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 ● Top Qatari official urges Israel and Hamas to do more to reach a cease-fire deal
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 ● 'Shehzada' insulted Maharajas but silent on atrocities by Nawabs: PM
 ● Just 8 pc women candidates contested first two phases of Lok Sabha polls

Himanta leads NDA alliance campaign for Kokrajhar seat

'Overwhelming support reflects NDA's devp vision'

Choice between 'those who opened fire at karsevaks and those who built Ram temple': Shah

KASGANJ (UP), April 28: Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday hit out at the opposition for keeping the Ram temple issue "hanging" and said the public has to choose between "those who opened fire at karsevaks and those who built the Ram temple."

(Samajwadi Party) kept the Ram temple issue hanging for more than 70 years. You made Modi ji the prime minister for a second time and he did 'Jai Shri Ram' by doing the consecration ceremony on January 22," Shah said. The home minister also alleged that the opposition parties ignored people from backward communities, who were granted their rights by Narendra Modi after he became prime minister.



Shah made these remarks at a public rally in support of Rajveer Singh, the BJP candidate from Etah-Kasganj in Uttar Pradesh. Attacking opposition party leaders for not attending the Ram temple consecration ceremony, Shah said, "The people who did not go to the consecration ceremony, they know that they are the people who shot at karsevaks."

Targeting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he said, "Rahul Gandhi says that if the BJP gets 400 seats, it will remove reservation. I want to say that we had a full majority for two terms but Narendra Modi is a supporter of reservation." "I want to say that it is a Modi guarantee that neither the BJP will remove reservations for SCs (Scheduled Castes), STs (Scheduled Tribes) (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, April 28: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma spearheaded a vibrant campaign rally on Sunday in Kokrajhar seeking support for the NDA alliance candidate in the Lok Sabha elections.

Sarma highlighted the widespread endorsement received by NDA candidates across all constituencies, including the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency. "The resounding support from people belonging to various communities underscores their faith in the NDA's vision for development," Sarma emphasised during his address at Fakiragram under Baukhangri - Parbatjhora LAC. Asserting the NDA's track record in fostering welfare and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM distracted by imaginary ghosts, ignoring real issues: Chidambaram

NEW DELHI, April 28: Taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday said the PM has imagined a Congress manifesto written by one of his ghost speech writers and he should debate the real issues included in the document.

and read in the Congress' manifesto words and sentences that are not there! He has imagined a Congress' manifesto written by one of his ghost speech writers," Chidambaram, who was the chairman of the committee that drafted the Congress manifesto, said. The phrase 'inheritance tax' does not occur anywhere in the manifesto, the former finance minister said in his post on X. "The Congress' promises on taxation are quite clear: Bring an era of transparency, equity, clarity and impartial tax administration of Direct Taxes; Maintain stable personal (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong issues show-cause notice to MLA Abdur Rashid Mandal

GUWAHATI, April 28: The opposition Congress in Assam on Sunday issued a show-cause notice to its MLA Abdur Rashid Mandal for his alleged anti-party activities. State Congress's chairman of the media department Bedabrat Bora said the party received numerous complaints from its block and other units of Goalpara district against Mandal recently. Mandal, the MLA of Goalpara West constituency, has been given time till Monday to reply to the notice, he said. "If he fails to reply within the stipulated (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

OM SHANTI

Born on 10th February, 1991 (Diphu) Died on 29th April, 2014 (New Delhi)

Bhaswati (Lovely) Nunisa

It's been ten years since you left us. Everyday sweet memories of yours comes our way. Since you will never be forgotten, we pledge to you today. The hollowed space within our hearts is the place where you will you'll always stay. We still love you and deeply miss you though you are gone. Today the 29th. April, 2024, on the day of your 10th. Death Anniversary, we all pray for eternal peace of your soul.

Bereaved family members
 Dr. Motilal Nunisa (father), Mainodi (Babli) Nunisa (elder sister) Ponaxi (Lolo) Nunisa (younger sister),
Uncles, Aunts.
All the Cousins: Thairingdao, (Smti.) Jaymala, Ms. Tanushree (Nathum), Ms. Donlikdi (Piky), Ms. Ronlikdi (Pinky), Ms. Priyashree (Zimzu), Bangham (Mao), Dr. (Ms) Rinklikdi (Nicky), Chiranjeev (Bonny), Ms. Ringsmaidi, Shivraj (Vir), Repshodao (Tintin), Ringdao, Jushring.

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Monetary policy expectations impact stocks more than rate moves: RBI paper

MUMBAI, April 28: Equity markets are impacted more by the expectations of future monetary policy than the policy rate surprises on the day of announcement of the policy by the Reserve Bank, said an analysis.

According to a working paper prepared by RBI officials, the regulatory and development measures which are announced along with the monetary policy too impact the stock markets.

"...equity markets are affected more by the changes in the market's expectations of future monetary policy (path factor) than the policy rate surprise (target factor) which is in agreement with the conventional thinking that equity markets are forward-looking," the paper said.

The volatility in equity markets on the day of policy announcement, it said, "is affected by both target and path factors, as markets digest the policy announcements and traders adjust their portfolios throughout the day".



RBI Working Paper on 'Equity Markets and Monetary Policy Surprises' is prepared by Mayank Gupta, Amit Pawar, Satyam Kumar, Abhinandan Borad and Subrat Kumar Set from Department of Economic and Policy Research, Reserve Bank of India.

The paper analyses the impact of monetary policy announcements

on the returns and volatility in the BSE Sensex by decomposing changes in Overnight Indexed Swap (OIS) rates on policy announcement days into target and path factors. The target factor captures the surprise component in central bank policy rate action, while the path factor captures the impact of central bank's communi-

cation on market expectations regarding the future path of monetary policy. While the short duration windows are aimed at controlling for other potential drivers of equity prices, it may be noted that the monetary policy announcements are accompanied by regulatory and developmental measures which can also impact markets, the paper said.

The sparse trading on occasions in the OIS markets as well as other domestic and global developments during the narrow window can also impact the analysis, it added.

The analysis covers the period starting with the implicit adoption of a flexible inflation targeting regime in India (January 2014) and ends in July 2022.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced the RBI Working Papers series in March 2011. The central bank said the views expressed in the paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the institution(s) to which they belong. (PTI)

Realme Unveils Realme C65 5G

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: Realme, a stalwart in the smartphone industry, has once again raised the bar with the launch of the Realme C65 5G, marking a significant milestone in its Champion Series - the Realme C Series. This latest addition amalgamates cutting-edge features with elegant design, promising an unparalleled smartphone experience for users. Renowned for its pioneering advancements in fast charging, camera technology, and design aesthetics, the Realme C Series continues to set industry benchmarks, continually evolving across key dimensions: charging, camera, storage, and design.

Speaking on the occasion, a spokesperson from Realme stated, "Realme is committed to democratizing technology, and today's launch of the Realme C65 5G underscores our dedication to innovation. As the world's first smartphone featuring the MediaTek Dimensity 6300 5G Chipset, the Realme C65 5G is poised to revolutionize user experiences with its exceptional performance and advanced features. The Realme C Series epitomizes our mission to make cutting-edge technology accessible to all, and with such groundbreaking features available at an affordable price point, this series has undoubtedly left an indelible mark in the industry."

Anuj Sidharth, Deputy Director of Marketing & Communications at MediaTek, highlighted, "The MediaTek Dimensity 6300 empowers mainstream 5G smartphones with enhanced gaming capabilities, superior cameras, and remarkable battery efficiency, courtesy of the TSMC 6nm-class chip. The Realme C65 5G, powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 6300, leverages MediaTek 5G UltraSave 3.0+ technology, delivering exceptional power efficiency and intelligent enhancements, along with MediaTek Hyper-Engine gaming technologies.

FIU notifies fresh terror financing reporting alerts for capital markets

NEW DELHI, April 28: A fresh set of 'alert indicators' have been issued by India's financial intelligence unit (FIU) for capital markets, insurance companies, online payment gateway intermediaries and crypto currency service providers for effective checking of suspicious transactions in their channels as part of the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regime.

These new guidelines have been issued under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) during the 2022-23 financial year and published in a recently released report that has been accessed by PTI.

This is part of the anti-money laundering (AML) and combating the financing of terrorism (CFT) regime followed by the country as part of which financial institutions and intermediaries are mandated to share suspicious transaction reports (STRs) with the FIU which subsequently analyses them and shares them for action with various investigative and intelligence agencies.

FIU proactively engages with the financial sector regulators and reporting entities to understand emerging risks and to undertake immediate mitigating measures, the charter for the federal financial data mining agency says.

In the case of capital markets, these supplemental guidelines have led to "a strategic shift in the manner in which FIU received information with respect to securities market transactions," the report said.

These 'alert indicators' will address "emerging risks" in the market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) - stock exchanges and depositories - like synchronised and manipulative trade practices, order spoofing, mis-utilisation of client funds by the stock brokers, suspicious off-market transactions etc.

In light of the growing trading volumes, the role the MIIs becomes "cardinal" in making the AML/CFT architecture more robust, it said.

Though the MIIs have been sending suspicious transaction reports (STRs) to the FIU for years now, the report said there was a lack of alert indicators "specific to them" and this left a lot of scope for improvement in their reporting quality, the report said.

The supplemental guidelines have specified clear areas of focus for the MIIs and it is expected that this would lead to a "marked improvement" in the reporting quality and thus will help FIU to generate meaningful intelligence for law enforcement agencies like the Income-tax department, ED, CBI, DRI etc., it said.

The new alert indicators were issued after a working group of agencies like markets regulator SEBI, FIU, stock exchanges and depositories decided to "comprehensively" revise these guidelines and change the system of only stock brokers and depository participants reporting STRs to the FIU, as they were the first point of contact for a client to access the

capital markets.

For stock exchanges, the fresh alert indicators mandate they consider cases where there is suspicion of mis-utilisation of client funds by the stockbrokers such as frauds and also analyse cases where "serious anomalies" from the perspective of money laundering and terrorism financing are observed during the course of inspections and audit of stock brokers, the report said.

In the case of depositories, the new alert indicators for generating STRs require them to deal with identification of suspicious off-market transfer, a way of transferring shares directly between two accounts without the involvement of an exchange platform.

A similar working group, that included insurance regulator IRDAI, went into issues related to the insurance sector during 2022-23 fiscal and the revised guidelines laid "special stress" for generating alerts in cases of frauds experienced by the insurance firms and analyse these from the AML/CFT perspective and furnish reports to FIU in suitable cases, the report said.

In the case of online payment gateways, a working group comprising banking regulator RBI, National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) "extensively" studied the business model of these technology-enabled financial services firms as these "new-age" players pose challenges in respect of transparency of the parties involved in transactions facilitated by them and the relative speed with which such transactions are completed, leading to emergence of AML/CFT risks. The agency also issued alert indicators for virtual digital asset (VDA) or crypto currency service providers ranging from directions to register with the FIU to carrying out "enhanced due diligence to implementation of travel rule."

The travel rule requires crypto currency service providers to share sender and recipient data with each other during transactions.

In the case of credit rating agencies (CRAs), the new guidelines will ensure timely reporting of STRs by them to FIU and help in identifying serious corporate frauds having AML/CFT implications in the early stages and ensure timely action by law enforcement agencies based on such financial intelligence preventing siphoning of funds by delinquent issuers, it said.

A similar set of alert indicators were issued to debenture trustees and they were directed to call for "periodic reports" from issuers of debentures and take appropriate action in the interest of the debenture holders as soon as any breach of trust deed or law comes to their notice even as the FIU said these violations may have implications from the AML/CFT perspective.

The FIU has also shared the new alert indicator guidelines for STR reporting with real estate agents categorised as designated non-financial businesses and professions (DNFBP) under PMLA. (PTI)

AdaniConneX raises \$1.44bn from 8 global banks

NEW DELHI, April 28: AdaniConneX, a joint venture equally owned by Adani Enterprises and EdgeConneX that is building data centres, secured India's largest sustainability-linked financing arrangement, raising up to USD 1.44 billion (around Rs 11,520 crore), the company said on Sunday.

Adani Enterprises Ltd, the flagship of billionaire Gautam Adani-run conglomerate, is investing around USD 1.5 billion on its fledgling data centre business in the next three years. Its joint venture with EdgeConneX plans to build nine data centres with a total capacity of 1 gigawatt by 2030 to provide infrastructure for the booming digital services demand.

In a statement, the firm said the "financing has an initial commitment of USD 875 million, with an accordion feature to extend commitment up to USD 1.44 billion." "The transaction elevates AdaniConneX's construction financing pool to USD 1.65 billion, building on the maiden construction facility of USD 213 million executed in June 2023," it said.

AdaniConneX, which has only one operational data centre in Chennai so far, has completed almost two-thirds of the construction in the Noida and Hyderabad facilities.

"The upcoming data centre facilities will employ state-of-the-art technologies and renewable energy solutions to minimise the ecological footprint while optimising operational efficiency."

"The sustainability-linked financing reinforces AdaniConneX's commitment towards driving a safety-first culture, delivering world-class Power Usage Effectiveness (PUE) by adopting



global best practices, and leveraging renewable energy resources," it added.

A key feature of the facility is the innovative solution of a syndicated guarantee-backed assurance programme in sync with the projects' procurement strategy. Definitive agreements have been executed with eight international lenders -- ING Bank NV, Intesa Sanpaolo, KfW IPEX, MUFG Bank Ltd, Natixis, Standard Chartered Bank, Societe Generale, and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation.

"Access to a wide pool of liquidity strengthens the company's strategy to fast-track the implementation of portfolio assets in sync with accelerating demand," the statement said.

This transformative approach towards financing is a significant step towards building sustainable digital infrastructure that will fuel economic progress and accelerate India's digital growth.

"This successful exercise is a testament to the collective resolve of the parties to meet the challenges of establishing sustainable

and robust digital infrastructure, thereby pushing norms and setting new industry benchmarks," said AdaniConneX CEO Jeyakumar Janakaram.

"Construction financing is a core element of the AdaniConneX capital management plan, enabling us to deliver a data centre solution firmly rooted in sustainability and environmental stewardship. We are delighted to embark on this journey alongside our esteemed international banking partners."

ING Bank NV, Intesa Sanpaolo, KfW IPEX, MUFG Bank Ltd, Natixis, Standard Chartered Bank, Societe Generale, and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation acted as Mandated Lead Arrangers.

ING Bank NV and MUFG Bank Ltd acted as Structuring Banks whereas ING Bank NV, MUFG Bank Ltd and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation acted as Sustainability coordinators.

Allen & Overy and Saraf & Partners were the borrower's counsels. The lenders' counsels were Milbank and Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas. (PTI)

Banks may have to slow down loan growth in FY25: S&P Global Ratings

NEW DELHI, April 28: Indian banks' credit growth, profitability and asset quality would remain robust in current fiscal reflecting strong economic growth, but they may be compelled to slow down their loan growth as deposits are not growing at a similar pace, S&P Global Ratings has said.

In the Asia-Pacific 2Q 2024 Banking Update, S&P Global Ratings Director SSEA Nikita Anand said the agency expects the sector's strong credit growth to moderate to 14 per cent in FY25, from 16 per cent in FY24, if deposit growth, especially retail deposits, remain tepid. Anand said there is a deterioration in loan-to-deposit ratio in every bank, with loan growth being 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth.

"We expect banks to bring down their loan growth in FY25 and bring it in line with deposit growth. If banks do not do that, they would be paying higher to get wholesale funding, which will impact profitability," she said at a recent webinar of S&P Global Ratings. Generally, loan growth has been led by private sector banks which see around 17-18 per cent growth, public sector banks on the other hand see loan growth in the range of 12-14 per cent.

Anand said Indian banks can support loan growth of as high as 15-20 per cent over three years without need for raising capital. The loan growth is 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth of the banking sector.

"For India, we expect credit growth, profitability and asset quality to remain robust reflecting strong economic growth. Loan growth is 1.5 times of nominal GDP growth, while deposit growth is in line with nominal GDP growth. "Loan growth should come in line with deposits rather than outpacing deposits. If credit growth doesn't slow, banks will have to fund it from wholesale funding and higher cost of such funding could further strain margins and hurt profitability," Anand said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

'Overwhelming support reflects

progress, Sarma lauded the alliance's governance in both the Bodoland Territorial Region and in the state of Assam.

"Our relentless commitment for citizens' welfare has led to significant developmental strides," he stated, pointing to the NDA's third consecutive term prospects under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Expressing confidence in the NDA's electoral prospects, Sarma predicted a substantial victory margin for NDA candidate Joyanta Basumatary in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency.

"The overwhelming support we witnessed today reflects the people's trust in our alliance," Sarma remarked.

Joining Sarma in rallying support was Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, who echoed the sentiments of gratitude and optimism.

"The outpouring of support for Joyanta Basumatary underscores the deep-rooted affection for the NDA alliance," Boro proclaimed, expressing certainty in securing victory in the upcoming elections.

The campaign witnessed a massive turnout, with Sarma addressing three electrifying rallies across the region, accompanied by key ministers and party members. From Kadamtola to Fakiragram and Srirampur, the fervor of support for the NDA alliance resonated among the crowds, with over thirty thousand supporters and well-wishers rallying behind the cause. As the campaign gains momentum, the NDA alliance stands poised to translate this groundswell of support into a decisive victory in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, signalling a new chapter of progress and development for the region.

Choice between 'those who

and OBCs (Other Backward Classes) nor will it allow anyone to do so," Shah said.

Listing the BJP government's schemes, including free ration and homes to the poor, Shah said the free ration scheme will continue till 2029 if the BJP returns to power. He also hit out at Samajwadi Party chief Yadav for allegedly fielding only members of his family.

Alleging that people had to migrate during the Samajwadi Party government, Shah said "goondas are forced to migrate not people" under BJP rule in Uttar Pradesh. "In Uttar Pradesh, where once bombs exploded, today 'bombs' are being manufactured for export under the leadership of Modi," Shah said.

He went on to claim that the BJP will secure more than 100 seats from the seats that went to the polls in the first two phases while the Congress and the Samajwadi Party will not be able to open their accounts. Polling in Kasganj will be held in the third phase on May 7. (PTI)

PM distracted by imaginary

income tax rates for the term of 5 years; Lessen the burden of tax on MSMEs," Chidambaram said.

He further said that the Congress promises to end the duplicitous 'cess' Raj of the Modi government and shopkeepers and retail businesses will be given significant tax relief and GST 2.0 will be introduced.

"It is disappointing to see the Hon'ble PM fight imaginary ghosts. He should debate the 'real' issues included in the Congress' Manifesto," Chidambaram said.

In a statement on Thursday, Chidambaram had said the "manufactured" controversies on 'redistribution of wealth' and 'inheritance tax' showed that fear has gripped the BJP, which has fallen back on distortion, falsehoods and abuse' as 'Modi ki Guarantee' has vanished without a trace. Chidambaram had asserted that the document is religion-neutral and promises justice for all sections of the people. (PTI)

Cong issues show-cause

time, then the party will take necessary action as per rule," he added. Mandal has been claiming that the party's Dhubri candidate Rakibul Hussain is neglecting him during the campaign.

Voting in Dhubri will take place in the third phase on May 7. (PTI)

Vedanta best-placed to ride rising commodity prices, say analysts

NEW DELHI, April 28: Mining conglomerate Vedanta Ltd is likely to see less pressure on cash flows after liability management at the holding company level and is now best placed to ride rising commodity prices, analysts said.

Improved performance in aluminium, power and zinc enabled the company to turn in EBITDA of ₹ 87,600 crore in the January-March quarter, up by 4 per cent quarter-on-quarter. The improved performance was attributable to lower cost of production in aluminium and zinc and higher sales volume, partially offset by softer zinc prices.

Despite marginal delays, Vedanta is set to complete its alumina/aluminium/ international zinc expansion during the current fiscal year (FY25), which will provide visibility around volume growth and cost reduction FY26 onwards. The start of coal mines in FY26 shall further lower its aluminium cost of production.

In a post earnings note, Nuvama Institutional Equities said management is moving ahead to demerge the businesses by end of current fiscal (April 2024 to March 2025). The vertical split of its businesses into six listed entities can yield Vedanta higher-than-current value. "We believe Vedanta is best placed to ride rising commodity prices. Rising commodity prices



not only improves cash flows, but open up the potential of increasing the valuation multiple too as debt overhang shall subside significantly," it said. Citi said liability management at the holding company gives confidence around Vedanta India's balance sheet as well.

"With less pressure on cash flows, commodity price resilience, potential sale of the steel/iron ore businesses -- management expects this over the course of two quarters, likely restructuring -- NOC is awaited from the lenders to file with the NCLT for the demerger, Vedanta hopes to complete the process by calendar year 2024, our dividend yield estimate of 10 per cent-plus -- we reiterate Buy (on company shares)," it said.

Phillip Capital said Vedanta has successfully resolved its debt issue

and commodity prices have also jumped, providing further support to the cash flows.

"We continue to hold our positive outlook as we feel the commodity prices have legroom to improve from here as well driven by Chinese stimulus and improved demand in 2H. The demerger of businesses and potential sales of any assets will help the management to meet its debt obligations. We have increased our FY26 EBITDA by 17 per cent."

Antique Stock Broking Ltd said strengthening of commodity prices (supported by tightening of supply and steady demand) would support topline growth while accrual of benefits of most cost optimization initiatives coming in FY25 onwards would support profitability. "We like the company's low-

cost producer advantage," it said. "We factor in 6 per cent higher aluminium, 9 per cent higher zinc prices, which raises our FY25/ 26 EBITDA by 11 per cent/ 15 per cent (respectively)." Centrum said for the current quarter, it expects sharp increase in commodity prices to aid strong growth in the zinc and aluminium segment driving overall earnings growth.

"Vedanta is set to level up across businesses through capacity expansion and cost savings through backward integration will drive margin improvement and earnings growth," it said. "We expect zinc india and aluminium to grow by 18 per cent and 30 per cent CAGR over FY24-26." Despite a huge dividend payout of Rs 45 per share and capex outlay of around USD 2 billion each in FY25 and FY26, strong earnings visibility is expected to help generate strong free cash flows to deleverage net debt position by USD 1.4 billion, it added. CLSA said Vedanta has guided for group Ebitda to rise to USD 6 billion/USD 7.5 billion by FY25/27 through capacity expansion, backward integration and value addition projects.

Reported net debt fell by ₹ 6,000 crore quarter-on-quarter to ₹ 56,300 crore helped by sharp working capital reduction (inventories/receivables), which is likely to be sustainable. (PTI)

Forest beat office to be established in Dhiraimajuli for protection of the villagers CCF Sandip Kumar visits Dhiraimajuli after elephant kills 3

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 28: Chief conservator of forest, (CCF) Sandip Kumar accompanying the local MLA, Ganesh Kumar Limbu visited Dhiraimajuli area near Dhekiajuli town in Sonitpur district on Sunday following the killing of three persons by a wild elephant in the village on Saturday.

The wild elephant had reportedly attacked three persons, including two forest guards, thereby killing them. Another person was also injured in the incident.

Villagers here are living in fear of attacks by wild elephants, which often stray into the villages in search of food.

Interacting with the media, Sandip Kumar expressed his concern over the unfortunate incident that had claimed the lives of two dedicated and expert forest guards along with a local villager.

"We are very grieved by this unfortunate incident as the two forest guards, Kuleswar Boro and Biren Rabha were honoured with many awards for their proficiency in dealing with many man-elephant conflict related



Their service was a major driving force for the state forest department and their untimely demise is an irreparable loss for us." "Dhiraimajuli is a fringe area of the river Brahmaputra. Wild elephants from the

Orang National park and Laokhowa and Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary enter the area creating mayhem among the people. So responding to the public demand, a forest beat office will soon be set up in the area for the protection of the people of the area from the wild elephants and wild attacks, thereby curbing the man-animal conflict.

The wild elephant is presently taking shelter in Laokhowa and Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary.

Meanwhile, the chief conservator of forest also informed that an expert team of forest personnel from the Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden in Guwahati has been camping in the area since Saturday evening and watching the animal.

He also visited the late Jatun Tanti's residence, who was the first victim to be killed by the wild elephant. During his visit he expressed his condolences to the bereaved family. He was also accompanied by the conservator of the forest, C. Ramesh, DFO, Sonitpur, Nripen Nath Kalita and other forest officials.

Alleged counterfeit oil from Nayara depot affecting commuters

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: Riders and drivers of Madarkhat, Dikom, Naharchuk felt harassed when the engines of the respective vehicles failed to provide desired mileage.

As many as 3 Nayara depots are located at Alimur in Lahowal, Naharchuk in Dikom and Ghoramara.

Some of the commuters also complained of engine failure allegedly due to the oil they refilled from the depots.

Locals said initially an Indian Oil petrol pump located at Meleng village located in Modarkhat area catered to the needs of commuters. However, due to the closure of the depot people resorted to buy oil from the Naira depot.

Those affected also complained of skyrocketing prices of diesel and petrol available at Nayara depot.

Naira depot is operated by Indo-Russian Oil Refinery and marketing Company.

Those affected have complained that owners of Nayara have allegedly been selling counterfeit oil in skyrocketing prices.

Concerned locals have further asked Nayara owner Prasad Kumar Panikar for an explanation on the issue and further threatened to shut down the pump if the issue persists.

Dibrugarh University signs MoU with ICMR-RMRC

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 28: A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Dibrugarh University and ICMR- Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Lahowal on Sunday.

A target has been set to advance collaborative research between the Dibrugarh University and the Regional Medical Research Centre.

The MoU was signed by Dibrugarh University registrar, Paramananda Sonowal in the presence of Rajiv Behl, director general of Health Research of the Indian Council of Medical Research and secretary, Government of India, and Natarajenivasan Kalimumsamay, director of the Regional Medical Research Centre, Lahowal.

The Dibrugarh University has been working hard to take forward scientific research since its inception. It also has a leading department of herbal sciences (department of pharmacological sciences) on pharmacology.

The agreement signed between these two leading institutes is expected to bring a message of greater success to the collaborative field of health research.

Over the years, this department has been able to introduce excellence in the field of research in drug preparation.

Meetings of governing body, Academic Council of Pragjyotishpur University held

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: The Pragjyotishpur University has organised the eighth meeting of the governing body followed by the second meeting of its Academic Council in Guwahati.

Esteemed members of the university spoke on matters concerning the institution's growth and development. While the governing body's meeting was held on April 26, meeting of the Academic Council was held on Saturday.

Proceedings on April 26 began with a Vaastu Pujan ceremony at the university's main campus in Hajongbari. The governing body meeting thereafter commenced with a confirmation of the proceedings of its previous meeting that was held on December 17 last year.

BJP hopes to get over 4,60,000 votes in Diphu LS constituency

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 28: In BJP's post election assessment the party has come down with a figure of 4,60,000 votes from Diphu (ST) parliamentary constituency comprising six Legislative Assembly segments of Diphu, Bokajan, Howraghat in Karbi Anglong district, Rongkhang and Amri in West Karbi Anglong and Halflong in Dima Hasao district.

In a press conference held at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, BJP - Karbi Anglong District Committee, East (EKADC) office here, the MP candidate Amarsing Tisso said combining Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao the BJP will get above of 4,60,000 votes.

Tisso said, "The overall poll percentage in Diphu (ST) parliamentary constituency was 75.61 per cent, which means 6,73,000 voters have cast their votes. Out of this the BJP will get over 4,60,000 votes. From Dima Hasao alone we will get 80,000 votes."

Tisso expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP national president, JP Nadda, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, BJP Assam Pradesh president, Bhabesh Kalita and BJP presidents of East Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong for their strong support. He also extended his gratitude to chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram



Rongkhang and NC Autonomous Council, Debolal Garlosa for their participation in the election campaign. Tisso also said the autonomous state issue will be his first priority in the Parliament.

Award presentation function of Aaelita Art and Craft School held



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 28: The results of the annual examination as well as the awards distribution ceremony of Aaelita Art and Craft School was held at the office of Chachal Shatadal Branch Sahitya Sabha in Guwahati on Sunday.

The programme was inaugurated by Yogacharya Shubhashish Kar by lightning the ceremonial lamp.

During the award function, Sangeet was performed by prominent artiste Sadananda Barman.

Kamal Chowdhury, faculty of USTM, Rajiv Das, principal of Anupurbik Art and Craft Institute, Keshav Barua, deputy editor of Agradut newspaper and Avani Sharma, principal of the Nandi Mikir Primary School participated in the event.

Hitesh Sharma, president of Prakritipremi Manch, Ganesh Chetri, Shatadru Chowdhury, senior jopurnalists Santosh Das, Dibyajyoti Das, national youth awardee, Budhin Saikia secretary of Chachal Senior Citizens Association, Siktadev Kar, yoga therapist, Guwahati Medical College and Hospital, Satya Prakash Pegu, retired joint commissioner, industry and commerce department, yoga teacher Manjit Das, Bhupen Das, Parth Pratim Gautam from Prakritipremi Manch and others attended the event and distributed the awards among the winners.

The prizes and certificates were presented only to the first, second and third winners in different categories. Special prizes were also presented to students, who had 100 per cent attendance in school.

The meeting was mentored by Dhananjay Talukdar, president of the school management committee while Jonaki Kalita Talukdar, the principal of the institute delivered the welcome address and expressed her gratitude to all the participants.

Continuing Medical Education event held in Tezpur

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 28: Under the auspices of the IMA Tezpur branch, the Shankara Cancer and Research Institute, Tezpur, in collaboration with API, Tezpur branch, on April 27 organised an event called "Continuing Medical Education (CME)" with special focus on the theme "Oncology in 2024: Where Have We Reached?" which featured insightful talks on the latest advancements in Medical Oncology, Radiation Oncology, and Surgical Oncology.

On the occasion, distinguished speakers such as Dr Venkata Pradeep Babu Koyyala discussed a recent breakthrough in Medical Oncology, while Dr Suhas V

Navada, shared insights into Radiation Oncology advancements and Dr Rajiv Paul spoke on the advancements in Surgical Oncology.

The event was conducted by the President and Secretaries of IMA Tezpur branch, Dr Dipen Mahanta, Dr Queen Gogoi, and Dr Ranjan Mahanta respectively. Subsequently, Devajet Kalita, the chief operating officer of Shankara Cancer and Research Institute, Tezpur, shouldered his total responsibility in ensuring the event's success.

Dr Kartik Chandra Borkotoki represented API, Tezpur branch, adding to the diverse expertise present.

Dr Venkata Pradeep Babu Koyyala highlighted the availabil-

ity of cutting-edge treatments at the Shankara Cancer and Research Institute, Tezpur, including targeted therapies, immunotherapies, and chemotherapy drugs with reduced side effects and infusion of reactions.

He also underscored the institute's provision of cervical cancer vaccines for prevention and breast cancer screening facilities, ensuring comprehensive cancer care for the community.

It is pertinent to state here that the CME served as a platform for healthcare professionals to stay abreast of the latest advancements in oncology and exchange valuable insights, ultimately contributing to enhanced patient care and outcomes in the region.

Aaradhya is also recipient of Bharat Gaurav Ratna Shri Samaan Award, honoured with doctorate degree in sports by World Peace of United Nations University

Aaradhya Dhanuka receives India's youngest honorary doctorate degree

HT Bureau



GUWAHATI, April 28: Aaradhya Dhanuka, has become the youngest achiever of the Doctorate Award at the tender age of 10 years.

The Honorary Doctorate Award Council awarded the Doctorate Award to Aaradhya, a resident of Guwahati. She is the daughter of industrialist Ghanshyam Dhanuka and Swati Dhanuka and granddaughter of renowned social worker Ashok Dhanuka and Kusum Dhanuka.

She is the youngest to hold this award in India as stated by both the prestigious organisations. She has also been honoured with the doctorate degree in sports by the World Peace of United Nations University and the Bharat Gaurav Ratna Shri Samaan

Award in New Delhi by the Indian actress Dia Mirza in presence of Param Vir Chakra awardee Yogendra Singh Yadav, international wrestler Narsingh Yadav, judge Avnish Saxena along with many other prominent dignitaries.

Aaradhya holds the remarkable feat of being the youngest honorary doctorate in sports, a child prodigy and has made the state proud through her immense talent.

She has also won seven state records, three national records and three world records along with the title of 'Hula Hooping Girl of Assam'. Her excellence in both academics and sports acts as an inspiration for aspiring individuals to go beyond their comfort zone and do wonders.

Track restoration in Lumding -Badarpur hill section



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: The operation of passenger and goods carrying trains that got affected with derailments of an engine of a goods train was restored on April 26 at about 2:00 pm.

The derailment had occurred at KM 110/7 between Jatinga Lampur and New Harangajao Stations under the Lumding division of NFR. On receipt of the information of the derailment, senior official from the division as well as from the headquarters at Maligaon led by the general manager, Chetan Kumar Shrivastava immediately rushed to the site.

Divisional railway manager of Lumding divisions, Prem Ranjan Kumar was also there at the site. Adequate manpower and machineries were also arranged and reached the site for the restoration work. Assistance from the Indian Army was also provided in terms of 25 trucks and 100 personnels. The Indian Army team, led by Major Abhishek and his team from the Silchar unit, were stationed at Jatinga. They were ready to help the railway administration and passengers in case of any exigency.

The Indian Army stayed at the site till the last train passed on April 26. Although the restoration work continued round the clock, the weather condition in the hill was not favourable due to frequent rainfall. During the restoration work,

land settlement was detected in that area for a track length of about 150 meters.

Ballasting was done in the affected portion by removing sleepers and rails. Then packing of ballast was done by using track machine to improve the stability. Senior officials at the site continued monitoring of the restoration works. Finally, the affected portion was given fit for the train operation at about 2 pm and the first train passed over the portion at about 4 pm.

More than 300 labours along with other technicians and 10 machines worked round the clock to restore the train service on that route that is vital not only for the entire South Assam areas, but also for states like Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram. In view of frequent rainfall in the nearby hilly areas, the entire hill section from Lumding to Badarpur is being monitored day and night.

However, in view of the derailment and subsequent detection of settlement of track, the NFR authority has decided to impose restriction on train movement in Jatinga Lampur and New Halflong portion of the hill section with effect from April 27. Accordingly, there will be no train movement on that section from 18:00 hours to 06:00 hours temporarily for undertaking works related to safety of railway tracks. This restriction will result into cancellations and rescheduling of few trains, which will be notified time to time until full normalization of that section.

World Veterinary Day celebrated in Tezpur



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 28: The Assam Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Association has celebrated the 'World Veterinary Day, 2024' at Tezpur by organising a programme in Sonitpur.

The programme was organised under the aegis of the district animal husbandry and veterinary department on Saturday. The event highlighted the essential role of veterinarians as well as healthcare workers and featured a walkathon with the veterinarians and field assistants, followed by an anti-rabies vaccination camp for the field workers aided by the Tezpur Medical College and Hospital and the Sonitpur district health department.

The meeting, which was held upholding the motto 'Veterinarians are the essential health workers', was inaugurated by Garga Mohan Das, ADC (Vety.) by ceremonial lighting of the lamp. Das highlighted how veterinarians are not only essential health workers, but also acknowledged the contribution of veterinarians as essential in administration.

Elaborating the significance of the day Das said, "Global animal welfare advocacy is the goal of the World Veterinary Day. The observance of the day acts as a reminder of how important veterinarians are in preserving the health of all animals, both domestic and wild. Increasing public awareness of the importance of the

work that veterinarians do is one of the main goals of the day."

Earlier an awareness rally was also taken out across Tezpur, highlighting the need to care about animals. Various officials and workers from the veterinary and animal husbandry department participated in the rally.

The technical session held during the daylong programme emphasised on veterinary public health and its link to human health. Speakers underscored the interconnectedness of environment, animal, and human health, addressing issues such as food safety, antimicrobial resistance, and zoonoses. During the interactive session, the administration addressed concerns from farmers such as rising animal feed prices and ensured a solution to it with help from the department. Moreover, optimizing milk production through heat synchronization was also addressed.

The meeting was also graced by district development commissioner Gurga Prasad Agarwala and district surveillance officer, Tilak Bhat-tacharya, former animal husbandry and veterinary officer Binoy Barman, Prasanta Das and other officials of the department. As part of the programme a progressive dairy farmer Kamlesh Shah was acknowledged for his entrepreneurial efforts in the field. Anti-rabies vaccines were also administered to all veterinarians and field assistants of the district on the occasion.

Weekly summer special trains from Guwahati, New Tinsukia

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: In view of the sudden surge of passengers during the summer, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) will operate weekly special trains from Guwahati and New Tinsukia.

One special train will operate between Guwahati and Shri Ganganagar in Rajasthan and the other will operate between New Tinsukia and SMVT Bengaluru. Both these trains will operate for nine trips each in both directions. Both the special trains will consist of AC 2-tier, AC 3-tier, sleeper class coaches for the convenience of passengers.

Accordingly, the Guwahati - Shri Ganganagar Special will depart from Guwahati at 18:15 hours on every Wednesday from May 1 till June 26 to reach Shri Ganganagar at 3:30 hours on Saturday. In return direction, the Shri Ganganagar - Guwahati Special will depart from Shri Ganganagar at 13:20 hours on every Sunday from May 5 till June 30 to reach Guwahati at 00:25 hours on Wednesday.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Test a servant while in the discharge of his duty, a relative in difficulty, a friend in adversity, and a wife in misfortune. -Chanakya

SC's EVM verdict

The recent Supreme Court ruling dismissing petitions advocating for 100% verification of VVPAT slips has stirred both anticipation and concern within the political landscape of India. Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta's resolute affirmation of the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) system as a cornerstone of the electoral process has drawn contrasting reactions. While some view it as a triumph of democracy, others question the potential implications for the legitimacy of election outcomes. The court's decision to uphold the integrity of the electoral process by trusting the existing protocols and technical aspects governing EVM usage is a definitive stance against indiscriminate suspicion. Yet, it also raises pertinent questions about the avenues available for recourse in case of electoral disputes. The directive allowing for the lodging of complaints within 7 days of result declaration, coupled with the scrutiny of EVMs upon written request, underscores a mechanism for addressing concerns post-election.

However, the envisaged scenario of a deluge of complaints, particularly in the event of a landslide victory such as the hypothetical 370 seats for the BJP, raises valid apprehensions about the potential for logistical and credibility challenges. The prospect of prolonged delays in result declaration and lingering doubts regarding the veracity of electoral outcomes looms large, casting a shadow over the democratic process. Justice Khanna's aversion to blanket suspicion of the poll process and his counterpart's concurrence emphasize the need for a balanced approach to electoral oversight. Yet, the specter of strategic manipulation through the lodging of complaints by losing candidates cannot be discounted. The parity in access to recourse between winning and losing factions underscores the delicate balance between ensuring electoral integrity and avoiding undue disruption to the democratic transition of power. The onus now lies on all stakeholders, including political parties, the Election Commission of India, and the judiciary, to navigate this nuanced terrain with vigilance and prudence. The safeguarding of electoral integrity demands a proactive commitment to transparency, accountability, and fairness, transcending partisan interests for the collective good of democracy.

The delineation of responsibilities, from the storage of Symbol Loading Units to the procedural safeguards for lodging complaints, underscores the meticulous framework underpinning the electoral process. However, the potential for abuse or exploitation of these mechanisms underscores the need for constant vigilance and institutional robustness to thwart any attempts at subverting the democratic will. While the Supreme Court's verdict reaffirms the foundational role of EVMs in the electoral process, it also highlights the imperative for continuous scrutiny and refinement of electoral mechanisms. The specter of post-election disputes and the attendant challenges necessitate a concerted effort by all stakeholders to uphold the sanctity of the democratic process. As India navigates the complex terrain of electoral governance, the principles of transparency, accountability, and impartiality must remain sacrosanct to safeguard the integrity of its democratic institutions. In the face of potential post-election disputes and the specter of strategic manipulation, it is imperative for the Election Commission of India to demonstrate unwavering resolve in upholding the integrity of the electoral process. Transparent communication, swift adjudication of complaints, and robust enforcement of electoral guidelines are essential to fostering public trust and confidence in the democratic process. Moreover, political actors must exercise restraint and refrain from exploiting procedural loopholes for partisan gain, recognizing that the stability and credibility of India's democracy hinge on the fidelity of its electoral institutions.

Janata Dal (S) KEY to BJP's Karnataka calculations in 2024 polls

By Sushil Kuttu

The Janata Dal (Secular) is in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party. Does this mean the JDS is fighting for its "political survival"? Ask party head HD Kumaraswamy, a former Karnataka Chief Minister and the son of ex-Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda, and he says JDS wants Lok Sabha seats to ensure good governance and Karnataka's share of national resources.

But it has been media practice to keep trotting "JDS fighting for survival" headlines whenever there is assembly or Lok Sabha elections. The BJP and the Congress are not seen fighting for "survival", when every five years, one of the two is sent packing by the Karnataka voter. The Congress and BJP take turns at governing and are declared in fine fettle even after losing elections. The same does not apply to the JDS. But if "survival" is criteria, and alliance a distress signal, then the INDI-Alliance must also be for "political survival" of each and every political party in the INDIA bloc. The Janata Dal Secular has been battling the stigma of "fighting for political survival" for nearly two decades.

Kumaraswamy was asked the question "are you in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata for your party's political survival"? The Janata Dal Secular leader said the BJP and JDS share good vibes and mutual interests; that if it was a "matter of existence" people toeing the line were barking up the wrong tree.

He spoke of "a strategic move based on a long-term vision", which does not sound like "Janata Dal (Secular) is fighting for its political survival". That Janata Dal (Secular) has been struggling to make a mark does not make it a party in its death throes. Janata Dal (Secular) has won elections and has also tasted power. Janata Dal Secular has won Parliament seats. Kumaraswamy is himself in the fray from Mandya and there is a gargantuan effort being put in to ensure his victory.

Besides, the BJP decided on an alliance with the Janata Dal Secular for what JDS brings to the table. The BJP will gain from the tie-up and vice versa. Janata Dal (Secular)'s electoral strength has been tested before and the party has delivered. The BJP-JDS alliance bothers the Congress which should be reason enough to declare Janata Dal Secular "fighting fit".

The BJP's decision to join forces with Janata Dal Secular is not to save JDS from extinction. It is about "mutual interests". In certain parts of Karnataka, Janata Dal Secular enjoys special clout, as it does among certain groups of people. Like, for example, the Vokkaliga community. The BJP can do with Vokkaliga votes as much as the Congress wouldn't want to lose Vokkaliga votes.

For the Lok Sabha elections at least, the Congress is the adversary and the party to beat. Janata Dal (Secular) doesn't think fighting the Congress to win Parliament seats is a matter of life and death for the Karnataka-based political party. In the Janata Dal (Secular)'s book, just like in any political party's book, elections come and go, assembly elections as well as parliamentary elections.

The Janata Dal Secular is in the midst of yet another Lok Sabha elections and to characterize Janata Dal Secular's participation in general election 2024 as "Janata Dal Secular is fighting for its political survival" is reading too much between the lines and a convenient canard. On June 4 the final word on this chapter in Janata Dal (Secular) history will be written and it wouldn't be about Janata Dal (Secular)'s fight for political survival.

On April 26 voting for as many as 14 Karnataka Lok Sabha constituencies took place, among them all the Bengaluru seats. That the BJP-Janata Dal (Secular) alliance was not fighting for Janata Dal (Secular)'s political survival was apparent. If anything, the alliance is a sign that Janata Dal (Secular) continues to be a significant political player in Karnataka. (IPA Service)

Elon Musk's advisers were not fully sure about Narendra Modi's third term in 2024

Elon Musk's choice to delay his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has raised questions about the real reason behind Musk's decision to postpone the visit despite Tesla's commitment to establishing a manufacturing base in the country as a priority.

According to industry insiders and analysts, the primary reason for the billionaire's decision to postpone his visit is the ongoing elections in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is currently focused on campaigning and unable to unveil any new economic policies offering incentives to Tesla for its manufacturing programme in India.

It was anticipated that Musk would reveal details about establishing a manufacturing facility in India following Delhi's recent announcement of reduced import duties on specific electric vehicles. This policy applies to companies willing to invest a minimum of US\$500 million in manufacturing plants within a three-year timeframe.

Just before Musk's highly awaited trip to India, he decided to cancel his visit. Musk mentioned in a post on X (formerly Twitter) on April 20 that due to significant Tesla commitments, he has to postpone his visit to India. However, he expressed eagerness to visit later in the year. According to some US based analysts, Musk was advised by his policy consultants to visit India after the Lok Sabha elections and the formation of a new government.

Though the general view in U.S. media is that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi is coming back with comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha

elections, some of the ace political strategists who have been monitoring the Indian elections took note of an anti-BJP trend in the first phase of polls on April 19. Sources said that the Musk advisers analysed the initial reports and advised the Tesla chief to postpone the visit till a new government is formed.

Following Musk's announcement on postponement, opposition Congress Party leader Jairam Ramesh took to social media to express his view that it was strange for Elon Musk to travel to India to meet a Prime Minister who is on the way out. Ramesh suggested that Musk, too, had recognized the prevailing situation and chosen to postpone his visit.

The Prime Minister of India National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) will extend a warm welcome to Musk in the near future, and the INDIA'n government plans to intensify its promotion of electric vehicles even further - I personally use one myself! The term "INDIA" refers to a coalition of opposition parties that are contesting against Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Musk's choice has caused BJP supporters to wonder if he had advance knowledge of the election outcome, which differs from the predictions of various surveys forecasting the BJP's victory. The election results are expected to be announced on June 4. During a press conference, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that the government aims to create an appealing environment for large companies looking to invest in



India. "Given the rising concerns about China among various industries and experts in specific fields, we have crafted policies to position India as an appealing destination for both manufacturing and services."

Although analysts were initially taken aback by Musk's choice, they concurred that Tesla would establish operations in India, a country that surpassed Japan to become the world's third-largest automobile market in 2022.

Puneet Gupta, the director of mobility at S&P Global, highlighted the importance of Tesla tapping into the Indian market to increase sales, especially as the company's profitability has been declining due to price cuts aimed at capturing a larger market share. This insight was shared in a report by the SCMP media house.

To establish a solid presence in the Indian market quickly and effectively, Gupta recommended that Tesla should aim to scale up rapidly. He also suggested that Tesla might consider partnering with a local entity to minimize risks. According to Gupta, Tesla would benefit from partnering

with a local company to navigate the complexities of launching operations in various Indian states. He also mentioned that Tesla might be evaluating potential policy changes by the upcoming Indian government.

Experts noted that India represents an attractive market opportunity for Tesla. Elon Musk had previously mentioned that India's high import taxes were a barrier to Tesla's car sales in the country. As a result, Delhi responded by implementing reduced taxes specifically for electric vehicle manufacturing, aligning with Musk's perspective.

Tesla announced on Tuesday, April 23rd, its intention to speed up the release of more affordable vehicles and begin manufacturing new models earlier than initially planned, moving up the timeline from late 2025.

Analysts suggest that although Tesla may eventually launch a budget-friendly model in India, initially, the company might import its current models into the market upon entry.

According to Suraj Ghosh, an independent auto analyst, Tesla would have to establish a presence in India regardless of the

specific car models being offered. "India is a crucial and rapidly expanding market, and Tesla will need to establish a presence here eventually. India is poised to become a significant manufacturing center and a key sales destination," he commented.

Ghosh mentioned that Tesla is likely to reveal its intention to establish a factory in India after accepting the tax benefits provided by the new electric vehicle policy. With its manufacturing base established, Tesla could potentially enter the luxury car segment in India, as suggested by Ghosh. He noted that Tesla's vehicles are expected to be priced in the range of 3.5-4 million Indian rupees (equivalent to US\$42,000 to US\$48,000), allowing the company to carve out a favourable market position.

According to analysts, as Tesla enters India's electric vehicle market, competition is expected to intensify. Local manufacturers like Tata Motors may lower prices by leveraging decreasing battery costs and incentives from Delhi linked to productivity.

Ramesh K. Vaidyanathan, managing partner at law firm BTG Advaya, shared with SCMP media house that Musk's choice is prudent given the government's focus on the election and regulations prohibiting significant policy declarations by politicians. Vaidyanathan anticipates a competitive battle among Indian states to attract Tesla for establishing its manufacturing facilities.

Tesla's decision to invest in India will be a significant and impactful announcement for clear reasons. (IPA Service)

Jyotirao Phule: Champion of Social Justice and Equality

By: Dipak Kurmi

India boasts a rich tapestry of social reformers who left an indelible mark on society, particularly uplifting the marginalized. Among them, Jyotirao Phule shines as a luminary, born in Maharashtra on April 11th. Revered as a social reformer, author, and activist, Phule's timeless ideas continue to resonate in the 21st century. His life was dedicated to empowering the downtrodden, notably women, Shudras, and Dalits. Recognizing early on that a nation's progress hinges on acknowledging its marginalized communities, Phule emerged as a visionary leader.

As India commemorates the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, it prompts a moment of reflection on the strides made towards realizing the aspirations of visionaries like Phule. In recent years, the government has spearheaded various welfare initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Balika Samridhhi Yojana, and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, alongside direct benefit transfer schemes targeting the economically disadvantaged. These endeavors echo Phule's timeless vision of self-reliance for marginalized communities, aligning with his belief in empowering them for sustainable progress.

He tirelessly deliberated to unearth solutions to dismantle the entrenched inequalities of caste, class, gender, and religion in society. From an early age, he grasped that people were ensnared in ignorance, blindly adhering to hollow customs and norms without true comprehension. His foresight centered on advancing universal rights through social empowerment, envisioning a society where every individual could thrive.

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Indeed, the erosion of age-old traditions stands as a testament to Phule's unwavering dedication, resilience, and sheer grit. His stoic demeanor and succinct manner left an indelible mark on society. Through his writings, Phule navigated a diverse array of socio-cultural issues, offering solutions that aimed to redefine the Hindu social order, once rife with hierarchies and divisions. His multifaceted approach resonated deeply, signaling a profound shift in societal consciousness.

Phule orchestrated a bold strategy to dismantle the web of inequalities entrenched in society, leaving an indelible mark on future reformers. He challenged conventional notions of family and marriage, rejecting rigid gender roles and advocating for contract marriages based on mutual consent. Additionally, he boldly denounced the priesthood system, recognizing its role in perpetuating oppression. Ahead of his time, Phule established an orphanage to support vulnerable widows, demonstrating his compassion and progressive ideals. His dedication to women's education was unwavering, viewing it as a vital tool for rectifying historical injustices.

Phule adamantly advocated for universal access to primary education, successfully lobbying the British Government to enforce compulsory education up to the age of 12. His pioneering efforts extended to language policy in schools, with his formula - embracing the mother tongue, Hindi, and English - later adopted by independent India. He firmly believed that proficiency in these three languages was essential for every individual's holistic development. Furthermore, Phule proposed that schools integrate vocational education, recognizing its potential to engage students and equip them with practical skills for future employment opportunities. He envisioned a curriculum that not only nurtured academic excellence but also fostered vocational proficiency, ensuring holistic development and enhanced employability.

Phule emphasized the importance of aligning primary education curricula with the evolving needs of society to ensure its quality. This sentiment resonates strongly with the principles outlined in the New Education Policy of 2020. His foresight in advocating for inclusive, equitable, and quality education echoes the objectives set forth by the United Nations, underscoring the enduring relevance of his vision. Phule's ideas and ideals resonate profoundly in the 21st century, rooted in his steadfast belief in forging an egalitarian social fabric - a cornerstone of any meaningful democracy. His vision endures as a timeless beacon, inspiring ongoing efforts toward building a society founded on equality and justice. The government's commitment to Phule's principles shines through its array of welfare policies. Yet, to truly honor his legacy, greater attention must be given to including marginalized groups, particularly women, in decision-making processes. Despite reserved seats for women across various levels of governance, their representation still lags behind men. In essence, prioritizing the mainstreaming of marginalized voices should be the government's guiding ethos, realizing Mahatma Phule's vision for a truly inclusive society.

Phule's founding of the Satyashodhak Samaj served as a catalyst for social empowerment and the promotion of caste equality. Phule's relentless advocacy for women's education and defiance of regressive norms left an indelible mark on society. His visionary approach to educational reforms, including vocational training and multilingual education, mirrors contemporary policies such as the New Education Policy of 2020. In our ongoing quest for societal equality, Phule's principles remain as pertinent as ever. Prioritizing the inclusion of marginalized voices, particularly women, resonates with his vision of social justice. As we pay tribute to Phule's enduring legacy, let us dedicate ourselves to amplifying the voices of the marginalized and building a society where every citizen is valued and heard. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Phule's philosophy emerged amidst the tumultuous backdrop of pre-colonial Maharashtra, a society marred by decay. His scathing critique of Brahminical religion, scriptures, and ideologies laid the groundwork for the Satyashodhak Samaj - a beacon of truth-seeking and social upliftment. Through radical writings and unwavering activism, he spearheaded a reformation movement within Hindu society, sparking widespread attention. The establishment of Satyashodhak Samaj provided a platform for marginalized voices, advocating for caste equality and championing the human rights of low-caste individuals. Phule's lifelong crusade against the rigid patriarchal order and his advocacy for education as a tool for emancipation underscored his commitment to social justice. Rejecting regressive hierarchies, he sought to bridge divisions among oppressed Hindus, paving the way for a more inclusive society.

Indeed, the erosion of age-old traditions stands as a testament to Phule's unwavering dedication, resilience, and sheer grit. His stoic demeanor and succinct manner left an indelible mark on society. Through his writings, Phule navigated a diverse array of socio-cultural issues, offering solutions that aimed to redefine the Hindu social order, once rife with hierarchies and divisions. His multifaceted approach resonated deeply, signaling a profound shift in societal consciousness.

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Election Commission of India degrades itself to Modi's own commission

By: K Raveendran

The Election Commission has forfeited all claims to be the national guardian of constitutional democracy by soft peddling on the complaints against alleged hate speech by prime minister Narendra Modi in what the whole country was watching as a litmus test for the independence and integrity of the poll body.

As was widely feared in political circles, the commission has miserably failed the test by tip-toeing around the issue and sending a faceless notice to Modi's party, sparing the PM himself of any blame. To create a semblance of independence, the commission has sent a similar notice to the Congress party as follow-up action on BJP's complaints against some of Rahul Gandhi's speeches as well. In doing so, however, the commission has degraded itself to Modi's Election Commission from its hallowed role as the Election Commission of India.

There have been several in-

stances in the past of the commission sucking up to the powers that be after the government progressively tightened its grip on the constitutional body, including the appointment of chief election commissioner and other commissioners. The government steam-rolled all protests that the new law on the appointment would lead to the ruling party's 'yes men' occupying the crucial posts and put in place a mechanism that placed complete control of the commission in the hands of the government. The commission's decision in the latest case involving the PM shows how true these fears were.

Modi's remarks at an election rally in Rajasthan had ignited a fierce debate on hate speech, constitutional norms, and the delicate balance between political power and institutional autonomy. Modi's reference to Muslims as 'infiltrators' sparked outrage and accusations of religious polarization, reverberating across the political landscape. He asserted that the Congress party, during its tenure, had declared

that Muslims held the 'first right' over the country's resources.

The prime minister was undeterred by the criticism and in fact, repeated his charge with greater force in subsequent rallies. Furthermore, he warned that if the Congress returned to power, it would redistribute wealth among those with more children, euphemistically referring to Muslims. The crowd applauded, but critics saw this as a dangerous dog whistle, playing on communal sentiments and perpetuating stereotypes. Obviously, Modi and his party know that he has nothing to fear from the election commission.

Modi's controversial remarks are not isolated incidents. They reflect a broader trend—the progressive erosion of constitutional entities' autonomy. Since the BJP assumed power a decade ago, India's tradition of diversity and secularism has come under attack. Critics argue that religious intolerance has surged, and institutions designed to be bulwarks against majoritarianism have faced unprecedented challenges.

The ECI, once revered for its impartiality, now grapples with allegations of partisanship.

Modi has been violating the model code of conduct for the elections with impunity. In fact, the commission has been at the centre of several controversies regarding its decisions to give a clean chit to Modi over allegations of a series of provocative speeches.

Adding to the complexity is the shadow cast by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Reports of operational interference have surfaced, with the PMO allegedly summoning election commission officials for meetings. While the PMO's role is to advise the Prime Minister, its involvement in electoral matters raises eyebrows. The delicate balance between executive authority and institutional independence thus hangs in the balance and new developments indicate a further worsening of the situation.

As the country votes in phases, the election commission's decision on Modi's hate speech will

reverberate far beyond this election cycle. It will shape the contours of Indian democracy, reaffirming or challenging the primacy of constitutional norms. The world is also watching as the ECI grapples with its historic responsibility—to safeguard the rights of all citizens, regardless of faith or ethnicity. The results on June 4 will not only determine the next government but also signal whether India's constitutional institutions remain resilient in the face of political storms.

The situation has to be seen in the context of Modi's rise to power coinciding with the ascendancy of Hindu nationalism. Once a fringe ideology, it now permeates mainstream discourse. His party's policies, often couched in nationalist rhetoric, have sparked debates about India's identity. The BJP denies fostering religious intolerance, emphasizing that its measures benefit all citizens. However, critics argue that the party's actions tell a different story—one of exclusion and marginalization. (IPA Service)

Global life expectancy increased by 6.2 years in the past three decades: Lancet study

By: Seema Prasad

An overall increase in life expectancy worldwide by 6.2 years was observed by a new study published in The Lancet from 1990 to 2021. This progress is owing to a reduction in deaths from enteric infections, lower respiratory infections, ischemic heart disease, and strokes across the globe. COVID-19, however, was a dampener in many countries.

Enteric illnesses are food and waterborne illnesses, that are bacterial, parasitical, and viral diseases, contributed to the highest reduction in deaths. The category of diseases includes typhoid and diarrhea. A reduction in deaths from these diseases increased life expectancy by 1-1 years during 1990-2021, with the increase more striking in the decade between 1990 and 2000 compared with subsequent decades.

Reduced mortality from enteric infectious diseases, contributed to a substantial gain of 3.1 years in life expectancy in South Asia.

"We already know how to save children from dying from enteric infections including diarrheal diseases, and progress in fighting this disease has been tremendous," Mohsen Naghavi, the Director of Subnational Burden of Disease Estimation at the Institute for Health Met-

rics and Evaluation (IHME), said in his statement.

"Now, we need to focus on preventing and treating these diseases, strengthening and expanding immunization programs, and developing brand-new vaccines against E. coli, norovirus, and Shigella," Naghavi, the study's lead author, added.

The researchers found that the second-largest contributing factor towards increasing life expectancy was the reduction in deaths from lower respiratory infections, leading to 0.9 years of gained life expectancy from 1990 to 2021.

Similarly, the researchers noted that a drop in chronic respiratory diseases contributed to an increase of 0.5 years in life expectancy. East Asia had a significant role in this, with improvements in mortality in China.

Life expectancy was highly variable between regions. Southeast Asia, east Asia, and Oceania gained 8.3 years of life expectancy overall, the highest worldwide. This is while simultaneously having the smallest reduction in life expectancy due to COVID-19 at 0.4 years.

"The global community must ensure that the lifesaving tools that have cut deaths from ischemic heart disease, stroke, and other non-communicable diseases in most high-income countries are

available to people in all countries, even where resources are limited," said Eve Wool, a senior research manager at IHME in a statement.

"Our study also found that some vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles, have shown widespread reductions in mortality rates and were geographically concentrated. Under-5 deaths from measles were concentrated within western and eastern sub-Saharan Africa," the researchers said.

The study, however, pointed out that digestive diseases and cirrhosis posed significant threats, with a lack of improvement from 2010 to 2019. Further, diabetes and kidney diseases result in a global loss of 0.1 years in life expectancy.

COVID-19 spanner Across all causes, COVID-19, resulted in a decline of 1.6 years between 2019 and 2021, causing the largest dent on global life expectancy estimates.

"The effect of COVID-19 on life expectancy showed varying degrees of severity, ranging from a large loss of 4.9 years in Andean Latin America to almost no change in East Asia," the paper said.

While life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa was impacted during the pandemic, the reduction was compounded by high mortality rates from HIV/AIDS. The paper

Regions with advanced medical facilities were able to contain the number of COVID-19 cases, in contrast to the locations with poor healthcare infrastructure. The researchers, however, said that, "strong health-care systems did not singularly influence the outcome of the pandemic."

Read India's life expectancy falls to 67.2 in 2021, decade-long improvement undone

There was no change in the leading causes of death in 1990 and 2019, but the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the rankings of these causes. In 2019, ischaemic heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lower respiratory infections were the leading causes of age-standardised deaths globally.

However, in 2021, COVID-19 emerged as the second leading cause of age-standardised deaths in 2021. It replaced stroke with 94 deaths per 100,000 population. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease was shifted to the fourth-leading position.

"The effect of COVID-19 on age-standardized mortality was similar to that of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in 2020 but increased by 60.2 percent in 2021, becoming similar to that of stroke and ischaemic heart disease," the paper

said.

The researchers added to the Global Burden of Diseases 2021 report and identified 12 additional causes of death.

These are COVID-19 and other pandemic-related mortality diseases, pulmonary arterial hypertension, and nine cancer types such as, "hepatoblastoma, Burkitt lymphoma, another non-Hodgkin lymphoma, eye cancer, retinoblastoma, other eye cancers, soft tissue and other extraosseous sarcomas, malignant neoplasm of bone and articular cartilage, and neuroblastoma and other peripheral nervous-cell tumors."

The study estimated excess mortality during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 in lower respiratory infections due to the complications of the disease. For measles, malaria, and pertussis, excess deaths were reported due to deferred care-seeking.

Successes and effective disease mitigation programmes can guide future policy in burdened countries, the researchers added. They said they plan to simplify their approach to estimating COVID-19-related deaths, removing the category of the residual 'other pandemic-related mortality (OPRM)' added by them to the GBD 2021. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Most people with heart disease consume excessive amounts of sodium, study finds



By: Robby Berman

Many people consume more than the daily recommended amount of sodium, particularly those who most need to reduce their intake for their heart health.

That's according to a new study, which found that people with cardiovascular disease (CVD) were consuming more than double the recommended 1,500 milligrams (mg) of sodium each day.

The average amount of sodium consumed daily was 3,096 mg, with 89% of the study's participants consuming more than the recommended amount.

The findings are being presented April 6-8 at the American College of Cardiology's Annual Scientific Session. The results have not yet been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

People with heart disease should reduce sodium intake

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends adults who do not have or are not known to be at risk for heart disease consumes no more than 2,300 mg of sodium per day. This is about the equivalent of a teaspoon of table salt.

The average person with heart disease in the present study exceeded that level by nearly 1,000 mg. The study used data from 3,170 participants in the Center for Disease Control's NHANES study. These sample included males and females older than 20 with a cardiovascular disease diagnosis.

Of this group, the majority were 65 or older, were white, and had an education level below high school graduate. Males, who accounted for slightly more than half of subjects (56.4%), were overweight with an average intake of 1,862 calories per day.

While overconsumption of sodium is often considered a result of fewer food choices, the study turns that hypothesis on its head.

The group with the greatest sodium intake were people at the higher end of the income scale and with a college degree or higher.

The study authors suggest that individuals with higher levels of education and income could have been better at reporting their sodium intake, which may have contributed to the surprising results.

What happens to the heart if you consume too much sodium?

The chemical name for table salt is sodium chloride. Sodium is a naturally occurring mineral, which is necessary for human health in small amounts.

"Sodium helps to balance the water in your body," explained cardiologist Jayne Morgan, MD, clinical director at the Piedmont Healthcare Corporation in Atlanta, GA. "It even supports the proper functioning of muscles and nerves." (Dr. Morgan was not involved in the study.)

"There is a saying in medicine, 'Where sodium goes, water follows,'" she told Medical News Today.

"This is why salt increases the blood volume in your bodies. The effect of this is an increase in blood pressure. The increased blood pressure then forces your heart to work harder, which then eventually puts you at risk of heart disease," Dr. Morgan said.

Dr. Morgan noted that excess sodium has long been linked with the hardening and stiffening of the arteries and atherosclerosis.

Does the average person consume too much salt?

A significant body of research has investigated why so many people crave salt.

"The consistent overconsumption of sodium across the socioeconomic spectrum suggests that factors beyond just access to resources may influence sodium intake," Michelle Routhenstein, registered dietitian nutritionist at EntirelyNourished.com, told MNT. Routhenstein was not involved in the study.

Routhenstein proposed this could imply "widespread availability and marketing of convenient high-sodium processed foods, cultural di-

etary habits that prioritize salty foods, and limited awareness or education about the health risks associated with excessive sodium consumption."

Morgan agreed, taking it a step further:

"This is a great testament to the pervasiveness of the Western diet and cravings for salt and 'flavor'. It also is a reflection of the ease and availability of sodium in many grocery products, even when buying 'healthy' options."

Dr. Morgan added that packaging and labeling is not easily understood by the average consumer.

She said the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), for instance, could "create a standard rating system for foods that everyone understands where that food choice is on a band spectrum of health. The consumer then can truly make an informed decision."

How to reduce dietary sodium intake

Tracking salt intake is the first step to reducing sodium consumption, but it can be difficult to know how much sodium you're actually consuming.

Many food products use sodium for reasons other than a salt flavor. Thickening, curing meat, moisture retention, and as a preservative. Many foods high in sodium don't taste salty at all.

"Without actively scrutinizing food labels and being attentive to sodium levels, people may inadvertently consume excessive amounts," Routhenstein said.

"Individuals may not be aware of the sodium content in their meals even before considering the use of a salt shaker," Routhenstein added. "For example, a typical restaurant meal can contain upwards of 2,000 mg or more of sodium, surpassing the recommended intake for individuals with heart disease."

Routhenstein recommended the following tips for reducing sodium intake:

- "To consume less dietary sodium, focus on cooking at home using fresh ingredients, choosing low-sodium options, using herbs and spices for flavor, reading labels, and being mindful of hidden sodium in processed foods. When dining out, individuals can make lower sodium, heart-healthier choices by asking for sauces and dressings on the side, opting for grilled or steamed options instead of fried ones, and requesting meals to be prepared without added salt."

"These simple adjustments can significantly contribute to reducing overall sodium intake while [you're] still enjoying delicious meals," Routhenstein noted.

Dr. Morgan offered four simple principles to keep in mind:

- Choose fresh foods.
- Limit side sauces, including salad dressings: barbecue, soy, teriyaki, ketchup, etc.
- Substitute salt for other herbs and spices when cooking.
- For salt cravings, try fresh fruit, dark chocolate, or almonds instead.

Common substitutes for salt Routhenstein suggested a number of ways to replace salt in food and still retain flavor, such as adding small amounts of lemon or grapefruit juices to recipes.

"The tangy taste of citrus fruits can trick taste buds into perceiving more saltiness than is actually present, allowing dishes to remain flavorful with reduced sodium content," she said.

Additionally, Routhenstein advocated for spiciness, incorporating chili peppers or hot sauce to your dishes depending on your taste preferences.

You could also replace the tabletop salt shaker with a shaker of garlic powder (not garlic salt, which has sodium), oregano, or any other favorite powder.

"Dijon mustard, whole grain mustard, or dry mustard powder can add tanginess and depth to dressings, marinades, and sauces. Incorporating mustard into vinaigrettes, sandwich spreads, or rubs offers a flavorful twist without relying on sodium," Routhenstein suggested. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Cyberknife Radiosurgery can treat even hard to access pituitary gland tumors

By: Dr. Aditya Gupta

What is a pituitary gland tumor?

Pituitary gland, which is also known as the master gland has the most important function of producing hormones that regulates the critical organs of the body including thyroid, adrenal glands, ovaries and testes. It is a small pea-size gland located behind the eyes and below the front of the brain. Improper functioning of the gland usually results in excess or under production of hormones that leads to a formation of mass called tumor, which can be benign or malignant.

Such tumors in this gland can create numerous serious medical conditions by interfering with the normal functioning of the endocrine system and pituitary gland. Some tumors produce hormones known as functional tumors, and others can cause the glands to secrete too few or too many hormones. Also if the tumor pressed on the nearby structure, for instance the optic nerve, can also limit a person's vision.

Though the occurrence of tumor is more likely after the age of 50 years, it still can impact at an early age. The survival rates of tumor due to its complicated location also depend on other factors like the patient's age, type and size of tumor.

What causes a pituitary gland tumor?

Mostly, pituitary gland tumors are non cancerous but the exact causes are unknown. Some of them are hereditary and some are caused by a rare genetic disorder called as multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1.

This disorder can also lead to over-activity or enlargement of 3 different endocrine-related glands, which also includes the pituitary gland. Many researchers are still underway to know the exact cause of such uncontrolled growth of certain cells that leads to a pituitary tumor.

What are the symptoms?

Depending upon the hormonal variations in the body, there can be a variety of symptoms. The most common symptoms include Headaches, vision problem, tiredness, mood changes, irritability, changes in menstrual cycle in women, impotence, infertility, inappropriate breast growth or production of breast milk, Cushing's syndrome which is a combination of weight gain, high blood pressure, diabetes, and easy bruising, the enlargement of the extremities or limbs, thickening of the skull and jaw caused by too much growth hormone.

Treatment for Pituitary gland tumor

Diagnosis at an early stage can help the treatment procedure to be totally non-invasive with the use of advances technology called as Cyberknife. Cyberknife which is the most advanced radiation therapy is completely

non-invasive therapy available for the treatment of benign as well as malignant tumors.

Highlights of the therapy being ease of access to any complex location without the need to use the surgical knife, precision of the beam with high dose radiation to the tumor location, and the safety. It is a day care procedure without pain and risk, and the patient can get back to daily chores as soon as the session gets over which depends on the tumor (30 minutes to 1 hour) and hence eliminates the requirement of any hospital stay. Moreover the procedure makes use of the most sophisticated image guidance technique to focus high doses of radiation directly to the tumor spot which eliminates the chances to damage the healthy cells as in any other methods of treatment.

This therapy works the best for tumors that are upto 1-3

cm in size (for pituitary tumors, this figure is even smaller) and is a very powerful and effective technique for treating patients suffering from early stage primary and medically inoperable tumors.

The treatment is safe to administer and also offers a new option in patients with recurrent pituitary tumors, those that cannot be operated, or those involving the cavernous sinus (an area difficult to reach and completely remove tumors from, without side effects).

Phasing of the cyberknife proce-

dure

1. Planning – To have enough time with the surgeon to design and finalize a customized treatment plan, imaging is performed a few days in advance.

2. Treatment – Once the plan is set in place, the patient will return for a non-invasive, pain-free treatment experience. Using advanced tumor-tracking technology, the CyberKnife system is able to deliver either one single high-dose treatment, or smaller doses (upto 5) over the course of two to five days, depending on the plan generated. This approach limits side effects and enables most patients to return to their regular routine the same day.

Each session of treatment usually lasts for about 30 -50 min and is cost effective with a success rate of 98% in such complicated tumors. Patients with pituitary adenomas receive stereotactic radio surgery with CyberKnife and are followed up for more than 12 months. After 6 months of therapy patients are monitored for positive responses and ensure there is no recurrence of any mass.

Typically MRI is doing 6 monthly for the first year, and then yearly for at least 5 years.

Pituitary tumors that are larger, and create pressure on the optic nerves are better dealt by endoscopic removal of the tumor through the nose. (The author is the Director of Neurosurgery and Cyberknife at Artemis Hospital Gurugram)

Do not ignore any backache, Prompt and early intervention can treat the condition

By: Dr. Puneet Girdhar

Back pain is a prevalent issue that affects millions worldwide, often stemming from various causes such as muscle strain, poor posture, injuries, or degenerative conditions. Among these, slipped discs remain a significant concern due to their debilitating impact on daily life.

Understanding the signs, causes, and diagnostic measures for slipped discs is crucial for effective management and prevention of long-term complications.

Slipped discs, also known as herniated or bulging discs, manifest through various symptoms including localized or radiating pain, muscle weakness, and numbness. These symptoms often arise due to factors like incorrect lifting techniques, poor posture, sedentary lifestyles, or genetic predispositions. Ignoring early warning signs can exacerbate the condition, leading to further damage to spinal discs over time.

The Role of Prolonged Sitting in Slipped Disc Development

Prolonged sitting, especially with poor posture, significantly increases the risk of developing a slipped disc, particularly in the lumbar spine. This sedentary behavior not only stresses spinal discs but also weakens supporting muscles, compounding the risk of disc degeneration and herniation.

Incorporating regular breaks, maintaining proper posture, and utilizing ergonomic furniture are essential to mitigate this risk.

Diagnostic Measures for Slipped Discs

Early diagnosis of slipped discs is paramount for timely intervention and management. Healthcare professionals employ various diagnostic tests including physical examinations, imaging tests like

MRI and CT scans, and electrodiagnostic tests to assess symptoms, identify nerve compression, and determine the extent of disc herniation.

Treatment Strategies for Slipped Discs

The treatment approach for slipped discs depends on factors such as symptom severity, location of the herniation, and patient-specific considerations.

Conservative treatments including pain management, physical therapy, activity modification, and epidural steroid injections are often effective in alleviating symptoms. However, surgical intervention such as microdiscectomy, laminectomy, or spinal fusion may be necessary in cases of severe pain or neurological deficits.

Conservative Treatment:

A. Pain Management: Over-the-counter pain medications such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or acetaminophen may help alleviate pain associated with a slipped disc. In some cases, prescription pain medications may be necessary for more severe pain.

B. Physical Therapy: Physical therapy exercises and techniques can help improve spinal flexibility, strengthen the muscles supporting the spine, and alleviate symptoms associated with a slipped disc. Physical therapists may also use modalities such as heat, ice, ultrasound, or electrical stimulation to reduce pain and inflammation.

C. Activity Modification: Avoiding activities that worsen symptoms, such as heavy lifting, bending, or prolonged sitting, and adopting ergonomic practices can help reduce strain on the spine and promote healing of the disc herniation.

D. Epidural Steroid Injections: Injections of corticosteroids into the space around the spinal nerves (epidural space) can help reduce inflammation and relieve pain associated with a slipped disc, particularly if conservative treatments alone are not

effective

Surgical Intervention:

A. Microdiscectomy: In cases where conservative treatments fail to provide relief or if there are signs of nerve compression causing severe pain or neurological deficits (such as weakness, numbness, or loss of bladder or bowel control), surgical intervention may be necessary.

Microdiscectomy is a minimally invasive surgical procedure performed to remove the portion of the herniated disc that is compressing the spinal nerves, thereby relieving pressure and alleviating symptom.

B. Laminectomy: In some cases, particularly if there is significant spinal stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal) or if the disc herniation is associated with other spinal abnormalities, a laminectomy may be performed to remove a portion of the vertebral bone (lamina) to relieve pressure on the spinal cord or nerves.

C. Spinal Fusion: In cases where there is instability of the spine or if multiple discs are affected, spinal fusion surgery may be recommended to stabilize the spine by fusing two or more vertebrae together using bone grafts, metal implants, or synthetic materials.

Prompt and early diagnosis of back pain, especially when indicative of a slipped disc, is crucial for preventing long-term complications and improving patient outcomes.

By understanding the symptoms, causes, and diagnostic measures associated with slipped discs, healthcare providers can offer timely interventions tailored to individual patient needs, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for those affected by this common yet debilitating condition. (The author is a Principal Director & Head - Orthopedic Spine Surgery, BLK - Max Super Speciality Hospital, New Delhi)

There is growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach a cease-fire deal and avert an Israeli attack on Rafah

Top Qatari official urges Israel and Hamas to do more to reach a cease-fire deal

TEL AVIV, April 28: A senior Qatari official has urged both Israel and Hamas to show "more commitment and more seriousness" in cease-fire negotiations in interviews with Israeli media, as pressure builds on both sides to move toward a deal that would set Israeli hostages free and bring potential respite in the nearly 7-month-long war in Gaza.

The interviews with liberal daily Haaretz and Israeli public broadcaster Kan were published and aired Saturday evening.

They came as Israel still promises to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah despite global concern for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians sheltering there, and as the sides are exchanging proposals surrounding a cease-fire deal.

Qatar, which hosts Hamas headquarters in Doha, has been a key intermediary throughout the Israel-Hamas war. Along with the US and Egypt, Qatar was instrumental in helping negotiate a brief halt to the fighting in November that led to the release of dozens of hostages.

The sides have held numerous rounds of negotiations since, none of which produced an additional truce. In a sign of its frustration, Qatar earlier this month said it was reassessing its role as mediator.

In the interviews, Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari expressed disappointment in both Hamas and Israel, saying each side has made its decisions based on political interests and not



with the good of civilians in mind. "We were hoping to see more commitment and more seriousness on both sides," he told Haaretz.

He did not reveal details of the current state of the talks, other than to say they have "effectively stopped," with "both sides entrenched in their positions."

"If there is a renewed sense of commitment on both sides, I'm sure we can reach a deal," he said.

The Israeli journalists conducted the in-

terviews in Qatar, which has no formal diplomatic ties with Israel.

Relations between Qatar and Israel have been strained throughout the war, as some politicians in Israel, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have criticized Qatar for not putting enough pressure on Hamas.

Israeli legislators have also cleared the way for the country to expel Al Jazeera, the Qatar-owned broadcaster.

Al-Ansari's remarks came after an

Egyptian delegation had discussed with Israeli officials a "new vision" for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza, according to an Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to freely discuss the developments.

But the progress seemed minimal. The Egyptian official said Israeli officials are open to discussing establishing a permanent cease-fire in Gaza as part of the second phase of a deal.

"They showed willingness to do so but not commitment," the official said. Israel has refused to end the war until it defeats Hamas.

The second phase would start after the release of civilian and sick hostages, and would include negotiating the release of soldiers, he added. Senior Palestinian prisoners would be released and a reconstruction process launched.

Hamas meanwhile said Saturday it was reviewing a new Israeli proposal for a cease-fire, which came in response to a Hamas proposal from two weeks ago.

Negotiations earlier this month centred on a six-week cease-fire proposal and the release of 40 civilian and sick hostages held by Hamas in exchange for freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

There is growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach a cease-fire deal and avert an Israeli attack on Rafah.

A letter penned by US President Joe Biden along with 17 other world leaders

urged Hamas to release the hostages immediately.

Hamas in recent days has released new videos of three hostages it holds, which appear to be meant to push Israel to make concessions.

Israel meanwhile has massed dozens of tanks and armored vehicles ahead of an expected offensive in Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population is seeking shelter. The planned incursion has raised global alarm because of concerns over potential harm to civilians. The troop buildup may also be a pressure tactic on Hamas in the truce talks.

Israel sees Rafah as Hamas' last major stronghold and has vowed to attack the militant group there in its bid to destroy its military and governing capabilities.

The war was sparked by Hamas' attack on October 7 into southern Israel, which killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli authorities, who say another 250 people were taken hostage. Hamas and other groups are holding about 130 people, including the remains of about 30, Israeli authorities say.

Israel's retaliatory assault on Hamas has killed more than 34,000 people, most of them women and children, according to health authorities in Gaza, who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants in their tally. The Israeli military says it has killed at least 12,000 militants, without providing evidence to back the claim. (AP)

Munitions explosion at a Cambodian army base kills 20 soldiers

CHBAR MON (CAMBODIA), April 28: Security was tight around a military base in southwestern Cambodia on Sunday, a day after a huge explosion there killed 20 soldiers, wounded others and damaged nearby houses.

Guards sought to keep media away from the site in Kompong Speu province.

Hun Manet said in a Facebook post on Saturday that he was "deeply shocked" when he received the news of the blast in the province's Chbar Mon district. It was not immediately clear what caused it.

A villager living nearby told The Associated Press on Sunday that he trembled after hearing the blast because he had never before experienced such a loud explosion.

"When the explosion happened, I was fixing my house with some construction workers," said Chim Sothea. "Suddenly there was a loud explosion, causing my house to shake and breaking tiles on my roof. They fell down but luckily they didn't fall inside the house."

Images from the scene showed several badly damaged buildings on the base, at least one with its roof blown off, and soldiers receiving treatment in a hospital. Other photos showed nearby houses with holes in their roofs.

Four buildings — three for storage and one work facility — were destroyed and several military vehicles damaged, Col. Youeng Sokhon, an army officer at the site, said in a brief report to army chief Gen. Mao Sophon, posted on social media. He added that 25 villagers' homes were damaged as well. Photos of the base showed the damaged structures in a large field, apparently with no civilian structures close by.

Another villager, who asked to be named only as Sophon, told AP he had heard a sharp sound, and when he saw smoke rising from the direction of the army base, he realized it was an explosion at the arms depot. He then ran back to his house from the small shop where he sells food and drink to shelter inside with his wife and two children.

He said the military immediately closed the road to the base and "villagers were in a panic, seeking a safe place." He then moved his family to his parent's home, farther away from the base. When he returned to his own house hours later, he found it undamaged but other villagers' houses had broken windows, doors and roofs, he said.

Cambodia, like many countries in the region, has been suffering from an extended heat wave, and the province where the blast took place registered a high of 39 C (102 F) on Saturday. While high temperatures normally can't detonate ammunition, they can degrade the stability of explosives over a period of time, with the risk that a single small explosion can set off a fire and a chain reaction.

Kiripost, an online English language news service, quoted villager Pheng Kimneang as saying a major explosion occurred at about 2:30 p.m., followed by smaller blasts for about another hour.

In March 2005, a nighttime blast at an arms depot in the northwestern provincial town of Battambang triggered an hours-long spray of shells and bullets, killing at least six people and panicking local residents.

A 2014 report by the Swiss-based group Small Arms Survey highlighted the dangers of poorly stored or mishandled munitions, calling it a "global problem." It noted that from 2013 through 2019 there were more than 500 incidents involving unplanned explosions at munitions sites.

"A single unplanned explosion at a munitions site can claim dozens of lives, injure hundreds of people, and displace thousands," it said. "The damage to infrastructure can be extensive, covering many square kilometers. In addition, the loss of economic activity can exceed tens of millions of dollars and have long-term ramifications for livelihoods and the environment." (AP)

Tornado in China's Guangzhou weaves wide devastation; cleanup efforts initiated

BEIJING, April 28: Aerial photos posted by Chinese state media on Sunday showed the wide devastation of a part of the southern city of Guangzhou after a tornado swept through the day before, killing five people, injuring dozens others and damaging over a hundred buildings.

As businesses and residents began cleaning debris, the images showed block upon block of devastation in the hardest hit areas with a few clusters of buildings standing amid the destruction, a truck overturned on its side and cars crushed by rubble. Some buildings had their sheet metal roofs torn off.

The tornado, which knocked out power in the area, also injured 33 people on Saturday, officials said.

Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong province and a manufacturing hub near Hong Kong. The tornado which struck during an afternoon thunderstorm that also brought hail damaged 141 factory buildings, according to authorities.

They said no homes were destroyed, though a news website under the Southern Media Group

reported that some had broken windows.

The tornado hit several villages in Guangzhou's Baiyun district. In one, packing material known as "pearl cotton" hung from buildings and trees, a report on the Southern Media website said. It blew into the compound of a nearby furniture company, where workers took shelter in a private home after the metal roof was ripped off their building, the news website reported.

Workers were rolling up the material to be carted away for disposal on Sunday.

The disaster hit one week after heavy rains and flooding killed at least four people in Guangdong province.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited Guangzhou during an official visit to China earlier in the month. The city, formerly known as Canton, also recently held the Canton Fair, a major export and import exhibition that draws buyers from around the world.

In September, two tornadoes killed 10 people in Jiangsu province in eastern China. (AP)

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar appointed as deputy PM

ISLAMABAD, April 28: Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar was on Sunday appointed as the deputy prime minister of the country, according to a notification issued by the Cabinet Division.

Dar, 73, a chartered accountant and a veteran politician, belongs to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party. According to the notification, the appointment was made by Prime Minister Sharif "with immediate effect and until further orders". Dar, a close Sharif family associate, has served as finance minister in two previous governments. He was considered the party's answer to all economic problems, serving as finance minister for the fourth and last time in the previous Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition government.

He was tipped to be made chairman of the Senate, the upper House of the Parliament last month, but lost the race after the PML-N made a deal with the former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari-led Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to win its support for the coalition government. (PTI)

Elon Musk in Beijing amid efforts to promote Tesla's autonomous driving tech

BEIJING, April 28: Billionaire Elon Musk arrived in Beijing on Sunday amid speculation that he may unveil Tesla's autonomous driving technology in the burgeoning electric vehicle (EV) market in China. The SpaceX and Tesla chief travelled to China at the invitation of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, meeting with CCPIT president Ren Hongbin to discuss further cooperation with the country, according to Chinese state-run broadcaster CTGN. Musk is expected to meet senior Chinese officials at the State Council and "old friends" in Beijing, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

His Tesla has become a popular EV in China after he set up a USD seven billion factory in Shanghai which went into production in 2020. Musk, who recently skipped a scheduled visit to India to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to firm up plans to open a Tesla factory in the country, is visiting Beijing when his Tesla market in China is threatened by the local EVs increasing sales.

The Austin-based (Texas) Tesla has faced fierce competition from

Chinese EV makers in the past few years. It has cut the prices of its Shanghai-made vehicles by up to six per cent to maintain its leading position in China's premium EV segment.

Grace Tao, Tesla's vice-president of external relations in China, wrote a commentary piece in China's official newspaper People's Daily on Friday, saying autonomous driving is a key growth driver for the country's new energy vehicle sector, arguing that the technology will hatch new business models such as robotaxis, a vision that Musk has embraced, the Post reported. Musk's latest visit to China coincides with the 2024 Beijing Auto Show, which kicked off on Thursday.

As a stronger backer of Beijing in the US despite concerns over China's rise across the political divide in Washington, Musk enjoys red carpet treatment in China. In 2019, Tesla was allowed to drive cars into the Zhongnanhai compound, the living and working area of Chinese leaders, when former Premier Li Keqiang hosted the CEO, and during Musk's three-day visit to Beijing last June he was re-

ceived by then foreign minister Qin Gang, according to the Post report.

The trip was warmly received by the Chinese public, with social-media posts focusing on the Chinese food Musk ate, and some referring to him as a "pioneer" and "brother Ma".

Tesla, the leader in China's premium EV segment, delivered 603,664 Model 3s and Model Ys made at its Shanghai Gigafactory to buyers in China last year, an increase of 37.3 per cent over 2022.

The growth rate matched the 37 per cent rise in sales recorded in 2022 when it delivered about 440,000 vehicles.

Tesla has sold more than 1.7 million cars in China since it entered the market in 2012 and located its biggest factory in Shanghai, where Musk enjoys high levels of political support for the project. In a sign of its further commitment to China, Tesla bought a parcel of land in Shanghai to build a factory with a planned annual capacity of 10,000 Tesla Megapack batteries, which are used for battery storage stations. (PTI)

Nepal a suitable destination for investment, says PM Prachanda as he opens investment summit

KATHMANDU, April 28: Nepal is a suitable destination for investment and there are immense opportunities in the country, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' said on Sunday as he inaugurated a key investment summit here that will see the participation of around 1,800 people from various countries, including 140 from India.

Inaugurating the third edition of the Nepal Investment Summit 2024 with the theme 'Emerging Nepal', Prachanda also said that Nepal is a potential country for investment from legal, geographical and strategic perspectives.

"Nepal is a suitable destination for foreign investment," the Prime Minister said as he urged investors from across the globe to seize the opportunity and benefit from it.

Prachanda, who is leading a government dominated by left parties, said that Nepal is fully committed to a liberal economic policy, providing full protection to investors.

He said that an investment-friendly environment has been created in the country.

Foreign Minister Barshaman Pun welcomed foreign investment as a catalyst for industrial development, infrastructure development, job creation, export promotion and the transfer of knowledge, skills, and technology. He expressed confidence that the summit will lead to agreements and collaboration between investors and stakeholders as Nepal's economic indicators are stabilising and showing positive trends.

Speaking on the occasion, India's Ambassador to Nepal Navin Srivas-

tava said that the Government of India, in future, will continue to encourage Indian investors further in Nepal.

"It is a matter of great satisfaction that India is today the biggest cumulative investor in Nepal with more than 33 per cent of Nepal's FDI stock currently amounting to nearly Nepal rupees 89 billion," the diplomat said.

In a video message, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal said that Nepal and India not only share border but also a deep-rooted friendship and a vision for a prosperous future.

"India has always been a trusted partner in Nepal's development journey," he added.

The two-day summit will witness the signing of MoUs between Nepal

and its development partners and foreign investors.

Nepal is showcasing around 146 projects for potential investors during the summit, which has attracted investors from around three dozen countries, including India, China, Japan, the UK, the US, the UAE and Germany.

In 2017, Nepal hosted the first investment summit, drawing investment commitments worth USD 13.5 billion from different countries.

Similarly, the second investment summit held in 2019 secured nearly USD 12 billion for 50 projects. However, only one-third of the commitments were realised in actual practice.

Over 200 investors from China and over 140 from India are attending the two-day summit. (PTI)

UK PM Rishi Sunak declines to rule out July election amid MP defection

LONDON, April 28: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday refused to categorically rule out a July general election amid a damaging defection by one of his Conservative Party MPs to the Opposition Labour Party, just days before local and mayoral elections in the country on May 2.

Dan Poulter, a doctor and Central Suffolk and North Ipswich member of Parliament said he will switch his allegiance to the Opposition benches before standing down as a parliamentarian at the next election because he can no longer defend the Tory government's track record on the National Health Service (NHS).

Against the backdrop of this latest embarrassment, Sunak was

asked during a 'Sky News' interview that his repeated assertion of a general election in the "second half of this year" could also mean July.

"When it comes to a general election, I've been very clear about that multiple times, and again, I'm not going to say anything more than I've already said. I've been very clear about that," said Sunak, who was then pressed five times to rule out an election during what would be a peak summer month for the UK.

"You're going to try and draw whatever conclusion you want from what I say. I'm going to always try and say the same thing. You should just listen to what I said, [the] same thing I've said all year," he replied. (PTI)

From Karachi to Chennai: Pakistani teen's journey for a new heart

KARACHI/CHENNAI, April 28: The heartwarming story of a 19-year-old Pakistani girl getting a new lease on life after a successful heart transplant in India highlights how borders can be eased for humanitarian purposes and the challenges faced by heart patients in the neighbouring country.

Ayesha Rashan from Karachi underwent a heart transplant surgery at MGM Healthcare, Chennai.

After a suitable brain-dead donor was available, she underwent cardiac transplantation on January 31, 2024. Following procedures, she was discharged this month.

Dr K R Balakrishnan, Chairman, Cardiac Sciences Director, Institute of Heart and Lung Transplant and Mechanical Circulatory Support, said Ayesha first came to them in 2019 when she was 14 years of age with severe heart failure and a very poorly functioning heart.

"She became very sick and had

a cardiac arrest and had to be resuscitated with CPR and put on a machine called ECMO to sustain circulation then we put in an artificial heart pump that time and eventually she recovered and went back to her country," he said.

"Over the next couple of years, she became sick again because one of her valves started leaking...and she developed severe failure on the right side of the heart and developed an infection and it became very difficult to treat her in that country," he added.

Balakrishnan said getting a visa for her was very difficult.

"Her mother is a single mother, they had no money or resources. We had to take care of the entire expenses including repeated hospitalisation," Dr Balakrishnan told PTI Videos.

Ayesha underwent surgery with the support of Aishwarya Trust, a Chennai-based NGO, and other transplant patients' contributions.



The transplant was done after getting a donor organ from a brain-dead elderly man from Delhi.

"The biggest challenge was there was no money," he said. The condition required Rs 30 to Rs 40 lakhs to treat.

"The hospital is not have sur-

gery," he said.

Ayesha, who aspires to be a fashion designer, thanked the Indian government for giving her a visa to visit the country for the treatment.

Ayesha's mother said the problem is that Pakistan does not have such a facility.

Ayesha is not the first Pakistani to get a heart transplant in India.

Muhammad Amir, whose name changed on request, was 37 years old in 2014 when cardiologists in Karachi told him that he was suffering from "dilated cardiomyopathy", a disease in which chambers of the heart become dilated and muscles get weak, impairing the heart's ability to pump blood effectively to the rest of the body.

"Doctors managed my condition with medication, but they told me a transplant was the only cure," Amir, now 46 told The News International, following reports of Ayesha receiving a successful heart transplant in India. "Through online research, I dis-

covered a heart transplant centre in Chennai, India, where I received a new heart from an anonymous Indian donor in 2014."

Amir isn't alone, Qari Zubair, an imam from Gujrat, was the first Pakistani to travel to Chennai for a heart transplant. Sadly, he developed complications and did not survive.

"According to my knowledge, around six Pakistanis have undergone heart transplants in India," Amir said, preferring to keep personal details private.

"I'm the longest survivor. Four others passed away after their transplants," he said.

Several transplant and cardiac surgeons cite a lack of expertise, high costs, limited post-operative care, and a shortage of deceased donors as the primary reasons for the absence of a heart transplant programme in Pakistan.

"The two main reasons we don't perform heart transplants are the lack of deceased donors

(transplant hearts can only be taken from deceased individuals) and a lack of expertise," said renowned liver transplant surgeon Dr Faisal Saud Dar.

Dr Dar, dean and CEO of the Pakistan Kidney and Liver Institute and Research Center in Lahore, emphasised the importance of raising awareness about organ donation after death to save lives.

Renowned cardiac surgeon Dr Pervaiz Chaudhry believes heart transplants will become a reality in Pakistan soon.

He has asked the authorities to define "brain death" in Pakistan, facilitating requests for organ donation from deceased individuals, the report said.

"While I understand heart transplants are complex and expensive, travelling to India for such procedures is a huge burden. I wish we had our own centres offering transplants at free or affordable rates to save more lives," he said. (PTI)

One killed, 3 injured in gunfight between village volunteers in Manipur



IMPHAL, April 28: One person was killed and three others injured in a gunfight between village volunteers of two warring communities in ethnic strife-torn Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Sunday, police said.

Dozens of gunmen had attacked Koutruk in Imphal West district on Sunday morning from elevated hilltops of neighbouring Kangpokpi district prompting village volunteers deployed in the fringe village to retaliate, the police said.

Exchange of fire gradually spread to adjacent villages of Kadangband and Senjam Chirang, they said.

Koutruk village has been witness to intense gunfights between village volunteers of two warring communities since ethnic violence broke out on May 3 last year. It has been identified as one of the most vulnerable areas for gun attacks.

More than 200 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic strife between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis since May 3 last year.

Meanwhile, denouncing the killing, the Kangpokpi district-based Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) has called for a 12-hour shutdown in the district from noon of April 28. (PTI)

Final talks for Harijan colony relocation in May



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 28: After several months, the final talks for the relocation of the Harijan Colony in Shillong, Meghalaya is expected to be held on May 7.

The Meghalaya government is scheduled to meet with the Harijan Panchayat Committee (HPC) and attempt to resolve the long-standing issue of relocating the Harijan Colony.

This meeting is expected to be the final round of discussions before a decision is reached.

Deputy Chief Minister Sniawhalang Dhar claimed, "It should be the last meeting, and the outcome will be known on that day."

This urgency follows Meghalaya High Court's concerns raised in July 2023 regarding the prolonged delay in finding a solution for the 342 families residing in the colony.

While the HPC initially rejected the government's relocation plan, there seems to be a shift in stance.

According to reports from a June 2023 High Court hearing, the HPC has agreed to the proposal in principle, though with suggested modifications.

The government's relocation plan involves providing a total of 3.6 acres of land for resettlement.

This includes 2.14 acres within the existing municipal board building and an additional 1.4 acres located opposite the current colony area. The Harijan Colony, also known as Them Lew Mawlong, has been at the center of discussions and legal proceedings for years.

AITUC Manipur unit renews highway protection force demand

IMPHAL, April 28: The Manipur unit of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) on Sunday renewed its long pending demand—setting up of highway protection force. Notably, over 4000 drivers, particularly belonging to the Meitei community, are jobless now after the ethnic crisis erupted in the nearby state a year ago, according to unions of drivers of inter-state service trucks. Addressing a press conference at Irawat Bhavan in Imphal today, AITUC Manipur unit general secretary Laishram Sotinkumar alleged that the state government is not taking up the plights of the labourers, particularly the drivers. The AITUC has been pressing the state government to set up a dedicated highway protection force to be deployed along the national highways in the state. However, no step to implement the demand is yet to be taken up by the state government, he said.

The demand was discussed at several cabinet meetings and even in the house of the state Assembly. However, the state government is not sending recommendations re-

garding the matter till date, he added.

"Our persistent demand is for the setting up of the highway protection force and we will continue to press the state government to implement the same," he asserted. The AITUC general secretary, while highlighting the grievances of the labourers ahead of the May Day, said that the workers are the most affected group of the society in the ongoing crisis.

He said that like in the previous years, the AITUC Manipur unit is going to host May Day observance this year, too, in Imphal's THAU ground. Unlike the previous years, the event will be organized in a low key manner taking into account the ongoing violence in the state.

He said that May Day has been observed in the state under the aegis of the All India Youth Federation in Manipur since 1939. He traced the first ever observance of the day under the initiative of late Lamyamba Irabot (Hijam Irabot) and this year would mark the 135th May Day celebration in the state. (NNN)

Indefinite business shutdown in Nagaland affects normal life

People rush to Assam to buy goods



KOIHMA, April 28: People made a beeline to neighbouring Assam to buy essential commodities as the indefinite shutdown of businesses to protest "extortion" by Naga political groups threw normal life out of gear in Nagaland, with the stir entering the third day on Sunday.

The shutdown was called by the Dimapur Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI) on Friday also to protest alleged government inaction to protect businesses in Dimapur, the commercial hub of the state.

The Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CNCCI) supported the call, following which shutdowns were imposed in other districts from Saturday.

Markets remained shut across the state, as a result of which people from Nagaland, especially those living along the inter-state boundary with Assam, reportedly went to the neighbouring state to buy essential commodities. No restriction on the movement of people and traffic has been imposed.

The Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CNCCI) announced that the indefinite state-wide shut-

down would continue but would be relaxed only for six hours from noon to 6 pm on Monday to allow the public to procure essential items.

CNCCI president Khekugha Muru said the decision was taken in consideration of the fact that the shutdown was imposed in many dis-

tricts without giving prior notice to the people. CNCCI urged the government to take steps to stop "unabated" extortion, and intimidation by underground groups.

State Home Commissioner Vikeyie Kenya has directed the police to take stringent measures as "such activities reflect adversely on

the law enforcing agency as well as on the state government".

He instructed the district administrations and the police to report any violation of the ceasefire ground rules to the Ceasefire Monitoring Group for appropriate action and also continue arresting "underground cadres", found extorting, under the National Security Act.

On the other hand, the DCCI on Saturday submitted a five-point charter of demands to the state government through the deputy commissioner of Dimapur.

DCCI demanded that the state government immediately clarify whether taxation by NPGs was legal or illegal. It also wondered whether the business community should pay GST or the taxation of NPGs.

The DCCI asked the government to declare "summoning business community members to NPG offices, camps and monitoring cells" as illegal and law enforcing agencies be empowered to act against such places.

The DCCI also demanded that extortion, kidnapping, and waylaying of transport should be dealt with swiftly with full force and without impunity. (PTI)

Gold smuggler arrested with gold worth ₹ 45.35 lakh in Manipur



IMPHAL, April 28: Officers of anti-smuggling unit of Imphal Customs Division arrested a person after smuggled gold worth roughly ₹ 45.35 lakh was recovered from a car he was coming with from Singjamei area of Imphal on Friday, an official source said today.

The officers conducted a check to the Maruti car at Singjamei parking area on Friday around 5.40 pm acting on specific information, said a statement of the Imphal customs division.

The officers intercepted the smuggled gold packed in three oval shaped plastic packets concealed underneath the handbrake of the car on thorough checking of the vehicle, it also said.

Upon examination of the packets revealed their contents to be yellow coloured paste suspected to contain gold of foreign origin, the statement added.

The recovered items, the vehicle and the driver were taken to the office of the Customs Division, Imphal for further procedures.

The processing of the yellow paste resulted in recovery of 627.53 gm gold, estimated to be ₹ 45.35,159 as per market rate as on April 26, 2024, it further said.

A case has been registered against the arrested person under the Customs Act, 1962 and further investigation is underway, the statement added. (NNN)

Over 70000 tons of coal yet to be transported to depots

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: The Meghalaya High Court-appointed committee, led by Justice (retired) BP Katakey, has directed the East Jaintia Hills district administration to transport 70,000 metric tons of coal to designated depots within 15 days.

This directive comes after a review meeting with state government officials.

Other districts like West Khasi Hills, South West Khasi Hills, and South Garo Hills have nearly completed the transportation process. East Jaintia Hills, which initially had the most significant amount (130,000 tons) of coal for transport, has only managed to move 60,000 tons so far.

Justice Katakey raised two concerns regarding the remaining coal.

He pointed out that coal owners might be reluctant to transport the coal due to a disinterest in the process.

There were also suspicions that the coal might have already been sold by the owners themselves, bypassing the official auction process.

The committee has instructed the East Jaintia Hills deputy commissioner to verify the actual quantity of coal remaining. Concerns exist that the reported 70,000 tons might be inaccurate.

Meanwhile, South West Khasi Hills will complete transportation of its remaining 5,000 tons by tomorrow. The High Court, in an earlier order, had allowed 45 days for transporting the coal to designated depots.



Justice Katakey also expressed disappointment regarding the slow lifting of auctioned coal by purchasers, citing a weak market.

The committee has given the government permission to extend the deadline for auction payment due to the time-consuming process and profit-sharing with Coal India Limited and auction agencies.

The committee successfully verified and reassessed around 14 lakh tons of coal, significantly less than the 32 lakh tons initially claimed by the state government.

Any coal found after transporting the verified amount will be considered illegally mined and seized. The proceeds from auctioning such seized coal will go solely to the state treasury.

So far, over 5.8 lakh tons of coal have been auctioned, but full payment has only been received for 1.48 lakh tons, reports stated.

MSRP expert committee to issue public notice for consultation

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: The Expert Committee on the Meghalaya State Reservation Policy has decided to issue a public notice to seek consultations, suggestions and comments from stakeholders on the State Reservation Policy.

The decision was taken during the second physical meeting of the Expert Committee held in the state capital in Shillong on Saturday.

An official statement informed that the Committee decided that a Public Notice will be issued soon to seek Consultations/Suggestions/Comments on the State Reservation Policy.

It was also decided that the Public Hearings will be conducted in Shillong and all other district headquarters or any other place(s) as the committee may decide after receiving comments/ suggestions from stakeholders.

The next meeting of the committee is scheduled in May, 2024.

The Expert Committee on the State Reservation Policy, Meghalaya was constituted on September 12, 2023 under the Chairmanship of



Justice (Retd) Mool Chand Garg along with four members - Justice (Retd.) Dr. Satish Chandra, Prof. D.V. Kumar, Prof. Chander Shekhar and Prof. Subhadip Mukherjee.

The meeting was also attended by officials of the Personnel Department. (NNN)

Repolling in six polling stations in Outer Manipur on April 30

IMPHAL, April 28: Repolling will be held in six polling stations in the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency on April 30, officials said.

The repolling was necessitated as unidentified persons had damaged EVMs and VVPATs before the completion of voting at four of these six polling stations on April 26, while EVM malfunctioning was reported at one polling station, and voting could not be completed at another due to "threat and intimidation by unknown miscreants", they said.

Voting at four polling stations in Ukhrul assembly

segment, and one each in Chingai assembly seat in Ukhrul and Karong in Senapati was declared null and void and repolling will be conducted on April 30, a notification issued by the office of Manipur's chief electoral officer said.

Around 76.06 per cent of 4.84 lakh voters exercised their franchise during polling in 13 of 28 assembly segments of Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency on April 26. Voting was held in the remaining 15 segments, along with the entire Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat, in the first phase on April 19. (PTI)

50 glorious years of Manipuri cinema celebrated with photo gallery launch

Manipur State Film Awards, established in 1984, as a cornerstone of the state's cinematic landscape

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: Manipur Governor Anusuiya Uikey inaugurated a photo gallery of Manipur's cinema and toured the S.N. Chand Cine Archive and Museum housed within the Palace Auditorium, Impal, on Saturday.

The museum showcases a collection of archival works from Manipuri cinema, including films and photographs of prominent personalities in the state's film industry.

The celebration coincides with the 50th anniversary of Manipuri cinema. "Matangi Manipur," directed by Deb Kumar Bose, holds the distinction of being the first Manipuri film.

Debuting in 1972, the movie garnered a President's Silver



Medal for Best Regional Film at the 20th National Film Awards.

Governor Uikey commended Manipuri cinema's resilience, evolving from 35mm black and

white films to the significant role video has played in recent decades.

She also highlighted the Manipuri State Film Awards, established in 1984, as a cornerstone of

the state's cinematic landscape.

Inspired by the National Film Awards, these accolades recognize excellence across various categories, fostering diverse talents and contributions within the industry.

The establishment of the S.N. Chand Cine Archive and Museum marks a historic milestone in this golden jubilee year.

Named after S.N. Chand, a pioneer and the first Manipuri director to release a feature film, "Broyendragee Luhongba" (shot in 1971 and released in 1973), the archive serves the crucial purpose of conserving and preserving Manipur's cinematic heritage, solidifying the state's position as a thriving film hub.

Nagaland decides to take strict action extortion, abduction

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 28: The Nagaland cabinet directed the state DGP and commissioner to immediately inform the various Naga political groups through the ceasefire monitoring group/ceasefire supervisory board that illegal activities such as extortion and kidnapping will be dealt as per law and culprits will be booked under the NSA and detained outside the state.

This amidst the ongoing indefinite shutter down across the state called the Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Dimapur Chamber of Commerce and Industry against the illegal and rampant taxes imposed upon the business community, particularly in Dimapur, by various Naga national political groups.

The shutter down entered the third day today.

Taking serious note, the state cabinet discussed the issue and conveyed its decision to the DGP and commissioner.

Further, the cabinet also directed the DGP to send additional forces immediately to Dimapur to curb such

illegal activities. It was also decided by the cabinet to provide additional required resources to the law enforcing agencies for increased mobility and for operationalising/increasing of CCTVs.

The state police department, in this connection, said all the Naga national political groups may be advised about the complete and absolute adherence to ceasefire ground rules and to confine their cadres to their designated camps and supervisory offices in letter and in spirit. The supervisory offices/cells may be discontinued from being used to summon civilians/businessman to their office for criminal intimidation, extortion, ransom besides other crimes, it said.

The unauthorised and illegal activities undertaken by the Naga national political groups under the garb of ceasefire with the government of India and violation of ceasefire ground rules have created unrest among the public and business community in the state, a communiqué by the state police stated. It further requested the chairman of CFMG/CFSB to advise the groups to adhere to laid down ceasefire ground rules, and not to vitiate the law and order situation in the state.



Delhi Cong chief Arvinder Singh Lovely resigns, says party unit was against alliance with AAP

NEW DELHI, April 28: In a setback to the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, senior leader Arvinder Singh Lovely has resigned as the party's Delhi unit chief, citing the alliance with the AAP as one of the reasons.

He said the Delhi Congress unit was against the alliance but the party high command went ahead with it.

In his resignation letter sent to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday, Lovely also said that he found himself "handicapped" as all unanimous decisions taken by senior Delhi unit leaders have been "unilaterally vetoed" by AICC Delhi in-charge Deepak Babria.

This comes days after former Delhi minister and AICC member Rajkumar Chauhan resigned from the party following an altercation with Babria.

Reacting to the development, the Delhi BJP on Sunday said this "explosion" was set in motion when the Congress started naming candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, while the AAP said this is an internal matter of the Congress.

In his letter to Kharge, Lovely said, "It is with a heavy heart that I write the present letter to you finding myself handicapped and un-

able to continue as the President of the Delhi party unit."

"I had gratefully accepted the role as the DPCC President with the sole objective of supporting the local Congress party workers with whom I have an extremely close connection and life-long association."

"However, since I cannot protect the interests of the party workers, I see no reason to continue in the said post. Therefore, with great regret and an extremely leaden heart, I, Arvinder Singh Lovely, do hereby tender my resignation from the post of DPCC President," he said.

A minister in the Sheila Dikshit government, Lovely was appointed as the Delhi Congress chief in August last year.

Lovely said even though the Delhi Congress unit was against the alliance with the AAP, he publicly backed it and made sure that the entire unit "fell in line with the high command's final order".

He said that he even withdrew his name as a potential candidate for the Lok Sabha polls in the interest of the party and so that other senior leaders could get tickets.

"The Delhi Congress unit was against an alliance with a party which was formed on the sole basis



of levelling false, fabricated and malafide corruption charges against the Congress party... half of the cabinet ministers (of the party) are presently in jail on corruption charges.

"Despite that, the party (Congress) made a decision to ally with the AAP in Delhi. We respected the party's final decision... I even went to the extent of visiting Mr Kejriwal's residence on the night of his arrest along with Mr Subash Chopra and Mr Sandeep Dikshit, despite the same being against my position on the matter," he said.

Lovely also criticised Congress North East Delhi candidate Kanhaiya Kumar for heaping praise on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is behind bars in a money laundering case.

"The candidate from North East Delhi has also been giving media bytes falsely praising the Delhi CM, in direct contravention of the party line and the local party workers' beliefs."

"In direct contradiction to the true factual position and the misery of Delhi Citizens, he endorsed the false propaganda of AAP in regard

to the supposed works done by them in education, health, road and electricity sectors," he said.

"Such ill-thought and factually incorrect statements have not gone down well" with the Delhi Congress unit since "the local party workers had an inherent understanding that the alliance was not done in appreciation of AAP's false propaganda of the development of Delhi," he said.

In fact, he added, the alliance was a "compromise" to improve the chances of victory of the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls.

"It appears that the North East Delhi candidate is unaware of the fact that admittedly, the condition of schools, hospitals and public infrastructure in Delhi, under the AAP rule, has severely worsened as compared to the development work done under the late Sheila Dikshit Ji's Congress regime," Lovely said.

The Congress and the AAP are constituents of the INDIA bloc formed by opposition parties to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. While the AAP is contesting four Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, the Congress has fielded candidates on three.

The BJP had won all the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi in the

2014 and 2019 general elections.

Lovely further said he was unable to continue as the party unit chief as "all unanimous decisions taken by the senior Delhi Congress leaders have been unilaterally vetoed by the AICC General Secretary (Delhi in-charge)".

"Since my appointment as DPCC President, the AICC General Secretary (Delhi In-charge) has not allowed me to make any senior appointments in the DPCC. My request for appointment of a veteran leader as media head of DPCC was blatantly rejected. Till date, AICC general secretary (Delhi in-charge) has not allowed the DPCC to appoint all block presidents in the city. Resultantly, more than 150 blocks in Delhi do not presently have a block president," he said.

Lovely alleged that AICC in-charge Babria forced him to suspend senior party leader Raj Kumar Chauhan.

"In direct contravention of my public democratic stand, the AICC general secretary (Delhi Incharge), distressingly, asked me to suspend Raj Kumar Chauhan (ex-Delhi Minister), Suren Kumar (ex-MLA) and other party functionaries from the party."

"He, instead of calming the sit-

uation, further also, in public meetings, entered into numerous heated exchanges with Sandeep Dikshit, (ex-MP), Raj Kumar Chauhan (ex-Delhi minister), Bisham Sharma (ex-MLA) and Suren Kumar (ex-MLA)," he wrote in his letter.

Lovely claimed the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) was not given any intimation about the decision to field Kanhaiya Kumar from North East Delhi seat and Udit Raj from North West Delhi seat before the official announcement was made by the party high command.

He further lamented that no senior AICC leader has spoken to him about pacifying the party workers who are unhappy with the decision and protested outside the DPCC office when the selected candidates were being introduced to the media.

Lovely accused Udit Raj of making "anti-party" statements in the press and disrespecting party workers. He claimed Raj had written several letters to him asking him to suspend various generational local party leaders.

Meanwhile, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said Lovely's decision to resign was driven by the voice of his soul. (PTI)

'Shehzada' insulted Maharajas but silent on atrocities by Nawabs: PM's attack on Rahul

'It was the Maharaja of Baroda who had identified the talent of Ambedkar...the Congress's shehzade doesn't remember the contributions of Rajas and Maharajas'

BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA), April 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of insulting India's Rajas and Maharajas, but remaining silent on the atrocities committed by Nawabs, Nizams, Sultans and Badshahs for the sake of appeasement politics.

He also continued his attack against the Congress on the "inheritance tax" issue and targeted the party's government in Karnataka on law and order issue.

The BJP is working on increasing the assets of the people, but Congress' shehzada (Rahul Gandhi) and his sister (Priyanka Gandhi Vadra), both are announcing that if they come to power, they will do the 'X-ray' of the country, Modi said.

"They will x-ray your property, bank lockers, lands, vehicles, also 'Streedhan' and ornaments of women, gold, the Mangalsutra. These people will raid every house and capture your assets. After capturing they are talking about redistributing it, they want it to give it to



their loved vote bank...will you allow this loot to happen?" he asked.

"I want to alert Congress," Modi said, asserting that "leave this intention. Until Modi is alive, I will not allow it..."

Addressing a mega public meeting here, he said, "Congress has ensured the writings of our history and our freedom struggle with an eye on appeasement and vote bank. Even

today, the Congress' shehzada (prince) is carrying forward that sin. You might have heard Congress' shehzada's recent statement -- he says Bharath's Rajas and Maharajas were atyachari (oppressive)."

"He (Gandhi) has accused them (Rajas and Maharajas) of usurping the lands and properties of people and poor...Congress' shehzada has insulted great personalities like Cha-

trapati Shivaji Maharaj and Kittur Rani Channamma, whose administration and patriotism inspires us even today," the prime minister said.

Recalling the contribution of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family for which they are respected across the country even today, he said: "the Congress' shehzada's statements were intentional, aimed at vote bank politics and appeasement."

"Shahzada spoke ill about Raja, Maharajas, but the shahzada's mouth was locked regarding the 'atyachar' that Nawabs, Nizams, Sultans and Badshahs committed in India's history. His mouth was shut on them, but on Raja, Maharajas he speaks ill and insults them," he said.

Noting that Gandhi cannot remember Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's oppressions, Modi said, "he (Aurangzeb) impured a number of our temples and destroyed them. Congress is happily making alliances with parties that praise Aurangzeb...they don't remember people who destroyed our religious places, indulged in killing, killing of

cows. They don't remember the Nawab, who played a role in the partition of India."

He further recalled the contributions of the Raja of Banaras in setting up Banaras Hindu University, and Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar in the reconstruction of temples.

"It was the Maharaja of Baroda who had identified the talent of Ambedkar...the Congress's shehzade doesn't remember the contributions of Rajas and Maharajas. For vote bank they show the guts of speaking against Rajas and Maharajas, but don't have strength to speak against Nawabs, sultans and Badshahs," he said adding that Congress' "appeasement mindset" has come out in the open before the country, and the same reflects in their manifesto.

Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa, party's candidate from Belagavi (Belagavi) and former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar and Chikkodi candidate Annasaheb Shankar Jolle, were among those present. (PTI)

Talks with China going on smoothly, India will never bow down: Rajnath

AHMEDABAD, April 28: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said talks between India and China are going smoothly and in a good environment, and India will never bow down.

Singh, who is in Ahmedabad to campaign for BJP candidates contesting the Lok Sabha elections, said India has become a powerful country from a military standpoint and wants to maintain good relations with its neighbours.

"India is no longer a weak India. India has also become a powerful country from a military point of view. We want to maintain good relations with our neighbouring countries," the minister said when asked about Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's accusation against the Narendra Modi government over Chinese aggression.

Talks between India and China are going on smoothly and in a good environment over whatever issues there are, he said.

"I understand that we should wait for the outcome of the talks. But I want to assure the countrymen that India has not bowed down anywhere, nor will it ever bow down," he said.

Singh also expressed confidence that India's defence exports, which crossed the ₹ 21,000 crore mark in the financial 2023-24, will increase going forward.

"In 2014, we exported ₹ 600 crore defence items, but now the figure has crossed ₹ 21,000 crore, and I can say that it is going to increase," he said.

The minister said the Modi government is committed to ensuring that defence items, whether missiles and other weapons, bombs or tanks, should be made in India and by Indians.

"Today, we have achieved defence production worth more than ₹ 1 lakh crore," he said. (PTI)

Bengal: TMC worker killed in 'factional fighting', woman BJP leader attacked

KOLKATA, April 28: A Trinamool Congress worker has been killed, while a local BJP leader has been seriously injured in separate incidents in Kolkata, police said on Sunday.

TMC worker Sanjeev Das, who was also known as Potla, was killed in Baguiati area allegedly in a clash between two factions of the party, a police officer said. A confrontation took place in Arjunpur West Para in Baguiati on Saturday night, escalating into brick-battling by both sides, in which Das was severely injured and was taken to a hospital, where doctors declared him brought dead, the police officer said. Eleven cases, including those related to the Arms Act, were earlier registered against Das, she said. A total of 13 people have been arrested in connection with the incident, the officer said, adding further investigation is underway.

The deceased's family members alleged that TMC

workers owing allegiance to the local councillor were behind the incident. They claimed that Das was beaten with rods after being injured in brick-battling. Meanwhile, a woman BJP leader, identified as Saraswati Sarkar, lodged a police complaint alleging that she was assaulted by TMC workers in Anandapur area in south Kolkata on Saturday night.

She claimed that she was attacked with sharp weapons when she and her party workers were putting up election banners and festoons, causing severe injuries to her head. She had registered a police complaint in the local police station.

Amit Malviya, BJP's IT cell head and co-in-charge of West Bengal, posted on X, "No woman is safe in West Bengal. Last night, TMC goons targeted Saraswati Sarkar, who serves as the BJP's Kasba Mandal president (in south Kolkata). The situation is further exacerbated by Mamata Banerjee's colossal

failure as the Home Minister of Bengal. One can only imagine the severity of safety concerns in #Sandeshkhali if even Kolkata is not secure. The people of Bengal will undoubtedly respond to these heinous acts."

Malviya also shared a video where she is seen sitting in a police station, with her head bleeding profusely. Sarkar later told reporters that two of her team members, who were putting up banners as part of the party campaign on Saturday night, were brutally beaten up by TMC workers.

"When I went to rescue them, I myself became a target of the TMC goons," she said.

West Bengal BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya claimed that Kolkata had earlier never witnessed such attacks on women, asserting that people of the state would give a "befitting reply to such atrocities". (PTI)

When Madhavrao Scindia campaigned against his mother, Kanshi Ram asked for a rupee from voters: Book

NEW DELHI, April 28: As poll fever is gripping the country, a new book provides many election-related nuggets of the past like Madhavrao Scindia's panache while canvassing against his mother, Kanshi Ram asking for a rupee from his voters as pledge and NT Rama Rao's histrionics in broken Hindi.

During the campaigning for the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, Madhavrao waged a battle to prevent the Guna seat from going to his mother - senior BJP leader and matriarch of the Gwalior royal family Vijayaraje Scindia.

Similarly, the target of Vijayaraje's broadside was not Rajiv Gandhi or the Congress candidate pitted against her, but her son Madhavrao, the Congress heavyweight defending his parliamentary seat in adjacent Gwalior, says writer-journalist Bhaskar Roy in his political memoir "Fifty Year Road".

"Ask your Maharaja why things have not happened. Where's development? If someone throws bricks at us, we will retaliate with stones," the Rajmata would keep blasting away.

"The widow of Maharaja Jivajirao Scindia - the last feudatory ruler of the princely state of Gwalior - Vi-

jayaraje in her younger days, as old photographs would testify, was an elegant princess lending grace to the royal palace. Her visceral antagonism towards her only son was indeed intriguing," writes Roy.

"It could not be explained by their political differences alone. Many said she had been deeply hurt by her son's decision to switch over to Congress at the beginning of his political career. She had been grooming him as a future leader of the Jan Sangh, the previous incarnation of the BJP.

"The rift, those privy to palace affairs said, had been caused by the tussle over managing the royal family's enormous assets. She had been stung, she said, by her son's attempt to get her defeated in the election," the book says.

Madhavrao, however, thought his mother played into the hands of the BJP which was "simply misusing her position".

Roy also writes how the then Andhra Pradesh chief minister NT Rama Rao was a tough challenger to Rajiv Gandhi as he tried to unite all anti-Congress forces.

At one public meeting in Haryana, supporters of Devi Lal -- who went on to become India's deputy prime minister later -- had



spread the word about "Tau's friend from down south" campaigning for them, in a reference to NTR.

However, NTR was not comfortable either in Hindi or English, Roy says.

"At one point, NTR addressed a gathering in a Hindi the farmers could hardly follow. One or two phrases, however, stayed with them. 'Congress ko ukhar phainko,' he roared, with filmy histrionics," the book says.

Roy then goes on to mention

Kanshi Ram's electoral foray in the high-profile parliamentary byelection from Allahabad in 1988.

Pitted against VP Singh and Sunil Shastri of Congress, Kanshi Ram polled an impressive 72,000 votes but managed to secure only the third position. Singh won that contest.

"Cash and liquor flow to garner votes for the big political parties. In Allahabad, I asked every voter to give me a one-rupee note to pledge their support to me. One Vote One

Note - I gave that slogan," the book quotes Kanshi Ram as saying.

In the book, published by Jaico, Roy looks at half a century in India's life from the mid-60s onward.

"Fifty Year Road", he says, is about a series of upheavals that had milestone India's contemporary history and appeared like a panorama before the author.

He talks about the Naxalbari uprising, 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, George Fernandes' historic rail strike, the Emergency, Operation Bluestar, Indra Gandhi's assassination, Rajiv Gandhi's push for technology, his ghastly killing by the LTTE terrorists, the rise of the Hindu right, the Babri Masjid demolition, Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh's stewardship of the UPA, and Narendra Modi's ascent to power.

Besides Rajiv Gandhi, Madhavrao Scindia, NTR and V P Singh, among the other personalities portrayed in the book are: Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Jyoti Basu, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, Charu Majumdar, Manmohan Singh, L K Advani, Sonia Gandhi, Amitabh Bachchan, and Narendra Modi.

On Friday, a 'critical conversation' around the book was held at

the India International Centre here in which former BSF DG Prakash Singh, former diplomat Navtej Sarna, Jamia Millia Islamia professor Anuradha Ghosh and the author participated.

Singh recalled that when the Naxalbari uprising flared up in the late 1960s, Intelligence Bureau bosses asked him to study the problem critically.

"When I first met (the principal Naxalite ideologue) Charu Majumdar in the Lalbazar (Kolkata Police headquarters) lock-up, my first reaction was how such a 'dubla-patta' (lean and thin) man could trigger political turmoil in a large part of the country," he said.

He said the portrayal of Naxalite insurgency in the book was "authentic and an accurate reflection" of the ground reality.

Sarna agreed with Roy that the large-scale anti-Sikh violence that had erupted in the wake of Indra Gandhi's assassination, should be called a pogrom and not a 'riot'.

According to Ghosh, the book stood out because of its insights into the political world. She pointed out that little anecdotes traced out with the writer's observant eye had added a new layer of meaning to the book. (PTI)

FIU notifies fresh money laundering, terror financing reporting alerts for capital markets

NEW DELHI, April 28: A fresh set of 'alert indicators' have been issued by India's financial intelligence unit (FIU) for capital markets, insurance companies, online payment gateway intermediaries and crypto currency service providers for effective checking of suspicious transactions in their channels as part of the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regime.

These new guidelines have been issued under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) during the 2022-23 financial year and published in a recently released report that has been accessed by PTI.

This is part of the anti-money laundering (AML) and combating the financing of terrorism (CFT) regime followed by the country as part of which financial institutions and intermediaries are mandated to share suspicious transaction reports (STRs) with the FIU which subsequently analyses them and shares them for action with various investigative and intelligence agencies.

FIU proactively engages with the financial sector regulators and reporting entities to understand emerging risks and to undertake immediate mitigating measures, the charter for the federal financial data mining agency says.

In the case of capital markets, these supplemental guidelines



have led to "a strategic shift in the manner in which FIU received information with respect to securities market transactions," the report said.

These 'alert indicators' will address "emerging risks" in the market infrastructure institutions (MIIs)— stock exchanges and depositories— like synchronised and manipulative trade practices, order spoofing, mis-utilisation of client funds by the stock brokers, suspicious off-market transactions etc.

In light of the growing trading volumes, the role the MIIs become "cardinal" in making the AML/CFT architecture more robust, it said.

Though the MIIs have been sending suspicious transaction reports (STRs) to the FIU for years now, the report said there was a lack of alert indicators "specific to them" and this left a lot of scope for improvement in their reporting quality, the report said.

The supplemental guidelines have specified clear areas of focus for the MIIs and it is expected that this would lead to a "marked improvement" in the reporting quality and thus will help FIU to generate meaningful intelligence for law enforcement agencies like the Income-tax department, ED, CBI, DRI etc, it said.

The new alert indicators were

issued after a working group of agencies like markets regulator SEBI, FIU, stock exchanges and depositories decided to "comprehensively" revise these guidelines and change the system of only stock brokers and depository participants reporting STRs to the FIU, as they were the first point of contact for a client to access the capital markets.

For stock exchanges, the fresh alert indicators mandate they consider cases where there is suspicion of mis-utilisation of client funds by the stockbrokers such as frauds and also analyse cases where "serious anomalies" from the perspective of money launder-

ing and terrorism financing are observed during the course of inspections and audit of stock brokers, the report said.

In the case of depositories, the new alert indicators for generating STRs require them to deal with identification of suspicious off-market transfer, a way of transferring shares directly between two accounts without the involvement of an exchange platform.

A similar working group, that included insurance regulator IRDAI, went into issues related to the insurance sector during 2022-23 fiscal and the revised guidelines laid "special stress" for generating alerts in cases of frauds experienced by the insurance firms and analyse these from the AML/CFT perspective and furnish reports to FIU in suitable cases, the report said.

In the case of online payment gateways, a working group comprising banking regulator RBI, National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) "extensively" studied the business model of these technology-enabled financial services firms as these "new-age" players pose challenges in respect of transparency of the parties involved in transactions facilitated by them and the relative speed with which such transactions are completed, leading to emergence of AML/CFT risks.

The agency also issued alert in-

dicators for virtual digital asset (VDA) or crypto currency service providers ranging from directions to register with the FIU to carrying out "enhanced due diligence to implementation of travel rule."

The travel rule requires crypto currency service providers to share sender and recipient data with each other during transactions.

In the case of credit rating agencies (CRAs), the new guidelines will ensure timely reporting of STRs by them to FIU and help in identifying serious corporate frauds having AML/CFT implications in the early stages and ensure timely action by law enforcement agencies based on such financial intelligence preventing siphoning of funds by delinquent issuers, it said.

A similar set of alert indicators were issued to debenture trustees and they were directed to call for "periodic reports" from issuers of debentures and take appropriate action in the interest of the debenture holders as soon as any breach of trust deed or law comes to their notice even as the FIU said these violations may have implications from the AML/CFT perspective.

The FIU has also shared the new alert indicator guidelines for STR reporting with real estate agents categorised as designated non-financial businesses and professions (DNFBP) under PMLA. (PTI)

Ukhand forest fires: IAF helicopter assists in firefighting for 2nd day

DEHRADUN, April 28: The fire-fighting operation in Uttarakhand's forests with the help of an Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter continued for the second day on Sunday with the blaze brought under control in several areas, officials said.

Efforts have also intensified to extinguish the raging forest fires in the state, especially in the worst-affected areas of Nainital, Haldwani and Ramnagar forest divisions, forest officials here said on Sunday.

The forest fires are gradually being controlled with the flames already doused in many areas. The fires in Marora and Khanana civil areas in Maniknath range of the Narendranagar forest division have been completely extinguished, they said.

The forest blaze in Nainital and adjoining areas is gradually being brought under control after the deployment of an IAF helicopter for the firefighting operations on Saturday morning, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said after reviewing the situation in the Kumaon region on Saturday night.

According to the Indian Air Force, a Mi-17 V5 helicopter has been deployed in Nainital and surrounding areas to douse the flames.

Apart from the IAF helicopter and Army personnel, Prantiya Rakshak Dal volunteers and homeguard personnel have also been roped in to help in the firefighting operations, Kumaon Commissioner Deepak Rawat said. Additional government vehicles, two each for the three forest divisions, have been provided to rush firefighting teams to the affected areas, he added.

Help from locals with the involvement of forest panchayat officials is also being taken as they are the first responders to forest fires, Rawat said.

Forest department personnel are going from village to village in the hills to raise awareness about forest fires, Garhwal DFO Anirudh Swapnil told reporters in Pauri.

Loudspeakers are being used to spread the messages. People are being asked to report any forest blaze immediately to the authorities and not to burn garbage in the open or carelessly throw burning cigarette butts or bidis in the forest areas, Swapnil said.

People are also being asked to report to the authorities if they catch someone setting a fire in the forests, he said, adding that any person reporting such a violation will be rewarded by the forest department.

Legal action under the Forest Act 1927 will be taken against anyone caught setting fire to the jungles, he added. Burning forests in order to obtain fresh grass for their cattle is a widely prevalent practice in the hills of Uttarakhand.

The chief minister has cancelled the leaves of forest department officials until the fire situation is completely brought under control.

Leave applications of forest department personnel will be considered only in case of medical emergencies, Dhami said. Forest officials said the IAF helicopter collected water from the Naini and Bhimtal lakes in a Bambi bucket and poured it over the burning forests of the Pines, Bhumi-adhar, Jyolikot, Narayan Nagar, Bhawali, Ramgarh and Mukteswar areas. The bucket can hold up to 5,000 litres of water at a time.

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

Village defence guard killed in gunfight with terrorists in J&K, search operation underway

JAMMU, April 28: A Village Defence Guard (VDG) member was killed in a gunfight with terrorists in a remote village in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district early Sunday, officials said.

A massive search operation is underway to flush out the terrorists, who are believed to have recently infiltrated from Pakistan, they said.

The exchange of fire was reported from Panara village of Basantgarh when a patrolling party of police and VDGs confronted the suspected terrorists around 7:45 am, the officials said.

According to them, following an initial exchange of fire that lasted over half an hour, the terrorists fled deep into the forest area and were being chased by the security forces.

VDG member Mohd Sharief, a resident of Khaned, was critically injured in the firing and later succumbed to injuries, the officials stated.

"After receipt of inputs regarding



movement of suspicious individuals late Saturday evening, J&K Police activated the security grid in Basantgarh police station limits. Today morning, a party of police picket Sang carrying along with them VDG members pro-

ceeded towards Chochnu Gala heights where a face-off ensued with a group of hiding terrorists," a police spokesperson said.

The Special Operations Group of police along with Army and CRPF parties

were rushed to the area to strengthen the cordon and neutralise the terrorists, the spokesperson added.

According to official sources, there was information about movement of two separate groups of terrorists, who infiltrated recently, from Kathua to Basantgarh. One of the groups with five members was confronted, while there was no trace of the other group, which has four members and whose movement was last reported in the Machedi top area bordering Kathua, they said. The sources said the terrorists are believed to have infiltrated from Kathua district and are heading to Kashmir via Chenab valley, taking advantage of the dense forest.

The Army airdropped Special Forces in the forest area and a massive search operation is underway to track and neutralise the terrorists, the sources said.

They said there was no fresh contact with the terrorists. (PTI)

Drugs worth ₹ 600 crore seized from Pakistani boat off Gujarat coast; 14 crew members held

AHMEDABAD, April 28: The Indian Coast Guard has seized 86 kg of drugs worth ₹ 600 crore from a Pakistani boat and arrested 14 persons on board the vessel off the Gujarat coast, the maritime security agency said on Sunday.

The overnight operation in the Arabian Sea was carried out in coordination with the Gujarat Anti-terrorism Squad (ATS) and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), it said.

"In a breathtaking overnight operation, Indian Coast Guard undertook an intelligence-based anti-narcotics operation at sea on 28 Apr 24. Approx 86 kg of narcotics worth ₹ 600 crore has been apprehended along with 14 crew from the Pakistani boat," the agency

said in a release.

The Coast Guard is yet to disclose what kind of narcotic substances were recovered from the Pakistani boat.

Coast Guard ships and aircraft were deployed for the operation, it said, adding that ICG ship Rajratna was used to identify the suspect boat with the help of NCB and ATS officials on board.

"No amount of evasive manoeuvring tactics employed by the drug-laden boat could save it from the swift and strong ICG ship Rajratna. The ship's specialist team embarked on the suspect boat and, after thorough checks, confirmed the presence of a sizable amount of narcotics," the Coast Guard said. (PTI)

Sandeshkhali: West Bengal govt moves SC against HC order directing CBI probe



NEW DELHI, April 28: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by the West Bengal government challenging the Calcutta High Court order which directed a CBI probe into allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta is likely to hear the matter.

In its plea before the top court, the state government said the high court's April 10, 2024 order demoralised the entire state machinery, including the police force.

"The high court in a very generic order directed the State to provide the required support to the CBI without any guidelines, which amounts to usurping the powers of the state police to investigate any cognisable offence in the Sandeshkhali area, even if the same is not related to the allegations levelled by the PIL petitioners," the plea said.

The CBI is already investigating the case of attack on Enforcement Directorate officials in Sandeshkhali and has registered three FIRs related to incidents on January 5.

Stating that the investigation will be monitored by the court, the high court directed the CBI to file a comprehensive report on the alleged illegal conversion of agricultural land into water bodies for pisciculture after conducting a thorough inspection of revenue records and physical inspection of land alleged to have been converted.

The high court also directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate allegations of crimes against women and land

grabbing in Sandeshkhali and submit a comprehensive report to it on the next date of hearing.

The high court bench had directed that the matter will be heard again on May 2, the date on which the CBI was asked to file the report. ED officials were attacked on January 5 by a mob when they went to Sandeshkhali to search the premises of now-suspended Trinamool Congress leader Shahjahan Sheikh in connection with a ration distribution scam case.

Passing the judgement, the high court observed that an impartial inquiry is required to be done by an agency which has the power to probe the criminal angle stated to be involved.

Noting that the petitioners had prayed for the constitution of an enquiry committee to be headed by a retired judge, the high court had said that it decided to order an investigation by the CBI considering the nature of allegations involving crimes against women and grabbing of land of locals, including those belonging to Scheduled Tribes and the volume of complaints placed before it by one of the petitioners.

Around 600 complaints in the form of affidavits, including those of alleged sexual atrocities, land grabbing and other crimes such as assault and destruction of property, have been submitted before the high court by petitioner-lawyer Priyanka Tibrewal.

The high court had said it decided to hand over to the CBI the probe with regard to allegations and complaints of people of Sandeshkhali as the central agency is already investigating the attack on ED officials there. (PTI)

Health secretary urges states, UTs to link ABHA IDs with health portals

NEW DELHI, April 28: The Union Health Secretary has urged states and union territories to take necessary action to link Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) with various health portals, such as Reproductive Child Health (RCH), National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NIKSHAY), among others.

As per the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) dashboard, total ABHA IDs created in the country as on April 3, 2024 is 5,894.60 lakhs, Health Secretary Apurva Chandra said.

However, total beneficiaries linked with ABHA under Non-com-

municable diseases (NCD), Sickle cell, RCH, NIKSHAY, National Viral Hepatitis Control Program (NVHCP) and Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme (PMNDP) are only 827.99 lakhs, 0.89 lakhs, 15.78 lakhs, 2.46 lakhs, 0.056 lakhs and 0.17 lakhs, respectively, he said.

"This shows that though the states have taken huge interest in creation of the IDs but non linking of health records with these IDs is not allowing the stakeholders, including the patients, from reaping the benefits of digital health records," the health secretary said. "You are, therefore, requested to kindly take necessary ac-

tion for linkage of existing beneficiaries with ABHA in the various portals and do regular review of the progress at your level," he stated in a letter to all the state and UT governments. Chandra said the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 27, 2021 and all the health facilities in the country are to take part in this mission. Further, via Health Facility Registry and Health Professional Registry, the ABDM platform has to be utilised to the optimum extent, he said in the letter.

"In this regard, all states and UTs have been requested in the past

through a letter on June 13, 2023 for the 100 per cent compliance in ABHA seeding on various portals. Some states and UTs have shown impressive progress in the creation of ABHA IDs," he said.

Chandra said currently, beneficiaries are being linked with ABHA under various health portals like NCD, Sickle Cell, Reproductive and Child Health (RCH), NIKSHAY, NVHCP and PMNDP, etc. Additionally, states and UTs have to link the beneficiaries under the IDSP-IHIP (Integrated Health Information Platform) portal, the health secretary said in the letter. (PTI)

Want to let world know about 'Chinese repression': Tibetan girl who was jailed for demanding 'Free Tibet'

DHARAMSHALA, April 28: On October 21, 2015, a 15-year-old Tibetan girl along with her sister was picked up by Chinese authorities in the Tibetan county of Ngaba and put behind bars for three years for publicly displaying portraits of the Dalai Lama and demanding a "free" Tibet.

In June last year, the girl, Namkyi, arrived in India weeks after entering Nepal following a 10-day arduous journey on foot with a "firm" resolve to aware people across the world about "Chinese repression" in Tibet, according to her account.

Namkyi, now 24, says she is currently studying at 'Sherab Gatsel Ling', an educational institution being run by the Tibetan government-in-exile in Himachal Pradesh's Dharamshala.

"What the Chinese government is showing to the entire world about Tibet is in total contrast to the real situation. The Tibetan people are living under increasing fear and repression," she told a small group of journalists.

"China has been trying to undermine Tibet's identity," she alleges. The Tibetan activists have been accusing China of denying religious freedom and trying to stamp out Tibet's cultural heritage and



identity. Beijing has been rejecting the charges.

"I want to tell the world what is happening in Tibet. I want to be the voice of the Tibetan people to let the world know about their pain and anguish, about the Chinese repression," Namkyi said.

The girl, born to a typical nomadic family in Charo village, also recalled her and her sister Tenzin Dolma's detention following their demonstration at a key locality in Ngaba, "calling for 'Free Tibet and seeking swift return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet'."

"Not more than 10 minutes into our march, four or five police officers came from behind and

snatched the portraits (of the Dalai Lama) from our hands," she said about the October 21, 2015 protest. "We did not let the portraits go from our hands and resisted the police action. Finally, the Police dragged us down the road and told us to be silent. But we shouted our slogans continuously," she said.

"They handcuffed our hands, put us into the police van, and took us away to the detention centre of Ngaba County. Then, they took us to another detention centre in Barkam city."

Namkyi said she and her sister were subjected to severe torture. "We were interrogated in a small room where a heater was switched

on with excessive heat. Different interrogators asked various questions such as who incited us to hold the protest; where did we get the portraits of the Dalai Lama and whether we had any acquaintances from outside etc," she said.

"Despite mental and physical torture, we only responded that both of us freely decided to hold the protest, and no one incited us, and also that our family members knew nothing about it."

Namkyi said the trial started nearly a year after the arrest. "That day (when the trial began), we both saw each other for the first time since our arrest," she remembered, adding the court sent to prisons.

"After three months in prison, I worked in a labour camp where copper wires were produced, and my sister made cigarette boxes at first, and then we were shifted to a wrist-watch manufacturing camp," she said.

"Later, we learned that our family had sent food and clothes for us, but we never got anything from the prison authorities."

"On 21 October 2018, we were released from prison after completing the prison term," she added.

Namkyi alleged that the Chinese authorities "troubled" her family

members and relatives in view of the demonstration held by her and her sister.

"On May 13, 2023, I started my journey of escape with my aunt Tsering Kyi without telling anyone," she said adding they first crossed over to Nepal through a border point.

Namkyi said she came to Dharamshala on June 28 last year. In India for close to 10 months, she feared for the safety of her family members.

"I am worried that my family may be targeted," she said.

Namkyi said her main aim now is to "let the world know the real situation in Tibet."

"People are living in pathetic conditions in Tibet. I want to be their voice to the world. I want to visit various countries and spread and tell them what is going on in Tibet," she added.

Namkyi said she had the opportunity to seek blessings of the Dalai Lama last year during which he underlined the need for working towards protecting the identity and cultural heritage of Tibet.

After a failed anti-Chinese uprising in 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama fled Tibet and came to India where he set up the government-in-exile. (PTI)

Diljit Dosanjh makes history sells out 'largest ever Punjabi show outside India'

NEW DELHI, April 28: Actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh has scripted history by selling out the "largest ever Punjabi show outside India" on the North American leg of his 'Dil-Luminati Tour'.

Kicking off his tour on Saturday night, Dosanjh regaled over 50,000 concert goers at the BC Place stadium in Vancouver, Canada, with songs such as "GOAT", "5 Taara", "Lover", "Kinni Kinni", and "Ishq Mitaye", the popular track from his latest film release "Amar Singh Chamkila".

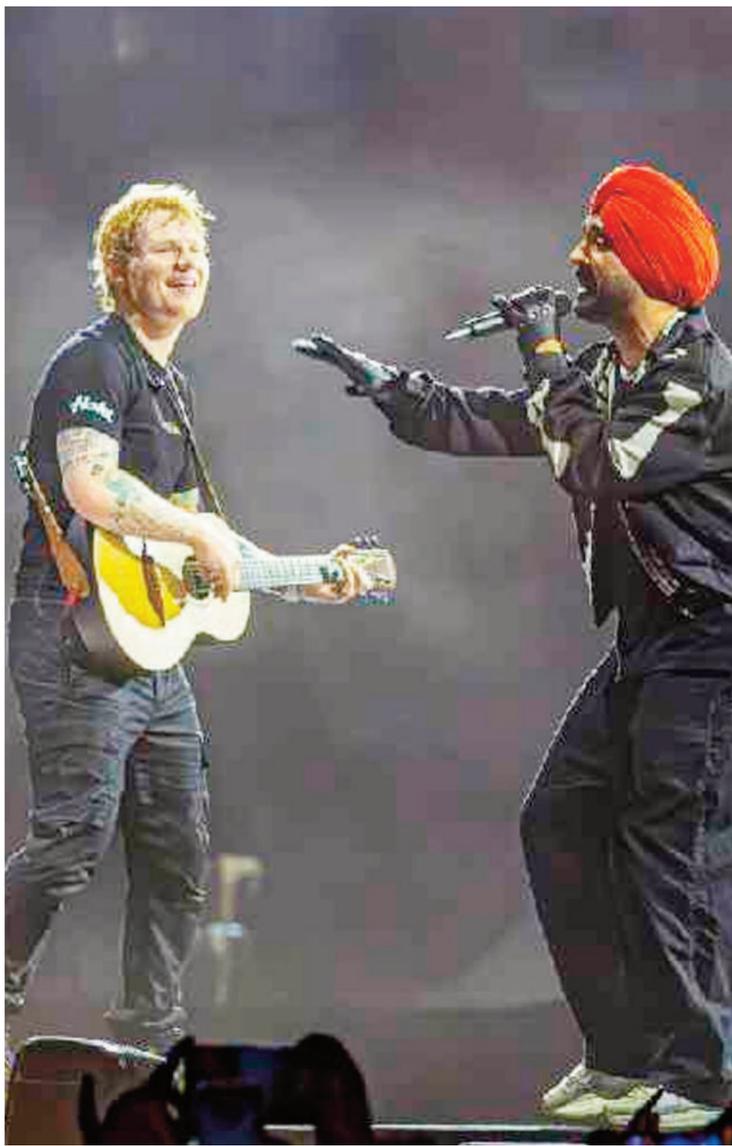
The singer shared a series of pictures and videos from the show on his Instagram page on Sunday. "HISTORY HAS BEEN WRITTEN. BC PLACE STADIUM SOLD OUT. DIL-LUMINATI TOUR," he captioned the post.

In a video, the general manager of BC Place can be seen handing over a congratulatory plaque to Dosanjh for the "largest ever Punjabi show outside India".

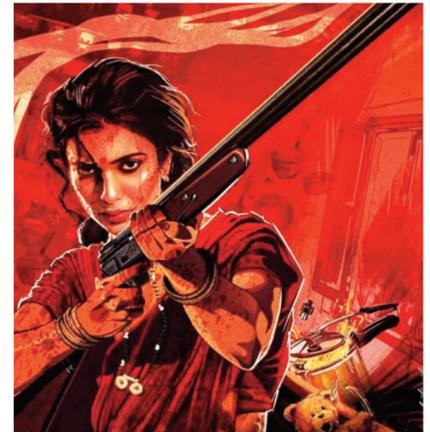
It was the first time in history that a Punjabi music superstar headline the Vancouver-based arena, according to Canadian media reports.

Dosanjh also shared a video on his Instagram Stories showing a massive billboard of his show with "Sold Out" written across. "HISTORY is made. Take a bow, @diljiddosanjh," said BC Place in a post on X.

As part of his tour, Dosanjh will now head to Calgary, Winnipeg, and Edmonton in Canada, before heading to the US. He will end the North American leg of his trek in Toronto on July 13. (PTI)



Samantha Ruth Prabhu announces new film 'Bangaram' on birthday



NEW DELHI, April 28: Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu on Sunday announced her new film titled "Bangaram" on the occasion of her 37th birthday.

The update comes months after "The Family Man 2" star said she will return to work after a seven-month hiatus following her myositis diagnosis in 2022.

"Bangaram" will be produced under the banner of Tralala Moving Pictures.

Samantha shared the title announcement teaser of the upcoming film on her Instagram page.

"Not everything has to glitter to be golden. #Bangaram @tralalamovingpictures Starting soon," she captioned her post.

The actor's last big-screen release was "Kushi". Next up for Samantha is the Prime Video series "Citadel: Honey Bunny" opposite Varun Dhawan. (PTI)

Rakshit Shetty's '777 Charlie' sets Japan premiere in June



NEW DELHI, April 28: National Award-winning film "777 Charlie" is set to be released in Japan on June 28, the makers have announced. Directed by Kiranraj K and starring Rakshit Shetty, "777 Charlie" won the best National Film Award for the best Kannada film last year. Shetty has also backed the movie via his production house Paramvah Studios.

According to the banner, the film will be distributed in Japan by Shochiku Studios, the outlet behind Seijiro Koyama's "Hachiko Monogatari" (1987), which inspired the 2009 Hollywood film "Hachi: A Dog's Tale" starring Richard Gere.

Paramvah Studios shared the news of the Japan premiere of "777 Charlie" on Saturday. "#777Charlie travels to #Japan. Legendary Studio @shochiku_movie, known for distributing popular movies such as 'Hachi: A Dog's Tale', will be distributing '777 Charlie' in Japan.

"It is indeed our honour to be associated with one of the largest and oldest film studios in Japan. #777Charlie Japan release on 28 June 2024. @rakshitshetty @Kiranraj61 @RajbShettyOMK @sangeethaSrInG @actorsimha @DanishSait @nobinpaul #ParamvahStudios," the post read.

"777 Charlie" is a 2022 Kannada film which follows the journey and bonding between Dharma, a lonely factory worker, played by Rakshit Shetty, and a stray Labrador dog called Charlie.

In an X post, Kiranraj said the movie will also be released in Russia, Taiwan, Latin America, Germany, and other countries. (PTI)

Sonu Sood retrieves WhatsApp account after 61 hours

NEW DELHI, April 28: Actor Sonu Sood on Sunday said he had retrieved his account on popular messaging app WhatsApp after 61 hours.

The actor, who first flagged the issue on social media on Friday, shared the update on his official X page.

"Finally retrieved my WhatsApp. Just 9483 messages in 61 hours. Thanks." Sood wrote.

He had also tagged the official page of WhatsApp on his Instagram Stories on Saturday.

"What's up. WhatsApp? Wake up!! Thousands of needy people must be desperately trying to reach out for help. Kindly look into this.

"The account stands blocked. @whatsapp URGENT," wrote the actor, who transformed from a reel-to-real hero for thousands of migrants as he helped them reach home during the lockdown and even find jobs through his charitable initiatives.

On Friday afternoon, Sood had shared a post,



saying his number was inaccessible on WhatsApp. "My number does not work on @WhatsApp. I have been facing this problem many a times. I feel time for you guys to upgrade your services (sic)" he wrote on X. Sood will next be seen in the action thriller "Fateh", which also marks his directorial debut. (PTI)

Tovino Thomas and Trisha Krishnan-starrer 'Identity' enters final leg of shooting

NEW DELHI, April 28: The shooting of "Identity", starring Tovino Thomas and Trisha Krishnan, is nearing completion.

Akhil Paul is directing the Malayalam crime thriller with Anas Khan. The director duo previously collaborated on 2020's "Forensic", which also featured Thomas.

In an Instagram post on Saturday, Paul said the cast and crew had wrapped the second schedule of "Identity" in Erode, Tamil Nadu.

"Nailed down another schedule @Erode. Filmed some core sequences involving fire, dust and vehicles over a beautiful dry landscape. With continuous night shoots and back-to-back day shoots under the blazing sun of Erode at 42 degree celsius, this one was indeed an adventurous schedule!

"Yes, we're stepping into the final leg of shooting IDENTITY. Ninety-nine Days. Another schedule down. Only a few more to go..." the director captioned a series of pictures from the film set.

Also starring Vinay Rai, "Identity" is produced by Raju Malliath and Century Kochumon. (PTI)



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

MUMBAI, April 28: Noted author Neil Gaiman on Saturday announced that his widely-loved short story "Cinnamon" has been turned into an animated film. For the upcoming English-language film, which is about an Indian Princess and a talking tiger, the author has partnered with Sharad Devarajan and Graphic India, which has an expertise in original Indian-themed character entertainment. Gaiman, the NYT best-selling author and creator of films and series including, "Coraline", "The Sandman", "American Gods" and "Good Omens", said he aims to transport audiences into the magical world of "Cinnamon" through the film. "I am thrilled to be collaborating with Sharad Devarajan and his exceptional team on 'Cinnamon.' Sharad's passion for storytelling and his deep understanding of Indian culture and mythology makes him the perfect partner to bring this tale to life. "Together, we are crafting a film that will transport audiences to a world of magic, wonder, and eternal truths, a story that celebrates the transformative power of compassion and the resilience of the human spirit. I cannot wait to share this incredible journey with animation fans around the world, old and new," the 63-year-old author said in a statement.

Gaiman has adapted the screenplay for the animated movie with Devarajan, Sarena Khan and Sujatha SV. The film is directed by acclaimed Indian animator, Jeevan J Kang. Devarajan said he is thrilled to partner with Gaiman and called him "one of the greatest storytellers". "I am honoured to bring his enchanting story of 'Cinnamon' to audiences around the world. Inspired by Indian fables, 'Cinnamon' weaves together the timeless theme of dharma as a young princess embarks on a journey of courage and self-discovery. At its core, it explores the universal human experience of the eternal struggle between light and darkness," Devarajan added. (PTI)

India men's team shocks Olympic champions Korea to bag historic Gold



SHANGHAI, April 28: Indian men's recurve team of Dhiraj Bommadevara, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav shocked reigning Olympic champions South Korea in a historic win to land an Archery World Cup gold medal after 14 years, here on Sunday.

This triumph over the archery powerhouse in well over a decade also comes as a boost to their chances of securing a berth in the upcoming Paris Olympics.

The trio of Dhiraj, Tarundeep and Pravin showed ice-cool com-

posure to get the better of mighty Koreans without dropping a set.

The 40-year-old Army man Tarundeep was also a part of the gold medal-winning team in Shanghai World Cup Stage 4 in August 2010. Then the recurve team comprising Rahul Banerjee, Tarundeep and Jayanta defeated Japan.

In a battle between the top-two seeds of the competition, India won 5-1 (57-57, 57-55, 55-53), taking their gold medal count to five in the season-opening Stage

1 World Cup.

The success also rubbed on the recurve mixed team of Ankita Bhakat and Dhiraj who trounced Alejandra Valencia and Matias Grande of Mexico 6-0 (35-31, 38-35, 39-37) to win bronze.

On a comeback trail after missing the whole 2023 after becoming mother in December 2022, Deepika Kumari faltered in the final hurdle to settle for a silver in the women's recurve individual section.

The former world No. 1, who

started from the bottom after qualifying as the 30th seed, eliminated two Koreans in the quarterfinal and semifinal.

But in the final, Deepika lost to Hangzhou Asian Games champion Lim Sihyeon in straight sets 6-0 (26-27, 27-29, 27-28).

Deepika had a poor start in the title round, with her second arrow landing in the seven-point red ring. Rising 20-year-old Lim dropped just one point to take the second set and sealed the gold without much fuss.

Overall, India returned with eight medals -- five gold, two silver and a bronze -- from the global showpiece.

In the men's team final, India were up against their nemesis South Korea, who featured two members of the Tokyo Olympics gold medal winning team in Kim Woojin and Kim Je Deok. Lee Woo Seok was the third member.

But the Indian trio put up a brave front and drilled in three 10s that included two X (closer to the centre) and three 9s to match their rivals (57-57) in the opening set. It put the pressure back on the Koreans who slipped twice into the 8-ring, while the Indians shot four perfect 10s including three Xs from six arrows to take the second set 57-55 and take 3-1 lead.

In the next set, the Koreans faltered and managed just 53 as the Indians held their nerves to close out the game with a 55 en route to clinch a first men's team World Cup gold since 2010.

Before this victory, the women's team had previously beaten the Koreans twice in the 2013 World Cup -- Medellin Stage 3 in July and Wroclaw Stage 4 in August.

"The nerves always kick in when Korea is in the final. But now, no one can doubt our ability to defeat them," declared former Commonwealth Games gold medalist Rahul Banerjee, a member of the Shanghai 2010 triumph. (PTI)

Hima to return to action after NADA panel's go-ahead following suspension for whereabouts failure



NEW DELHI, April 28: Star India sprinter Hima Das will return to action at the Indian Grand Prix 1 on Tuesday in Bengaluru after a disciplinary panel of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) gave the green signal to her following a hearing last month, according to sources.

The 24-year-old Hima was last year provisionally suspended by the NADA for three whereabouts failures in 12 months. Her name figured in the women's 200m race entry list for the IGP 1 on April 30, prepared by the Athletics Federation of India.

"She was set free in a hearing by the NADA Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel last month," an Indian athletics team source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. The source did not elaborate about how the NADA disciplinary panel cleared her to compete again.

Hima had won a 400m individual silver at the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games. She was also a part of the gold and silver-winning women's 4x400m and mixed 4x400m relay quartets in Jakarta.

The runner from Assam was not named in the Hangzhou Asian Games team last year due to an injury she had sustained earlier this year.

She last ran a race — a 200m — during the Indian Grand Prix in Bengaluru in April last year, where she won a gold with a time

of 23.77 seconds. After that, she missed the whole of 2023 season.

In September last year, it had come to light that Hima committed three whereabouts failures in a one-year period and she was provisionally suspended by the NADA.

At that time also, there was no clarity on whether Hima's whereabouts failure related to filing or missed test.

She had faced a maximum two-year ban if proven guilty, which can be reduced to a minimum of one year depending on the degree of her fault.

Under the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) rules, any combination of three whereabouts failures — filing failure and/or missed test — within a period of 12 months constitute an anti-doping rule violation.

Athletes included in the Registered Testing Pool (RTP) must provide full address for their overnight location, the name and full address of each location where they train, work or conduct other regular scheduled activities, as well as the usual time-frames of each activity.

RTP athletes must also identify a 60-minute window and location for each day of the quarter, during which they must be available for testing. Failure to comply with whereabouts and testing obligations will result in a whereabouts failure. (PTI)

Shooter Maheshwari locks 21st Paris Olympic quota place with silver medal in Doha

NEW DELHI, April 28: Shooter Maheshwari Chauhan on Sunday sealed India's 21st quota place for the Paris Olympics by winning a silver medal in the women's skeet event on the concluding day of the ISSF Final Olympic Qualification Championship Shotgun in Doha.

Maheshwari, competing in her maiden ISSF Final, lost 3-4 to Chile's Francisca Crovetto Chadid in a shoot-off for gold, after both were tied at 54 hits in the 60-shot final. It is India's second Paris quota place in the women's skeet.

"I am thrilled. There has been a lot of hard work over the years to get here. I am a bit bummed about the shoot-off, but overall, it has been very satisfying," said Maheshwari after the final.

The day began with the Indian on top of the qualification pile, but a final round score of 23 meant she would qualify for the top-six final in fourth position. Her tally of 121, however, did give her the new national record.

Given Chadid had already secured a quota place in earlier competitions and

China's Jiang Yiting, the sixth qualifier, was ineligible as her nation had already exhausted their quotas in the event, Maheshwari's fight was with three others (Kazakhstan's Assem Orybay, Azerbaijan's Rigina Meftakhetdinova and the top qualifier Sweden's Victoria Larsson).

At the first elimination stage (after 20 shots), the Indian was in second place behind Chadid, having missed two targets.

Orybay the Kazakh, was first to bow out with five misses in the first 20 targets. The quota was confirmed after Rigina

bowed out next, having missed five in 30. Victoria of Sweden would claim the other available quota.

That probably calmed the nerves with Maheshwari getting stronger as the final progressed, catching up with the leader after 50 shots. Both had missed five at that stage.

Maheshwari then had three chances to win gold, but it was not to be and she missed her double entirely in the third shoot-off round to hand Chadid the gold. (PTI)

People can talk anything they want to I know my game better: Kohli on his strike rate

AHMEDABAD, April 28: Indian superstar Virat Kohli on Sunday dismissed the constant talk over his strike rate against spin in the middle overs, saying he knows his game better than those who question his approach.

Kohli upped his game against spinners to make 70 not out off 44 balls in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's nine-wicket win over Gujarat Titans here on Sunday.

However, the likes of Sunil Gavaskar had questioned his lack of intent against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Thursday when he made 51 off 43 balls. His knock was in stark contrast to Rajat Patidar's uber aggressive 50 off 20 balls.

"There's a reason why you do it for 15 years, for me, it's just about doing my job. It's kind of muscle memory for me now. People can talk anything they want to, they can talk about me not able to push on (strike rate) and me not playing spin well. But you yourself know the game better," Kohli said after the match.

Despite back to back wins, RCB are languishing at the bottom of the table with three wins in 10 games.

"We wanted to play more for our self respect, we want to play for the fans who have backed us, we know we haven't played up to the standards required (so far in the tournament), we know we can do a lot more better and it's something which we'll try and do," he said.

Talking about Jacks stunning hundred, he said, "Phenomenal, initially when he came to bat, he

was annoyed that he wasn't able to strike the ball as he wanted to. The only talk was for him to stay calm.

"We know how explosive he can be when he gets going. The over from Mohit was the game changer. I was just happy to stay around and watch him go.

"I thought we would win in 19 overs, but to do it in 16 was absolutely brilliant. The wicket did start to get better as the first innings wore on, the ball was coming nicely onto the bat. We never dropped below ten an over through the innings."

Player of the match Jacks said batting along with Kohli gave him confidence.

"Amazing feeling right now. I struggled early on, but Virat kept his intensity. I just kept going. It was trying to be positive. Once I got Mohit Sharma away, I relaxed. It's amazing [to bat with Kohli].

"To spend some time (with Kohli) in the middle is a huge feeling. It just gave me some confidence to hit my first six. Needed to more adaptable at the beginning. Just lucky today - 17 off 17 don't win you many games!"

GT captain Shubman Gill admitted that his side would need to come up with better plans.

"It was great hitting by them. But having said that, we need to come up with better plans. At the end of the day what matters is how much you've got after 20 overs," he said.

"We were not able to pick up wickets in the middle overs, which is one of our strengths." (PTI)

Jadumani, Akash enter quarterfinals of ASBC Asian U-22 & Youth Boxing C'ships

ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN), April 28: Mandangbam Jadumani Singh (51kg) and Akash Gorkha (60kg) entered the quarterfinals of the ASBC Asian U22 & Youth Boxing Championships here on Sunday.

Jadumani Singh outperformed Aldarkhiig Battulga of Mongolia by winning the bout with an RSC (Referee Stop Contest) decision in round two in U-22 category.

Akash, on the other hand, faced a tough challenge against Mongolia's Ganbaatar Gan Erdene but made a remarkable comeback after

losing the first round to win the bout 4-1.

Both the boxers will play their quarter-final bout on Tuesday.

Ajay Kumar (63.5kg) and Ankush (71kg) will begin their campaign in the U-22 category later on Sunday.

On Saturday, Jatin (57kg), Sagar Jakhar (60kg) and Yashwardhan Singh (63.5kg) also entered the next round. Jatin and Yashwardhan won their bouts with an identical 5-0 win, while Sagar received a walkover from his opponent Leong Brandon of Singapore.

On Monday, 11 boxers will be in action in their respective youth categories with Laxmi (50kg), Tamanna (54kg), Yatri Patel (57kg) and Shrusthi Sathe (63kg) competing in the women's category.

Brijesh Tamta (48kg), Jitesh (54kg), Sagar Jakhar (69kg), Sumit (67kg), Rahul Kundu (75kg), Hemant Sangwan (86kg) and Lakshay Rathi (+92kg) will compete in the men's category.

The finals for the youth and U-22 category will be played on May 6 and 7 respectively. (PTI)



Batters have evolved quicker than bowlers in IPL: Klusener

LUCKNOW, April 28: Lucknow Super Giants assistant coach Lance Klusener placed the quicker evolution of batters as reason behind the frequent tall team totals in the ongoing Indian Premier League.

The teams have been going past 200 and even 250 quite effortlessly in this IPL, and the former South African all-rounder opined that the modest performance by bowlers at death overs too has helped batters to add quick runs.

"Just looking at the bowling performances throughout the competition, for me, they have been quite disappointing. There hasn't been a lot of good bowling," Klusener told the media after LSG's seven-wicket loss to Rajasthan Royals here on Saturday.

"There's been a lot of ordinary bowling and batsmen are just so good these days, they're taking advantage. Maybe the batsmen have evolved a lot quicker than the bowlers in this competition.

"I haven't seen a lot of good death bowling in the competition and that's why teams have been able to take advantage. Sure, surfaces have been flat. I haven't seen a lot of swing either," he added.

Klusener observed that the bowlers are opting for several variations at death but they have not been using the wide yorkers enough.

"It's easy to overcomplicate. If you run in and execute even four out of six yorkers...we don't see that anymore. We don't see that skill," he said.

"We're going to slower balls and a whole lot of other variations. That pure death bowling of yorkers, whether it's wide or straight, that's a skill that we don't see very often these days," he added.

Klusener said LSG will have to start putting performances together and they cannot continue to be good in one area and bad in the other.

"We're doing a lot of good stuff



but in patches, and for us to get deeper into the competition come later on in the month, we're going to have to make sure that we're putting all those little things together," he said.

"We can't just bat well and not bowl well or field. We need to make sure we put all that together. The good thing is we're in a great position — we're the mas-

fan of the impact player rule in IPL.

"Personally, I'm not in favour. But I think it's been extremely effective. Just me personally, I like 11 on 11," he said.

"But I think the way the entertainment has been provided, and a little bit of strategy on when and how to use it...I think it's worked excellently and they've been extremely successful," Klusener noted.

Meanwhile, Rajasthan Royals' pace bowler Avesh Khan said the IPL table-toppers need to improve on their bowling skills during overs 6 to 16.

Having kept LSG under pressure for the majority of the powerplay, Rajasthan's bowlers could not maintain the pressure as KL Rahul (76) and Deepak Hooda (50) responded with a 115-run partnership for the third wicket.

"We feel that we need to show further improvement in the phase of overs 6-16 as a bowling unit. We will discuss this in our team meeting," he said. (PTI)

Kolkata Knight Riders wary of resurgent DC, marauding McGurk

KOLKATA, April 28: A resurgent Delhi Capitals will look to exploit Kolkata Knight Riders' bowling vulnerabilities and ascend to top-four in the table during their Indian Premier League match here on Monday.

With four wins in their last five matches, the Rishabh Pant-led side is gradually assembling their pieces and starting to look like a force to be reckoned with.

On the other hand, the Gautam Gambhir-mentored side has endured three defeats in their last five matches with their profligacy in bowling hurting them badly.

Signed up as Lungi Ngidi's replacement, Aussie Jake Fraser-McGurk has proved to be their X-factor with his ferocious batting display at the top.

A natural power-hitter with superb hand-eye coordination, the 22-year-old has taken the IPL by storm scoring 247 runs in five matches at a strike-rate of 237.50.

His brutal treatment of the otherwise sensational Jasprit Bumrah stands as a testimony of his skill-level. McGurk slammed a slower ball from the Mumbai Indians pacer for a six and it was the first time a batter lofted Bumrah for a first-ball six.

The pacer conceded 18 runs in his first over, the most by him in this season in a single over as DC overcame MI by 10 runs on Saturday.

He made a 27-ball 84 against MI, and McGurk will relish the batting-friendly conditions at Eden



Gardens where 523 runs, including a record 42 sixes, were scored between Punjab Kings and KKR.

The PBKS on that occasion had scaled down a world record 262. But DC's batting is not only about McGurk, the South African Tristian Stubbs also left everyone in awe with his astonishing power-hitting, smashing a 25-ball 48 not out against Mumbai.

Pant is also making rapid progress with every match as the DC top-five in Fraser-McGurk, Abhishek Porel, Shai Hope, Pant and Stubbs will be a cause of concern for KKR bowling.

The KKR replaced injured Mitchell Starc with Sri Lankan pacer Dushmantha Chameera but the latter gave away 16 runs per over in his debut for KKR and

failed to inspire any confidence. Barring spinner Sunil Narine, who returned with 1/24 from his four overs, none of the KKR bowlers made any impact.

IPL's costliest buy Starc has been their biggest letdown and KKR would hope that the Aussie hits his stride soon after overcoming the thumb injury.

In bowling, Kuldeep Yadav who was sidelined under Dinesh Karthik while he was with KKR, will look to prove a point against the Kolkatans as he along with left-arm spinner Axar Patel has formed a formidable spin pair.

However, the home side has some positives to look up to. Narine's sensational form with the bat -- 357 runs from eight matches with two fifties and one century --

has given a thrust to their batting up the order this season.

Narine and Phil Salt have scored bulk of their runs at the top, but the likes of Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Shreyas Iyer, Rinku Singh, Andre Russell and Ramandeep Singh will have to chip in with a bit more runs.

After this match, KKR will be on the road to face Mumbai and Lucknow, hence they will be eager to register a win before those tougher assignments and keep themselves in the play-off race.

Teams (from): Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain and Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra, Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Gulbadin Naib, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.

Match starts: 7.30pm. (PTI)

Young Indian women's team seals Uber Cup quarterfinal spot

CHENGDU (CHINA), April 28: Isharani Baruah and Anmol Kharb shone bright as the Indian women's team entered the quarter-finals of the Uber Cup badminton tournament with a lopsided 4-1 win over Singapore in the second tie of group A, here on Sunday.

Asian champions India, who had defeated Canada 4-1 in the opening tie, produced another fine show as they recovered from the opening match loss of Ashmita Chaliha and went on to win the rest of the contests with ease to come up trumps.

It turned out to be a fine weekend for the young and inexperienced Indian side who were missing the big guns, but they displayed their skill and temperament at the big stage to win two out of two ties.

China blanked Canada 3-0 in another group A match and the result was enough for both India and their Asian neighbours to seal the quarterfinal spot.

With the twin victories, India are now placed in the second position behind China in Group A. The two teams will clash on Tuesday in their final group match to decide the top spot.

The 53rd-ranked Chaliha, who had outwitted Canada's Michelle Li on Saturday, found the going tough against world No. 18 Yeo Jia Min on Sunday, going down 15-21, 18-21.

National champions Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra, ranked 67, then brought India back with a 21-15, 21-16 win over Xiao En Heng and Jin Yu Jia in the



first women's doubles. Isharani, ranked 83rd, went on to double India's lead by claiming a 21-13, 21-16 win over Insyirah Khan in the second singles.

The 64th-ranked pair of Simran Singhi and Ritika Thaker dished out a superb performance en route to a 21-8, 21-11 win over Yi Ting Elsa Lai and Zan Michelle as India took an unassailable 3-1 lead.

Rising star Anmol, ranked 258th, then sealed the tie with a 21-15, 21-13 win over Lee Xin Megan in the third singles.

Later, Shruti said the Indians did not bow down to pressure despite losing the first match. "It was a very important match, because if we won this tie (vs Singapore) we would qualify (to the quarterfinals). So, there was a bit of pressure but in a good way. Even though Ashmita lost, she gave her best."

"It was then our turn to give our best. We were not very confident during our first tie but today we were more confident. The side courts have a little bit of drift but our court was fine," said Shruti.

India have reached the semi-finals of the Uber Cup thrice in 1957, 2014 and 2016.

Defending champions Indian men's team will face England on Monday in their second group C tie. India had defeated Thailand 4-1 in the opening tie.

Results: India bt Singapore 4-1 (Ashmita Chaliha lost to Yeo Jia Min 15-21, 18-21; Priya Konjengbam/Shruti Mishra bt Xiao En Heng/Yu Jia Jin 21-15, 21-16; Isharani Baruah bt Insyirah Khan 21-13, 21-16; Simran Singhi/Ritika Thaker bt Lai Yi Ting Elsa and Michelle Zan 21-8, 21-11; Anmol Kharab bt Lee Xin Yi Megan 21-15, 21-13. (PTI)

Shooter Maheshwari clinches silver medal in Doha

NEW DELHI, April 28: Shooter Maheshwari Chauhan on Sunday sealed India's 21st quota place for the Paris Olympics by winning a silver medal in the women's skeet event on the concluding day of the ISSF Final Olympic Qualification Championship Shotgun in Doha.

Maheshwari, competing in her maiden ISSF Final, lost 3-4 to Chile's Francisca Crovetto Chadid in a shoot-off for gold, after both were tied at 54 hits in the 60-shot final. It is India's second Paris quota place in the women's skeet. "I am thrilled. There has been a lot of hard work over the years to get here. I am a bit bummed about the shoot-off, but overall, it has been very satisfying," said Maheshwari after the final.

The day began with the Indian on top of the qualification pile, but a final round score of 23 meant she would qualify for the top-six final in fourth position. Her tally of 121, however, did give her the new national record.

Given Chadid had already secured a quota place in earlier competitions and China's Jiang Yiting, the sixth qualifier, was ineligible as her nation had already exhausted their quotas in the event, Maheshwari's fight was with three others (Kazakhstan's Assem Orybay, Azerbaijan's Rigina Metkhetdinova and the top qualifier Sweden's Victoria Larsson).

At the first elimination stage (after 20 shots), the Indian was in second place behind Chadid, having missed two targets. (PTI)

Samson, Rahul put their hands up for WC selection: Smith



NEW DELHI, April 28: The classy fifties made by Sanju Samson and KL Rahul in the IPL has intensified the race for the second wicketkeeper's slot in the Indian team for the upcoming T20 World Cup, reckoned former South African captain Graeme Smith.

The Indian squad for the marquee event in June is set to be announced soon and Rishabh Pant is set to be drafted in as the first-choice wicketkeeper-batter.

"They (Rahul and Samson) needed to build a partnership. Rahul did it with (Deepak) Hooda and Sanju did it beautifully with Dhruv Jurel. The difference

was that Sanju finished the game, while KL got out at a key phase. But it was brilliant to see both excellent players put their hands up for World Cup selection," said Smith in JioCinema.

Rahul made a 48-ball 76 for Lucknow Super Giants, but Samson trumped that effort with an unbeaten 71 off 33 balls as Rajasthan Royals cruised to a seven-wicket victory.

Former Australian pacer Brett Lee lauded Jurel for supporting Samson with a fine 52 not out off 34 balls during their unbroken fourth wicket stand that was worth 121 runs.

"He's a quality batter. He's got proper cricket

shots. He can play all formats of the game and knows when to go through the gears as needed.

"His shots are classy and have the power to go towards the cow corner. He shows his class and continues to grow in stature," said the New South Welshman.

The point found resonance in Smith.

"The run-chase looked easy. Dhruv Jurel and Sanju Samson had an incredible partnership to get them over the line. They had (Shimron) Hetmyer still to bat, so there was a lot in the tank, lots of match-winners with the bat and ball. That squad is looking very strong," said Smith. (PTI)

Pakistan appoint Kirsten as ODI, T20I head coach, Gillespie in Test

LAHORE, April 28: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday appointed World Cup-winning Gary Kirsten as their head coach for ODIs and T20Is, while former Australian pacer Jason Gillespie will take over that role in Test cricket.

Along with them, former Pakistan all-rounder Azhar Mahmood was appointed as the assistant coach of the team across the formats.

All appointments have been made for a duration of two years, and Naqvi said the coaches will not be subjected to evaluation before their term comes to an end.

"The appointment of (Gary) Kirsten and (Jason) Gillespie who are high-profile coaches shows how much value is given to the Pakistan cricket team and how much potential foreign coaches see in our players," PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi said during a media conference.

"We want to give the team the best facilities and that is why we have gone for Kirsten and Gillespie," he added.

Kirsten, who is currently the mentor of IPL side Gujarat Titans, is expected to take over from Pakistan's tour of England from May 22.

Pakistan will play four T20Is and from there the team will travel for the T20 World Cup in June.

"He is presently occupied in



the IPL while Gillespie will join the team before the start of our Test cricket schedule in August," Naqvi said.

Asked if Kirsten and Gillespie would be available with the Pakistan team all the time he said the coaches will mostly be with the team and take their vacations as agreed in their contracts.

"We also want their expertise to improve our domestic cricket and help our local coaches," Mahmood, who also attended the media conference, was the interim coach in the just-concluded T20I series at home against New Zealand, said it was time the Pakistani players showed more discipline and did things out of the box.

"If we are to keep up with the changing times in cricket our players also have to do

some things unconventionally and think out of the box," he said.

Pakistan have been on the search for a full-time head coach since the end of the 50-over World Cup last year where they failed to enter the knockout stages.

After their shambolic effort in the marquee event held in India, Pakistan had sacked the entire set of coaching staff — head coach Grant Bradburn, team director Mickey Arthur, bowling coach Morne Morkel and batting coach Andrew Puttick.

Premier batter Babar Azam was also removed from captaincy post the ICC showpiece with Pakistan opting to appoint pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi as their white-ball leader and Shan Masood doing that duty in Tests.

Along with that, Pakistan had also turned to former cricketer Muhammad Hafeez for the guiding role during their tour to Australia.

But Hafeez lost the job after Pakistan lost 0-3 in the Test series and 1-4 in the T20Is.

While Masood was retained as Test captain, Afridi was relieved from leadership and Babar was reinstated in the last week of March.

However, Pakistan could not find a full-time head coach despite them approaching some top names such as Matthew Hayden and Shane Watson.

Eventually, they zeroed in on Kirsten, who had led India to the World Cup triumph in 2011, and Gillespie, who comes with a bagful of coaching experience with English county side Sussex.

Naqvi explained the rationale behind choosing foreign names for coaching roles, and this is also the first time PCB has appointed separate foreign head coaches for different formats.

"We have maintained a balance for this. There's a lot of talent in our country. But we're not that far ahead in medical sciences which is why there are some fitness issues in our team.

"So, closing our options to get the best options from outside our country may not give us the best results for us," said Naqvi. (PTI)

India should pick two wrist-spinners for T20 WC: Pathan

MUMBAI, April 28: Former all-rounder Irfan Pathan said India must pick five specialist bowlers along with two wrist-spinners in their squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup to be played in the Caribbean and the USA. With the May 1 deadline for the squad announcement approaching fast, discussions have intensified around the combination of India's squad for the showpiece event starting on June 2. "You need five good bowlers — that's a must. What are your wicket-taking options? When you're talking about Ravindra Jadeja at No. 8 and playing as a spin (all-rounder), I would rather have two wrist-spinners playing," Pathan told Star Sports.

"I would rather have two proper wrist-spinners playing, (Ravi) Bishnoi and Kuldeep (Yadav), in my playing XI. If you look at Bishnoi's numbers, you know, when he played, he was pretty good." Pathan, however, is not in favour of calling up Rajasthan Royals' Yuzvendra Chahal for the World Cup. "Yes, we're talking about Chahal right now because of the IPL performances but don't forget the fielding part of it as well. If you have to balance the fielding, you have to balance where a bowler can bowl at the particular area," he said. Pathan conceded that Jasprit Bumrah is the only automatic selection among the bowlers.

"There's only one player who you can blindly say (certain for selection) is Bumrah. But apart from Bumrah, you need at least two fast bowlers who can be part of the regular XI," the former India cricketer said. "The biggest problem the Indian team has is the combination of fast bowling. It's very important to fix that combination, so go towards experience."

"With Bumrah, you can see (Mohammed) Siraj and Arshdeep (Singh) there, which I don't think is ideal, but this is the only option you have now," he said.

Former India batter K Srikanth, meanwhile, is not in favour of Siraj being selected for the World Cup. "Bumrah is in the squad. Arshdeep as well. But the third pacer can't be Siraj. He'll bowl well in one game and then not perform in 10 games. He's an erratic bowler, you saw it in the World Cup," he said. (PTI)

Batters have evolved quicker than bowlers in IPL: Klusener

LUCKNOW, April 28: Lucknow Super Giants assistant coach Lance Klusener placed the quicker evolution of batters as reason behind the frequent tall team totals in the ongoing Indian Premier League.

The teams have been going past 200 and even 250 quite effortlessly in this IPL, and the former South African all-rounder opined that the modest performance by bowlers at death overs too has helped batters to add quick runs.

"Just looking at the bowling performances throughout the competition, for me, they have been quite disappointing. There hasn't been a lot of good bowling," Klusener told the media after LSG's seven-wicket loss to Rajasthan Royals here on Saturday.

"There's been a lot of ordinary bowling and batsmen are just so good these days, they're taking advantage. Maybe the batsmen have evolved a lot quicker than the bowlers in this competition."

"I haven't seen a lot of good death bowling in the competition and that's why teams have been able to take advantage. Sure, surfaces have been flat. I haven't seen a lot of swing either," he added.

Klusener observed that the bowlers are opting for several variations at death but they have not been using the wide yorkers enough.

"It's easy to overcomplicate. If you run in



and execute even four out of six yorkers...we don't see that anymore. We don't see that skill," he said.

"We're going to slower balls and a whole lot of other variations. That pure death bowling of yorkers, whether it's wide or straight, that's a skill that we don't see very often these days," he added.

Klusener said LSG will have to start putting performances together and they cannot continue to be good in one area and bad in

the other.

"We're doing a lot of good stuff but in patches, and for us to get deeper into the competition come later on in the month, we're going to have to make sure that we're putting all those little things together," he said.

"We can't just bat well and not bowl well or field. We need to make sure we put all that together. The good thing is we're in a great position — we're the master of our