indians, who lost 1-5 and 2-4 in the first two Tests, produced a much-better show on Wednesday with the defensive unit leading from the front.

It was a classic battle between the ever-attacking Australians against the Indian defence, which the latter narrowly lost eventually.

India took the lead through Jugraj Singh's penalty corner conversion in the 41st minute, but Jeremy Hayward (44th and 49th) dashed the visitors' hopes by scoring a brace to hand Australia their third win on the trot.

India played cohesively and with a lot more intensity to frustrate the Kookaburras, who secured as many as six penalty corners in the opening quarter but failed to get past the resolute defence of the visitors.

Credit must go to both Indian goalkeepers -- Sreejesh and Krishan Bahadur Pathak -- for their brilliant display in the first half.

It was the hosts who had the first scoring chance in the form of a penalty corner in the fourth minute but Sreejesh made a lovely low diving save to his right to keep out Hayward's shot.

Five minutes later, Australia secured three more penalty corners but they failed to get past the "The Great Indian Wall" in Sreejesh.



The Indians moved the ball well and they too earned a penalty corner but skipper Harmanpreet Singh's effort was saved by the Australian goalie.

Australia earned two more set pieces in the first quarter but the Indian defence stood tall.

Australia changed the tempo of the game in the second quarter and played fast-paced, attacking hockey to put pressure on the Indian defence, which produced a rock solid performance.

After Sreejesh, it was Pathak's turn to show his heroics. He first denied Australia skipper Aran Zaleski with a save off his chest and then came out of his line to keep out Tim Brand.

Australia continued to play high-press after the change of ends and secured another set piece soon but Joel Rintala's flick was off target.

India took the lead against the run of play from their second

penalty corner through Jugraj's lightning flick.

Jolted by the goal, Australia launched fierce attacks and secured two more penalty corners but they couldn't beat Sreejesh, who was magnificent under the bar, pulling off saves after saves.

A rare defensive lapse from Amit Rohidas finally helped Australia to bounce back.

Rohidas miss-trapped a ball inside the circle and conceded a penalty stroke for blocking an

Australian striker. Hayward stepped up to score Australia's equaliser.

The Australians secured two more penalty corners in the final quarter and from the second chance, Hayward finally broke Sreejesh's defence with a powerful flick.

Eight minutes from the hooter, Lalit Upadhyay's powerful hit from the top of the circle was kept out by the Australian goalkeeper. (PTI)

the same venue during the UWW Ranking Series event last year. She will also be watched along with Antim Kundu (65kg), who won a silver at the U20 World Championships last year. Harshita had won a bronze in the same championships and will look to do well at the senior stage.

Indian team for Asian Championships: Free Style: Udit (57 Kg), Akash Dahiya (61Kg), Rohit (65Kg), Abhimanyou (70Kg), Yash Tushir (74 Kg), Parvinder Singh (79Kg), Sandeep Singh Mann (86kg), Vinay (92 Kg), Vicky (97Kg), and Anirudh Kumar (125Kg).

Greco Roman Style: Arjun Halakurki (55Kg), Pravesh (60kg), Umesh. (63kg), Vinayak Siddheshwar Patil (67Kg), Ankit Gulia (72kg), Sajjan Bhanwala (77 Kg), Rohit Dahiya (82kg), Ajay (87Kg), Narinder Cheema (97 Kg), and Mehar Singh (130 Kg) Women Wrestling: Shivane Pawar (50kg), Anju (53kg), Tamanna (55kg), Sarita Mor (57kg), Pushpa Yadav (59 Kg), Manisha Bhanwala (62kg), Antim Kundu (65kg), Radhika (68kg), Harshita (72kg), Priya (76 Kg). (PTI)

Messi and Inter Miami try to overturn 2-1 deficit against Monterrey and reach CONCACAF semifinal

MONTERREY (MEXICO), April 10: Lionel Messi and Inter Miami will try to overturn a 2-1 deficit from the first leg when they play Monterrey on Wednesday night for a spot in the CONCACAF Champions Cup semifinals.

Messi missed last week's first leg of the home-and-home, total-goals series. The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner returned from a hamstring injury that had sidelined him since a March 13 Champions Cup match against Nashville to play the second half of last Saturday's Major League Soccer game at Colorado, scoring once in a 2-2 draw.

"He is fine. He felt good after playing 45 minutes last Saturday. We still have today's practice, but apparently the injury is behind him," Miami coach Gerardo Martino said Tuesday. "That's the most important thing. Never mind tomorrow's match. The season is just beginning for us, and we need healthy players."

The match sold out in just a few hours and asking prices for resale tickets ranged from \$450-\$1,900.

"Leo's presence transcends any situation, people love football, and we knew something like this could happen," Martino said. "This is what happens when you have the best player in the world."

Messi did not speak to media. He has held only two media availabilities with Inter Miami since signing with the team last July 15: on Aug. 17 in Florida and on Feb.

6 in Tokyo during a preseason tour.

Hundreds of Mexican fans began gathering early Tuesday morning outside Miami's team hotel in San Pedro Garza, a high-end neighborhood in Monterrey.

"It's crazy out here. There are a lot of Messi fans here," said Juan Escalante, a 29-year-old factory employee who missed work to try to see his idol. "I have been here since early morning. Unfortunately the bus went through too fast, and I missed him."

Miami took a lead last week on Tomás Avilés' 19th-minute goal, but Monterrey went ahead when Maximiliano Meza scored in the 69th and Jorge Rodríguez in the 89th.

Because CONCACAF uses away goals as a tiebreaker, a 1-0 Miami win wouldn't be sufficient.

"It might take more than just one goal," Martino said.

Monterrey coach Fernando Ortiz said his team is aware of what Messi can do.

"We are Monterrey. We are at home, with our people. Let Messi worry about us," Ortiz said. "It's very fortunate to be able to face the best player in the world. We are going to enjoy it, but we want to win."

Monterrey is a five-time CONCACAF champion, winning last in 2021.

"Monterrey is not going to change with the lead," Ortiz said. "We are going for a positive outcome." (AP)

Wanderers, Kingsmead, Newlands among eight South African venues for 2027 WC

JOHANNESBURG, April 10: Eight of South Africa's top cricket stadiums, including Wanderers in Johannesburg, Durban's Kingsmead and Newlands in Cape Town, have been confirmed as venues for the 2027 ICC ODI World Cup, a News24 report said on Wednesday.

The 2027 World Cup will be jointly hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia across October and November.

Cricket South Africa's (CSA) chief executive officer, Pholotsi Moseki said the venues were decided keeping in mind the availability of hotel rooms and airport.

"The exercise (of choosing the venues) was a scientific one and also included the number of hotel rooms and the availability of an airport. If there was disappointment, it was also tempered by the reality that was based on the venues that were chosen," Moseki was quoted as saying by the South African website.

Moseki further stated that it was hard for them to leave out

the three venues in Benoni, JB Marks Oval and Diamond Oval.

"We do indeed have 11 ICC-accredited venues, so it was hard to leave out three, but a whole lot of things were taken into consideration. There's also the important matter of training venues outside of the ones available at the venue."

While the main venues will be the Wanderers, Centurion Park in Pretoria, Kingsmead, St George's Park in Gqeberha, Boland Park in Paarl and Newlands, the Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein and Buffalo Park in East London will also host some fixtures, with other games being staged in tournament co-hosts Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Hosts South Africa and Zimbabwe have directly qualified for the tournament, but Namibia will have to go through the African qualifiers. The top eight teams in the ICC ODI rankings gain direct qualification, while the remaining four spots will be determined through global qualifier tournaments. (PTI)

Sarita Mor headlines India's challenge at Asian Championships

BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN), April 10: With India's star wrestlers not in contention, the country's next-generation players will look to prove themselves on the big stage, even as the accomplished Sarita Mor will also be closely watched when the Asian Championships begin here on Thursday.

It was decided during the March 21 trials that winners in 17 Olympic weight categories will attempt to qualify for the Paris Games during the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek from April 19, while the runners-up in these categories will be given the opportunity to compete in the Asian Championships.

Since Olympic-quota winner Anitm Panghal, who was given a direct entry into the Championships, has pulled out of the event, Anju will represent India in the women's 53kg category.

Anju had won the 53kg trials where Vinesh Phogat had finished in top-4 to stay in contention in that category as well.

India have not found a good Sushil Kumar replacement in the men's free style 74kg since he left the scene. Narsingh Pancham



Yadav has aged and Jitender Kumar has also failed to make the category his own despite having the potential.

Yash Tushir has been striving to do well in this category and it will be a good opportunity for him to excel. Last year, he had missed out on a bronze medal after bouncing back in contention through repechage round and would like to complete the unfinished business.

Rohit Kumar, who had outplayed Bajrang Punia in the men's 65kg trials, had lost to Sujiet Kalakal and would like to make up for the lost opportunity.

In women's event, 2021 World Championship medalist Sarita Mor is the biggest name in India's squad. Asian Championships has been a happy hunting ground for her. It's an event she won twice (2020, 2021) apart from winning a silver (2017) and a bronze (2017).

Radhika has been making a transition to the senior level in 68kg. She had won a silver in the senior 2022 championships apart from winning a silver at the U23 Asian championships last year.

Manisha Bhanwala (62kg) has done well in the domestic competitions and also grabbed a gold at

Gukesh downs Abasov to jump into joint lead with Nepomniachtchi

TORONTO, April 10: Grandmaster D Gukesh grabbed a share of the lead alongside Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi by becoming the only Indian to post a win in the fifth round of the FIDE Candidates Chess Tournament, outwitting Azerbaijan's Nijat Abasov in a hard-fought contest here.

With nine rounds still to come in the double round-robin event, the 17-year-old Gukesh and Nepomniachtchi share the top spot with 3.5 points and they are followed by top-seeded American Fabio Caruana half a point behind. American Hikaru Nakamura was the other winner on the day against Firouz Alireza of France while Indian teen R Pragganandhaa played out a draw with overnight sole leader Nepomniachtchi.

Vidit Gujrathi also put an end to his losses by settling for a draw with Caruana.

Pragganandhaa and Nakamura share the fourth spot with 2.5 points followed closely by Gujrathi on two points. Alireza and Abasov share the last position on 1.5 points apiece.

In the Women's competition, nothing changed in terms of standings with all the four games ending in draws.

Pragganandhaa's sister R Vaishali could not dent the defenses of Anna Muzychuk and Koneru Humpy recovered with a draw against Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia.

Tournament leader Zhongyi Tan of China was held to a draw by the continuously improving Nurgul Salimova of Bulgaria and Russian Kateryna Lagno signed peace with Tingjie Lei of China. Tan remained in front following the drawing melee with 3.5 points in her kitty and Goryachkina inched up to 3 points to remain right behind the leader.

Lagno, Vaishali and Salimova shared the third spot with 2.5 points, half a point ahead of Humpy, Muzychuk and Lei.

Gukesh started off with the King pawn and faced the Petroff defense. The Indian ensured a complex middle game and had an edge right till the time the players hit the first time control. However, on the 40th move, Gukesh erred

and what seemed like a walk-in-the-park became a tough game, Abasov fought hard and was close to a draw by the 80th move but a blunder by the Azerbaijani on the 83rd cast the die decisively in Gukesh's favour with an extra pawn in the queen and pawn endgame.

The game lasted 87 moves and went on for a marathon six hours. Pragganandhaa displayed his acumen for the complexities against Nepomniachtchi.

It was another petroff defense of the day wherein the Indian first sacrificed a pawn and followed it up with a brilliant knight sacrifice that left him with a scary advantage. As things turned out, it was impossible to play like a machine in a clearly better position and once Pragganandhaa traded the queens, the game was sealed towards a draw in the rook and pawn ending. Gujrathi started off brilliantly with a victory over Nakamura in the second round, but after two losses, it was time to stay put against favourite Caruana. Not failing in his objective, the Nasik-based player was solid

and got his chances in the Rossolimo variation.

Caruana's king was trapped in the middle and Gujrathi had to also find machine-like moves to force matters. With the clock ticking away, it was never easy and the end result was a draw through repetition.

Nakamura was also lucky against Alireza. A draw looked like a likely result in the ending but Alireza missed a simple tactic that gave the American a much-needed victory.

In the women's section, Vaishali stood worse after a pawn sacrifice against Muzychuk in the Italian opening game as white.

She, however, kept herself in the game by keeping the position closed and in the end it was a draw. Humpy did not get much as white against Goryachkina.

The middle game out of a Queen's gambit did not have much spice and the game drifted in to an endgame with rook and minor pieces. Once the minor pieces were off the board, the players decided it was time to split the point. (PTI)



Neeraj Chopra to compete in Paavo Nurmi Games in Finland on June 18

NEW DELHI, April 10: Superstar Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will compete in the prestigious Paavo Nurmi Games in Turku, Finland on June 18, where he will be up against 19-year-old sensation Max Dehning of Germany, the latest entrant in the 90m club, the organisers said.

The 26-year-old Chopra, who will begin his season in the Doha Diamond League Meeting on May 10, had won a silver in the 2022 edition of the Paavo Nurmi Games with a throw of 89.30m -- his career second best -- while he pulled out of the event in 2023 as he was recovering from an injury then. Chopra has a personal best of 89.94m.

The Paavo Nurmi Games are named after the legendary Finnish middle and long distance runner. It is a World Athletics Continental Tour Gold series event, one of the most prestigious single-day competitions outside the Diamond League Meeting series.

"Javelin throw Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra will return to Turku in June. Chopra will compete in the Paavo Nurmi Games after a year's break and will meet a high-quality group of competitors. The competition will take place in Turku on June 18," said Arttu Salonen, who is responsible for athlete procurement at Paavo Nurmi Games, on the official event website.

"In addition to Chopra, we already have a contract with German Julian Weber and spring's surprise Max Dehning.

"The goal is to throw the toughest javelin competition of the summer in Turku before the Paris Olympics. Negotiations with others continue. Naturally, we want top domestic names to cover Turku, led by Oliver Hebler (who won gold in 2022 edition with 89.83)."

In February, teenager Dehning threw a sensational 90.20m -- more than 11.07m more than his earlier best of 79.13 -- to become the youngest javelin thrower to breach the coveted 90m mark at the German Winter Throwing Championships in Halle. He, however, could produce a throw of 80.30m in the European Throwing Cup in Leiria, Portugal on March 10.

Julian Weber is the reigning European champion, whose longest throw last season was 88.72. (PTI)

Desperate times for RCB as they take on equally struggling MI

MUMBAI, April 10: Desperate Royal Challengers Bengaluru will be under tremendous pressure to get their act together against an equally struggling Mumbai Indians when the two teams face-off in an Indian Premier League match here on Thursday.

Four losses in five matches have not only vindicated how poor RCB were in the last IPL auction, but they have also missed the opportunity to make it up with better on-field showing.

However, there is nothing much to separate the two teams as RCB are just a rung below MI in the points table at the ninth position with MI winning just one (29-run victory over Delhi Capitals) out of their four games so far.

Virat Kohli's brilliance, notwithstanding, RCB's campaign is under threat of falling apart even before they could register enough wins to have a real shot at the knockouts.

With the halfway mark of the ongoing IPL approaching rapidly, it is imperative for RCB's overseas stars, including skipper Faf du Plessis (109 runs), Glenn Maxwell (32) and Cameron Green (68) to find form.

Kohli's imperious form -- 316 runs with one century and two fifties at a strike rate of 146.29 -- has been the lone bright spot for RCB.

With the memories of his 50th ODI century in the World Cup semifinal at the Wankhede Stadium just five months ago still fresh, Kohli would be keen to



flourish again at the same venue on Thursday.

Any bowling attack would be left searching for answers if one of their part-timers is topping the list of wicket-takers. And in RCB's case, whose bowling looked threadbare even before they hit the ground running, Maxwell's four scalps neither provide any respite nor assurance.

But their recent record against MI could boost RCB, who have won four of their last five games. The overall record in 32 matches, however, is tilted in favour of the five-time champions, who enjoy 18 wins against RCB's 14.

MI would know present circumstances provide them with a ripe opportunity to build up on their recent success and move further up in the points table after a rough start.

For a side which invariably

starts IPL with a few losses, MI know their way around these lanes. A contest against a floundering RCB could bring about their second win on the trot and some further boost in confidence, before facing defending champions Chennai Super Kings.

But it would be imperative for MI not to get too far ahead, since they also have their share of concerns.

Even though Rohit Sharma and Ishan Kishan have set the scoring tempo at the top, the middle-order has failed to carry the momentum for which skipper Hardik Pandya is answerable to a large extent.

It remains to be seen if the anger of MI fans against Pandya persists when he takes the field next, as he got some respite in their last game which was attended by thousands of children and not regular supporters.

Suryakumar Yadav's return amid a lot of attention ended in a damp squib, but the world's no. 1 T20 batter would be itching to hit the strides and get a big score.

Romario Shepherd's blitz against Anrich Nortje for 32 runs in an over clearly proved to be the difference against DC here, since the visitors managed to go past the 200-run mark despite not looking threatening enough while chasing an imposing 235-run target.

Teams (from):

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kvena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalk Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Vishnu Vinod, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, 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.

Time: 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

It progresses across ecosystem, Agarkar on Kohli's fitness benchmark



MUMBAI, April 10: The fitness blueprint designed by Virat Kohli has had a ripple effect on the whole Indian cricketing ecosystem, said chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar, who described MS Dhoni as a pure instinct man of a sport that had embraced the use of data and insight long ago.

Kohli might be 35 years old but he remains second to none when it comes to performing the most difficult fitness drills.

"You look at guys like Virat (Kohli), he is one of those guys who set the benchmark. 10-15 years into his career, he has only got fitter, you can see the results. If someone like him sets an example and puts forward certain things that you need or certain fitness levels that you need, gradually it progresses across the ecosystem."

"Gradually it has progressed (to the younger generation). The one difference you have seen over the last 15-20 years or so is the fitness

levels of players," said Agarkar on SportifywithPRG.

Kohli has been in sublime form in the ongoing edition of the IPL, smashing a record-extending eighth century in the tournament over the years, while also leading the run charts with 316 from five games so far.

Dhoni's instincts have seen him win five coveted IPL titles, and though he has relinquished the position of skipper at Chennai Super Kings, his presence on the field is enough to infuse loads of confidence in his side.

The former India cricketer felt that artificial intelligence cannot be a substitute to someone like Dhoni whose captaincy instincts are incredible.

"The amount of data that's available, is incredible. You can plan a whole innings and I think everybody does it now, but it doesn't mean it will work all the time. You need a captain on the ground be-

cause not everything that you've planned is going to go your way.

"On a particular day it might, but most days it won't. And that's where you need human instinct. That's why you call MS Dhoni a great captain because he had a feel for the game. He knew what was happening and how the game was changing," opined the 46-year-old former India pace bowler.

Agarkar said that the IPL had become a huge platform to spot talent but what mattered most was a strong temperament, which would set them apart from the rest.

"You can see it, (IPL) keeps throwing up players out of the blue. Having been a selector for a few months, there are certain players who suddenly come and show even on the big stage. IPL is a fairly big stage because of the pressures involved, big crowds."

"You might be bowling to the top batters in the world, or you might be facing one of the top bowlers in the world, and that's when you stand up and that's where you judge the temperament of a player, whether he can do it consistently," said Agarkar.

"It's sometimes a difficult task because of the sheer numbers (of players coming through the domestic structure) that we have. But, eventually, the more you watch players and temperament sometimes separates it."

Agarkar believes a tight-knit side will, more often than not, be a winning side. "A tight-knit group generally helps. You don't need to be the best friends but you want to enjoy each others' success. If that doesn't happen sometimes it is a bit difficult." (PTI)

Hardik Pandya is the glue holding Mumbai Indians' batting together: Tim David

MUMBAI, April 10: Mumbai Indians' all-rounder Tim David on Wednesday defended skipper Hardik Pandya's scoring rate in the ongoing IPL, saying he has been the "glue" which is holding the batting together for the five-time winners.

Even though Pandya has struck at 138.46 to get 108 runs in four matches so far while batting at different slots, his failure to go ballistic in the middle as well as lower order has been noticeable this season.

In the first game against his former side Gujarat Titans, Pandya succumbed to pressure after a four-ball 11 in a tricky chase whereas in the next, the MI skipper could only manage a 20-ball 24 at No 5 against Sunrisers Hyderabad while chasing a monumental 278.

Pandya did a commendable job on a tough pitch against Rajasthan Royals to top-score with a 21-ball 34 in a low-scoring game, but his 33-ball 39 (3x4s, 1x6s) was in stark contrast to the other MI batters who went hammer and tongs to help the team record its highest total of 234/5 at home in the last match.

"We have had conversations about how we have played. Hardik has been playing a really important job for our team," David told the media during Mumbai Indians' training session at the Wankhede Stadium on the eve of their clash against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

"Look at the last match (vs Delhi Capitals), we struggled really hard for momentum towards the back end (against Delhi Capitals). Hardik played a perfect innings that set the platform for myself and Romario (Shepherd) to go on with at the end," David added.

"We got ourselves to a platform and he got that one ball that he could have hit for six. He hit it high on the bat and missed the middle and he is out (and) that is how the game goes."

The Australian all-rounder said having an extra batter in the line-up with the impact player rule in place could allow some batting line-ups like Kolkata Knight Riders to go boom or bust, but Pandya holds the innings together.

"With the extra freedom of having an extra batter, there is maybe a little bit less responsibility. Some people are playing with a little bit more freedom or throwing caution to the wind. It goes both ways. KKR, the way they have been playing, they have been scoring a lot of runs."

"The other night, they were playing the same way (against Chennai Super Kings). They were looking to go big or bust a bit. They fall in a heap in the middle order." (PTI)

Paris Olympics track and field gold winners to get USD 50,000: World Athletics

MONACO, April 10: In a first for an Olympic sport, gold-medallists in 48 athletics events of this year's Paris Games will be awarded USD 50,000 by World Athletics, which will widen the spectrum by giving prize money to all three medal winners at the 2028 Los Angeles edition.

India is hoping for a gold medal in Paris from reigning Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra, who finished on top in the Tokyo Games. He became the first Indian track and field athlete and second overall in individual sports to win a gold in the Olympic Games.

With the landmark decision announced on Wednesday, World Athletics (WA) will become the first international federation to award prize money at an Olympic Games.

"World Athletics... will become the first international federation to award prize money at an Olympic Games, financially rewarding athletes for achieving the pinnacle of sporting success, starting at this summer's Olympic Games in Paris," WA said in a statement. World Athletics President Sebastian Coe said the introduction of prize money for Olympic gold medallists was a "pivotal moment" for the international body and the sport of athletics as a whole.

"A total prize pot of USD 2.4 million has



been ring fenced from the International Olympic Committee's revenue share allocation, which is received by World Athletics every four years. This will be used to reward athletes who win a gold medal in each of the 48 athletics events in Paris with USD 50,000 (Rs 41.60 lakh)," WA stated.

"This initiative by World Athletics also includes a firm commitment to extend the prize money at a tiered level, to Olympic silver and bronze medal winners at the LA 2028 Olympic Games."

Relay teams will receive the same amount, to be shared among the team.

The format and structure of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics bonuses will be announced nearer the time of Games.

The payment of prize money will, however, depend upon the World Athletics rat-

ification process, including athletes undergoing and clearing the usual anti-doping procedures. Coe said the move underscores WA's commitment to empowering the athletes and recognising the critical role they play in the success of any Olympic Games.

"This is the continuation of a journey we started back in 2015, which sees all the money World Athletics receives from the International Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games go directly back into our sport," he said.

"We started with the Olympic dividend payments to our Member Federations, which saw us distribute an extra USD five million a year on top of existing grants aimed at athletics growth projects, and we are now in a position to also fund gold medal performances for athletes in Paris, with a commitment to reward all three medallists at the LA28 Olympic Games."

Coe added that it is impossible to put a marketable value on winning an Olympic medal, or on the commitment and focus it takes to represent one's country. "I think it is important we start somewhere and make sure some of the revenues generated by our athletes at the Olympic Games are directly returned to those who make the Games the global spectacle that it is." (PTI)

Sindhu wins; Lakshya, Srikanth lose in opening round

NINGBO (CHINA), April 10: Double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu survived some tense moments before progressing to the women's singles second round but it was curtains for Lakshya Sen and Kidambi Srikanth in men's singles at the Badminton Asia Championships here on Wednesday.

Sindhu, who is desperately seeking to rediscover her form ahead of the Paris Olympics, almost blew away a five-point advantage in the decider before managing a gritty 18-21 21-14 21-19 win against world number 33 Goh Jin Wei from Malaysia.

Sindhu had lost to her Malaysian opponent the last time they meet in Sudirman Cup though the Indian has a 4-1 record against her.

Next up for Sindhu is China's Han Yue, against whom the Indian has a flawless 5-0 record.

It was, however, a difficult day for Olympic-bound Sen, who lost 19-21 15-21 to local favourite and top seed Shi Yu Qi, and Srikanth, who suffered a 14-21 13-21 loss against Indonesia's Anthony Ginting in the opening round.

Talented Priyanshu Rajawat also crashed out in the men's singles opening round.

Rajawat was not match for eight-seeded Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia, losing 9-21 13-21 in 39 minutes.

It was also curtains for the Panda sisters -- Rutuparna and Swetaparna -- in the opening round of women's doubles, losing 8-21 13-21 against seventh seeds Zhang Shu Xian and Zheng Yu W of China.

MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila too was left heartbroken after losing 21-23 21-19 24-26 against seventh seeded Chinese pair of Liu Yu Chen and Ou Xuan Yi. Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand too went down 2-21 11-21 to fourth seeded Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning in women's doubles opener to dash their faint Paris Olympics qualification hopes.

Malvika Bansod and Aakarshi Kashyap too faltered in the opening hurdle, losing to

Korea's Sim Yu Jin and Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrungphan respectively.

Sindhu vs Jin Wei The continental championship provides a chance to Sindhu, who is on a comeback trail after recovering from an injury, to test her wares against some of the world's best shuttlers and the Indian did dug deep after losing the opening game. She fought her way back into the contest and kept herself afloat despite lagging from the start in the decider, before turning the tables to move to five match points.

But she seems to have suffered a meltdown, squandering four match points before her opponent found the net. (PTI)

Was sidelined with three injuries, worked to become better version of myself: Suryakumar

MUMBAI, April 10: India and Mumbai Indians batter Suryakumar Yadav on Wednesday revealed that he battled three different injuries in the past three months but worked hard to become a "better version" of himself while going through a "boring" recovery process.

The world No.1 T20 batter, who made his comeback last week in the Indian Premier League, revealed that apart from sports hernia for which he had to undergo a surgery and an ankle problem, he also endured an injury to his right knee.

"I had two-three niggles together, sports hernia, ankle and then right knee. I had to take one step at a time, follow the small things and here I am, really happy to be on the ground," Yadav said

in a video released by IPL.

The 33-year-old said it was "boring" for him to follow the same routine during rehab work at the start but he decided to make the most of the opportunity.

"It's actually a little difficult to describe the last three (or) three-and-a-half months. It was difficult, the first two-three weeks, because I felt (it was) very boring, because I felt (it was) very boring doing the same things again and again (in) the rehab," he said.

"But (by) the fourth-fifth week, I realised that it is important going forward."

A conversation with his wife was helpful in giving him perspective.

"When I spoke to my wife and all the people at NCA, they said it has to be a second version of yourself, you have to be a little

different when you come back on the field. I started doing all those small things like sleeping on time, following a good diet -- that was most important," he added.

Yadav said time away from the game helped him focus on aspects he had neglected and that helped him recover faster.

"I (had) never read a book in my life and I started doing that as well. Getting up in the morning, spending a good quality time at the rehab centre and focusing on everything, connecting myself, my brain and my body with the rehab and it helped me really well to recover a little faster," he said.

"I wanted to be a better version of myself, when I got injured, I realised what were the things I wanted to work on. I got 2-3



months to work on myself in terms of fitness and on my body as well," he said.

'SKY' lauded the coaches and staff at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru for understand-

ing and supporting him in his recovery phase, even when he did not like the grind.

"I am really grateful to the support staff at NCA, everyone, right from trainers to physios who took care of me right from the morning. They took everything, whatever I said."

"A few days I was feeling angry to do the rehab but then they took that in their stride and understood really well how I wanted to work," he said.

Yadav, who had faced trouble clearing his fitness tests at NCA at the initial stage of this IPL, said he never felt he was not around the Mumbai Indians' team.

"My whole cricketing journey started from here and when I entered the hotel and the ground, it never felt (like) that I (had) left

this place," he said.

"The first day when I did my practice session with the boys and everyone around, it felt that I was here since the IPL started."

However, Yadav admitted he could not watch IPL matches since he followed a strict routine.

"It is always difficult when your team is playing and you are sitting in the room and watching. I cannot say that I did not watch the games, I watched half of the games as I was sleeping on time when I was in Bangalore, at about 10:30pm-10:45pm," he said.

"It was difficult but at the same time, it gave me a lot of motivation and inspiration that yes, they are playing there and I have to work really hard on myself and my recovery and get there as soon as possible," he added. (PTI)