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

Pradyut moves EC against Himanta

GUWAHATI, April 10: Congress MP and Lok Sabha poll candidate from Nagaon constituency, Pradyut Bordoloi, has filed a complaint against chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleging that he violated the model code of conduct by offering money to all ration cardholders during the ongoing election campaign. Bordoloi filed the complaint to the chief election commissioner on Tuesday night, alleging that Sarma, in a public meeting in Lakhimpur during the day, made a promise to transfer Rs 10,000 to the bank accounts of every ration cardholder after the election. Stating that such assurances are a "clear violation" of MCC, the Congress leader said, "Such promises are not only unethical but also an attempt to influence voters through financial inducements, thereby compromising the integrity of the electoral process". He urged the ECI to investigate the



matter thoroughly and take appropriate action against the chief minister for his "misconduct". Bordoloi also filed another complaint with the chief electoral officer alleging that the BJP was continuing with the controversial socio-economic survey,

promising to include beneficiaries under the 'Orunodoi' cash direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme," the Congress MP said. Bordoloi claimed that such forms were being distributed in Ward No 1 of Matharboi of Barapujia Gaon Panchayat in Morigaon district on Tuesday. "I fear that similar activities might be taking place in other locations as well. This blatant disregard for electoral norms and the misuse of government schemes for electoral gains is unacceptable," he added. The CEO's office on April 5 showed the ruling BJP over an allegation of violation of MCC, raised by the CPI(M). The Left party had alleged that the BJP violated the MCC by collecting data of people, on the pretext of conducting a socio-economic survey, with the intention of increasing the number of beneficiaries under a government scheme. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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

ITANAGAR, April 10: BJP president JP Nadda on Wednesday claimed that the Northeast, which was earlier known for bandh culture, insurgency and targeted killings, has made rapid progress in the last ten years of the Modi government. He released the party manifesto for the April 19 simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the northeastern state. "The Northeast, which was neglected for decades, has witnessed a sea change after the BJP-led NDA government came to power at the Centre in 2014. The region is now known for progress, development and prosperity," Nadda said. He said the BJP government at the Centre is working for the development of the northeastern states in various sectors, including power, tourism, internet connectivity, agriculture and sports. The manifesto promises the creation of ro-

burst infrastructure, women empowerment, employment and accountable governance. Nadda said the BJP government would launch the Arunachal Pradesh Gati Shakti master plan for the next five years to boost multi-modal connectivity and integrated infrastructural development in the state by implementing projects in roadways, railways and airways sectors. "The BJP is committed to implementing the promises made in the manifesto in letter and spirit. We have already done what we had promised, and what had not been promised has also been fulfilled," he said. The manifesto is not merely a document but a roadmap to set the tempo of developmental activities in the state in the next five years, Nadda said. Stating that the NDA government at the Centre is committed to the development of Northeast, the BJP (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



HT BRIEFS Public holiday

IMPHAL: Manipur government has declared public holiday on April 19 and April 26, when voting will take place for all two Lok Sabha seats in the state, as public holidays. An order regarding the declaration of public holiday on these poll days was issued by the General Administration Department (GAD) on Wednesday. The state GAD issued the order in pursuance of a letter of the Election Commission of India coupled with another letter of the chief electoral officer (CEO) Manipur. The order declared a public holiday for all public offices, educational institutions, autonomous bodies, etc., and a paid holiday for commercial and private undertakings in the state located within the area of 47 Assembly segments where the polling will take place on April 19.

Election Commission

SHILLONG: The Election Commission on Wednesday issued show cause notices to Voice of the People Party (VPP) for disrupting an election campaign and for using social media to create fake news against the candidate of the National People Party (NPP). The VPP has been directed to reply to the show cause notice related to the alleged fake news by April 11 and regarding the disrupting of the election campaign before April 12. In the notice addressed to the VPP president Ardent M Basaiawmait, the returning officer of Shillong Parliamentary constituency said that a complaint has been received on April 9 claiming that on evening of April 8, during the election campaign organised by the NPP at Jaiw, East Khasi Hills, supporters of the VPP disrupted the campaign. The VPP supporters resorted to sloganeering and thus disrupted the meeting causing it to be cancelled before time.

It is Anyaykaal not Amritkaal: Jairam

Jairam Ramesh vows to uphold democracy and unity

JORHAT, April 10: Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Wednesday reiterated the party's unwavering commitment to safeguarding democracy, upholding the Constitution, and fostering unity among the people. Addressing the media at a gathering here, Ramesh highlighted the detrimental impact of the past decade under the NDA government at the Centre, emphasising the prevalence of widespread injustices against the populace. The Congress leader asserted that the Congress Party is dedicated to rectifying these injustices and restoring the faith of the people in the democratic fabric of the nation. Ramesh criticised Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's rhetoric about 'Amritkaal' (Golden Era), stating that the reality for the country was far from it, labelling it as 'Anyaykaal' (Era of Injustice). He also enumerated five major injustices - Nari Anyay (Injustice against Women), Yuva Anyay (Injustice against Youth), Kisan Anyay (Injustice against Farmers), Shramik Anyay (Injustice against Workers), and Hissedari Anyay (Injustice against Participation) - and asserted that the Congress Party was committed to addressing each of these issues by offering five guarantees for each, totaling 25 guarantees. Furthermore, Ramesh highlighted the distribution of Nyay Cards across India, incorporating these 25 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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

DIPHU, April 10: Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), has emerged as a key figure in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) campaign strategy for the 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency. Ronghang, appointed as a 'star campaigner' by the BJP's national leadership, has embarked on an intensive election campaign to rally support for BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso. With a fleet of helicopters at his disposal, CEM Ronghang is set to traverse the hill districts of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao, reaching out to voters across the region. In his latest campaign leg, Ronghang's chopper touched down at



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

Record created after 40 lakh women pledge to vote

GUWAHATI, April 10: In a remarkable achievement, the Assam chief electoral officer (CEO) and Assam's Rural and Urban Livelihood Missions have made their mark in the India Book of Records by orchestrating a historic pledge-taking event involving 40 lakh women across the state. At a gathering held at the CEO's office in Dispur on Wednesday, over 40 lakh women members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) from various regions of Assam gathered to pledge their commitment to uphold the democratic values of the nation and ensure the integrity of the forthcoming 18th Lok Sabha elections. Narvijay Yadav, adjudicator from the India Book of Records, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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

AGARTALA, April 10: Tribal outfits such as the Tipra Motha were formed not to defeat the BJP but to "uproot" the CPI(M), senior BJP leader Biplab Kumar Deb said on Wednesday. Addressing an election rally in Bagma, he said tribals have come out of the "grip" of the Left which ignored their aspirations. "There was a time when the communists used to proudly say that they started their election campaign by winning the 20 ST-reserved assembly seats. Now, those days are gone. Tribals have come out of your grip for ignoring their aspirations," said Deb, the BJP candidate of the Tripura West constituency. "Tribal parties such as TUIS, INPT, IPFT and Tipra Motha were not formed to defeat the BJP or Narendra Modi, they came into ex-



istence to uproot the communists from the state as they used indigenous people as their vote bank for 30 years," he added. Deb, the former CM of Tripura and a sitting Rajya Sabha MP, also attacked CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Chaudhury for calling Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Debbarma a "traitor". "Pradyot 'Maharaj' was good when he gave you a free run in last year's assembly election in Sabroom by not fielding a candidate. The same man became a traitor when he met PM Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for the welfare of the indigenous people," he said. Deb said that while the CPI(M) was putting in all efforts to defeat Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Kerala, the two parties have joined hands in Tripura. He urged people to vote for the BJP and ensure a third term for PM Modi. The Tipra Motha, which emerged as the principal opposition party in the state by securing 13 seats in last year's assembly elections, joined the BJP-led government last month. The CPI(M) has been claiming that it would have won the assembly votes if the Tipra Motha had not created a division in anti-BJP votes, paving the way for the ruling party to return to power for a second consecutive term. (PTI)

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

DIPHU, April 10: The All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) on Wednesday unveiled its election manifesto, titled 'Save Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao,' emphasising key priorities and commitments aimed at addressing the pressing issues faced by the hill districts of Assam. At a ceremony held at Hotel Hempi in Birla, the APHLC president and candidate JI Kathar outlined the core principles and objectives of the manifesto, underscoring the urgent need for the implementation of Article 244 (A), a long-standing demand of the people of the three hill districts. The manifesto also addresses critical issues such as opposing the dilution of the 6th Schedule, economic inequality, influx control,



and enhancing the quality of education. Kathar emphasized the party's dedication to using various means, including awareness campaigns and legal action, to uphold tribal rights and combat electoral malpractices. "We have been tirelessly using torchlight for the past seven years to enlighten the people and using scis-

sors to cut down the lotus of the BJP and the names of illegal non-tribal voters from the voter list," Kathar stated. Highlighting the economic disparities in Karbi Anglong, Kathar stressed the need to address the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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

OXFORD, April 10: Humanity has only two years left "to save the world" by making dramatic changes in the way it spews heat-trapping emissions and it has even less time to act to get the finances behind such a massive shift, the head of the United Nations climate agency said on Wednesday. With governments of the world facing a 2025 deadline for new and stronger plans to curb carbon pollution, nearly half of the world's populations voting in elections this year, and crucial global finance meetings later this month in Washington, United Nations executive climate secretary Simon Stiell said he knows his warning may sound melodramatic. But he said action over the next two years is "essential." "We still have a chance to make greenhouse gas emissions tumble, with a new generation of national climate plans. But we need these stronger plans, now," Stiell said in a



speech at the Chatham House think tank in London. He suggested that climate action is not just for powerful people to address — in a not-so-veiled reference to the electoral calendar this year. "Who exactly has two years to save the world? The answer is every person on this planet," Stiell said. "More and more people want cli-

mate action right across societies and political spectrums, in large part because they are feeling the impacts of the climate crisis in their everyday lives and their household budgets." Crop-destroying droughts have increased the need for bold action to curb emissions and help farmers adapt which could boost food security and lessen hunger, he said. "Cutting fossil fuel pollution will mean better health and huge savings for governments and households alike," Stiell said. Not everyone is convinced such warnings will be helpful. "Two years to save the world' is meaningless rhetoric — at best, it's likely to be ignored, at worst, it will be counterproductive," said Princeton University climate scientist Michael Oppenheimer, who is also a professor of international affairs. Levels of carbon dioxide and methane in the air last year hit all-time highs, according to United States government calculations, while scientists calculate that the world's carbon dioxide emissions jumped 1.1 per cent. Last year was the hottest year on record by far, global temperature monitoring groups concluded. If emissions of carbon dioxide and methane from burning of coal, oil and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Wild mushroom consumption claims five lives

DIPHU, April 10: A devastating incident has rocked the Borjuri Kleng Bey village of Rongmongve under Angjokpami Police Station in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, as five individuals, including three minors, tragically lost their lives after consuming wild mushrooms. According to sources from the villagers, the incident unfolded last Friday, April 5, when Waisong Bey, son of Mensing Bey, and his wife Monisha Lekthepti ventured into the nearby jungle to forage for vegetables. During their excursion, they collected wild mushrooms, which they brought back home. Later that evening, the family prepared and consumed the mushrooms, unaware of the danger they posed. Subsequently, all nine members of the family ingested the toxic mushrooms. On April 6, all nine family members began experiencing symptoms of illness, including vomiting, headache, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Home Poll Visit ensures voting accessibility for senior citizens and PwDs

HAFLONG, April 10: Absentee voters falling under the categories of senior citizens aged 85 and above (AVSC) and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) during the upcoming Lok Sabha Parliamentary Election, 2024 will have the option to exercise their franchise through a unique initiative called Home Poll Visit, said an official on Wednesday. In this regard, Simanta Kumar Das, the district commissioner & district election officer of Dima Hasao, issued a crucial directive. According to the letter issued, this innovative approach aims to overcome accessibility challenges and ensure the inclusivity of the electoral process. The Home Poll Visit initiative is scheduled to take place on the 13th and 16th of April, 2024, covering 48 sectors and 117

polling stations across the Dima Hasao district. A team comprising 48 Polling Officers, along with booth level officers (BLO), police personnel, and videographers, will visit the homes of eligible voters on these designated days. Biplojjoy Purkayastha, the assistant commissioner in charge of the postal ballot cell, revealed that a total of 289 voters are eligible to cast their votes through the Home Poll Visit in Dima Hasao. He also emphasised the importance of the initiative in ensuring that every eligible citizen, irrespective of age or physical ability, has the opportunity to participate in the electoral process without any hindrance. In adherence to the directive, all AVSC and AVPD voters are requested to stay at home on the specified dates. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Himanta boosts BJP campaign in Patsaku



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

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

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister expressed his grati-

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

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

Governor extends greetings

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

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

Yogotsav 2024 showcases vibrant celebration



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

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

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

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

havidyalaya, and Pratishruti Yoga and Center Darrang & Guwahati.

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

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

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

Complaint filed against APHLC organising secretary

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

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

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

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

Flying squad seizes cash

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

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

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

Demise of ATASU leader

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

Tezpur's Government College of Teacher Education organises ICT workshop

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

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

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

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

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

SVEEP programme in Tezpur



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

The duo entertained the audi-

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

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

Congress supporters join BJP in Karbi Anglong

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

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

The 52 members from Congress joining the BJP were welcomed by

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

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

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

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

NFR announces summer special trains to ease passenger rush



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

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

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

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

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

QUOTE OF THE DAY

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

Beleaguered Kejriwal

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

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

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

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

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

Aitikaaf: A sacred journey towards spiritual refinement and divine grace

By: Aubaid Akhoo

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

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

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

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

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

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

A means of divine forgive-

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By: Kanchan Basu

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Once there is decent mobile

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reaching out:

POST BAG

Heed the warnings

Sir/Ma'am

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

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

Dr. Vijaykumar H K
Raichur, Karnataka
hkvkmech1@gmail.com

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

By: Edward Doddridge, Annie Foppert & Stuart Corney

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

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

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

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

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

A winter of permanent night

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

What could assail the ice continent?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Collective action against plastic pollution: A global priority agenda



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



By: Jessica Boxall & Michael Head

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We also carried out a similar study among refugees from neighbouring Burkina Faso who fled across the border to the upper east region of Ghana. Again, 100% had experienced food insecurity. Mion isn't suffering from a sudden famine, and nothing particularly unusual has happened to cause this food insecurity. This situation is considered to be a "normal phenomenon" due to the effects of climate change.

Shifting seasons, pests and diseases
The first is that the same climate change ef-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ZEENAT AMAN 'STRONGLY RECOMMENDS' LIVING TOGETHER BEFORE MARRIAGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



HAILEE STEINFELD BOARDS RYAN COOGLER'S UNTITLED SUPERNATURAL THRILLER

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

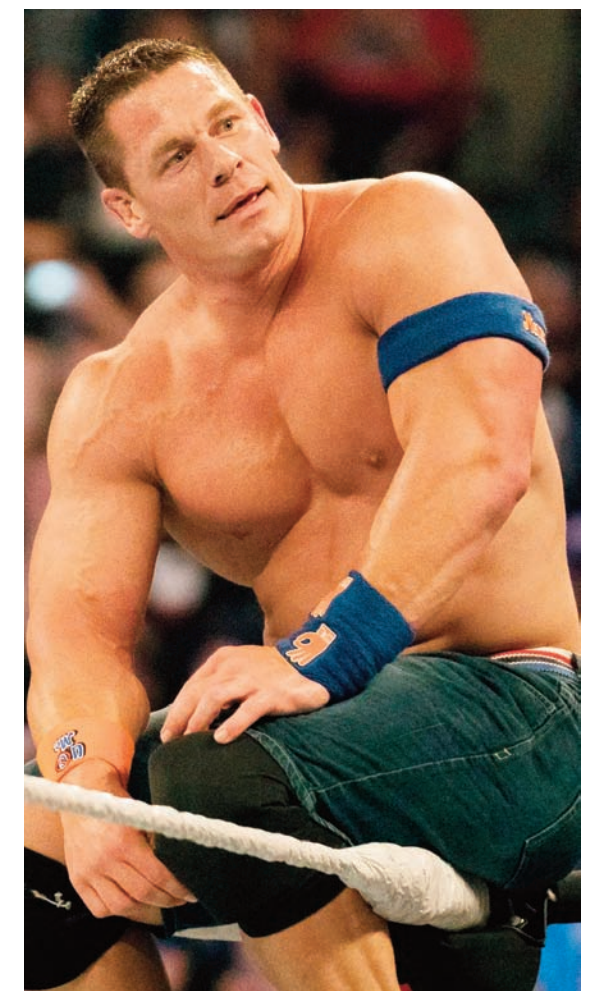
The trailer opens with Fleck still locked up in Arkham, the asylum in Gotham City where most of DC comics villains end up. He finds a glimmer of hope when he meets Quinn. The two are shown running through the streets, watching movies together and dancing against a moonlit sky. In one of the sequences,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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



