

WORLD  
NATION

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## 19 traditional crafts, products of Assam get GI tag

13 products linked to Bodo people ● A big win for state's heritage: Himanta

GUWAHATI, March 31: As many as 19 traditional products and crafts of Assam, including 'Bihu Dhol', 'Jaapi' and several items of the Bodo community, have been accorded the geographical indication (GI) tag, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday.

Thirteen of these products are specifically linked to the Bodos, who form the largest tribal group in the state. Terming it a big win for the state's heritage, Sarma wrote on X: "Six prestigious GI Tags have been granted to traditional crafts with support from NABARD, RO Guwahati, and facilitated by Padma Shri Dr Rajani Kant, GI Expert".

"This includes iconic items like Bihu Dhol, Japi, Sarthebari Metal Craft, and more. These products, deeply rooted in history, support nearly one lakh people directly," he said. Japi is a traditional bamboo



hat and Bihu Dhol a traditional drum played during Bihu festival.

The applications for the GI tags for the six products were filed in the latter part of 2022 and the certifications were announced on Saturday.

Assam Asharikandi Terracotta Craft, Assam Pani Mateka Craft, Sarthebari Metal Craft and Assam Mising Hand-

loom Products are the other products that received the GI tags.

In a separate post on X, Sarma said 13 products of the Bodo community have also obtained this unique certification. "What a better day than Bodofa's birth anniversary to receive the GI tags for 13 articles which embody the rich cultural heritage of our Bodo community. This recognition will greatly boost the promotion of the items and in taking forward the legacy of these cultural items," he said.

Late Upendranath Brahma, a leader of the community, was honoured with the title of 'Bodofa' (guardian of the Bodos). Sarma also shared a post by Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) chief Pramod Bodo, which makes mention of the GI tags.

"Today is a day of immense pride for all of Bodoland, as on the birth anniversary of Bodofa U N Brahma, 13 articles that embody Bodo identity have received the prestigious GI Tag from Geographical Indication Registry, Govt of India," he said. The 13 items that have received the GI tag include three agricultural products — Gongar Dunjia, Keradapini and Khardwi — and six musical instruments — Kham, Serja, Thorkha, Jotha, Gongona and Sifung. (PTI)

## Banned UNLF (P) delaying surrender of cadre, weapons despite ceasefire agreement: Officials

NEW DELHI/IMPHAL, March 31: The United National Liberation Front (P), a banned terror group, has failed to surrender weapons or provide a list of its members despite signing a ceasefire agreement with the Centre four months ago, officials said on Sunday, amid concerns by security agencies that its cadre were still carrying out violence in Manipur.

Even after three rounds of talks with state authorities, the UNLF, the first Meitei terror outfit to agree to a ceasefire, has not complied with the agreed terms since the agreement was inked on November 29 last.

Concerns have been raised by security agencies over the ongoing violence in Manipur attributed to UNLF (P) members despite the ceasefire.

Led by Kh Pamei, the UNLF (P) made history by becoming the first Meitei armed group in the Imphal Valley to engage in a ceasefire agreement with the government, pledging to renounce violence.

The UNLF (P)'s demand for camp establishment near Kuki-populated areas was resisted by security agencies, fearing a potential escalation in ethnic conflicts that have already resulted in over 200 casualties in the state. Temporary camp arrangements have been approved in Ingorok in Thoubal district and agriculture town, Kachching Khunou, in Kachching district, the officials said.

Security agencies rejected the UNLF's objection to the presence of central paramilitary forces at the camps as also setting up camps on the foothills. Officials urged the UNLF to surrender weapons and provide a list of members for relocation.

Recent reports indicate that UNLF members are establishing camps near Kuki settlements to target tribal



populations, fostering tensions.

Despite the ceasefire agreement's intent to halt hostilities, recent incidents show UNLF (P) members are carrying out violent activities with impunity, even looting arms from security forces, the officials said.

According to reports, the cadre of the banned terror group were allegedly involved in looting arms and ammunition from the 5th India Reserve Battalion (IRB) at Chingarel in Manipur East on February 13 and opening fire at Moirangporel on vehicles heading towards Churachandpur last month.

The unrest escalated when reports claimed that a shooting incident in Maphou village, predominantly inhabited by the people of the Kuki ethnicity, was carried out by individuals allegedly associated with the Arambai Tengol and UNLF (P) cadre. These cadre of UNLF (P) were reportedly providing live updates on social media while claiming to target (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### HT BRIEFS

#### Passes away

HOWRAGHAT: Well known writer, poetess and assistant teacher of Atigaon MV School, Anuprabha Hazarika passed away on last night at Guwahati Medical College & Hospital. She was 47. She was the writer of 'Amuthi Jonak'. She was Assistant Secretary of Sadou Assam Lekhika Samaroh Samiti and Karbi Anglong Lekhika Samaroh Samiti. She had worked as Editor of 'Jonak' published by Sarbanjanin Rongali Bihu Samiti and 'Naamamrit' published by Sri-manta Sankardeva Sangha, Karbi Anglong District committee. She was conferred Kavya Saurabh Award by Janagosthiya Sanskritik Ekya Manch, Bokaghat last year. Sadou Karbi Anglong Lekhika Samaroh Samiti, Sarbanjanin Rongali Bihu Samiti, Bakaliaghat and various social organisations pay their condolences to her departed soul. She left behind her husband and a daughter.

#### Lightning strike

KHERONI: A lightning strike killed one in West Karbi Anglong on Sunday. The lightning struck Pintu Chauhan (21), son of Rampreet Chauhan and resident of Tilha Basti, PO and PS Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong at around 4 pm, under Donkamukam Revenue Circle, West Karbi Anglong. Chauhan died on the spot.

#### Strong wind

BOKAJAN: A sudden strong wind destroyed and damaged many houses in Bokajan Sub-Division in Karbi Anglong in the afternoon. The strong wind came at around 12:30 pm. Many houses have their roof blown off in Karagaon Chandra Rongpi; Rajen Rongpi and Longhup Timung villages in Borjan area. Due to the damaged caused by the wind many households have nowhere to cook and their clothing are soiled.

#### Gatoonga tea

JORHAT: Barooah and Associates Limited founded by Padma Shri Dr Hemendra Prasad Barooah (late) has acquired Moheema Tea Estate in Golaghat district with the aim to increase its pan India presence and has forayed into the retail tea market by launching Gatoonga tea brand. Dhruba Jyoti Dowerah, deputy managing director, B & A Limited while addressing newsmen at Gatoonga tea estate here on Sunday said that the Gatoonga brand was launched on Sunday to commemorate the 98th birth anniversary of its visionary founder Padma late Dr Hemendra Prasad Barooah by tapping the Assam market and gradually expanding it across India. Barooah & Associates Limited is the ₹ 300 crore Barooahs & Associates Group's listed flagship company and is one of the leading black tea producers of India. "Our high quality black tea, sold through other companies and auctions, has been popular in the market for decades and now garden fresh non-blended tea would be available to the retail customers in attractive branded packages," said Dowerah.

## Not 'save democracy' but 'save family', 'hide corruption' rally: BJP

NEW DELHI, March 31: The BJP on Sunday slammed the opposition INDIA bloc's rally at Ramlila Ground here, saying it was not a "save democracy" meeting as projected but a "save family" and "hide corruption" rally.

The ruling party also hit back at Rahul Gandhi over his "match-fixing" accusation against Prime Minister Narendra Modi as it cited the decision of the then Indira Gandhi government in 1974 to hand over Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka to accuse the Congress of compromising the interests of Tamil Nadu and the country.

BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said, "Some people are talking about match fixing. In 1974, the

Indira Gandhi government, compromising the country's national interest and interest of the people of Tamil Nadu, handed over Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka to benefit the Congress' first family...Rahul Gandhi ji, your family had done a deal-fixing."

Addressing a press conference here, Poonawalla slammed the Congress over Gandhi's claim that the entire country will be on fire if the BJP returns to power as it seems to amend the Constitution. Divisive politics is in the "DNA" of the main opposition, he alleged.

Earlier, another BJP spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member, Sudhanshu Trivedi, attacked the opposition rally as its leaders began

gathering at the famous Ramlila Ground here in a show of unity to galvanise people's support amid investigation agencies' action against several constituents of the INDIA bloc. Ramlila Ground once hosted "India against corruption" movement under the leadership of Anna Hazare, Trivedi said, adding that it is now hosting a rally for "everybody with corruption".

Trivedi cited corruption cases against a host of leaders, including those from the Congress, DMK and the RJD, to assert that all these charges date back to pre-2014 period amid the opposition's accusation that the Modi government is implicating them in graft probes due to its political (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Bhupen rues Oppn failure to field common candidates

GUWAHATI, March 31: Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah has asserted that the opposition parties' attempt to contest the Lok Sabha polls unitedly in the state fell apart "due to national politics".

He claimed that the AAP contesting separately in the state would be its "biggest blunder", while the TMC's refusal to concede any constituency to the Congress in West Bengal "impacted the alliance adversely".

"We had formed the United Opposition Forum, Assam (UOFA) eight months before the INDIA bloc was constituted. Ours is a 16-party forum and out of these, three are contesting the Lok Sabha polls directly. But it is not due to my leadership or politics in the state, but due to national politics," Borah said in an interview with PTI.

Of the total 14 seats in the state, the Congress is contesting 13, leaving one for the UOFA member Assam Jaitiya Parishad (AJP).

The other UOFA constituents, which have put up candidates in the state, are the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the CPI(M). Borah pointed out that the AAP and the Congress have a seat-sharing arrangement in Delhi, but are fighting in all seats separately in Punjab.

"The AAP had announced candidates for three seats in Assam, but fortunately they withdrew their nominee (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Sudden rain, storm damage Guwahati airport, flights diverted

GUWAHATI, March 31: A sudden downpour accompanied by a storm wreaked havoc at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport here on Sunday, prompting the authorities to briefly halt operations and divert six flights to other destinations, a senior official said.

The storm uprooted a big tree at the Oil India complex outside the Adani Group-controlled facility and blocked a road, chief airport officer (CAO) Utpal Baruah told PTI.

"We immediately rushed there and cleared the road for smooth supply of fuel to the terminal. It took us over half-an-hour," he said.

When the rain and storm lashed the area, a portion of the roof was blown away in the forecourt area, Baruah said.

"It was very old and could not withstand the impact. Due to this, the ceiling broke open and water started flowing inside. However, there was no injury and everything is under control," he said.

A purported video of the ceiling falling apart and rainwater gushing has gone viral on different social media platforms.

Baruah also said that water entered the terminal from the ceiling. "I am personally monitoring the situation so that passengers do not face any inconvenience. Due to the storm and heavy rain, the visibility dropped drastically and we had to divert six flights," the CAO said. The flights operated by IndiGo, Air India and Air India Express have been diverted to Agartala and Kolkata, he said.

"The visibility has improved and normal operations have resumed. Flights have started landing in Guwahati," Baruah added. (PTI)

## Congress chief appeals to people for funds to fight polls

GUWAHATI, March 31: Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah on Sunday appealed to the masses to contribute funds for party candidates contesting the Lok Sabha elections, claiming the organisation was facing an "acute financial crisis" due to the sealing of its accounts allegedly at the behest of the BJP government.

In a video message on X, Borah said the "situation will take a dire turn" if the party's accounts were not opened through legal recourse, which it has sought. Addressing party leaders, workers, farmers, youth and top media functionaries, Borah said the Congress traditionally provides monetary assistance to its Lok Sabha election candidates.

"But this time, Congress' bank accounts have been sealed, over Rs 1,500 crore has already been taken away as fine and more fine is being imposed by the BJP government," he alleged.

"We have helped our candidates with the limited resources at hand, but that is not enough," the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee

(APCC) president said.

He said that if the party's accounts could be opened even after taking legal recourse, the situation would further deteriorate. Borah urged all to help the Congress in this "fight to save democracy and constitution, against communalism and against BJP's devious conspiracy".

Another senior Congress leader and co-in charge of APCC, Prithviraj Sathe, had said on Saturday that the party has asked its candidates to approach the public for votes as well as funds for the Lok Sabha polls while putting forth the people who "democracy is at stake" in the country. He maintained that the Congress is facing serious financial problems due to the Income Tax department's actions "at the behest of the ruling party" and doesn't even have adequate funds for fighting the elections. "We have asked our candidates to approach the public for votes as well as monetary help, and explain to the public why such a situation has emerged, how the BJP is finishing off democracy," he claimed. (PTI)

## Priyanka urges EC to ensure level-playing field in LS polls

NEW DELHI, March 31: The opposition INDIA bloc on Sunday urged the Election Commission to ensure a level-playing field in the Lok Sabha polls and asserted that despite the BJP creating "undemocratic obstacles", the alliance is committed to fight, win and save the country's democracy.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra read out the demands of the opposition alliance at the 'Loktantra Bachao Rally' at the Ramlila ground here. She said the Election Commission should ensure a level playing field for all parties in Lok Sabha elections.

The poll panel should stop the Enforcement Directorate, CBI and the Income Tax department's actions against opposition parties being taken to adversely impact the elections, the Congress leader demanded, adding that former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal be immediately released. During the elections, action to forcefully scuttle the finances of opposition parties should be immediately stopped, she said, reading out the INDIA bloc's demands at the rally. The opposition alliance also demanded that a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Kickbacks' used in AAP's Goa campaign also detected by I-T, CBI: ED

NEW DELHI, March 31: The money trail of the alleged ₹ 45 crore kickbacks generated from the Delhi excise policy "scam" and used for the 2022 Goa election campaign by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), as claimed by the Enforcement Directorate, has also been "substantiated" by the CBI and the Income-Tax department in their separate investigations, according to documents filed in court.

A wide network of Hawala operators and 'Angadiyas' are also being investigated by the ED in this case where it recently arrested Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and his political outfit are liable to be prosecuted in the alleged laundering of these funds.

Statements of five 'Angadiya' firm operators have also been recorded by the ED to establish the "money trail" of this alleged ₹ 45 crore bribe amount. 'Angadiyas' are informal courier and bank services like Hawala which are especially used by diamond and jewellery sector businesses to transfer big cash amounts and other valuables by skirting the KYC-based formal banking route in order to avoid government taxes and duties.

Former Telangana chief minister K Chandrababhan Naidu's MLC daughter K Kavitha, former Delhi deputy CM and AAP leader Manish Sisodia and AAP Rajya

Sabha MP Sanjay Singh are among the 16 prominent persons arrested in this case by the agency.

The AAP and its leaders have repeatedly denied the charges of wrongdoing, with Kejriwal alleging that the case was concocted by the BJP-led Centre to create a "smokescreen" to project AAP as a corrupt party.

The party has alleged that statements of other people involved in the case like TDP Lok Sabha candidate Magunta Sreenivasulu Reddy, his son Raghav Magunta and businesswoman and Aurobindo Pharma promoter Sarath Reddy were changed to implicate Kejriwal and stop his participation in the upcoming general elections.

The amount of ₹ 45 crore - "proceeds of crime" under the anti-money laundering law - is claimed by the ED to be part of the total ₹ 100 crore bribe amount given by the 'South Group' of politicians and liquor businessmen to AAP and its leaders for entering the Delhi liquor market in a prime position. The ED has claimed that ₹ 45 crore was pumped by the AAP for its Goa election campaign. According to the details of the investigation shared by the ED with a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court here, Aam Aadmi Party engaged a company called Chariot Productions Media Pvt. Ltd. for its election (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Around 5 lakh unpublished Sanskrit manuscripts preserved at Nepal's Department of Archaeology

## Nepal, India to collaborate to promote Sanskrit education

KATHMANDU, March 31: Nepalese and Indian Sanskrit scholars have proposed to organise an International Sanskrit Conference every year and set up a study centre to conduct research and arrange publication of Sanskrit scriptures, especially the manuscripts found in the Himalayan nation.

Adopting a five-point resolution at the end of a three-day Nepal-India International Sanskrit Conclave in Kathmandu, the participants also adopted a resolution to provide support for the development of gurukuls in Nepal with the collaboration of Maharshi Sandipani Veda Vidya Pratishthan, Ujjain, according to a press release.

One of the resolutions mentions that Niti Anusandhan Pratishthan Nepal will function as the head of-



fice of the Nepal-India Sanskrit Study Centre.

The centre will conduct joint research and arrange the publication of Sanskrit scriptures from both

Nepal and India and study Sanskrit manuscripts found in Nepal.

It is estimated that there are around five lakh unpublished Sanskrit manuscripts preserved at

Nepal's Department of Archaeology. One of the resolutions mentions organising a training programme for Nepali Sanskrit students in India to enhance their Sanskrit learning capability, according to the release issued by Niti Anusandhan on Sunday.

As per the resolution, Central Sanskrit University, Delhi, will facilitate libraries of Gurukuls in Nepal and provide necessary books to Sanskrit educational institutions in Nepal.

The conclave also adopted a resolution to promote the religion, culture, philosophy, history and archaeology of Nepal and India alongside the preservation of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit languages. The three-day conclave organised by the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Infosys to receive ₹ 6,329 crore tax refund from I-T department

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Infosys expects a refund of ₹ 6,329 crore from the Income Tax Department, the country's second largest IT services company said.

It also informed the stock exchanges about tax demand to the tune of ₹ 2,763 crore, citing various assessment orders.

Infosys Ltd said it has received orders from the Income Tax Department for assessment years 07-08 to 15-16, 17-18, and 18-19 during the quarter.

"As per the orders, the company expects a refund of ₹ 6,329 crore (including interest). The company is in the process of evaluating the implications of these orders on the financial statements for the quarter and year ending March 31, 2024," Infosys said in a BSE filing.

Infosys, which competes with TCS and Wipro and others in the market for IT services contracts, is scheduled to declare its financial results for the fourth quarter of the



current fiscal year as well as the full FY24 on April 18.

The Bengaluru-headquartered IT company also said it has received an order for assessment year 22-23 with a tax demand of ₹ 2,763 crore, including interest, and for assessment year 11-12 with a tax demand of ₹ 4 crore, interest included.

Infosys has received assessment orders for subsidiaries as well, totalling ₹ 277 crore.

These include assessment orders for assessment years 21-22 and 18-19, respectively, with total tax demand of ₹ 145 crore; order for assessment year 22-23 with a tax demand of ₹ 127 crore; and for assessment year 22-23 entailing tax demand of ₹ 5 crore -- all of them inclusive of interest.

"The company is in the process of evaluating the implications of these orders on the financial statements for the quarter and year ending March 31, 2024 and also evaluating filing appeals against these orders," Infosys said.

Further, a subsidiary of the company has received refund orders under Section 254 for assessment years 07-08 and 08-09 and under Section 154 for assessment year 16-17, it said, adding that the refund amount as per these orders is ₹ 14 crore.

"The company is in the process of evaluating the implications of these orders on the financial statements for the quarter and year ending March 31, 2024. As on March 29, 2024, the above orders cumulatively exceed the materiality criteria as prescribed under Regulation 30 of the Listing Regulations (as amended), and accordingly this disclosure is submitted," Infosys said. (PTI)

# Luxury car sales could breach 50K mark for first time ever: Audi India head

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Luxury car sales in India could cross the milestone of 50,000 units for the first time in a year in 2024 amid growing demand for such models, according to Audi India head Balbir Singh Dhillon.

The overall domestic luxury car segment grew by 28 per cent annually last year to record sales volume of around 48,500 units.

Luxury car volumes in India currently account for less than 2 per cent of the overall passenger vehicle sales annually and the sector has been more or less at the same level for the past decade.

"Even if the sales grow by around 10 per cent and we do not face issues like disruptions like issues with global supply chain, we (industry) could cross the 50,000 volume mark in a year for the first time ever in 2024," Dhillon told PTI in an interaction.

Audi reported an 89 per cent growth in retail sales in India at 7,931 units last year as compared to a total of 4,187 units in 2022.

Similarly, Mercedes-Benz India recorded its best-ever year in its history in India with sales of 17,408 units, registering a growth of 10 per cent over 15,822 units in



2022. BMW India sold a total of 14,172 units across BMW and MINI brands last year.

When asked when the industry volume could touch 1 lakh-unit mark annually, Dhillon said: "This year if we cross the 50,000 unit mark and the growth continues to be double digit in the coming years then we could see it happening."

He noted that the industry growth may moderate a bit this year as compared to 28 per cent recorded in 2023 over 2022.

"This year we anticipate the industry to grow as well but not in high double digit, maybe lower double digit," Dhillon said,

adding that the industry faced supply chain challenges hampering sales in the January-March quarter.

On Audi's focus areas for the current year, Dhillon stated that the automaker would like to push sales as it now has a very strong product portfolio in the country.

"That is the first area and we are also looking to expand the sales infra of our pre-owned car business vertical. Last year we had 25 showrooms and by the end of this year we aim to take that figure to 30 outlets," he noted. Besides, customer centricity and sustainable business is another focus area for the company this year, Dhillon said. (PTI)

## RBI to set up Digital India Trust Agency to check illegal lending apps

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** As part of its efforts to curb growing cyber fraud, the Reserve Bank is considering establishing a Digital India Trust Agency (DIGITA) to stop the mushrooming of illegal lending apps.

The proposed agency will enable verification of digital lending apps and maintain a public register of verified apps, sources said.

Apps not carrying the 'verified' signature of DIGITA should be considered unauthorised for the purpose of law enforcement, sources said, adding that this will serve as a pivotal checkpoint in the fight against financial crimes in the digital realm.

DIGITA, once in place, would be entrusted with the responsibility of vetting digital lending apps, they noted.

According to sources, a thorough verification process would help instil greater transparency and accountability within the growing digital lending sector, which has witnessed a surge in fraudulent activities and unscrupulous practices in recent times.

Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India has shared a list of 442 unique digital lending apps with the IT Ministry to whitelist with Google.

Besides, Google has removed over 2,200 digital lending apps (DLAs) from its app store from September 2022 to August 2023.

The search giant has updated its policy regarding the enforcement of loan apps on the PlayStore, and only those apps are allowed which are published by the RBI's regulated entities (REs) or those working in partnership with REs.

This policy change by Google has happened at the request of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Department of Financial Services (DFS) under the Finance Ministry. (PTI)

## Lot of 'onion peeling' for attaining global first: SEBI chief on T+0 settlements

**AHMEDABAD, March 31:** Attaining the global first of T+0 settlement involved a lot of problem-solving and personal discomforts, SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch has said giving the analogy of "onion peeling" for the achievement.

Speaking at the annual convocation of the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) on Saturday, Buch also said the current generation of Indians is on its way to seeing the "high noon" of the new India.

"My colleagues often tell me that problem-solving with me is like peeling an onion. It makes everybody cry in the process. But by the time you are done, peeling layer after layer after layer of the onion, you suddenly realise there is no problem left," she said while addressing students of IIMA as the chief guest of the 59th annual convocation.

Stock exchanges BSE and NSE on Thursday launched the beta version of T+0, or same-day trade settlement on an optional basis for select stocks, which will offer investors an option to transact in 25 securities in T+0 settlement.

"When India became the first large market in the world to move to T+1 settlement, and just two days ago when we went live with an optional T+0 settlement, the process felt pretty much the same—lots of onion peeling happened to make for a global first," Buch said.

Notably, Buch is the first woman to head the capital markets regulator—Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Buch said she doggedly followed the mantra of doing what is right, no matter how hard, and leaving no stone unturned, no matter how hard.

"I believe that at a conscious and a subconscious level, my mantra has been very very simple. Do the right thing, no matter how hard. Leave no stone unturned, no matter how hard. The wonderful thing about this mantra is that eight times out of ten you actually succeed. And the two



times that you don't, you have absolutely no regret," she added.

Buch further said the graduates will discover their own mantra for going forward, which will be the "default setting" within which it is effortless for them to operate.

"And until you find that mantra, it is as though you have a quiver full of arrows, some sharp, some not so sharp. And as you aim for the goals that you choose, you may find that your sharp arrows were perfectly well, wonderful, or that you need to sharpen some of your arrows," the SEBI chief said.

She also asked students to not overthink if it feels effortless and enjoyable in their journey.

"Just go with the flow," she added.

Buch, however, suggested students probe the nature of their mantra if they face a dilemma about the direction they are taking and whether their mantra is a match for the goals that they are aiming for.

"In today's multi-dimensional and multi-varied world, there is an infinite set of combinations of which mantra can help you achieve which goal. You just need to make sure that you find a fit at a point in time," she said.

Buch said her generation was very fortunate to participate in the dawn of the new India.

"Your generation, in my view, is even more fortunate. You are on your way to seeing the high noon of the new India," she added. (PTI)

Adani his position as the world's second-richest man.

In the months following the Hindenburg report, the conglomerate redrew its strategy, including trimming debt through prepayments and repayments of borrowings, paring the founder's share pledge and bringing in promoter and marquee investor equity.

The strategy seems to be paying off, with the share prices of the 10 listed companies recovering all of the Hindenburg losses.

The group's revenues have continued to grow, helping it reduce debt, meet financial obligations, boost stability and make strategic investments to further its growth and expansion plans.

Adani Group has raised over \$ 5 billion (Rs 41,500 crore) in equity and double of that in debt since the Hindenburg report.

Star investor GQG Partners bought stakes worth almost \$ 4.3 billion in five group companies between March and August 2023, while Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and French energy giant TotalEnergies poured in \$ 770 million in renewable energy firm Adani Green Energy Ltd, according to company filings and stock exchange data.

Parallely, the promoters infused \$ 4.6 billion to repay loans against shares, servicing loans taken for cement acquisitions and supporting green investments. Even before last week's announcement, it had been doing mergers and acquisitions (M&As), acquiring Sanghi cement for \$ 431 million, 49.38 per cent in Indian Oil Tanking for \$ 128 million, Karaikal port for \$ 181 million, and Coastal Energen for \$ 420 million, filing and stock exchange data showed.

Adani group has planned a ₹ 7 lakh crore capital expenditure over the next decade for expanding its infrastructure business, according to a recent investor presentation by the company management. (PTI)

## Banned UNLF (P) delaying

the Kuki community. The ceasefire deal was envisioned to end decades-long conflicts between UNLF (P) and security forces, paving the way for community concerns to be addressed. Formed in 1964, the UNLF (P) has operated within and outside Indian borders.

The Centre has signed agreements with Northeastern armed groups since 2014 to quell unrest and foster growth. Furthermore, a Suspension of Operations (SoO) with 21 Kuki-dominated groups has been in place since 2008 to maintain peace in Manipur's hilly regions. The unilateral withdrawal by the Manipur government from the SoO due to allegations of land encroachment by two Kuki insurgent groups in March has not received central government endorsement. (PTI)

## Not 'save democracy' but

vendetta. People who trashed many leaders as thieves and crooks have joined hands with them, and it is a strange and startling sight, he said, in an apparent reference to the coming together of the Aam Aadmi Party with other opposition parties.

Their leader is now Late Prasad Yadav, a convict in several corruption cases, he added. They are all here to hide their old sins and it must be noted that they had been against the construction of the Ram temple and some of them called for eradication of Hinduism, he alleged.

These parties represent the crisis of credibility in Indian politics while the BJP under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi symbolises the politics of credibility and the track record of delivering on its promises. In a swipe at opposition parties, he said while they claim to have come together to save democracy but they are themselves dynastic organisations which never allowed others to rise. People will give them a befitting reply in the polls, he said. (PTI)

## Bhupen rues Oppn failure

from Guwahati. I had requested (AAP state president) Bhabesh Choudhury that they should not contest alone and we were ready to give them one seat, but they insisted on three." "I think this will be the biggest political blunder for AAP as after results, it will be proved that they are nobody in the state," the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) chief claimed.

Speaking about the TMC fielding candidates in Assam, Borah maintained that it is a "regional party based in West Bengal" and there is no alliance with the Congress in the neighbouring state. "If they are not ready to give a single seat in their stronghold, how can I, as the state president of Assam, sit with the TMC president here and give them seats? The starting point is West Bengal and not Assam with them," he said.

As far as the CPI(M) is concerned, the Left party is fighting against the Congress in Kerala and has fielded a candidate in Assam, he said.

"Although these three parties are not in the same view in the state, all are part of the opposition bloc INDIA against the BJP. I have also decided that I will not speak a single word against these parties," Borah added.

Assam will go to polls in three phases on April 19, 26 and May 7. The Congress has three MPs in the outgoing Lok Sabha, while the other UOFA members don't have any representation from the state. The ruling BJP has nine MPs from Assam, while one each is held by AIUDF and an Independent. (PTI)

## 'Kickbacks' used in AAP's

campaign in Goa during 2021-22. "On examination of the vendors of Chariot Productions engaged for outdoor campaigns, it was found that many of the vendors were made 'part cash part bill' payments...." the agency claimed in its court papers.

It also said that an employee of one such vendor company has recorded his statement with the ED saying he was given ₹ 6.29 lakh payment "via Hawala" from an 'Angadiya' operator in Mumbai.

The agency recorded the statement of an employee of the said 'Angadiya' operator, R Kantilal, where it was found that the Income-Tax department had raided their Goa office in January 2022 and all their documents, notes, chits, and slips were seized by the taxman during these searches.

The ED approached the tax department and retrieved the data of this 'Angadiya' firm and its analysis "shows that about ₹ 45 crore has been transferred through Hawala to Goa".

"This Hawala trail of about ₹ 45 crore was also investigated and substantiated by the predicate agency CBI and the same were duly mentioned by CBI in its second supplementary chargesheet filed before a special court on 08.07.2023," the ED said.

The ED filed its money laundering case to probe alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy of 2021-22 on August 22, 2022, taking cognisance of a CBI FIR that was lodged on August 17, 2022.

The agency has charged the AAP, the ruling party of Delhi, of "committing the offence of money laundering through Arvind Kejriwal", the party's national convenor and chief minister of Delhi.

Stating that AAP being a political party, defined as an association or a body of individual citizens of India under the Representation of People Act, the ED claimed it can be categorised as a "company" as contemplated under section 70 of the PMLA.

As Arvind Kejriwal was "in-charge of and responsible" for the said company i.e. AAP during the time of the offence, he and his party "shall be deemed guilty" of offences mentioned under the anti-money laundering law and liable to be prosecuted and punished, it claimed.

A money trail of cash funds of ₹ 25 crore, transferred allegedly through Hawala by Raghav Magunta, son of Lok Sabha MP Magunta Sreenivasulu Reddy, to BRS leader K Kavitha and her associates in Chennai has also been tracked by the ED.

Magunta Sreenivasulu Reddy is a prominent liquor businessman in south India and the sitting YSRCP MP from Ongole seat. He recently joined the TDP and got a ticket to contest the upcoming general elections from the same seat. The Maguntas, K Kavitha and businessman Sarath Reddy are alleged to be part of the 'South Group'. The ED, as per official sources, may also attach assets of the AAP terming them equivalent to the proceeds of crime generated through this claimed scam. (PTI)

## Priyanka urges EC to ensure

Supreme Court-monitored SIT be set to probe the BJP's "extortion" of funds through the electoral bonds scheme. Last month, the Supreme Court annulled the electoral bonds scheme for political funding, saying it violates the Constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression as well as the right to information.

Addressing the rally, Priyanka Gandhi said that despite the BJP creating "undemocratic obstacles", the INDIA bloc was committed to fighting, winning, and saving democracy in India. In her remarks before reading out the INDIA bloc's demands, she said, "I have been coming to Ramlila Maidan since childhood. Every year Ravan's effigy is set on fire."

"When I was a kid, I used to come (here) with my grandmother Indira Ji and she used to narrate the Ramayana to me. Those in power today call themselves Ram Bhakts. When I was sitting here I thought that I should say something to them. I want to remind them of the 1,000-year-old tale and its message." "When Lord Ram fought for truth, he did not have power, resources or even a chariot. Ravan had chariots, resources, army and gold but Lord Ram had truth, hope, belief, love, kindness, modesty, patience, courage and truth. I want to tell those in power and PM Narendra Modi that the message of Lord Ram's life is that power is not permanent... and arrogance gets shattered," Priyanka Gandhi added. (PTI)

## Nepal, India to collaborate

Niti Anusandhan Pratisthan in collaboration with the Central Sanskrit University, Delhi, and India Foundation, Delhi, has the participation of over 120 Sanskrit scholars, professors and government officials from both the neighbouring countries. The main objective of the international conference was to strengthen the Nepal-Indian relations and promote Sanskrit education in Nepal and India. (PTI)

# Adani Group shrugs off Hindenburg effect, back to rapid expansion spree

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Adani group opened a \$ 1.2 billion copper plant, bought a port in Odisha, raised stakes in a cement company and stitched an alliance with rival Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries, all in a matter of one week in signs that the apples-to-airport conglomerate has shrugged off the Hindenburg effect and is back to rapid expansion spree.

In the last one week, Adani group has through regulatory filings and press statements announced expansions and investments in its mainstay ports business, diversification into metal refining, fund infusion into a two-year-old cement foray and continuing progress in the commissioning of its mega solar project.

It started with the March 26 announcement of Adani Ports acquiring a 95 per cent stake in Gopalpur Port for ₹ 3,350 crore, taking the number of seaports under its control to 15 - the highest with any private firm in the country.

This was followed by Adani Enterprises Ltd - the group's flagship firm and business incubator - announcing on March 28 the first phase of the world's largest single-location copper manufacturing plant at Mundra in Gujarat, marking the conglomerate's foray into metals refining.

The \$ 1.2 billion (about ₹ 10,000 crore) plant helped India join China and other nations that are rapidly expanding production of copper, a metal crucial for transition away from fossil fuels. Technologies critical to the energy transition like electric vehicles (EVs), charging infrastructure, solar photovoltaics (PV), wind and batteries, all require copper.

On the same day, group promoter Gautam Adani and his family invested ₹ 6,661 crore in Ambuja Cements to raise a stake in the country's second-largest cement company to 66.7 per cent as



it looked well-positioned to benefit from the country's infrastructure boom.

A day later, Adani Green Energy Ltd - the renewable energy arm of the group - announced the start of operation of its 775-megawatt solar power projects in Khavda, Gujarat. Khavda is the site where it is building a vast solar farm to generate 30 gigawatts of electricity from solar rays as part of its plans to reach 45 GW capacity by 2030.

Also happening on March 28 was Adani and his often perceived rival billionaire Mukesh Ambani collaborating for the first time, when Reliance Industries picked up a 26 per cent stake in Adani Power's Madhya Pradesh power project for ₹ 50 crore and signed a pact to use the plants' 500 MW of electricity for captive use.

The two businessmen hailing from Gujarat have often been pitted by media and commentators against each other, but they have for years tiptoed around each other to reach the top two rungs of Asia's wealth ladder.

Adani aspires to be the world's largest renewable energy producer by 2030, while Reliance is building four gigafactories at Jamnagar in Gujarat -- one each for solar panels, batteries, green hydrogen, and fuel cells. Adani is also building three giga factories for manufacturing solar modules, wind turbines and hydrogen electrolyzers. A clash was also forecast when the Adani group applied to participate in an auction of spectrum or airwaves capable of carrying fifth-generation (5G) data and voice services. However, unlike Ambani, Adani bought a 400 MHz spectrum in the 26 GHz band, which is not for public networks.

On the contrary, the two have been far from rivals. In 2022, a firm with erstwhile links to Ambani sold its stake in news broadcaster NDTV to Adani, paving the way for the takeover.

The announcements in the last one week are signs that Adani is back on an expansion spree, analysts said. These developments took place 14 months after Hindenburg Research accused the Adani Group of "brazen stock manipulation" and accounting fraud, leading to a stock market rout that erased about \$ 150 billion in market value at its lowest point.

The rout in stock prices following the allegations, which the group denied, cost tycoon Gautam

# Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma's birth anniversary observed

## Communities honour legacy of former ABSU president with day-long programs & tributes

### HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, March 31:** People cutting across communities, especially the Bodo community, remembered the contribution and dedication of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, former president of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), on his 68th birth anniversary, observed as 'Students' Day' in different districts of the state with day-long programs scheduled on Sunday.

In Kokrajhar, the central committee of All Bodo Students Union, in association with Upendra Nath Brahma Trust (UNBT) and Kokrajhar district committee of ABSU, observed the 'Students' Day' at Thulungapuri Dotma amidst the presence of a huge gathering of the public and student fraternities.

ABSU president Dipen Boro hoisted the union flag followed by a rich floral tribute to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma at his tomb and samadhi sthal.

On the occasion, balloons and white pigeons were released by invited guests as a symbolic gesture to promote sustainable peace and tranquility among citizens, followed by sapling plantation to mark the observation of Students' Day.

President of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and noted author, Dr Surath Narzary, paid rich floral tributes to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma.

Eminent journalist from Mumbai, Rupa Chenoy, state cabinet minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma, Rajya Sabha MP, Rungwra Narzary, NDA alliance candidate for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Joyanta Basumatary, BTR executive member Ukil Mushahary, chairman of Upendra Nath Brahma Trust, Dr Subung Basumatary, UPPL general secretary, Raju Kumar Narzary, UN Academy director, Krishna Gopal Basumatary, leaders from Dularai Bodo Primary Teachers Association, Tribal Sangha, Dularai Bodo Harimu Afad, were present and offered tributes to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma.

ABSU president Dipen Boro, recalling the contributions and dedication of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, stated that he sacrificed his entire life for the welfare and upliftment of downtrodden communities, including Bodos, in Assam and

across the world.

He said that the student union has been observing Bodofa's birth anniversary as 'Students' Day' every year on March 31 to keep alive his ideology and philosophy among society. Boro called for Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, the former president of ABSU, to be honoured with the Bharat Ratna award, the highest civilian award from the Government of India.

"The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) demands that the Government of India award the country's highest civilian honour, Bharat Ratna, to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma. Bodofa was a leader not only for Bodos but also for students and the underprivileged who believed in non-violence. Bodofa, as a student leader, brought about remarkable changes in the lives of downtrodden communities through the 'Bodoland' movement. Bodofa dreamt of a literate society with the motto 'live and let live'," Boro added.

An open discussion on the contributions and sacrifice of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma was also held on the occasion, chaired by Dipen Boro, ABSU president. Eminent journalist Rupa Chenoy graced the occasion as the chief guest. She highlighted and recalled the contributions of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, who led the Bodoland movement for the identity and development of the Bodos and other downtrodden communities in the region.

In Tamulpur, the Tamulpur district committee of ABSU, in association with Tamulpur anchalik committee, ABSU observed Students' Day at Lahapara LP school playground in Tamulpur. The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, graced the occasion as the chief guest and offered rich floral tributes to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma.

CEM Boro stated that Students' Day was observed on March 31, the birth anniversary of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, to discuss his contributions and dedication. He mentioned that the BTR government celebrates the day as 'Students' Day' every year to keep alive the ideology and philosophy of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma among society. He



urged the student community to dedicate their studies to lead healthy and prosperous lives.

The Media Trust, Assam, also observed the birth anniversary of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma at its Rupnagar office complex in Guwahati. Members and officials of the Media Trust, Assam, offered tributes to Bodofa.

Meanwhile, the state government has declared March 31 as Chatra Divas (Students' Day) across the state, marking the birth anniversary of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma. Several districts across the state have also observed the day with befitting programs.

**Our Nagaon correspondent adds:** Nowgong College (Autonomous) and Nowgong Girls' College observed the birth anniversary of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma as Students' Day at their respective college premises here on Sunday.

The NSS unit in association with the Internal Quality Assurance Cell of the historic Nowgong College (Autonomous) organised the event with day-long programs. The program began with garlanding the portrait of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma and paying floral tributes to the former students' leader. Ranjit Kumar Mazindar, in-charge principal of the college, spoke on the importance of celebrating the birth anniversary of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma and highlighted his contributions. Dr Nilutpal Kr.

Brahma, HoD, department of Chemistry, elaborated on Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma's philosophy of life. Dr Bhuvan Chandra Chutiyia initiated the program.

As part of the celebration of the day, an essay writing competition was also conducted during the day, as mentioned in a press note here.

Similarly, Nowgong Girls' College also observed the day with day-long programs here. The program began with the lighting of earthen lamps at the portrait of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma at 'Chinta Jurani Kaksha' of Nowgong Girls' College by Dr Kulen Ch Das, principal of the college. The program was mentored by Professor Dr Amia Pator, who also spoke on the occasion. A lecture competition on the life and contributions of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma was also organised, with a sizable number of students from the college participating. Madhusmita Sharma and Ritza Chakraborty bagged the first and second prizes respectively in the competition, while Sneha Borkatoki claimed the third prize of the competition, as asserted in another press note here.

**Our Biswanath Chariali correspondent adds:** Biswanath College observed Chatra Divas in a befitting manner here at Biswanath College for the second consecutive year with a variety of programs on Sunday. A meeting commenced with the lighting of an earthen lamp by the principal of Biswanath College, Dr

Chinta Mani Sharma, in honour of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma. Additionally, Dr Sharma led the college fraternity in paying floral tribute to the holy soul. Following this, other faculty members and the students present in the meeting paid homage to the portrait of Upendra Nath Brahma.

The meeting, compered by Dr Naresh Thakur, coordinator IQAC (Internal Quality Assurance Cell), witnessed the presence of more than three hundred students besides teachers and non-teaching staff. Dr Debashis Sarmah, assistant professor of the department of Physics, and Balin Bhuyan, assistant professor of the department of Assamese, shed light on the life and philosophy of Bodofa; the guardian of Bodos, Raktim Medhi, general secretary of Biswanath College Students' Union, also spoke a few lines on the occasion. Finally, the chairperson of the meeting, Dr Chinta Mani Sharma, addressed the gathering by focusing on various aspects of Bodofa's life. In conclusion, the vote of thanks was proposed by Dr Biswajit Sarma, assistant professor of the department of Zoology. A cultural event by students from Kanakalata Girls' Hostel was also presented on this occasion.

The program was made successful with the support of the office bearers of BCSU, NCC cadets, NSS volunteers, boarders of Kanakalata Girls' Hostel, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and the students of the college.

**Our Tezpur correspondent adds:** With the rest of the state, Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma was widely remembered on his 68th birth anniversary on Sunday in Sonitpur District by different schools and colleges, including Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College, Dhekiajuli, Rangapara College, and other institutions, organising various programs, including educational symposiums and quiz competitions among students.

It is worth mentioning that Upendra Nath Brahma, an iconic and uncompromising leader for the Bodos, was born on March 31, 1956, in Boragari village of Dotoma, a small township in Kokrajhar district, BTR. The title of 'Bodofa' was posthumously conferred upon Brahma on

May 8, 1990, in recognition of his visionary work for the community and his able leadership. Paying rich tribute to the great Bodo leader, his birthday has been observed as 'Students' Day'.

Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College celebrated Chatra Divas on Sunday with different programs. Inaugurating the program, coordinator of IQAC, LOKD College, Dr Jyotshna Baruah, delivered an insightful lecture highlighting the life and works of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma and the significance of the day. Attending the program, compered by NSS program officer Prasanta Boro, principal of the college Dr Sukdev Adhikari, in his speech, stressed the need to follow the path shown by Upendra Nath Brahma. This was followed by a skit performance by the Pushpalata Das Girls' hostel border. Udangri Boro, assistant professor, Bodo department, conducted the quiz competition, assisted by Dr Jyotshna Baruah. Altogether, 6 teams of 5 students each enthusiastically participated in the competition.

Rangapara College observed the day with a day-long program, including the UN Brahma Memorial Lecture at the digital seminar hall. Gracing the occasion as chief guest, former president of Bodo Sahitya Sabha Taren Chandra Boro, discussed the contributions made by Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma to build the nation. During his speech, Boro said that Brahma worked incessantly to bring total evolution for the people, and the new generation, especially the student community, has to learn a lot from his life, works, and philosophy.

At the outset of the program, principal of the college Dr Ranjan Kalita and the college fraternity took part in a shradhanjali program along with the guests and paid homage to the great leader. This was followed by the inaugural speech delivered by Prasanta Boro, head of Bodo department, Rangapara College. Addressing the gathering, Dr Ranjan Kalita, principal, Rangapara College, discussed the distinctive qualities, merit, and brilliant career of the student life of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma. Several students from the college also took part in the lecture program.

## Assam Rifles organises lecture

### HT Correspondent

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 31:** Assam Rifles organised a lecture on 'Know Your Army/AR' at Sotai under Sonitpur district on Sunday, as stated in a press release. The lecture was an effort to pique the interest of our youngsters and motivate them to join the Indian Army/AR. The event aimed to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the army's roles, responsibilities, and achievements among civilians, especially youth.

During the lecture, seasoned officers and experts shared valuable insights into the rich history, organisational structure, and operational capabilities of the Indian Army and specifically the Assam Rifles. They highlighted the diverse range of roles undertaken by the army, including safeguarding the nation's borders, aiding in disaster relief, and maintaining internal security.

Participants were enlightened about the Assam Rifles' unique contributions, particularly in the north-eastern region, where they play a crucial role in maintaining peace and security. The lecture emphasised the significance of unity, discipline, and sacrifice embodied by the men and women serving in the Assam Rifles.

Moreover, the session facilitated an interactive platform where attendees could engage with army personnel, ask questions, and gain firsthand knowledge about the challenges and triumphs faced by soldiers in their line of duty.

By organising such lectures, Assam Rifles not only enhances public awareness but also cultivates a sense of patriotism and respect for the armed forces, inspiring younger generations to consider serving their country with pride and dedication. A total of 69 youths attended the event with full zeal and enthusiasm.

## Election training in Sivasagar

### HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, March 31:** Preparations are in full swing in Sivasagar and Demow assembly segments of the Jorhat LS constituency as the Lok Sabha elections 2024 draw near. After the second phase of training for 1,200 presiding and first polling officers on March 30, the second and third phases of training will be conducted on Monday, April 1. A total of 105 micro-observers have been deployed in 95-Demow and 96 Sivasagar assembly constituencies to closely monitor the election process. These micro-observers have been trained to perform their duties properly. The training will be held on April 2 at Madhav Bezbarua Hall, Sivasagar University from 10.00 am.

## Himanta attends Tiwa Cultural Festival

### CM announces initiatives for language preservation



### HT Correspondent

**MORIGAON, March 31:** Chief minister Himanta Sarma played a significant role in the culmination of the three-day-long 'Tiwa Kanthichuri Kham' or Tiwa Cultural Festival,

held at the Tiwa Fa Indraching Deuri Khetra in Morigaon. This festival, organised centrally by the Tiwa Autonomous Council along with various Tiwa community organisations - Tiwa Chhatra Sanstha, Tiwa Yuva Chhatra Parishad,

## National flag found on ground in Digboi

### HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, March 31:** The high-mast national flag, which was hoisted on the middle floor of Digboi town, lay on the ground from last Saturday night until Sunday afternoon.

The high-mast flag was unveiled by Dibrugarh MP and Union minister of state, Rameswar Teli, on May 15, 2023.

Constructed at a cost of several lakhs of rupees through the Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL) CSR scheme, the flag was hoisted and handed over to the local police station with the help of a concerned local person, Md Awwal Rahman, media fraternity, and school students.

Md Awwal Rahman, a prominent social worker of Digboi, stated that on Sunday when he went to the market, he noticed the high-mast Tricolour flag lying on the ground. Despite being only 50 meters away from the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) office, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) office, and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) general office, nobody came to address the situation, which he found very unfortunate.

Md Awwal Rahman emphasised that the Tricolour flag is the pride of every Indian, symbolising the sacrifices made by countless individuals for independence. He expressed disappointment that no citizens of Digboi took responsibility to pick up the Tricolour flag.

This correspondent attempted to reach out to the concerned department in Digboi, but unfortunately, they were unable to establish contact.

## Lurinjiyoti launches election campaigns in Dibrugarh constituency

### HT Correspondent

**DIBRUGARH, March 31:** Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president and INDIA Bloc candidate for Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency, Lurinjiyoti Gogoi, geared up his election campaigns in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts.

While addressing a rally at Laipuli in Tinsukia, Lurinjiyoti Gogoi came down heavily on Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal for supporting the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

"This election, our fight is not easy because we are up against the powerful and richest political party. But if we fight together, we can achieve victory. So, this time, we are united, and most of the Opposition parties have joined us and fielded me from the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat. I am committed to

working for the upliftment of Assamese culture and language until my last breath," Gogoi asserted.

Gogoi said, "We know how the BJP government has imposed CAA in Assam. We cannot accept the CAA because it violates the Assam Accord. Our fight is against injustice, and this time the people of this constituency should decide and vote for the betterment of Assamese society."

Lurinjiyoti Gogoi is primarily targeting the village people of Dibrugarh Lok Sabha, and he is organising his campaigns mostly in rural areas. He has been seen seeking blessings from the elderly and engaging in conversations with them, seeking their support in the upcoming elections.

In another election rally in Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency, Lurinjiyoti Gogoi said flood and

erosion are major issues in the constituency, and every year people face the wrath of erosion. "If I win this Lok Sabha seat, I will raise the issue in parliament and do whatever is needed to solve this perennial problem," Gogoi said.

"Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat is one of the prestigious seats, and I am grateful that the INDIA Bloc has fielded me from this seat. If we fight together with full strength, we can win this seat," Gogoi added.

The Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat is going to witness a triangular contest with BJP stalwart and Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal, AAP's Manoj Dhanowar, and INDIA Bloc candidate Lurinjiyoti Gogoi.

Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat will go to polls on April 19 in the first phase of the election.

## Mass BJP joining programme at Margherita

### HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, March 31:** With the Lok Sabha election day announced, the nation is abuzz with election fervour, witnessing a flurry of election-related activities from political parties, leaders, and supporters. Concurrently, the landscape of party affiliations and factionalism is evolving.

The BJP has fortified its organisational stronghold by garnering support from various political quarters, including the Opposition Congress. A mass enrollment event took place on Sunday at 83 no Margherita LAC within the 13th Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency, where a steady stream of individuals is joining daily, spearheaded by Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma.

Notably, the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS), historically aligned with Congress since post-independence, is undergoing a notable transition and has been leaning towards the saffron party. The

Margherita branch of ACMS witnessed this shift on Sunday, as over 500 tea workers from approximately 12 tea estates, led by Hari Nanda Goh, the secretary of ACMS Margherita branch, recently embraced the BJP.

The mass enrollment event saw the presence of prominent figures including Bhaskar Sharma, MLA of 83 no Margherita constituency, Kushi Kanta Borah, president of BJP Tinsukia district committee, Bhoben Sharma, convener of 83 no Margherita constituency, Bhadeswar Moran, secretary of BJP Tinsukia district committee, Dhiraj Sonowal, president of Margherita BJP Town Mandal, alongside other senior leaders of Margherita.

Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma underscored the widespread support for the BJP under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, welcoming all who eagerly join the party.

## NHRCCB appeals to BCCI

### HT Correspondent

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 31:** The National Human Rights and Crime Control Bureau (NHRCCB) of Assam has made a fervent plea to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to ensure the inclusion of Riyan Parag in the Indian cricket team for the upcoming T20 World Cup. Nishant Thard, the state president of NHRCC, in an email addressed to the BCCI chairman on Sunday, emphasised the historical under-representation of players from the North East and Assam in Indian cricket.

Informing the matter through a press release, Mrinmay Kr Nath, state media officer of the organisation, stated that highlighting the significant talents emerging from Assam, NHRCCB attributed the lack of representation to the state's in-

adequate sports infrastructure. The organisation underscored the transformative impact of enhancing the sports sector in Assam, citing it as instrumental in nurturing exceptional talents like Riyan Parag.

The email specifically cited Parag's remarkable performances across various formats, including the Ranji Trophy, national ODIs, and T20s, as well as his contributions in the IPL. The NHRCCB emphasised Riyan's versatility and potential, advocating for his selection across all three cricket formats. In urging the BCCI chairman to include Parag in the main XI for the upcoming T20 World Cup, the NHRCCB reinforced its commitment to fostering inclusivity and providing opportunities for talented individuals from underrepresented regions like the North East.

## MSSV to host quiz competition

### HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, March 31:** The department of Assamese, Mahapurusha Srimanta

Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, is going to conduct a prize money quiz competition on April 5 at the varsity complex here. The competition will cover the fields of literature, culture, sports, economics, audio-visual, and Srimanta Sankaradev. The three best teams of the competition will be awarded ₹ 10,000, ₹ 7000, and ₹ 5000 in cash respectively, along with trophies and certificates in the competition. In a press note asserted here that only one team from an institution will be allowed to participate in the event. Any queries for detailed information regarding the competition, one can contact 863739946 or 8638194889 numbers, the press note added.

## Suspect apprehended in connection with homicide case

### HT Bureau

**DIPHU, March 31:** On Saturday evening, Dulup Deka from Koilaghat in Golaghat district, under the jurisdiction of Bokaghat Police Station, was apprehended. Deka is under suspicion for his alleged involvement in the homicide of Rowelson Ronghang from Kajojan in Karbi Anglong district.

Rowelson Ronghang, a resident of Kajojan under Dolamora Police Station in Karbi Anglong, was fatally attacked by unidentified individuals on March 24. The incident took place within the jurisdiction of Bokaghat Police Station.

This killing has sparked outrage in Karbi Anglong, with the victim's family demanding swift apprehension of the perpetrators. Deka is currently in police custody for further questioning. Details surrounding Deka's arrest have not been disclosed by the police, who suspect the involvement of additional individuals in the murder.

## Cochlear implant program

### HT Correspondent

**DEMOW, March 31:** Dr Babasabheb Ambekar Vaidyakiya Pratishthan's Swargadeo Siu-Ka-Pha Multi-Specialty Hospital, an ONGC CSR initiative situated at Rajabari near Demow in Sivasagar district, is set to introduce the 'Cochlear Implant Program' for the first time ever in Sivasagar. The program will commence at the hospital on Monday, April 1. In this regard, the Swargadeo Siu-Ka-Pha Multi-Specialty Hospital will host a launching event on Monday at the hospital.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character.*  
- Albert Einstein

## Tax terrorism slur

In recent days, India has witnessed a troubling trend that strikes at the heart of democratic principles. Allegations of tax terrorism, selective targeting of opposition parties, and the detainment of prominent leaders have raised serious concerns about the state of governance and political fairness in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government finds itself embroiled in controversy following revelations of coercion and intimidation tactics aimed at extracting funds from businesses and corporations. The recent exposure of undisclosed donors and recipients under the Electoral Bond Scheme, mandated by the Supreme Court, has shed light on the murky depths of political finance in India. Reports of businesses feeling compelled to donate to the ruling BJP under duress from investigating agencies raise troubling questions about the integrity of the electoral process. Furthermore, the actions taken against opposition parties, particularly the detention of leaders like Arvind Kejriwal and the freezing of Congress's bank accounts, smack of political vendetta. These incidents, coupled with exorbitant fines and tax demands conveniently timed on the eve of the Lok Sabha election, paint a picture of a government willing to go to any lengths to maintain its grip on power.

The international community has taken notice, with countries like Germany and the United States, along with the United Nations, expressing concern over the deteriorating state of democratic norms in India. The characterization of these actions as "tax terrorism" by opposition leaders underscores the gravity of the situation. The timing and nature of the penalties imposed on opposition parties raise legitimate questions about the impartiality and competence of the Income Tax Department under the Modi government. The sudden detection of discrepancies, coupled with hefty fines and penalties spanning several years, smacks of political manipulation rather than genuine tax enforcement. The selective targeting of specific parties further erodes public trust in the impartiality of governmental institutions. The detention of Arvind Kejriwal, a prominent opposition figure known for his electoral victories against the BJP in Delhi, is particularly troubling. His incarceration on seemingly dubious charges reeks of political retribution and undermines the principles of democratic governance. The curtailment of his powers as Chief Minister and the centralization of authority in the Lieutenant Governor's office represent a dangerous deviation from established norms of federalism.

Moreover, the intertwining of financial penalties with political motives, as evidenced by the pardoning of individuals associated with the ruling party after substantial donations, further underscores the erosion of ethical boundaries within Indian politics. Such actions not only tarnish the reputation of the government but also undermine the very foundations of parliamentary democracy. As we approach the Lok Sabha election, it is imperative that the ECI and the SC uphold the integrity of the electoral process. Political parties must be held accountable for their finances, and transparency should be paramount to ensure a level playing field for all contestants. The allegations of tax terrorism and political oppression must be thoroughly investigated, and those responsible held accountable to restore faith in democratic institutions. The recent developments in Indian politics serve as a stark reminder of the fragility of democratic values in the face of unchecked power. It is incumbent upon all stakeholders, from political leaders to civil society, to safeguard the principles of accountability, transparency, and fairness that form the cornerstone of a vibrant democracy. Anything less would be a disservice to the ideals upon which our nation was founded.

## E-Evidence: Implementing India's new criminal laws

The three recently enacted criminal laws - Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (replacing the Indian Penal Code), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (replacing the Code of Criminal Procedure), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (replacing the Indian Evidence Act)—are scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2024. Simultaneously, the implementation of Section 106(2) of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), which mandates a 10-year imprisonment for fatal accidents not promptly reported to the police, has been temporarily suspended, as officially notified by the Central government.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and various State governments are actively preparing for a seamless transition. Modifications in the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) pertaining to investigative processes and police operations have been implemented. While a few new offenses and alterations have been introduced in the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), the core content of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 remains largely unchanged in the context of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA). Noteworthy adjustments include a slight expansion in the scope of secondary evidence and some revisions in the provisions related to electronic evidence within the BSA.

Clear guidance regarding electronic records is provided in the definitions section. As an example accompanying the definition of "document," which encompasses electronic and digital records, it is clarified that items such as emails, server logs, documents stored on computers, laptops, or smartphones, messages, websites, and locational information (the term "information" is suggested instead of "evidence") are all considered as documents. Additionally, voice mail messages stored on digital devices fall within the scope of the defined term.

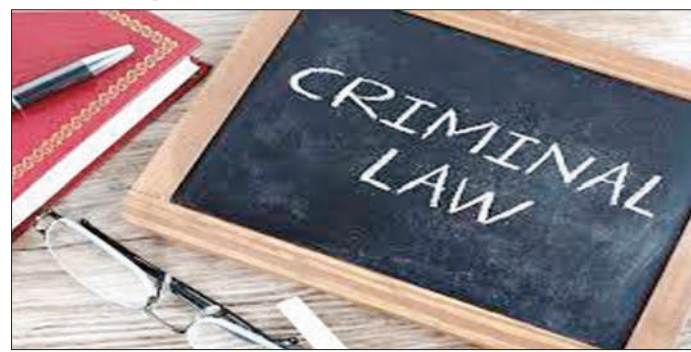
Likewise, the provision addressing primary (electronic) evidence (Section 57) is elucidated through Explanations, providing clear guidance. One of these four explanations spec-

ifies that in cases where a video recording is both stored in electronic form and simultaneously transmitted, broadcast, or transferred elsewhere, each of the preserved recordings is considered primary evidence. This could prove beneficial for investigative agencies in establishing the culpability of a cyber-criminal, even if the original electronic record is destroyed to refute allegations. The value of such evidence remains intact when collected from alternative sources, preventing its diminishment.

Section 63, addressing the admissibility of electronic records, incorporates terms like 'semi-conductor memory' and 'any communication device' for enhanced clarity. It's noteworthy that these inclusions do not alter the provision's impact, as the definition of 'electronic form' outlined in the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 encompasses information generated, sent, received, or stored in 'computer memory'. Likewise, the comprehensive definition of 'computer network' in the IT Act covers 'communication device'. Therefore, the terms used in Section 63 align seamlessly with the broader definitions provided in the IT Act.

It's important to note that the computer's primary memory, encompassing random access memory (RAM) and cache memory, essentially constitutes semi-conductor memory. This type of memory is vital for the efficient and rapid operation of a computer. Despite its volatile nature, this memory can disclose crucial information when electronic devices are recovered and seized in a 'power-on' condition.

The matter concerning the admissibility of electronic records is well-established. While there are certain alterations in Section 63 of the BSA (equivalent to 65-B of the Indian Evidence Act), the precedent set by the Supreme Court in the case of Arjun Panditrao Khotkar vs Kailash Kushanrao Gorantyal & Ors. (2020) remains equally ap-



plicable to the new provisions. The Court, in this instance, affirmed that the requisite certificate under Section 65-B(4) - now Section 63(4) of the BSA - is indispensable for admitting electronic records.

Notably, other provisions related to the admissibility of secondary evidence do not apply to electronic records, given that Section 65-B of the IE Act commences with a non-obstante clause, and both Section 65-A and Section 65-B constitute a comprehensive legal framework in themselves. The non-obstante clause from the Indian Evidence Act is pre-

served in the BSA. The Court emphasized that if obtaining the necessary certificate from the individual in possession of an electronic device proved challenging, an alternative recourse was available. Namely, an application could be submitted to a judge, seeking the production of the required certificate from the person involved, particularly in situations where the individual declined to provide it willingly.

The Court determined that while the certificate should ideally be submitted along with all other documents during the filing of the police report, and at the latest, before the commencement of the trial, any failure to do so in a timely manner is considered a curable defect.

Notably, as Section 65-B (and now Section 63 of the BSA) does not specify the precise stage at which the certificate must be presented to the court, the court retains the discretion, in suitable cases, to permit the prosecution to introduce the cer-

tificate at a later stage without prejudicing the accused during the trial. The Court further emphasized that in cases where compliance with the law is impossible, the alleged disobedience can be excused. In simpler terms, if producing the required certificate is deemed impossible, the court has the authority to waive the mandatory requirement for its submission.

Section 63(4) of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam stipulates that the certificate must bear the signatures of two individuals, a departure from the Indian Evidence Act's requirement for only one. The first signature is to be provided by the person overseeing the computer, communication device, or relevant activities' management, while the second must come from an expert. The BSA includes a pre-defined format for the certificate in its Schedule. The expert's verification involves stating that a specific hash value is derived by applying a particular hash algorithm.

Here, a hash function refers to an algorithm translating one sequence of bits into another, typically smaller, set known as the "hash result." This process ensures that an electronic record consistently produces the same result whenever the algorithm is executed using the same electronic record as input. This computational infeasibility prevents the reconstruction of the original electronic record from the algorithm's hash result.

While the Central Government has not issued any notification under the IT Act regarding hash algorithms for encryption in the secure use of the electronic medium, the standard certificate format in the BSA enumerates 'SHA1,

SHA256, MD5, and Other (legally acceptable standard)' as applicable hash algorithms.

While MD5 (Message Digest5) and SHA1 (Secure Hash Algorithm1) are acknowledged to have certain vulnerabilities, SHA256 is widely regarded as more secure. Consequently, agencies are encouraged to utilize SHA256 to safeguard the integrity of data.

The introduction of expert certification, while aiding the court in admitting electronic records, poses the potential to escalate the workload for cyber laboratories. Given the pervasive use of smartphones in contemporary crime, where call records and location information play pivotal roles in investigations, the demand for expert-signed certificates may strain cyberlabs with an abrupt surge in workload. Many cyber laboratories, including some in Chhattisgarh, may face challenges as they might lack sufficient manpower.

Additionally, certain cyberlabs may not even be officially notified under the IT Act to provide expert opinions on electronic records.

It would have been a more reasonable approach if expert opinion were required only when the integrity of the seized electronic record is contested by the opposing party during the trial. In such instances, the courts could always seek expert input. The investigating officer could have sufficed by ensuring that one of the hash algorithms was applied and the message digest was attached to the certificate before its collection.

An immediate and comprehensive awareness campaign is essential now to educate the public about encryption modes and methods, especially targeting private agencies utilizing closed-circuit televisions or other electronic devices for security purposes. Concurrently, enforcement agencies should utilize the time leading up to July to establish the necessary infrastructure, ensuring they are well-prepared to shoulder the additional responsibilities that may arise. *(The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)*

## Netanyahu's walls are caving in as he has already lost his public opinion war

By: James M Dorsey

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's walls are caving in. His multiple battles fall into two categories: keeping his increasingly fragile government in place and fighting a war he has already lost in the court of public opinion and possibly on the ground in Gaza if measured by the prime minister's war goals.

On Monday, Israel suffered its most significant international setback since 2016 with the US allowing the United Nations Security Council to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The United States abstained in a 2016 Council vote that condemned Israeli settlement activity. The US Gaza vote strains Israel's relations with the United States, its main backer that prevented the Security Council from demanding a ceasefire for the past six months, as well as Europe, and most of the rest of the international community. US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield controversially attempted to soften the blow by declaring the resolution "non-binding," even though UN Security Council resolutions are legally binding and constitute international law. In doing so, Thomas-Greenfield was also trying to create a buffer against likely pressure on the United States to sanction Israel if it refuses to abide by the resolution.

That did not stop Netanyahu from responding to the US abstention in the UN vote by cancelling a visit to Washington by an Israeli delegation headed by Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, who lacks a military background, to discuss Israel's planned ground offensive in Rafah, the southern Gaza city that is home to more than a million Palestinians displaced by the war.

With Defence Minister Yoav Gallant already meeting with senior US officials in Washington in a separate visit, Netanyahu's defiance is largely symbolic. Nevertheless, Gallant, responding to the UN vote, warned that Israel "will act against Hamas everywhere, even in areas where we have not been yet." Gallant stopped short of naming potential target countries, but Qatar, the main ceasefire and prisoner exchange mediator, and Turkey are likely to top the list.

Israel has accused Qatar, home to several exiled Hamas leaders, of funding Hamas, although the US and Israel acquiesced in their presence in the Gulf state to maintain a back channel with the group. Netanyahu for years solicited Qatari funding in a bid to prevent a breakdown of law and order in Gaza and keep the Palestinian polity, split between Hamas and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Palestine Authority, divided.

The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), founded by Yigal Carmon, a former advisor to Israel's West Bank and Gaza occupation authority and Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin, has produced in recent months a series of reports designed to bolster Israeli denunciations of Qatar. This week, MEMRI took Qatar to task for hosting the Doha-based, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS).

Palestinian and Jordanian members of the Union have called on their compatriots to join the fight against Israel and "the Jews" with protests and uprisings against autocratic rulers who allegedly enable Israel's war, a reference to Arab countries that have diplomatic relations with Israel. The clerics also urged Arab militaries to come to the support of their Palestinian brethren.

Meanwhile, US Assistant Secretary of State William Russo warned in a readout of a phone call with Israeli

foreign ministry officials earlier this month that "the Israelis seemed oblivious to the fact that they are facing major, possibly generational damage to their reputation not just in the region but elsewhere in the world. We are concerned that the Israelis are missing the forest for the trees and are making a major strategic error in writing off their reputation damage."

Add to this the fact that the evolution of the war in recent weeks and running battles with Palestinian fighters in the West Bank suggests that even if the fighting ends today, Israel is looking at an insurgency in Gaza and the West Bank for the foreseeable future unless the ceasefire is linked to a credible effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US intelligence community last month predicted that "Israel probably will face lingering armed resistance from Hamas for years to come, and the military will struggle to neutralize Hamas's underground infrastructure, which allows insurgents to hide, regain strength, and surprise Israeli forces."

In Gaza, the Israeli military increasingly is fighting in places it initially occupied and then withdrew from in the belief that it had defeated Hamas.

Battles in recent days in and around Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis and Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City erupted in areas Israel earlier said had been cleared of Palestinian fighters. In addition, Hamas, hours before the UN vote, launched, for the first time in two months, rockets at the Israeli port city of Ashdod.

Israel's seeming inability six months into the war to defeat Hamas, despite dealing it severe body blows, is compounded by its incapability or unwillingness to maintain law and order in Gaza, its effort to undermine for political rather than security reasons the United Nations Relief and Welfare Agency (UNRWA), the predominant humanitarian organisation in the Strip, and its refusal to allow unfettered humanitarian supplies to enter the territory. The power vacuum created by Israeli military tactics and policy reinforces Hamas' resilience and its ability to return to areas vacated by Israeli forces. Taken together, the UN setback and the evolution of the war contradict Netanyahu's assertions that Israel is achieving its war goals, including destroying Hamas, freeing more than 100 remaining hostages kidnapped by the group in its October 7 attack on Israel, and ensuring that Gaza no longer serves as a launching pad for Palestinian resistance.

Netanyahu will have been heartened by the insistence, in response to the UN resolution, of Gallant and Benny Gantz, a member of the war cabinet, that Israel will continue the war until its goals have been realised. Nevertheless, the UN resolution weakens Israel's negotiating position in talks mediated by Qatar, the United States, and Egypt to secure a ceasefire and an exchange of the hostages for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. The resolution, in effect, constitutes an attempt to force negotiating parties to reach agreement in the next two weeks by demanding an immediate ceasefire for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan that would end on April 10, but lead "to a lasting sustainable ceasefire."

While most Security Council members will read the resolution's demand for "the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages" as a reference to the Hamas-held hostages, it allows Hamas and others to interpret the clause as also including Palestinians in Israeli prisons. The claim would be substantiated by the ongoing ceasefire negotiations and Israel's past willingness to exchange prisoners. *(IPA Service)*

## India's youth lost a decade, now constitute 83 per cent of the jobless

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

India's youth have lost a decade. They trusted Narendra Modi's promise made during election campaign in 2014 to provide "work with dignity for every hand", but now after a decade on the eve of Lok Sabha General Election 2024, they find themselves simply misled by a decade of PM Narendra Modi's bluff, which has just been exposed by the India Employment Report 2024 jointly published by International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute for Human Development (IHD). Youth now constitute 83 per cent of the jobless in India, and growth is not employment-intensive.

The promise of "work with dignity for every hand" meant generation of 2 crore jobs every year, since around 7 million youth leave farm sector and migrate in search of employment while about 13 million join workforce every year. Every year 16 million youngsters attain adulthood, while two-third of India's population is below the age of 35. Now with the publication of the India Employment report it is clear that millions of youths could never find job at all, many of them have become overage, and even 90 per cent of those who somehow managed to find job are informally employed, while 82 per cent of the workforce are in the informal sector. Self-employment remains the primary source of employment for 55.8 per cent in 2022, while casual and regular employment accounted for 22.7 and 21.5 per cent respectively. India Employment Report 2024 is the third in the series of publication by IHD (New Delhi) on labour and employment issue. The Report prepared in collaboration with ILO focuses on Youth Employment, Education, and Skills. It is based on the government data of National Sample Surveys (NSS) and Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) between 2000 and 2022, with a postscript for 2023.

Other sources of data included the Annual Survey of Industries, the National Account of Statistics, and the Reserve Bank of India-KLEMS database. It is precisely due to this reason Modi government could not refute the findings, rather the government's stand on unemployment found expression in Chief Economic Advisor of the Government of India V A Nageswaran's statement that Government can't really address unemployment problem. The statement is outrageous for several reasons, one of them is a statement made by PM Narendra Modi himself only a week earlier on March 20 in Startup Mahakumbh, New Delhi that India's "youth have opted to become job creators more than job seekers." PM Modi was obviously just downplaying the grim unem-

ployment scenario in the country, a quagmire that has been created under his rule in the last 10 years, since his policies focus on wealth creation and profit, not on employment. Only 20 big companies have 60 per cent of wealth and earning 70 per cent of entire national income.

Modi government did not bring the "National Employment Policy" recommended by Indian Labour Conference, the top tripartite body in India on labour and employment issues, way back in the 45th session held in May 2013. At that time unemployment rate was around 4.1 per cent. ILC's 46th session held in 2015, and thereafter, Modi government did not convene any other session. Even the four controversial labour codes were brought without consulting ILC and stakeholder Central Trade Unions.

Though PM Modi has been bluffing on providing employment, unemployment reached 45 years high to 6.1 per cent. Modi government has claimed just a few weeks ago that unemployment has declined to 3.1 per cent. However, the India Employment Report 2024 portrays a grim picture on job front especially for Indian Youth. The resentment was obvious when CEA Nageswaran said that government can't really solve unemployment problem.

The most startling confession has been made by the Chief Economic Adviser; former Union Finance Minister P Chidambaram said adding that "Government cannot solve the problem of unemployment". Shocking if that is the official stand of the BJP government, we must boldly tell the BJP "Vacate your seat". It is worth recalling that Acharya Vinoba Bhave had been advocating employment for all, and R K Patil said how it was possible! Vinoba's answer was that you are holding the rein of the horse and the rider is thrown off, it is your fault. If you can't provide employment for all, you must resign. However, PM Narendra Modi and BJP are seeking for their third term. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has said, "Our Youth is bearing the brunt of Modi Government's pathetic apathy, as ever-increasing unemployment had destroyed their future. ILO & IHD report conclusively says that the unemployment problem is grim in India. They are Conservative; we are sitting on a ticking bomb of joblessness!" He alleged that youth unemployment has tripled under the Modi government compared to 2012.

On employment trend and current scenario, the report says that labour force participation rate, the workforce participation rate and the unemployment rate showed long-term deterioration between 2000 and 2019. The gains on employment front halted and even reversed after 2019, and employment conditions remain poor.

Nearly two-thirds of the incremental employment after 2019 comprised self-employed workers, among whom unpaid (women) family workers predominate. The share of regular work, which steadily increased after 2000, started declining after 2018. The real wages of regular workers either remained stagnant or declined during 2012-22, though there was a modest upward trend of wages for casual labourers. Self-employed real earnings also declined after 2019. Overall wages have remained low. As much as 62 per cent of the unskilled casual agriculture workers and 70 per cent of such workers in the construction sector at the all-India level did not receive the prescribed daily minimum wages in 2022. Platform and gig work have been expanding, but it is, to a large extent, the extension of informal work, with hardly any social security provisions, as 90 per cent of the workforce which are informally employed.

During 2000-2012 employment grew by 1.6 per cent while gross value added grew at a much faster rate at 6.2 per cent. However, during 2012-19, employment grew at nearly negligible rate of 0.01 per cent while gross value added grew by 6.7 per cent. The paradox of employment is that it grew after 2019 due to COVID-19 pandemic because growth of agriculture employment after the great returning of migrant workers from cities, which actually was unemployment in disguise, as in the case of self-employment. Shift from non-agriculture employment to agriculture employment was only subsistence activities in agriculture due to the lack of opportunities outside.

Youth employment remains a challenge, since they formed 27 per cent of the population in 2021. Youth employment is, by and large, of poorer quality than employment for adults. Youth unemployment increased nearly threefold, from 5.7 per cent in 2000 to 17.5 per cent in 2019 but declined to 12.1 per cent in 2022. The youth unemployment rate has increased with the level of education, with the highest rates among those with a graduate degree or higher and higher among women than men. In 2022, the unemployment rate among youths was six times greater than among persons with a secondary or higher level of education (at 18.4 per cent) and nine times greater among graduates (at 29.1 per cent) than for persons who cannot read and write (at 3.4 per cent). Women not in employment, education or training amounted to a proportion nearly five times larger than among their male counterparts (48.4 per cent versus 9.8 per cent) and accounted for around 95 per cent of the total youth population not in employment, education or training in 2022. *(IPA Service)*

# Feeling 'crazy in love'? It might not be Love, but Limerence

By: Aakriti Sanghi

Remember Tara, from Tamasha (starring Deepika Padukone and Ranbir Kapoor in lead roles), fixated on the carefree and spontaneous Ved she meets in Corsica? She confesses, "It's been four years since we last met. But it still feels the same — I don't know what it is. I thought about love and all but then felt how stupid I am... Whenever I meet you it's just... (stops speaking)"

Or try recalling Geet from Jab We Met, who overlooked all the glaring red flags to paint a rosy picture of her relationship with Anshuman, unaware of its initial one-sidedness.

And then there's Joe Goldberg from You — the American psychological thriller TV series — where every woman he "loves" is just a figment of his imagination, his obsession consuming him even before truly knowing them.

Now, you might wonder, what connects these three fictional characters?

Well, if you look closely, you'll find that each of these characters yearns for something unattainable — a fixation on an idealised version of love that may not exist.

They pursue their love interests, fueled by passion yet tinged with a hint of delusion, leaving us to question the true nature of their affection.

**What Is Limerence? How does it differ from healthy romantic attraction?**

According to a US-based psychologist and published researcher Tanya Percy Vasunia, "Limerence is characterised as an intense state of infatuation or obsession, often described as ex-

treme and all-consuming."

"While both can be powerful, limerence involves extreme fixation, akin to wearing blinders, whereas healthy love empowers and allows for a more balanced perspective. The inability to see beyond the person and an obsessive focus on their perceived perfection define limerence." — Tanya Percy Vasunia.

Elaborating on this, Shahzeen Shivasani, a relationship expert and author of Love, Lust and Lemons, says that limerence can be best likened to experiencing love at first sight.

"Limerence is an intense emotional state that leaves you craving for the other person. The feelings are akin to those exciting emotions you wallow in when you meet someone for the first time. Essentially, it's a strong attraction where you end up falling for a perfected image of who they could be." — Shahzeen Shivasani.

According to Shivasani, people dealing with limerence may prioritise the object of their affection above everything else, even sometimes at the expense of their own well-being and other commitments.

"Such hyper-focus on one person can lead one to take impulsive actions to secure the object of their attraction," she adds.

**Understanding the three stages of Limerence**

While limerence may initially resemble falling in love, Vasunia explains that it follows a distinct trajectory with three stages: infatuation, crystallisation, and deterioration.

The initial stage of infatuation is marked by an overwhelming attraction towards another person.



Their unattainability adds allure, fueling an insatiable longing.

During this phase, the individual becomes consumed by thoughts of the object of their affection, finding them irresistibly intriguing.

As the infatuation intensifies, it transitions into the second stage:

**crystallisation.** Here, the person begins to idealise the object of their infatuation and places them on pedestal, perceiving them as flawless and capable of fulfilling all desires.

However, when fantasy eventually dashes against reality, it leads to the third stage:

**deterioration.** The individual is confronted with the stark contrast between their love interest's idealised image and the actual person they are. As expectations remain unmet, disappointment ensues, leading to a grieving process for the loss of the fantasy.

"It is thus worth noting that, unlike limerence, love encompasses a combination of behaviours, cognitions and emotions that permits recognition of imperfections and nuances in the beloved, fostering a holistic per-

spective rather than an idealised one-dimensional perception." — Tanya Percy Vasunia, psychologist.

She goes on to explain, "Limerence, at its core, is a rollercoaster of emotions that can leave individuals feeling dissonant about their feelings towards someone. This intensity can be so overpowering that it masks any doubts or concerns, both for themselves and those around them."

However, as time passes, the facade of limerence begins to fade, revealing the stark reality beneath.

**Why do some people experience Limerence?**

Addressing the significance of attachment styles in the onset of limerence, Vasunia explains that attachment theory helps understand how individuals form emotional bonds and relate to others based on childhood experiences.

It primarily sorts people into secure, avoidant, anxious, or disorganized types. For example, an anxious person due to their fear of abandonment may struggle to disengage, even when the relationship lacks reciprocity.

Additionally, there's a growing recognition of inner child work

as a significant aspect of understanding limerence.

Inner child work involves exploring one's early relationships, particularly with caregivers, and how they shape perceptions of safety, security, and intimacy.

"Difficulties in forming secure attachments during childhood can predispose individuals to seeking validation and security elsewhere, often sought in idealised romantic partners—a hallmark of limerence—where they idealise their partners as saviours who can alleviate their inner turmoil and provide hope and solace amid tumultuous times." — Tanya Percy Vasunia, psychologist.

Yet Vasunia emphasises, "Blaming parents for attachment difficulties oversimplifies complex dynamics. Instead, it's about acknowledging the interplay between early experiences, individual processing of those specific events, and personal coping mechanisms."

**Can Limerence manifest as a trauma response?**

Beyond attachment styles and the influence of early relationships, according to Vasunia, limerence, in some cases, can stem from trauma and function as a response to it.

Individuals predisposed to mental health concerns like OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD) or unhealthy attachments may be more vulnerable to experiencing limerence.

A 2015 study, Exploring the Lived-Experience of Limerence: A Journey toward Authenticity, conducted by researchers Lynn Willmott and Evie Bentley also linked limerence with conditions

such as anxiety, depression, and substance use.

However, Tanya cautions that trauma should be understood within its heavy context, encompassing emotionally jarring events with physical manifestations.

"In cases of profound trauma, where individuals struggle to move past the event, there is a tendency to romanticise or idealise the situation as a coping mechanism," she adds.

"Individuals may convince themselves that the traumatic experience was positive or that things will eventually be fine, even if the reality is far from perfect, contributing to the development of limerence." — Tanya Percy Vasunia.

Furthermore, limerence can also arise following tumultuous experiences in previous relationships.

For instance, if someone has endured a particularly damaging relationship, they might seek solace in a subsequent relationship, perceiving it as a perfect antidote to their prior trauma. However, this perception may be flawed, leading to a recurrence of limerence.

While limerence occurring as a response to trauma is possible, it's not universal, and individual predispositions play a significant role.

"Seeking therapy or mental health support is advisable for those experiencing patterns of limerence tied to trauma or challenging experiences," advises Tanya.

**Can limerence fade with time?**

While the intensity of limerence may diminish over time, its underlying patterns often persist,

leading individuals to repeat similar emotional cycles with new objects of affection.

To address limerence without therapy, Vasunia suggests starting with first-order changes that can help regulate brain chemistry and mitigate the intensity of limerent feelings.

- Get support from trusted individuals

- Stick to routines

- Journaling

- Find other healthy distractions

- Stay physically active

- Focus on your overall well-being

However, second-order changes involves delving into attachment styles, and object relations, and addressing underlying psychological predispositions, and might need professional intervention.

Additionally, relationship expert Shahzeen Shivasani emphasises the need for intentional effort to manage and overcome limerence. She underscores the importance of setting boundaries, stating that difficulty in maintaining healthy boundaries can lead to unhealthy codependency on one's partner.

She adds, "For those awaiting reciprocation of their affection, consider shifting your focus to what you can control. Idealising something you don't or can't have may only exacerbate negative feelings. Instead, try cultivating passions and focusing on your other interests in life." — Shahzeen Shivasani.

While cultural narratives often glorify all-consuming love, according to experts, healthy love should be empowering, not debilitating like limerence. (Courtesy: The Quint)

## What is the difference between bipolar 1 and bipolar 2? Role of Robotic surgery in the management of hepatobiliary and pancreatic cancers

By: Jayne Leonard

People with bipolar I experience manic episodes, while people with bipolar II experience less severe hypomanic episodes. The two condition types have certain symptoms in common as well as similar symptom frequency.

People with bipolar disorder experience uncommon highs or lows in mood. During a "high," also known as a manic episode, people feel intense energy or excitement.

During a "low" or depressive episode, they experience symptoms of depression, such as feeling down, excessive guilt, frequent tearfulness, and lack of interest in enjoyable activities.

**There are four distinct types of bipolar disorder:**

- bipolar I disorder
- bipolar II disorder
- cyclothymic disorder, or cyclothymia
- other specified and unspecified bipolar disorder

A doctor can diagnose a person with one of the above types based on the duration and intensity of their symptoms.

Bipolar I and bipolar II are the most widespread forms of bipolar disorder. They are also typically the more severe bipolar disorders, and they share many similar symptoms. However, they are distinct from one another.

In this article, learn about the similarities and differences between bipolar I and bipolar II. We also consider their causes, symptoms, and available treatment options.

**Bipolar I vs. bipolar II**

Bipolar I and II have similar symptoms and symptom patterns. However, people who have bipolar II typically experience less severe manic episodes than people with bipolar I.

Doctors refer to these less severe periods of mania as hypomania. These episodes must last for at least 4 days but no more than 7 days.

To receive a diagnosis of bipolar II, a person must experience cycles of hypomanic and depressive episodes without ever having a full manic episode.

By contrast, a doctor can diagnose bipolar I based on the presence of a manic episode alone. People with bipolar I disorder have at least one manic episode that persists for a week or longer or severe mania that requires hospitalization.

Those with bipolar II disorder do not generally require hospitalization during hypomanic periods. Doctors sometimes misdiagnose bipolar II as depression because the hypomanic symptoms can be very subtle. In addition, they may also misdiagnose periods of sudden joy as hypomania.

In between these episodes of

mania and depression, people who have either of these types of bipolar may experience periods of stable mood. A person may also alternate between symptoms of depression and mania at the same time. This is known as bipolar with mixed features.

**Symptoms of bipolar I and bipolar II**

The main symptoms of bipolar I and bipolar II are mania, hypomania, and depression.

**Mania**

During a manic episode, people can experience:

- intense enthusiasm, happiness, or excitement
- anger, restlessness, or irritability
- increased energy
- less need for sleep and difficulty sleeping
- racing thoughts
- difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- reckless behaviour such as excessive substance use
- excessive pleasure-seeking behaviours

**Hypomania**

In a state of hypomania, people experience symptoms similar to those in mania, except less severe.

Hypomania can still interfere with a person's quality of life, and family and friends may notice that the person is experiencing mood changes.

**Depression**

People with bipolar disorder may experience depressive symptoms that are the same as those experienced in cases of clinical depression. These include:

- low or depressed mood
- hopelessness
- low energy and fatigue
- changes in sleeping patterns
- changes in appetite
- poor concentration
- loss of interest in formerly enjoyable activities
- low self-esteem
- psychomotor agitation
- thoughts of suicide or death
- suicidal behaviour

**Prevalence of bipolar disorder**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), approximately 2.8% of adults in the United States experience bipolar disorder in a given year. An estimated 4.4% of people experience bipolar disorder at some point in their lives.

The condition affects men and women almost equally for bipolar I, but rates in bipolar II appear to be slightly higher for women. Onset occurs at an average age of 25. However, it can happen to people of any age.

**Diagnosis of bipolar disorder**

To receive a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, individuals will need to see a psychiatrist, psychologist, or supervised counsellor. They will review the person's medical history, symptoms, and may seek to exclude other potential causes.

This psychiatric assessment will focus on a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. They may also assess how other people respond to the individual in social situations.

The psychiatrist or psychologist may also ask a person to keep a mood diary to track their moods, sleep patterns, and other symptoms. This diary can help with a diagnosis.

The psychiatrist or psychologist will compare the person's symptoms to the criteria for bipolar disorders outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).

The psychiatrist or psychologist may carry out blood tests, a physical examination, or brain imaging tests to rule out other causes of the symptoms.

**Treatment for bipolar I and bipolar II**

Treatment for bipolar I disorder and bipolar II disorder typically consists of medications, psychotherapy, and lifestyle changes.

As bipolar disorder is a long-term condition, treatment will be long lasting. Some people may have a treatment team that includes a psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist, and psychiatric nurse practitioner.

**Medications**

Doctors usually prescribe mood stabilizers, such as lithium, for bipolar disorder. They may also prescribe antipsychotic drugs for manic episodes and antidepressants for depression.

As antidepressant medications may trigger manic episodes in some people, doctors might recommend a combination of antidepressant and antipsychotic drugs to reduce depression while stabilizing mood.

For people with anxiety or sleep problems, anti-anxiety medications, such as benzodiazepines, may help. However, this strategy may come with a risk of dependence on benzodiazepines.

People can begin taking medications right away, even if they are not currently experiencing a manic or depressive episode.

It is vital to continue taking medications even during periods

of stable mood to avoid relapse.

**Psychotherapy**

Psychotherapy can play a role in bipolar I and II treatment plans. Therapy may occur in person or remotely.

**Several different types of therapy can help, including:**

**Interpersonal and social rhythm therapy (IPSRT):** This focuses on establishing a structured routine to help people cope with symptoms.

**Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):** CBT helps people challenge negative thoughts and replace them with more realistic or objective ones. It can also increase a person's awareness of their thoughts and emotional responses. This may help them track changes in mood, identify triggers, and recognize patterns of thoughts and emotions that might signal the onset of a manic or depressive episode, thus allowing them to prepare a plan to manage these symptoms.

**Family-focused therapies:** These therapies enhance communication with family members and to foster family support.

However, psychotherapy is not a frontline treatment for bipolar disorders, and there are many instances in which individuals can remain stable without it.

**Lifestyle changes**

Many people can make lifestyle changes to manage their symptoms and help stabilize their moods. Examples of helpful changes include:

- avoiding alcohol and drugs
- exercising regularly
- eating a balanced diet
- establishing a sleep routine
- attending a support group for people with mood-related disorders
- practicing mindfulness and meditation
- reducing stress where possible
- learning more about their condition

Some people also find it helpful to keep a daily mood diary. Keeping a journal can allow people to see patterns in their thoughts, moods, and behaviours. A mood diary also helps identify triggers for manic or depressive episodes. This may help a person take appropriate action before a slight mood change worsens.

**Outlook**

Although bipolar I and II are long-term conditions, most people can manage their symptoms with medications, therapy, and lifestyle changes.

Maintaining regular contact with mental health professionals and seeking support from friends and family can make it easier to cope with challenging symptoms. Anyone who thinks they may be experiencing symptoms of bipolar I or II should speak with a doctor for a proper diagnosis. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

By: Dr Surender Kumar Dabas

Hepatobiliary and pancreatic cancers are cancers involving the liver, gallbladder, bile ducts and its branches and pancreas. Robotic surgery has emerged as a transformative technology in the field of hepatobiliary and pancreatic cancers, revolutionizing the way these complex surgeries are performed. The integration of robotics into surgical procedures has significantly impacted patient outcomes, offering advantages such as enhanced precision, improved visualization, and reduced invasiveness.

In hepatobiliary and pancreatic surgeries, the intricate anatomy and proximity to vital structures pose challenges to traditional open surgeries.

Over the years of surgical evolution, open surgery has largely been replaced by minimally invasive surgery, laparoscopic to begin with and now recent transition to robotic surgery. This is more so true in the management of complex hepatobiliary and pancreatic tumours.

The introduction of robotics at the end of last millennium has helped overcome the shortcomings of laparoscopic surgery due to its inherent 3D HD vision, 7 degrees of freedom, more precision and control, meticulous dissection, better ergonomics, improved dexterity,

endowrist movements, 10X magnification and greater instrument stability. This allows for more precise dissection and reconstruction, minimizing damage to surrounding tissues and organs.

One key benefit of robotic surgery in hepatobiliary and pancreatic cancers is its minimally invasive nature. Traditional open surgeries often involve large incisions, leading to prolonged recovery times and increased postoperative pain. Robotic-assisted procedures utilize smaller keyhole incisions, resulting in reduced blood loss, shorter hospital stays, and quicker recovery for patients.

The robotic platform's ability to facilitate complex manoeuvres in confined spaces is particularly advantageous in hepatobiliary and pancreatic surgeries.

Surgeons can navigate intricate anatomical structures with greater ease, ensuring meticulous removal of tumours and precise reconstruction of vessels and ducts. This level of precision contributes to improved oncological outcomes and a lower risk of complications.

Furthermore, the enhanced visualization offered by robotic systems is invaluable in identifying and sparing critical structures, such as major blood vessels and the bile ducts during surgery. This can be crucial in preserving organ function and minimizing postoperative complications.

The role of robotic surgery ex-

tends beyond the operating room. Telesurgery, enabled by advanced robotic systems, allows experienced surgeons to remotely guide less-experienced colleagues through complex procedures. This facilitates knowledge transfer and expands access to specialized surgical expertise, especially in regions with limited resources.

Despite the numerous advantages, challenges remain in the widespread adoption of robotic surgery for hepatobiliary and pancreatic cancers. The initial cost of acquiring robotic systems and the need for specialized training are factors that healthcare institutions must consider.

Additionally, ongoing research is essential to continually assess the long-term outcomes and cost-effectiveness of robotic-assisted procedures in comparison to traditional approaches.

In conclusion, robotic surgery has significantly influenced the management of hepatobiliary and pancreatic cancers, offering improved precision, reduced invasiveness, and enhanced patient outcomes. As technology continues to advance and experience with robotic systems grows, the role of robotics in these complex surgeries is likely to expand, further shaping the future of surgical oncology. (The author is the Vice Chairman - Oncology, BLK-Max Super Specialty Hospital, New Delhi)

## Unhealthy levels of arsenic in water could exacerbate health concerns when used to boil rice

By: Seema Prasad

A new study underlines the risk of using water contaminated with arsenic to cook rice, a staple food serving more than half the world's population. It highlighted that 32 per cent of the global population lives in low- and middle-income countries that do not adhere to the World Health Organization's recommended limits.

The study, conducted by the University of Sheffield's Institute for Sustainable Food and the Department of Geography (United Kingdom), pointed out that some countries still follow the outdated WHO standard of 50 parts per billion as a safe threshold for arsenic in drinking water. Professor of soil and environmental science and lead author Manoj Menon mentioned in a statement that there is often very little or no regulation to current WHO standards.

Menon added that India is among 40 other countries that adopted 10 parts per billion as its standard. However, 19 other countries have no evidence of any regulations.

Rice contains more arsenic in comparison to other cereals. The world's most widely consumed grain contains inorganic arsenic (iAs) — a Group I carcinogen according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a part of WHO. This poses a significant

health concern when rice is cooked with water that has unhealthy amounts of arsenic. Prolonged exposure can lead to even diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

The researchers showed how different cooking techniques affected the absorption of arsenic from the water.

When the rice was cooked with excess water with a rice-to-water ratio of 1:6-12 or with percolating cooking water, it was effective at removing arsenic to a significant extent in both white and brown rice.

In the other method, referred to as the parboiled and a b s o r b e d method, unwashed rice was added to deionised water and it was left to simmer for 5 minutes, after which the water was filtered out to remove arsenic on the surface. They found that white and parboiled rice absorbs more arsenic than brown rice, demonstrating that the population in Western countries and Asia is more at risk of suffering health consequences.

"This significant result suggests that brown rice could be a safer choice in regions with limited availability of iAs-safe water for cook-

ing, reducing risk to vulnerable populations," the researchers said in their paper.

"We hypothesise that the bran layer in brown rice may act as a physical or chemical barrier, preventing the accumulation of iAs in the starchy interior part of the cooked rice, whereas in white or parboiled rice (both without the bran), the rice grain is likely to absorb and accumulate more iAs from the cooking water," the researchers added. Iron and Manganese are abundant in bran, and these elements may bind with iAs, they said.

The researchers recommended that countries with high per capita rice consumers — like

Bangladesh — should have policies in place that ensure the supply of water does not have much arsenic, particularly for domestic consumption.

Where possible, selecting varieties of rice that don't absorb as much arsenic and using cooking methods that remove as much arsenic from the water and grains as possible is required in countries with high levels of arsenic in water, Menon recommended. (Courtesy: Dawn To Earth)



# 2 dead as Russia launches attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure

*Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant, one of the largest in the northeastern Kharkiv region, was completely destroyed following Russian shelling last week*

KYIV, March 31: A Russian cruise missile strike on infrastructure in Ukraine's western Lviv region killed one man, while another man died in an attack in the northeast officials said Sunday.

The attack in Lviv destroyed a building and sparked a fire, Gov. Maksym Kozitskyi wrote on social media app Telegram. He said that rescue operations were being conducted.

In the Kharkiv region, Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said that an air attack killed a 19-year-old man Sunday after a projectile hit a gas station.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands in Ukraine's Odesa region were left without power Sunday after debris from a downed Russian drone caused a blaze at an energy facility, Gov. Oleh Kiper said. Some 170,000 homes suffered power outages as a result of the attack, said Ukraine's largest private electricity operator, DTEK.

The Ukrainian air force said that



it shot down nine of the 11 Shahed-type drones launched by Russia overnight, as well as nine out of 14 cruise missiles.

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

Ukrainian energy company Centrenerg announced Saturday that the Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant,

one of the largest in the northeastern Kharkiv region, was completely destroyed following Russian shelling last week. Power outage schedules were still in place for around 120,000 people in the region, where 700,000 had lost electricity after the plant was hit on March 22.

In a message Sunday to mark the date when some of Ukraine's

Christians celebrate Easter, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged the country to persevere.

"There is not a day or night right now when Russian terror does not try to shatter our lives. Last night, we once again saw rockets and Shaheds launched against our people," he said.

"We defend ourselves, we persevere; our spirit does not give up and knows that death can be averted. Life can win," Zelenskyy said. Ukraine's Catholic, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter Sunday according to the Gregorian calendar. The country's religious majority, Orthodox Christians, follow the Julian calendar, which in 2024 places Easter on May 5.

Many of Ukraine's Orthodox Christians began marking Christmas in line with the Gregorian calendar on Dec. 25 in 2023, in a move adopted by some of the country's churches to distance themselves from Russia. However,

the dates for Easter and other religious holidays have so far remained unchanged.

In Russia, meanwhile, 10 Czech-made Vampire rockets landed in the border region of Belgorod on Sunday, the Ministry of Defense said. One woman was injured when a fire broke out following the attack, said regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed orders heralding the start of the country's annual spring recruitment season, officially drafting 150,000 conscripts.

Russia's parliament raised the upper age limit for conscripts from 27 to 30 in July 2023 in a move that appeared to be part of efforts to expand the country's military during the fighting in Ukraine. All Russian men are obliged to complete the yearlong national service, although many avoid the draft by using deferments granted to students, people with chronic illnesses and others. (AP)

## Israeli airstrike on hospital tent camp in Gaza kills 2 Palestinians



DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), March 31: An Israeli airstrike hit a tent camp inside a hospital in central Gaza on Sunday, killing two Palestinians and wounding another 15.

The strike hit one of several tents in the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, where thousands of people have been sheltering for months after fleeing their homes elsewhere in the war-ravaged territory.

Journalists were working from tents nearby, and an Associated Press reporter witnessed the strike and aftermath. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

Tens of thousands of people have sought shelter in Gaza's hospitals since the start of the war, viewing them as relatively safe from airstrikes. Israel accuses Hamas and other militants of operating in and around medical facilities, and troops have raided a number of hospitals.

Israeli troops have been raiding Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest, for nearly two weeks and say they have fought heavy battles with militants in and around the medical compound. The military says it has killed scores of fighters, including senior Hamas operatives. Palestinian families who fled from the area, including many who had already been displaced earlier in the war, say they were ordered to march south by Israeli soldiers after days of heavy fighting.

Only a third of Gaza's hospitals are even partially functioning, even as Israeli strikes kill and wound scores of people every day. Doctors say they are often forced to treat patients on hospital floors because all the beds are taken, and to operate without anesthetic and other crucial medical supplies.

An international team of doctors who had recently visited Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, where Sunday's strike occurred, said they were horrified by the war's gruesome impact on Palestinian children. The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed across the border on Oct. 7 and rampaged across southern Israel, killing some 1,200

people and dragging around 250 hostages back to Gaza. Over 100 captives were freed last year in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Israel responded to the assault with one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history, one that has driven around 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million from their homes.

The United Nations and partners have warned that famine could occur in devastated, largely isolated northern Gaza as early as this month. Humanitarian officials say deliveries by sea and air are not enough and that Israel must allow far more aid by road. The top U.N. court has ordered Israel to open more land crossings and take other measures to address the crisis.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Sunday that at least 32,782 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, including 77 whose bodies were brought to hospitals over the last 24 hours. The ministry's count does not differentiate between civilians and fighters, but it has said that women and children make up around two-thirds of those killed.

Israel says over one-third of the dead are militants, though it has not provided evidence to support that, and it blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the group operates in residential areas.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have been trying to broker another cease-fire and hostage release since January. Hamas is demanding that any such agreement lead to an end to the war and the withdrawal of all Israeli forces.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected those demands and says Israel will keep fighting until it has destroyed Hamas' military and governing capabilities. But he is under growing pressure to reach a deal from families of the hostages, some of whom have joined mass demonstrations calling for early elections to replace him.

The cease-fire talks resumed in Cairo on Sunday, with little expectation of any breakthrough. (AP)

## 'France to deliver hundreds of armoured vehicles to Ukraine'

PARIS, March 31: French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu said France is to deliver "hundreds" of armoured vehicles by the beginning of next year to Ukraine as part of a new package of military aid for the country that just entered its third year since the Russian invasion.

In an interview with the French newspaper La Tribune's Sunday edition, Lecornu said that "to hold such an extensive front line, the Ukrainian army needs, for example, our armoured personnel carriers. It's absolutely key for troop mobility".

The French military is currently replacing its old VAB armoured personnel carriers that started being used in 1979 by a new generation of armoured vehicles. "This old equipment, still operational, is going directly to Ukraine in large quantities. We're talking about hundreds (of vehicles) in 2024 and early 2025," Lecornu said.

Lecornu also said France will provide Ukraine with more anti-aircraft missiles. The move comes as France's government is pushing its military industry to boost its production to meet Kyiv's urgent needs for ammunition.

Lecornu on Tuesday said France will soon be able to deliver 78 Caesar howitzers to Ukraine and will increase its supply of shells. (AP)

## Mega pre-election survey indicates even UK PM Rishi Sunak's seat at risk

LONDON, March 31: A new so-called mega poll released by a civil society campaign organisation indicates that the governing Conservative Party is in for a major drubbing in the general election expected later this year, with even British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's seat in North Yorkshire hanging in the balance.

The 15,029-person MRP poll conducted by Survation on behalf of Best for Britain puts the Opposition Labour Party on 45 per cent of the vote share with a 19-point lead over the Conservatives, up three points from the group's previous poll at the end of last year. "The Sunday Times' analysis of the major seat-by-seat survey claims Tory prospects have hit a record low, which means they are on track for their worst election result, winning fewer than 100 seats. Labour could win 468, giving Opposition leader Sir Keir Starmer's party a whopping 286-seat majority."

"Our MRP forecast shows that, if the election were held tomorrow, Sunak's Conservatives would lose 250 MPs across the country and the Labour Party would win with 468 seats. This would be the worst ever result for the Conservatives at a General Election," claims the Best for Britain analysis.

"The extent of the damage to the



Conservative Party doesn't stop there either. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's seat of Richmond and Northallerton becomes a hyper-marginal, with the Labour Party just 2.4 per cent behind him. The same is true in Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's new seat of Godalming and Ash in which the Liberal Democrats trail by just 1 per cent," it adds.

The analysis claims that of the estimated 28 sitting Cabinet members expected to contest the polls, only 13 of them would be re-elected should they decide to stand again. While undecided voters were not accounted for in the survey, they represented about 15 per cent of

those asked and the Tories will be pinning their hopes on winning them over when the country finally goes to the polls.

Lord David Frost, the former Brexit secretary and a vocal critic of Sunak, told "The Sunday Times" that these latest survey figures showed the "desperate situation" the Conservative Party was facing. "The polling is getting worse over time, not better," he said.

Sunak's aides fear he could face a leadership challenge after the local elections if, as predicted, the Tories face humiliating defeats in the May 2 local council and mayoral polls. It will revive talk of re-

bellion in his party ranks, which have never fully quietened down with Tory MPs fearful of losing their seats when the general election comes.

"If Sunak tried to call an election, I think there would be a real risk of an unedifying situation when a serious attempt would have been made to remove the PM before the final dissolution of Parliament," one Tory MP told the newspaper.

"There were certainly several MPs who said they would have immediately put letters in to force a confidence vote," the MP said.

A total of 53 MPs would need to sign letters of no-confidence for the party's powerful backbench 1922 Committee to force such a vote of no-confidence in Sunak. Rebels claim they are in the mid-20s now, with at least another 10 expected to join the ranks in the coming weeks.

The repeal of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act in 2022 restored the ability of British prime ministers to set election dates. However, by law a general election has to take place at least every five years, making January 2025 the outermost deadline for Sunak to go to the ballot box. He has repeatedly indicated that he intends to call a general election in the second half of 2024, with October-November being touted as the possible timeline. (PTI)

## Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif bans red carpets at official events

ISLAMABAD, March 31: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has banned the use of red carpets at government events, reserving them exclusively for diplomatic receptions, as part of austerity measures to cut down unnecessary expenditures in the cash-strapped nation.

Sharif expressed annoyance over the use of red carpets during the visits of federal ministers and senior authorities at government functions.

According to the Cabinet Division, a ban has been imposed on the use of red carpet on the prime minister's directives. According to a notification issued by the Cabinet division, the prime minister has instructed that the red carpet will not be used for federal ministers and government figures at official events in the future.

However, it could be used as a protocol only for foreign diplomats, The Express Tribune newspaper reported. The decision to ban red carpets is more than just a symbolic gesture. It

represents a tangible effort to curb unnecessary expenditures and redirect resources to more critical areas of governance.

By eliminating the use of red carpets, the government aims to save funds and promote a more responsible and prudent approach to public finances. Last week, Prime Minister Sharif and members of the Cabinet decided to voluntarily forego their salaries and perks as part of the government's efforts to promote austerity.

Last month, the prime minister stated that austerity measures were the government's top priority.

Earlier, President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari decided against taking salary and perks, owing to economic challenges being faced by the country. Sharif earlier this month took oath as the prime minister for a second time since 2022 amidst staggering economic and security challenges. (PTI)

## Japan confirms experts met in China to ease concerns over discharge of treated radioactive water

TOKYO, March 31: Japan said Sunday its experts have held talks with their Chinese counterparts to try to assuage Beijing's concerns over the discharge of treated radioactive wastewater from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea.

The discharges have been opposed by fishing groups and neighbouring countries especially China, which banned all imports of Japanese seafood. China's move has largely affected Japanese scallop growers and exporters to China.

During the talks held Saturday in the northeastern Chinese city of Dalian, Japanese officials provided "science-based" explanation of how the discharges have been safely carried out as planned, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

A 2011 earthquake and tsunami damaged the Fukushima plant's



power supply and reactor cooling functions, triggering meltdowns of three reactors and causing large amounts of radioactive wastewater to accumulate. After more than a decade of storage in tanks taking up much space on the complex, the plant began discharging the water after treating it at least once and diluting it with seawater on August 24, starting a process that's expected to take decades.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Chinese President Xi

Jinping at their summit meeting in November agreed to hold scientific talks by experts, and the countries have since held a number of informal meetings. Sunday's statement from the Japanese Foreign Ministry was its first public acknowledgement of the talks.

The experts exchanged views on "technical matters" involving the discharges, the ministry official said on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue. While stressing the importance of transparency, the official declined to give any other details, including what the Chinese side said and whether their differences have been narrowed.

The meeting comes just after the International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Mariano Guterres's visit to the plant in mid-March confirming that the ongoing discharges have been safely carried out as planned. (AP)

## Some Chinese workers planning to leave Pakistan over security reasons: Analyst

ISLAMABAD, March 31: The recent deadly attack on Chinese workers in Pakistan has shaken their confidence and some of them are planning to leave the country over security reasons, according to a security analyst.

Muhammad Amir Rana in an article published in Dawn newspaper on Sunday wrote that the terrorist attack on the Chinese engineers' vehicle on Tuesday, which killed five Chinese, is having consequences and Chinese companies have suspended work on at least three critical hydropower projects: the Dasu dam, the Diamer-Basha dam, and the Tarbela 5th Extension.

"The attack has caused significant alarm. Apart from disrupting these vital infrastructure projects, it has shaken the confidence of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan. Reports indicate some are considering leaving the country due to safety concerns," he wrote.

Thousands of Chinese personnel are working in Pakistan on several projects being carried out under the aegis of the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Rana said that the Pakistani government has repeatedly pledged to bring the perpetrators to justice. However, the recent incident has eroded trust and Chinese social media reflects growing anxiety, with calls for stricter security measures to protect Chinese lives.

Whenever a major terrorist incident occurs in the country, the media, security experts, and even state institutions start to make sweeping generalisations and the first and most well-known excuse cited is foreign involvement in the attacks, especially those targeting Chinese nationals or CPEC-related projects. Three names of terrorist groups spring to mind: Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Balochistan Liberation Army, and the Islamic State-Khorasan and the same is the case for the recent Shingla attack as the names of all three groups popped up immediately after the attack.

The TTP has been projected as the prime suspect, as one of its commanders was declared the mastermind behind a similar attack on the Chinese in Kohistan in 2021, and the names of a few TTP commanders who may have orchestrated the attack are circulating in the media.

Rana said Pakistan's militant landscape may not be too complex but is diverse, where ideologies, sociopolitical factors, and group dynamics all work within local contexts. In any counterterrorism inquiry, local context and dynamics are more important than broader ideological and political motivations. He said quickly jumping to conclusions distracts investigation and impacts the state's ability to tackle the security situation comprehensively.

Rana opined that the state's history of compromise with militant groups has emboldened them.

Shingla, upper and lower Kohistan, and Battagram districts of the Hazara region in KP and the adjoining Diamer district in Gilgit-Baltistan share religious, social, tribal, ethnic, and cultural codes. The region has been frequently in the news due to 'honour' killings, burning of girls' schools, and the killing of Shia travellers. Recently, it has gained notoriety for attacks on Chinese workers involved in development projects in the area.

The locals support religious organisations, giving them financial and human resources, and weapons. Before receiving large compensation sums for the Dasu and Basha dams, the region thrived on timber smuggling. Extremist tendencies in the region are stronger than those in the neighbouring areas.

Security institutions, bureaucracy, and the area's political leadership have tried to run the administration through local jirgas and by involving religious scholars, which can result in leniency towards criminals, with many extremist elements taking the law into their own hands. (PTI)

## Pope presides over a blustery Easter Sunday Mass

ROME, March 31: Rallying from a winter-long bout of respiratory problems, Pope Francis led some 30,000 people in Easter celebrations Sunday, making a strong appeal for a cease-fire in Gaza and a prisoner swap between Russia and Ukraine.

Francis presided over Easter Sunday Mass in a flower-decked St. Peter's Square and then delivered a heartfelt prayer for peace in his annual roundup of global crises delivered from the loggia overlooking the piazza. In between, he made several loops around the piazza in his popemobile, greeting well-wishers.

"Peace is never made with weapons, but with outstretched hands and open hearts," Francis said, to applause from the wind-swept crowd below.

Francis appeared in good form, despite having celebrated the 2½-hour nighttime Easter Vigil just hours before. The pontiff, who had part of one lung removed as a



young man, has been battling respiratory problems all winter.

The Vatican said some 30,000 people attended the Mass, with more packing the Via della Conciliazione boulevard leading to the piazza. At the start of the service, a gust of wind knocked over a

large religious icon on the altar just a few feet from the pope; ushers quickly righted it.

Easter Mass is one of the most important dates on the liturgical calendar, celebrating what the faithful believe was Jesus' resurrection after his crucifixion. The

Mass precedes the pope's "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world) blessing, in which the pope traditionally offers a laundry list of the threats afflicting humanity.

This year, Francis said his thoughts went particularly to people in Ukraine and Gaza and all those facing war, particularly the children who he said had "forgotten how to smile."

"In calling for respect for the principles of international law, I express my hope for a general exchange of all prisoners between Russia and Ukraine: all for the sake of all!" he said.

He called for the "prompt" release of prisoners taken from Israel on October 7, an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and for humanitarian access to reach Palestinians.

"Let us not allow the current hostilities to continue to have grave repercussions on the civil population, by now at the limit of its endurance, and above all on the children," he said in a speech that

also touched on the plight of Haitians, the Rohingya and victims of human trafficking.

For the past few weeks, Francis has generally avoided delivering long speeches to avoid the strain on his breathing. He ditched his Palm Sunday homily last week and decided at the last minute to stay home from the Good Friday procession at the Colosseum.

The Vatican said in a brief explanation that the decision was made to "conserve his health."

The decision clearly paid off, as Francis was able to recite the prayers of the lengthy Saturday night Easter Vigil service, including administering the sacraments of baptism and First Communion to eight new Catholics, and preside over Easter Sunday Mass and deliver his speech.

After a busy Holy Week, Francis should have some time to recover as there are no major foreign trips scheduled for several months. (AP)

# 14 Independent candidates in the fray, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Pawan Kumar Sain said 133 candidates in fray for 50 assembly constituencies in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, March 31: A total of 133 candidates are in the fray for the 50 assembly constituencies in Arunachal Pradesh, which will go to the polls on April 19, officials said on Sunday.

The ruling BJP has already won 10 seats of the 60-member assembly uncontested. Among those won are Chief Minister Pema Khandu, and two first-time candidates -- Ratu Tech from Sagalee and Hage Appa of the Ziro-Hapoli seat.

The BJP has fielded candidates in all the 50 seats that are going to the polls, while the opposition Congress is fighting in only 19 seats.

The Meghalaya-based NPP has fielded candidates in 20 seats, the NCP is fighting 14 seats, the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) is contesting 11 seats, the Arunachal Democratic Party has fielded candidates in four seats, while the Lok Janashakti Party (LJP) is fighting one seat.

Also, there are 14 Independent candidates in the fray, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Pawan Kumar Sain said.

A total of 80 nominees are first-time candidates. The highest num-



ber of first-time candidates has been fielded by the Congress. Of its 19 candidates, 17 are new.

BJP has fielded 14 new candidates, while the NPP has nominated 16 first-time nominees.

Among the candidates, there are eight women -- the highest in any assembly election in the state, though it's dismally low compared to other parts of the country. The BJP has fielded four women, while

the Congress has fielded three, and there is also a female Independent candidate.

The assembly polls in the state will be held along with the Lok Sabha elections.

A total of 14 candidates are fighting for the two Lok Sabha seats in the state. Eight candidates are in the fray for the Arunachal West constituency and six candidates for the Arunachal East seat.

A total of 8,86,848 people are eligible to vote in the simultaneous elections.

There are a total of 2,226 polling booths in the state, and of them, 228 could be reached only on foot.

A total of 480 polling booths are in the shadow areas, where mobile or connectivity is an issue, while 588 booths have been identified as critical and 443 as vulnerable, the CEO said.

"Polling station No 2-Pumao Primary School in Longding assembly constituency has the highest number of voters at 1,462, while the Malogam temporary structure in Malogam village in Hayuliang constituency has only one voter," he said.

Polling station No 18-Lugthang in Mukto constituency in Tawang district is the highest polling station in the state, located at an altitude of 13,383 ft, he added.

Counting of votes for assembly polls would be held on June 2, while the votes polled for the Lok Sabha constituencies would be counted on June 4 along with the rest of the country. (PTI)

## RPF recovers Ganja worth over ₹ 9 lakhs at Agartala station

GUWAHATI, March 31: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of NF Railway, during their drive against anti-social trade and activities within railway territory recovered ganja weighing above 91 kgs that worth around ₹ 9.19 lakhs approximately. The contraband item was recovered during regular checks and drives conducted on March 27 and 28 in different trains and at stations over NF Railway by RPF. On March 28, a joint team of RPF and GRP/Agartala with IT Cell/Lumding during regular checks and drive at Agartala railway station apprehended 2 persons. The team seized 39 kgs of ganja that worth ₹ 3.90 lakhs (approx) which were kept concealed in four bags. In another incident on the same day, RPF team of Rangia recovered 15.5 kgs unclaimed ganja that worth ₹ 1.55 lakhs (approx) from train No 12520 DN (Agartala - LokmanyaTilak) Express. Later, the apprehended person along with the recovered ganja was handed over to respective GRP post of Agartala & Rangia for further course of action.

Similarly, on March 27, RPF team of Agartala and Dharmanagar while conducting regular checks at their respective railway stations, recovered around 37.4 kgs of ganja. One person was apprehended in connection to the incident at Agartala railway station while the recovery at Dharmanagar station went unclaimed. The recovered contraband goods were to worth above ₹ 3.74 lakhs (approx). Later both the recoveries and the apprehended person were handed over to their respective GRP post of Agartala & Dharmanagar for further course of action.

Besides, curbing the trade of illicit drugs and items RPF of NFR also conducted various drives against other criminal activities within railway premises. In an incident at Dimapur railway station on March 26, RPF team of Dimapur post apprehended one person involved in activities related to sedating rail passengers. The team recovered 20 nos. of suspected sedative drugs along with biscuit packets, cash, cold drink bottle and a phone from the possession of the apprehended person.

Earlier, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is celebrated on the first Sunday after Good Friday, which marks the crucifixion. (PTI)

## Porters act as vital links between polling parties, electors in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, March 31: A remnant of the British Raj, the Auxiliary Labour Corps (ALCs), also known as porters, still act as vital links between election personnel and people in Arunachal Pradesh as they are tasked with carrying polling materials, ration items and transporting EVMs to remote areas of the mountainous state, officials said.

Around 3,000 ALCs are being deployed this time to assist polling parties to reach 228 booths in the state, which are almost inaccessible they said.

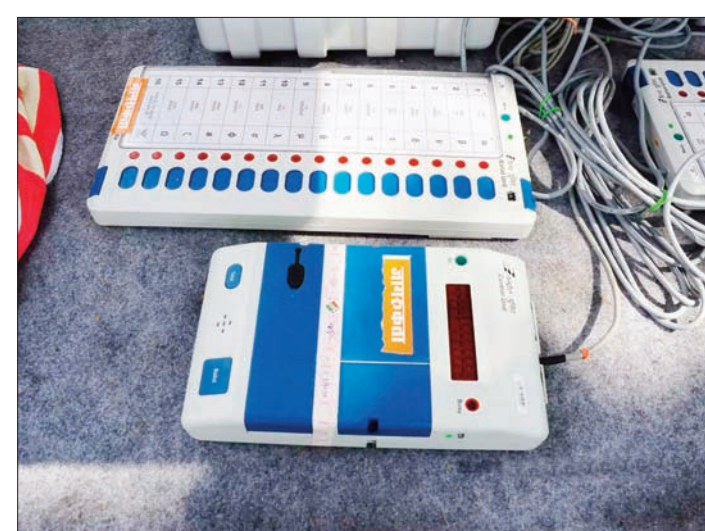
"We are dependent on them to transport election materials to inaccessible polling stations where foot march is required," chief electoral officer Pawan Kumar Sain said.

Trekking the rugged and almost inaccessible terrains of the state, ALCs serve as a bridge between the government and the people and ensure that the polling process goes smoothly, joint chief electoral officer Liken Koyu said.

The ALCs were first appointed by the British to carry materials. After Arunachal Pradesh attained statehood in 1987, the regular appointment of ALCs was stopped. They are now recruited temporarily.

Services of ALCs are required at the time of transporting public distribution system (PDS) materials and opening new administrative centres during polls, Koyu said.

In 2019, the election office



hired 2,100 ALCs, while 1,400 were deployed during the 2014 elections, the officials said.

"Around 3,000 ALCs will be inducted this time to assist polling personnel in 228 polling stations in the state," he said.

Besides, casual labourers would also be deployed to assist election personnel.

The ALCs are being deployed by the respective district election officers (DEO), depending on the requirement, Koyu added.

Declaration of results gets delayed in several seats as EVMS are transported by ALCs to the counting centres, which generally involves more than three days of arduous trekking.

Arunachal Pradesh has 228 remote and almost-inaccessible

polling stations, where election officials have to undertake extensive journeys on foot.

Of these, 61 will require a two-day walk, while seven will need three-day trekking.

In response to the logistical challenges, the state election machinery has planned to deploy a minimum of four ALCs for each of the 228 polling stations, Koyu said, acknowledging the pivotal role the unsung heroes play in facilitating the democratic process in the state.

Arunachal Pradesh will go to simultaneous polls for two Lok Sabha and 60 assembly constituencies on April 19.

Counting of votes for assembly polls would be held on June 2 and for Lok Sabha on June 4. (PTI)

## Thundershowers mar Easter celebrations in Mizoram



AIZAWL, March 31: Thundershowers accompanied by strong winds in parts of Mizoram on Sunday morning marred the Easter celebrations.

The strong winds left a trail of destruction in various areas but no casualty was reported, officials said.

A church building belonging to the United Pentecostal Church (UPC) at Lungtan village in Champhai district collapsed and another church building at Sialsuk

in Aizawl district was also damaged, they said.

An Assam-type building in Champai's Rahsi locality and several houses in Baktawng village in Aizawl district were either partly or fully damaged, they said.

Reports from the other districts are yet to be received, an official in state capital Aizawl said in the evening.

The calamity dampened the festive spirit to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ after

his crucifixion.

Notwithstanding the rains, special prayers and worship services were held at all churches of different denominations during which sermons relating to Christ's resurrection were delivered.

The celebration began on Saturday evening with special worship services by different churches, and the Catholic Church members holding the Easter vigil.

Usual sunrise services were organised by the youth wings of different churches, including the Presbyterian and the Baptist churches.

The churches also served high tea after worship services as part of the celebration.

Several local churches belonging to the Roman Catholic and United Pentecostal Church denominations held community feasts to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus.

Roman Catholic churches also organised mass, and they will also hold Easter processions at night.

Easter, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is celebrated on the first Sunday after Good Friday, which marks the crucifixion. (PTI)

## Tripura: 'Rignai Pachra' textile, Tripureswari temple's 'Pera' get GI tag

AGARTALA, March 31: Two indigenous products of Tripura -- the 'Pera' of Tripureswari temple and the 'Rignai Pachra', have been accorded the geographical indication (GI) tag, Chief Minister Manik Saha said on Sunday.

"I am glad to inform that 'Pera' (prasad) of Tripureswari temple and 'Rignai Pachra', a traditional cloth for women of indigenous tribes, have been given the GI tag," he said in a



post on Facebook. Earlier in the month, 'Risa', a handwoven cloth worn by the indigenous communities of the state, had received the GI tag.

"I am happy to share that Tripureswari temple's 'Pera', made of milk and sugar, and 'Rignai Pachra' textile were accorded the prestigious GI tag on Saturday," said Prasad Rao, the former CEO of the Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission (TRLM). (PTI)

## Ichamati killing case suspects identified

GUWAHATI, March 31: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma has assured action against the culprits involved in the killing of two non-tribals at Ichamati in East Khasi Hills district. Two persons were killed by unidentified assailants at Ichamati in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills district on Wednesday after a protest rally against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) called by the Khasi Students' Union. Chief Minister Sangma said that Meghalaya police have identified some suspects.

"Police are actively searching for those involved. We will follow the law and ensure justice is served," Sangma said on Saturday.

This comes amidst simmering tensions at Ichamati in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills, following the brutal murders on Wednesday. The area remains on edge, with residents fearful of retaliation. The Chief Minister's comments follow criticism for his initial silence on the issue. Sangma, known for his social media presence, had not addressed the Ichamati killings despite actively campaigning online.

IMPHAL, March 31: Several self help groups are imparting skill-based training such as making of incense sticks (agarbatti), candles and disinfectants to women displaced by the violence in Manipur and staying in relief camps to help them become economically independent.

Kongkham Monica, a displaced woman in her early thirties from Serou area staying at Wangkhei Relief Camp in Imphal East district said she received skill training in making incense sticks, candles from a women self help group.

"We have been staying at this camp after our homes were burnt in May... and were dependent entirely on donation of others. We didn't have even ten rupees when we first came here. A women self help group Kangleipak Women Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd conducted a skill training programme and taught us how to make disinfectants, incense sticks, candles and ways of packaging so that we can use these skills to earn a living," the mother of three said.

She said the raw materials required to make these items are given by local vol-



unteers who help in running the relief camps.

The profits from the sales are kept by the displaced persons, Kongkham said.

"The skill training programme has helped us to earn a little money. Earlier when we came to the camp, we had nothing but totally depended on donation of

others. But now even though things are still hard we are trying," she said, adding that a market shed was also built by a civil body to sell our items.

Similar skill training is being provided by 'Eta: North East Women's Network', a non-profit group, which conducted multiple training programmes to support dis-

## Nagaland celebrates Easter Sunday with religious fervour



KOHHIMA, March 31: Easter Sunday was celebrated in Christian majority Nagaland with religious fervour as believers thronged the sunrise service at the heritage, Old DC Bungalow here.

Easter Sunday marks the triumph of Jesus Christ over death on the third day after being crucified in Mt Calvary on Good Friday.

Multitude of believers irrespective of denomination and age congregated to celebrate the joyous occasion organized by the Kohima Baptist Pastors Fellowship (KBPF).

They offered prayers of thanksgiving for redeeming humankind from the clutches of sin.

The congregation was led by state Chaplain Rev J W Yamyap Konyak.

Nagaland Governor L Ganesan, Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton extended warm greetings to the people of the state on the occasion.

"Easter is celebrated every year around the world with great reverence. On this blessed day, let us celebrate the testament of God's love to humanity and the spirit of

forgiveness. May the resurrection of Jesus Christ fill all our hearts with joy, hope and bring abundant blessings to all," the governor said in his message.

"Jesus' greatest act of love on Good Friday is followed by the greatest act of power on Easter Sunday, which is His resurrection. May the miracle of Easter bring renewed love, hope and joy in our lives. I wish everyone a Happy and blessed Easter," the chief minister said.

"A blessed Easter to all! As we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and his triumph over death and sin, let us rejoice in the promise of eternal life through Christ's sacrifice. May this day remind us all of the power of love, forgiveness and new beginnings. Wishing everyone peace, joy and unity!" said the deputy chief minister.

Meanwhile, during the day, churches across the state held special Easter services and exchanged greetings praising the Lord.

The day was also marked with Easter feast breaking of fast held by the faithful which ranged from 3 to 40 days. (PTI)

## Elderly woman's residence attacked in Manipur

GUWAHATI, March 31: Gunmen who came in a Gypsy fired bullets and lobbed two hand grenades at the residence of a 78 woman at Khagempalli in Imphal, Manipur on Saturday night.

They fired around 7-8 bullets that pierced through the walls and window panes of the house belonging to one Laishram Memcha, 78.

They fled away from the scene on the Gypsy white colour after hurling two grenades.

The bombs remained unexploded causing panic to the residents.

As was seen in the CCTV camera, the number of gunmen who came in the vehicle and fled away from the crowded residential area would be around 5-6.

The incident happened at around 8 pm on Saturday at the residence of one L Memcha, 78, of Khagempalli Huidrom Leikai, Imphal West.

On receiving the report, two teams of Manipur police from the Imphal West district police commando and Singjamei police station rushed to the spot.

Immediately, the Manipur police bomb detection and disposal squad that arrived at the scene retrieved the explosives and deposited the grenade, the police said.

A case was also registered in this connection.

L Memcha, a bamboo products business person said that she is not getting any monetary demand from any outfit or groups.

She said she wanted to ascertain the cause behind the attacks at her house.

She further asked the attackers to clarify why her house was targeted. She also wanted to have a dialogue with the attackers at the earliest for a peaceful life. Meanwhile, reports said that a sit-in protest was also staged against the attacks at Huidromleikai, Imphal on Sunday afternoon.

## Profits from the sales are kept by the displaced persons Women in Manipur relief camps get skill based training

placed victims of Manipur violence.

"After violence broke out, we conducted survey in 26 relief camps in Bishnupur district which is one of the worst affected districts in the state," Samom Beerjurekha, trustee of Eta, told PTI.

"We interacted with hundreds of displaced women to assess their skills and explore available opportunities for them to enhance their economic sustainability," Samom said.

She said "Ours is purely a voluntary enterprise. We tied with up individuals with specific handmade goods and took their service. After the programme, we provide the initial capital that is required for procuring raw materials from our own funds. We also urge the inmates to sell their products at their optimal best. However, we go a step further, and assist in selling the items."

Eta has purchased at least 29 looms and distributed it to beneficiaries as part of its mission to improve women's empowerment, she claimed.

A local volunteer, Babyna Maibam, at Palace Compound relief camp where a

similar skill training programme was taken up said "Despite pleas from all, the feasibility of these women returning to their native places in Churachandpur, Moreh, Serou is very low. In the relief camps, there is plenty of time. The skill training by self-help groups has given a new ray of hope for hundreds of these internally displaced women. When these women return to their homes, they can use these newly learnt skills to earn a living in the future."

A majority of over 50,000 internally displaced people are currently staying at relief centres across five valley districts and three hill districts.

At least 219 people have been killed in the ethnic strife in the state that started on May 3 last year after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts. (PTI)

# PM 'violating' Constitution, resorting to confrontational federalism: Cong

## Congress leader also accused BJP of destabilising State governments and toppling several governments

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** As INDIA bloc leaders gathered for a show of unity at the Ramlila ground here, the Congress on Sunday accused the Modi government of violating the Constitution by resorting to "confrontational federalism".

The Congress also accused the prime minister of resorting to fiscal centralisation, obstruction of state programs, destabilising state governments, misusing governors and subverting the rights of States.

In a statement, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said as the INDIA Janbandhan's rally at Ramlila Maidan gets underway, it is necessary to recall how the PM is "violating", in letter and spirit, Article 1 of the Constitution of India that states "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States."

He said the Prime Minister started off his innings in May 2014 talking about cooperative federalism.

"Instead, what he has delivered is confrontational federalism. Cooperative federalism is based on consensus, for which the PM has demonstrated a singular unwillingness and incapacity. In contrast, confrontational federalism is based on creating conflict and division, which is the PM's core skill," Ramesh charged in his statement.

The Congress leader said there are five major patterns to the prime minister's "concerted assault" on the Constitution's federal structure --



fiscal centralisation, obstruction of state programs, destabilising State governments, misuse of governors and subverting the rights of States.

Alleging fiscal centralisation, Ramesh said every time States get their constitutional share of taxes, or their legitimate entitlement, the PM and the FM make it out as though they are doing the states a big favour. In reality, he said, there are multiple instances which show they are averse to sharing revenue with states.

He said cess is a type of tax that is not shared with the states and since 2014, the share of tax revenue collected as 'cess' or 'surcharge' has grown, from just around 10 percent to over 26 percent. In the last five years, the revenue collection from cesses has risen by over 133 per-

cent, amounting to lakhs of crores withheld from states, he said.

Alleging interference in the Finance Commission, he said, "In a blatantly illegal and unconstitutional move, the prime minister tried to directly interfere in the working of the 14th Finance Commission, pressuring the Chairman to reduce the states' share of Central taxes from 42 percent to 33 percent."

Ramesh also alleged withholding of funds, saying 223 out of 236 taluks of Karnataka are grappling with the effects of drought, with 123 experiencing severe drought conditions.

Noting that Karnataka needs ₹ 17,900 crore as compensation, and farmers have lost crops worth ₹ 35,000 crore, he said not a single rupee has been released by the Cen-

tre to address this critical situation. The Congress leader also accused the BJP of destabilising State governments and toppling several governments.

"Using its thousands of crores of ill-gotten electoral bond wealth and the intimidation of the ED/CBI/IT, the BJP has illegally attempted and/or successfully brought down many state governments since 2014 by breaking parties and buying MLAs. The list includes Maharashtra, Goa, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Uttarakhand, and Arunachal Pradesh," Ramesh charged.

"The ED, IT, and CBI have been rendered the frontal organisations of the BJP, and have been used to intimidate senior leaders of the INDIA bloc in several states. At least two chief ministers, and 11 ministers across the country, have been arrested while in office."

"The Modi government has been continuously inventing new ways for remote-controlled Governors to interfere in states functioning," he alleged. Ramesh said Governors have become the first line of offense for the BJP in their attempts to topple Opposition Governments.

"In states like Maharashtra, even the Supreme Court has censured the Modi-appointed Governors for their unconstitutional attempts to destabilise sitting State Governments."

"Modi-appointed Governors are

notorious for interfering in the governance of the state. This has included not giving assent to Bills for months or even years after they are passed in the legislature, facilitating the BJP's mergers and acquisitions department, hindering the appointment of Vice-Chancellors to universities, and refusing to allow the chief minister to decide his own Cabinet," the Congress leader alleged.

Alleging subverting the rights of states, he said the cooperative sector is a State subject, and different states have had huge success managing their own cooperatives, such as dairy in Gujarat or sugar in Maharashtra.

"However, the Modi government has tried to seize control of this sector by making a new Cooperatives Ministry in the Centre," he said.

Ramesh alleged that a stream of Modi-government interventions in education, whether NEP or NEET, takes away states' power to run their own education systems, and strips them of any voice in education policy.

"The myopic Centrally-imposed policies are making medical education inaccessible to state government school students, by setting the syllabus in accordance with the Central government curriculum. The linguistic diversity of India, from Marathi to Bengali, is not respected in these Central systems," he alleged. (PTI)

# Challenge BJP to cross even 200 seats; won't allow CAA in Bengal: Mamata

**KRISHNANAGAR (WB), March 31:** West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday mocked the BJP-led NDA's target of winning 400-plus seats in the Lok Sabha polls and challenged the saffron party to win at least 200 constituencies.

The TMC chief also reaffirmed her refusal to allow the enforcement of the Citizenship Amendment Act in the state and cautioned the people that applying for CAA would turn an applicant into a foreigner and urged them not to apply for it.

"The BJP is saying '400 paar', I challenge them to cross the 200-seat benchmark first. In the 2021 West Bengal assembly polls, they aimed for 200 plus seats but had to stop at 77. Some of these 77 have since joined us," she said while campaigning for TMC candidate Mahua Moitra in the Krishnanagar area.

Dubbing the BJP a 'jumla' party, the TMC supremo accused them of "peddling lies" regarding the CAA, stating "Modi's guarantee on CAA is a zero guarantee."

"The CAA is a trap to turn legal citizens into foreigners. Once you implement CAA, NRC will follow. We would allow neither CAA nor NRC in West Bengal. Don't fall for the false assurance of the central government. If you apply, you will be designated as a foreigner for 5 years," Banerjee said while addressing her first rally in the election season after her injury earlier

this month. Reaching out to the Matua community, who are expected to benefit most from the implementation of the CAA, the TMC supremo urged the community to have faith in her, stating she would never allow "anyone to snatch your citizenship."

"Matuas, please have faith in me. I will not allow anyone to snatch your citizenship. Do you want that or want to live peacefully? Through CAA, they will snatch everything from you and keep you in a detention camp," she said.

Matuas, originally from East Pakistan, are a weaker section of Hindus who migrated to India during the partition and after the creation of Bangladesh following religious persecution.

Since the 90s, political parties have courted the support of the Matuas, whose substantial population and tendency to vote cohesively make them a valuable voting bloc akin to minority groups, particularly in alignment with the BJP's stance on the CAA.

According to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), rules of which were notified on March 13, the government will now start granting Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants - Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, and Christians - from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who arrived in India before December 31, 2014. (PTI)

# Former Bihar Congress president Anil Sharma quits

**PATNA, March 31:** In a setback to the Congress in Bihar ahead of Lok Sabha polls, former state president Anil Sharma on Sunday quit the party, claiming that it was stuck in a "disastrous" partnership with the RJD.

Making the announcement at a press conference here, Sharma also voiced disgust over the recent induction, "with much fanfare", of controversial former MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav.

"Today, the party leadership is busy with a rally in Delhi where it is talking of the need to save democracy. Sadly, though, no democracy can be seen in the Congress where even our duly elected national president can take no step without consulting Rahul Gandhi or his close aide KC Venugopal," alleged Sharma.

Sharma became the fourth former Bihar Congress president to have quit the party in nearly a decade. The latest instance was that of Ashok Chaudhary, who quit the party and joined JD(U) in 2018, a few months after a factional feud caused him to give up the state president's post.

Earlier, in 2015, Ram Jatan Sinha had quit the Congress and after a brief stint in JD(U), he has been in political wilderness. The year before saw Mehboob Ali Kaiser joining late Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP which helped him enjoy two consecutive terms in Lok Sabha from Khagaria.

However, Sharma insisted he was quit from a different cloth, stating, "I joined Congress in 1985. In nearly four decades, I held organisational posts twice, as state general secretary and then as state president. Never did I lobby for a ticket or a legislative council berth

for myself. Nor have I explored possibilities in any other party ahead of quitting the Congress."

About the timing of his step that comes just ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, he said, "I have, since my state president days, been critical of the tie-up with RJD which has helped them thrive at our expense. In the eyes of the people, we have only ended up being held guilty of supporting the jungle raj of Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi."

Sharma said the last straw came when Pappu Yadav was inducted into the party.

"He was virtually felicitated at the national headquarters. The party is upset that Lalu has thwarted its attempt to give Yadav a ticket. Instead, it should have thought about many better candidates, who are not getting a chance because Congress leadership cannot assert itself before the dominating ally," he said.

Notably, out of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar, the RJD is contesting 26, leaving nine for Congress and five for three Left parties.

Replying to a question, Sharma said the choice of candidates by the RJD showed "tickets have been put up for sale, without taking into account winnability", and that possibility of a "tacit understanding" with BJP, as is speculated by a section of the media in the case of Mayawati's BSP in adjoining Uttar Pradesh, "can certainly not be ruled out".

Meanwhile, state Congress media cell chairman Rajesh Rathore issued a statement slamming Sharma for trying to make "a cowardly escape" and find "an excuse for falling at the feet of Narendra Modi". (PTI)

# Tyranny won't work, can't keep Delhi CM behind bars for long: Sunita Kejriwal at INDIA bloc rally

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Tyranny won't work and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal cannot be kept behind bars for long, said Sunita Kejriwal, reading out her husband's message from Enforcement Directorate custody at the INDIA bloc's 'Loktantra Bachao' rally here on Sunday.

In her maiden speech at a political rally, Sunita also asked people whether Kejriwal should resign as Chief Minister.

"The BJP is demanding the resignation of Chief Minister Kejriwal. Should he resign? Is his arrest justified? He is a 'sher' (lion). They won't be able to keep him behind bars for long," she said. Sunita thanked people for showering blessings on her husband.

"This tyranny will not work. My husband is getting lots of blessings," she said.

Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 21 in a money laundering



case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. He is in ED custody till April 1.

Kejriwal's message included six guarantees on behalf of the INDIA bloc -- uninterrupted power supply, free electricity for the poor, government schools, Mohalla Clinics and multispecialty hospitals, minimum sup-

port price for farmers, and full statehood for Delhi.

"People of Delhi have faced injustice for the last 75 years. Their government was handicapped. We will make Delhi a full state if the INDIA bloc comes to power."

"If you give an opportunity to the INDIA bloc, we will build a

great nation," Sunita said while reading out her husband's message.

"Mother India is in pain. She feels pained when people do not get uninterrupted power supply or when someone dies without getting treatment," she added.

In a show of opposition unity ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, INDIA bloc leaders came together at the 'Loktantra Bachao' rally at the Ramlila ground here in the backdrop of Kejriwal's arrest.

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) leader Sharad Pawar, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI general secretary D Raja, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti, NC's Farooq Abdullah and Jharkhand Chief Minister Champai Soren were among those present. (PTI)

# PM Modi trying to do match-fixing in Lok Sabha polls: Rahul

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of trying to do "match-fixing" in the Lok Sabha polls and asserted that if the BJP succeeds in its endeavours, the country's Constitution will be changed and people's rights taken away. Addressing the INDIA bloc's 'Save Democracy' rally at the Ramlila Maidan here, the former Congress chief said this is not an ordinary election but one to save the country's democracy and Constitution.

"When pressure is put on umpires and captain, players are bought off and the match is won, in cricket, it is called match-fixing. We have Lok Sabha polls before us. Who selected the umpires? Before the match started, two players were arrested... Narendra Modi is trying to do match-fixing in these polls," Gandhi said. The BJP is raising the slogan of getting 400 seats, but without EVMs, match-fixing, pressure on opposition leaders and buying media, they will not be able to cross even 180 seats, he claimed.

Gandhi said the Congress is the biggest opposition party and all its accounts

have been frozen. "Two chief ministers were arrested. What kind of election is this," Gandhi alleged, adding, "Match-fixing is being done by PM Modi along with three-four billionaires. This is being done to snatch the Constitution from the poor." The Constitution is the voice of the people and the day it is finished, this country will be finished, he asserted, adding if the Constitution goes, the rights of the poor and reservation will also go.

"A BJP MP said 'we will change the Constitution when we get over 400 seats'. It was not said just like that, it was to test the idea," Gandhi said, referring to Anant Kumar Hegde's remark about amending the Constitution.

"They think the country can be run with the threats and intimidation of police, CBI and ED... You can buy media and suppress them but you cannot suppress the voice of India. No force in this world can suppress this voice of people," the former Congress chief said. He claimed that if the BJP wins the election through match-fixing and changes the Constitution, then the country would not be saved and "there will be fire everywhere". (PTI)

# South will help reach Modi target of 370; BJP has highest TRP in country: Gadkari

**NAGPUR, March 31:** Avowing abiding confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of 370 seats, BJP leader Nitin Gadkari says the additional seats to its current strength of 288 will come from gains in southern India in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

In a wide ranging interview with PTI at his residence in Nagpur, Gadkari said there is "no doubt" in his mind that the BJP-led NDA alliance will cross 400 seats and that Modi will take over as prime minister for a third term because of the solid work done by the government in the last 10 years.

He dismissed allegations that the Modi government is "weaponising" central probe agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate and CBI to weaken the opposition, saying BJP's rivals should make efforts to overcome adversity by winning the confidence of the people.

"Is it our responsibility to make the opposition weak or strong? When we had just two MPs and were weak, we never got any package out of sympathy," Gadkari, who is seeking a third Lok Sabha term from Nagpur, said.

Gadkari launched his campaign with a massive road show on Saturday through Nagpur, his motorcade crawling through a sea of supporters who withstood 40 degrees Celsius temperature to welcome the local hero. The

programme, which was to take two hours ended four hours later as supporters covered him with gulal and insisted on offering him snacks every time he stopped.

Gadkari said the BJP emerged stronger over the years due to the sheer hard work of its workers and the opposition too has to make efforts to earn the people's confidence.

"The nature of democracy is such that this keeps changing. Whatever role you play, you always have to make efforts and overcome adversity. This is important for any opposition party," he said.

He was also asked to explain the arithmetic of 370 seats for BJP and more than 400 seats for the National Democratic Alliance, given that they have already maxed out in their stronghold states.

"There is no need to make a state-wise analysis. This time we will taste success in the South. The work we have done in the south and the northeast over the last 10 years under Prime Minister Modi's leadership... we have started getting results of the same," he said.

"We have worked hard in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. We had very little presence in these states. This time we will do well in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. We have been performing well in north India. So, I feel the BJP will alone



get 370 seats and the NDA will cross 400," Gadkari said.

The senior BJP leader said the people of the country want to see development and have faith in the leadership of Modi, which will be reflected in the elections.

To a question on the claims by certain quarters that the BJP will fall short of the majority mark, which in turn could trigger a race for the post of the prime minister, Gadkari responded vehemently: "Not at all!"

"We are completely confident that we will get a complete majority and will also cross the 400 mark and Narendra Modi ji will become the country's prime minister for the third consecutive term. There is no

doubt about this in my mind," he said. Questioned about his personal agenda for the centenary celebrations of the RSS in 2025, the ideological fountainhead of the BJP, Gadkari said his "personal agenda" was only towards his constituency that has elected him.

"I do not have any personal agenda. RSS will spell out its agenda. Whatever their expectations, it is our responsibility to fulfil them," he said.

He was also asked if there is lack of level playing field in the elections due to the arrest of opposition leaders, including Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, and the income tax notices amounting to ₹ 3,500 crore on the Congress party.

The Union minister said the law was "taking its own course" and the BJP or the government had nothing to do with it.

"We have not taken any action on our own. The cases have been registered as per the law. This has nothing to do with the BJP or Modi ji. The agencies keep doing their jobs," Gadkari said.

The senior BJP leader dismissed opposition allegations of the government weaponising the ED, CBI and Income Tax department, which were taking action in cases related to opposition leaders.

"This is completely wrong. We are not weaponising anybody. The law takes its own course. Now, if ₹ 300-400 crore are found in anybody's home, people also see it. Then there is an inquiry. If anyone has done wrong, action is taken. If anybody is aggrieved, they have the option to move court," he said.

Gadkari was also dismissive about the uproar over the revelations of donations made through electoral bonds and said it was but natural for the BJP, which is the ruling party, to get a major share in the donations.

"Even in television media, those who have greater TRP get a good rate in advertisement. Those who have less TRP, get advertisements at a lower rate. Today, we are the ruling party, hence we got more donations. If tomorrow any other

party comes to power, it will get more donations," he said.

Gadkari said the ground reality was every political party required money and there was need to find a legal way to raise resources.

"I do not wish to say anything as the matter is sub-judice. After the Supreme Court has its say, all political parties should get together. In some countries, the government finances political parties. We will have to look for some options, this is what I feel," he said.

Gadkari said there is no substance in the opposition's claims that the BJP is indulging in "washing machine politics" -- absolving opposition figures facing corruption charges if they agree to join the party.

"There is no such thing. The law takes its own course. The agencies do their work on the basis of the evidence they gather. This allegation is completely wrong and baseless. No such work takes place," he said, responding to opposition allegations of BJP being a "great washing machine".

On the CBI clean chit to NCP leader Praful Patel in the Air India corruption case, Gadkari said the action had nothing to do with the BJP or the prime minister. "The truth came out in the inquiry," he said. Gadkari recalled former prime minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee's remarks on remaining true to the

ideology and the principles of the party when asked about any advice to the opposition to revive itself.

"Having a difference of opinion is necessary for a democracy. But the real problem is having no opinion. (Aaj hamarey desh mein bat bhinnata yeh loktantra ke liye awashyak bhi hai. Usme problem nahi hai. Para mat shunyata yeh hamari samasya hai.) Whatever party you are in and its ideology, it is important to stand by it with conviction -- in victory or in defeat," he said.

"I remember when I entered politics against the Emergency and started working with Jayprakash ji, the conditions were not favourable for us. But we kept on working in adverse conditions and one day Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the prime minister. Today, Modi has ruled the country for the last 10 years. Sure, the people give you an opportunity, but you have to have patience and work hard," Gadkari said.

Gadkari who won with a margin of more than two lakh seats in the 2019 elections said his goal this time is to win by a five lakh margin. He said he is confident of getting minority and Dalit votes this time. Pitted against him is Vikas Thakre of the Congress, a former mayor of Nagpur who also has good grassroots connect with people. (PTI)

# President Murmu confers Bharat Ratna on L K Advani

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** President Droupadi Murmu conferred Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honour, on BJP stalwart and former deputy prime minister L K Advani at his residence here on Sunday.

The ceremony was attended by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, defence minister Rajnath Singh, home minister Amit Shah and the family members of Advani, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a post on X.

Prime Minister Modi sat next to Advani as the President honoured the veteran leader with Bharat Ratna.

Modi said on X that it was very special to witness the conferring of the Bharat Ratna on Advani and this honour is a recognition of his enduring contributions to the nation's progress.

"His dedication to public service and his pivotal role in shaping modern India have left an indelible mark on our history. I am proud to have got the opportunity to work with him very closely over the last several decades," the prime minister said.

The Rashtrapati Bhavan described Advani as a doyen of Indian politics and said that he has served the nation with unwavering dedication and distinction for over seven decades. As a parliamentarian, his emphasis on dialogue en-



riched parliamentary traditions, it said.

Whether as home minister or as deputy prime minister, Advani always prioritised national interest above all, earning him respect and admiration from across party lines, it said in a series of posts on X.

"His long and tireless struggle for India's cultural regeneration culminated in the reconstruction of Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya in 2024," it said.

Among the handful of post-independence political leaders who

succeeded in reshaping the national agenda and placing it on the path of development, Advani's accomplishments provide the best articulation of the genius of India and its inclusive traditions, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said and shared pictures of the ceremony on X.

Born in Karachi (now in Pakistan) in 1927, Advani migrated to India in 1947 during Partition.

The 96-year-old BJP stalwart served as deputy prime minister from June 2002 to May 2004 and

as Union home minister from October 1999 to May 2004. He was BJP president multiple times -- from 1986 to 1990, 1993 to 1998, and 2004 to 2005.

The Rashtrapati Bhavan said that with his vision of cultural nationalism, Advani toiled hard for decades, across the length and breadth of the country and brought about a transformation in the socio-political landscape.

"When Emergency put India's democracy at risk, the indefatigable crusader in him helped guard it

against authoritarian tendencies," it said in the post.

As the information and broadcasting minister in the Janata Party government (1977-79), Advani was instrumental in the restoration of democracy by dismantling the Emergency's antidemocratic legal edifice, reads the profile of the veteran leader shared by the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

His contribution at the time was as intellectually inspiring, as politically impactful.

A high point in Advani's political life came when he spearheaded the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in the late 1980s and laid the foundation for the revival of cultural nationalism.

"His struggle culminated in the reconstruction of the magnificent Shri Ram temple in Ayodhya in 2024, thus fulfilling the decades-old aspirations of countless Indians," it said.

During his tenure as India's home minister, Advani brought about the most comprehensive reforms in India's national security system. He took a pro-active and uncompromising approach to counter cross-border terrorism and made sincere as well as consistent efforts to bring peace in Kashmir.

His emphasis on harmonious centre-state relations resulted in the carving out of three new states -- Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand.

Advani's eventful political life will be remembered for his determined and diligent pursuit of core enduring ideals such as the defence of democracy, cultural nationalism and clean politics, according to the profile of the veteran leader shared by the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

During his fight against Emergency (1975-77), Advani spent 19 months in Bangalore's central jail.

His book *A Prisoner's Scrap-Book* (1977) is praised globally as one of the best works of prison literature, the profile stated, adding that Advani has always set exemplary standards in political ethics.

Regarded as a statesman who combines intellectualism, integrity and mass appeal, Advani has been an avid reader and a prolific writer. For his exceptional service in public life, Advani was conferred Padma Vibhushan, the country's second-highest civilian award, in 2015.

This year, the government announced five Bharat Ratna awards -- one to Advani and four posthumously to former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, agriculture scientist M S Swaminathan and two-time former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur.

Rao, Singh, Swaminathan and Thakur's kin received the award from the president on Saturday at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. (PTI)

## Court rejects bail plea of PFI Delhi unit chief Parvez Ahmed

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** A court here has rejected the bail plea of Parvez Ahmed - the chief of the Delhi unit of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI) - who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate for his alleged role in money laundering in the guise of cash donations.

Ahmed contended in his plea that his continued incarceration was unwarranted and there was no likelihood of the trial being concluded shortly.

Noting the evidence before it, Additional Sessions Judge Chanderjit said, "The accused could not overcome the threshold stipulation predicated in section 45 of PMLA. Hence, the present bail application is disposed of as dismissed".

The twin conditions under Section 45 state that when an accused in a money laundering case applies for bail, the court has to first give an opportunity to the public prosecutor to be heard and only when it is satisfied that the accused is not guilty and unlikely to commit a similar offence when released, can bail be granted.

Special Public Prosecutor N K Matta and advocate Mohammed Faizan appeared for the ED.

The council had opposed the bail plea underlining that the accused had been "evasive", besides making "deliberate attempts to mislead the investigation and conceal his role in the offence of money laundering".

Rejecting Ahmed's argument for bail on the grounds that he was not aware of dealing with proceeds of crime, the court said, "Whether applicant (Ahmed) knew or did not know that he was dealing with proceeds of crime and whether the same was tainted money can be ascertained after the evidence has been led."

It also rejected the accused's argument that he did not follow up on the collection of donations and was not directly involved in dealing with accounts, saying being the Delhi unit state president, his "bare denial" will not absolve him of the role played in PFI.

In an order passed on March 18, the court also said that no recovery of cash from the accused was needed to hold him liable under PMLA.

"The material on record does show that there is an inflow of money through various sources, some of which are stated to be suspicious. There are allegations of raising money from abroad, without accounting for it," the court said.

"The statements of various accused when juxtaposed with each other do raise contradictions in respect of the entire process of the source of money and eventually indicate that there is layering of money," it added.

The court has reserved its order on the bail of other arrested PFI functionaries, including the general secretary Mohammed Ilias and office secretary Abdul Muqueet.

The agency arrested the three accused on September 22, 2022.

The federal probe agency had alleged that the three accused along with other members of PFI collected funds through donations, hawala, banking channels, etc and used the funds for unlawful activities and commission of scheduled offences. (PTI)

## NGO partners with ICMR to foster sensitivity towards individuals with reduced mobility

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** With an aim of training students, nurses, and medical practitioners in utilising assistive devices and fostering sensitivity towards individuals with reduced mobility, an NGO in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research has initiated a sensitization training workshops at medical colleges and hospitals here.

So far workshops have been held at the Vardhman Mahavir Medical College (VMCC) of the Safdarjung Hospital, the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS), and the Hindu Rao Hospital among others.

"Svayam aims to train over 600 students, nurses, and medical practitioners to sensitize them towards individuals with reduced mobility and how the quality of their life can be enhanced with the help of assistive devices," Sminu Jindal, Founder-Chairperson of the NGO Svayam, said.

Svayam along with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) hosted a discussion 'Accessibility and Assistive Devices are crucial for Viksit Bharat' on March 27 in which over 70 professionals from institutions such as AIIMS, ICMR, WHO, Ministry of Railways, among others participated. Partnering with the ICMR and a network of 20 NGOs, Svayam is spearheading a national campaign to highlight the critical need for inclusive environments and assistive technologies for a significant portion of the population. This ground-breaking initiative seeks to declare March 27 as 'World Accessibility Day', highlighting the importance of accessibility and inclusion for all.

The event addressed the pressing need for accessibility in India. With an estimated 26.8 million people living with disabilities and 104 million aged 65 and above facing mobility con-

straints, the need for concerted efforts is evident. "Despite these challenges, India lacks a designated day dedicated to accessibility. Establishing such an occasion could catalyse unified action and focused initiatives to enhance accessibility nationwide," Jindal said.

Addressing the event, Rajesh Aggarwal, Secretary of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DePWD) said, "The era demands accessibility for all, not as a luxury but as a fundamental requirement. Let us stand together, bridging gaps and empowering every individual towards a dignified life."

Svayam, in collaboration with 20 NGOs spanning across 35 districts in 10 states, is advocating for the global recognition of 27th March as the World Accessibility Day.

During the discussion, Dr Ravinder Singh, senior scientist at ICMR, and emphasised the imperative of creating

healthcare environments that are inherently accessible. "Accessibility is the cornerstone of Viksit Bharat. We are also dedicated to empowering future healthcare professionals with the values of universal accessibility," he said.

Jindal underlined that accessibility is not a privilege but a birthright for all. "Let the barriers crumble, and opportunities flourish equally for every individual. Together, with our dedicated partners, we stand united to forge a barrier-free future," she said.

Dr Swadeep Srivastava, founder, HEAL Foundation, said, "Celebrating World Accessibility Day is an important milestone to bring to focus the need for accessibility. Let us recognise that access to healthcare communication is not a privilege but a fundamental human right. With over a billion people living with disabilities, it's imperative that we ensure all digital health platforms are universally accessible". (PTI)

## Clash between two groups after dispute in MP's Sagar; police launch probe

**SAGAR, March 31:** Two groups allegedly clashed and pelted each other with stones following a dispute in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar city, police said on Sunday. Some persons were injured in the incident which took place on Saturday night in Sagar area under Cantt police station limits, they said. Tension prevailed in the area and the police used teargas shells to disperse the crowd. The police registered three FIRs and a process was on to identify those involved in the incident. Cantt police station in-charge Ravindra Singh Chouhan told PTI over phone.

"There was an immediate reason behind the incident. A person was driving an auto-rickshaw and he was beaten up by a crowd following a dispute. Later, persons

from another group also gathered which led to the stone-pelting incident," he said. Superintendent of Police Abhishek Tiwari said information about the dispute between the two groups was received on Saturday night.

The police used teargas shells to disperse members of both the groups, he said.

Tiwari said the police were examining CCTV footage of the area and action will be taken in the matter. Asked if the dispute started over playing a religious song following which two-three persons were attacked by a large number of people, Tiwari said the facts are being examined on the basis of statements of the injured persons, CCTV footage and eyewitness accounts and strict action will be taken. (PTI)

## SC to hear today Gyanvapi committee's plea against allowing puja in cellar



**NEW DELHI, March 31:** The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on April 1 a Gyanvapi mosque management committee's plea against an Allahabad High Court decision upholding a lower court's order allowing Hindu prayers in the southern cellar of the mosque.

A bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra will hear the plea of Anjuman Intezamia Masajid Committee, which manages the affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, challenging the HC's February 26 decision.

The high court had dismissed the committee's plea in which it had challenged the district court's January 31 order allowing Hindus to offer prayers in the cellar.

While dismissing the plea of the mosque committee on February 26, the high court had observed that the Uttar Pradesh government's 1993 decision of stopping worship rituals inside the "Vyas Tehkhana" -- located at the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi -- was "illegal".

It had said that the worship rituals were stopped by "illegal action of the state without there being any order in writing" and rejected two appeals filed by the mosque management committee challenging the Varanasi district judge's January 17 order -- that appointed the district magistrate as the receiver of the "Vyas Tehkhana" -- and the January 31 order by which the judge allowed 'puja' to be performed there.

The high court ordered that wor-

ship will continue in the "Vyas Tehkhana" of the mosque, which stands adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

A survey conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on the court's order had suggested that the Gyanvapi mosque was constructed during Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's rule over the remains of a Hindu temple.

The district court had ruled on January 31 that a Hindu priest can perform prayers before the idols in the southern cellar of the mosque.

The prayers are now being conducted by a Hindu priest nominated by the Kashi Vishwanath temple trust and petitioner Shailendra Kumar Pathak, who claimed that his maternal grandfather Somnath Vyas, also a priest, offered prayers in the cellar till December 1993.

He had said puja was stopped during the tenure of then Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav after the Babri masjid in Ayodhya was demolished on December 6, 1992.

During the hearing before the trial court, the Muslim side had contested the petitioner's version. It had said no idols existed in the cellar and hence, there was no question of prayers being offered there till 1993.

The Muslim side had also countered the petitioner's claim that the basement was under his grandfather's control.

The petitioner had claimed that his family had the control of the cellar even during the British rule. (PTI)

## ED attaches assets of kin of gangster who 'managed' crime money of Lawrence Bishnoi

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Cash, bank deposits and land worth ₹ 17.82 crore belonging to the family members of "gangster" Surender Singh alias Chiku have been attached as part of a money laundering investigation against the Lawrence Bishnoi gang and others, the Enforcement Directorate said on Sunday.

The immovable assets are located in Haryana's Narnaul and Rajasthan's Jaipur, the central agency said in a statement.

It said Chiku was "managing the crime money of Lawrence Bishnoi through his gang members and acquired properties in the names of his



family members and relatives".

Chiku is currently lodged in Tihar jail and was arrested in this case by the ED in February after the agency conducted searches against his family members and linked persons in Rajasthan and Haryana.

The probe found, the ED said, alleged "illegal" involvement of Chiku

in mining businesses in Narnaul through a company called Nimawat Granites Pvt. Ltd.

"Surender Singh Chiku wielded his criminal clout and introduced his brother-in-law Vikash Kumar as a director and a shareholder in this company that was awarded a mining tender at Bakhrija mines in Narnaul."

"Through this deal, Surender Singh Chiku and Vikash Kumar extorted ₹ 2.84 crore without business investment," the agency claimed.

The "proceeds of crime" extorted from mining businesses were acquired through legal banking channel, channelised into normal economy and used to purchase im-

movable properties and for personal consumption, it claimed.

The agency said it conducted a drone survey of the mined area in the presence of mining and revenue officials to make calibrated estimates of the extorted money from mining businesses under the patronage of gangster Chiku.

"It has emerged that the quarrying has resulted in extraction of more than 1 lakh metric tonnes of stones from these mines," the ED said.

The ED's money laundering case stems from multiple Haryana Police FIRs against Chiku and his family members on charges of kidnapping, murder and extortion, etc. (PTI)

## Pune-based Army Sports Institute training female athletes: Lt Gen A K Singh

**PUNE, March 31:** Pune-based Army Sports Institute will be imparting rigorous training to young female athletes to help them compete at national and international level, Lt General Ajai Kumar Singh, General Officer-Commanding-in-Chief of Southern Command said on Sunday.

Altogether 30 girls have been enrolled and will begin training at the institute in May, Lt Gen Singh said in an interview to PTI, on the eve of the Southern Command celebrating its 130th Raising Day on April 1.

The army's initiative will contribute significantly to the holistic development of the sports landscape in India and also underscores the significance of gender equality and inclusivity in sports, Lt Gen Singh said.

The newly-established Army Girls Sports Company aims at nurturing girl talent in archery, athletics, boxing and weightlifting, the top army commander said.

The Army Sports Institute is one of the two centres of excellence identified for this initiative. The other centre is Army Marksmanship Unit in Mhow.

The selected girls will undergo rigorous training and compete at both national and international levels, offering them the opportunity to demonstrate their prowess and



bring honour to the nation.

The selected girls will also be eligible for recruitment as direct entry Non-Commissioned Officers and Junior Commissioned Officers, in addition to enrolment as Agniveers, he said.

"Progressive steps to enhance deployment avenues for women officers are being taken. Women officers being commissioned from OTA Chennai will now pass out along with their male batchmates with common merit. Permanent commission to women officers has also commenced after being considered by gender neutral selection boards," he said.

The Southern Command has

conducted various activities in line with the government's schemes, including creation of 75 Amrit Sarovars with a catchment area of 485 lakh cubic litres, adoption of 75 schools under project Vidyanjali, millet provision for Southern Command Zone, proposal for Nagar Van and Yojana and Jal Shakti Abhiyan, he said.

The Southern Command has always been the first responder in times of crisis, be it the Bhuj earthquake of January 2001 or the floods in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, he said.

The Command played a significant role during Cyclone Tauktae relief operations in May 2021. The

cyclone had affected areas of Kerala, Lakshadweep, Dadra and Nagar Haveli areas.

The Southern Command was also at the forefront during relief and rescue work during the Morbi bridge collapse in October 2022 and Cyclone Michaung, he said.

During cyclones Biparjoy and Michaung, relief columns of Southern Command were actively deployed, establishing close liaison and synergy with the civil administration. They provided relief to thousands of civilians and evacuated them to safety.

The army columns were the first to reach numerous cut-off villages like Kalvai village in Tamil Nadu's Tuticorin district with relief, he said.

The Command's valiant soldiers without caring for their own lives, have stood by the people and shall continue to do so at all times as part of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations, he said. The Command area includes catchment basin of rivers like Narmada, Krishna, Godavari and Cauvery.

The Southern Command, headquartered in Pune since its formation in 1895, has around 7 lakh ex-servicemen and 2.5 lakhs Veer Naris (widows of armed forces personnel who laid down their life for the nation).

"The welfare of these veterans and Veer Naris is an important responsibility of the Southern Command. Efforts are underway for setting up old age homes where the veterans could spend the golden years of their life with reasonable comfort and hospice care for palliative requirements," Lt Gen Singh said.

Two such old age homes have been set up at Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram.

Around 3,000 veterans attended the mega ex-servicemen's rally in Pune in February. Around 45,000 veterans attended online.

"Activities like resolution of grievances pertaining to pension and medical checkup were held. Employment certificates were also awarded to veterans and Veer Naris, providing them an opportunity for their second innings," he said.

A Prakriti Wellness Centre has been established at Pune offering holistic healing through multi-disciplinary avenues such as naturopathy, ayurveda and yoga therapy to promote inner wellness and holistic health for serving personnel, dependents and veterans of the armed forces, he said.

A counter offering Jan Aushadhi products and millets produce has also been set up in the Command. (PTI)

# Want to do action films with SRK, Aamir & Ajay Devgn: Ali Abbas Zafar

**MUMBAI, March 31:** His upcoming film *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan* features action stars like Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff, and going forward filmmaker Ali Abbas Zafar says he wants to direct Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan and Ajay Devgn in separate movies in the genre. In the past, Ali Abbas Zafar has collaborated with Salman Khan on films such as *Tiger Zinda Hai*, *Sultan*, and *Bharat*. "I want to work with all the actors in the industry, but definitely on my wish list are Aamir sir, Shah Rukh sir, and Ajay Devgn. I want to do action with them. It will be a different kind of action with each of them," the director told PTI in an interview here. His primary objective, Zafar said, is to develop a unique kind of action movie that challenges each of these superstars. "Like, *Sultan* is a sports drama, but it also has action. You have to make an action film for every different actor which is customised for them or brings them out of their comfort zone. 'It's a dream for any director to work with all those guys. They've been here for 30-35 years, and the kind of fan base that they have is amazing. So, let's see, fingers crossed,' he added. Citing the example of *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*, the filmmaker said the script demanded two action stars, which is why Kumar and Shroff are headlining his latest movie. "What is most important is that you should be honest that you are not making a project but you are making a film that stars will do justice to. The script needs to cast the actors. I work on the script first, then take it to the actors," he said. Zafar also gave an update about his action film *Super Soldier* with Katrina Kaif. He said the movie is presently on hold and he has started production on another action film also starring Kaif, who has appeared in three of Zafar's films: *Mere Brother Ki Dulhan*, *Tiger Zinda Hai* and *Bharat*. "There's something for which I'm in talks with Katrina, it is not '*Super Soldier*'. It is a new film. '*Super Soldier*' is not happening for a while. If I work with her, it will be an action film," he added. Also starring Prithviraj Sukumaran, Alaya F, Manushi Chhillar, and Sonakshi Sinha, "*Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*" will be released on the occasion of Eid on April 10 in Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu. (PTI)



## Prithviraj Sukumaran-starrer 'The Goat Life' crosses ₹ 50 crore-mark globally

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Survival drama *The Goat Life*, starring Prithviraj Sukumaran, has collected over Rs 50 crore in worldwide gross collections, the makers announced on Sunday.

The Malayalam film follows the real-life story of Najeeb (Sukumaran), a Malayali immigrant labourer who finds himself forced into slavery as a goatherd in the secluded farm of Saudi Arabia.

Directed by Blessy, the movie is based on the 2008 bestselling novel "*Aadujeevitham*" by Benyamin. It hit the screens on Friday. Sukumaran, who is also distributing *The Goat Life* in Malayalam through Prithviraj Productions, posted the box office update on his official X page.

"#AaduJeetham #TheGoatLifeInCinema @DirectorBlessy @benyamin\_bh @arrahman @Amala\_ams @Haitianhero @rikaby @resulp @iamkrigokul @HombaleFilms @AAFilmsIndia @PrithvirajProd @Red-GiantMovies\_ @MythriOfficial @Magic\_Frames @ListinStephen," the actor shared a poster stating the film had made Rs 50 crore in worldwide gross collections.

"Thank you all for your love and support," it also read. Produced by Visual Romance, *The Goat Life* also features Amala Paul, K.R. Gokul, as well as Hollywood actor Jimmy Jean-Louis and Arab actors Talib al Balushi and Rikaby in pivotal roles.

Academy Award winners A R Rahman and Resul Pookutty have given music and sound design, respectively. (PTI)

## 'CREW' RAISES ₹ 41.13 CRORE IN TWO DAYS



**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Heist comedy "*Crew*" has grossed ₹ 41.13 crore worldwide within two days of its release, the makers said on Sunday. Heist comedy "*Crew*" has grossed ₹ 41.13 crore worldwide within two days of its release, the makers said on Sunday.

Starring Tabu, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Kriti Sanon, the film is directed by Rajesh A Krishnan of "*Lootcase*" fame. Diljit Dosanjh and Kapil Sharma also round out its cast.

"*Crew*" opened to good reviews on Friday and earned ₹ 20.07 crore at the box office. According to the makers, the film added ₹ 21.06 crore to its global box office (gross) collection on Saturday.

Production house Balaji Motion Pictures shared the box office update of the movie on its official X page.

"The sky's the limit! Join our crew as we soar to greater glory! #CrewInCinemasNow #Tabu #KareenaKapoorKhan @kritisanon @diljitdosanjh and a special appearance by @KapilSharmaK9," the banner said in the post, adding the film's total worldwide gross collection stands at Rs 41.13 crore. "*Crew*" follows the story of three air hostesses -- played by Tabu, Kareena and Kriti -- working for an airline called Kohinoor that is on the verge of bankruptcy and their attempts to keep their head above water. The film also stars Saswata Chatterjee, Rajesh Sharma and Kulbhushan Kharbada. It is produced by Rhea Kapoor, Anil Kapoor, Ekta R Kapoor, and Shobha Kapoor. (PTI)

## Nani to reunite with 'Dasara' director Srikanth Odela

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Actor Nani is set to reteam with his "*Dasara*" director Srikanth Odela for his 33rd feature film.

The "*Jersey*" star made the announcement on the first-year release anniversary of "*Dasara*" on Saturday.

"*Dasara* turns one year today. On this occasion.. #Nani33. A Srikanth Odela MADNESS again," Nani wrote on X.

The tagline of the upcoming pan-India film reads: "You don't need an identity to be a leader". It will be produced by Sudhakar Cherukuri, who also backed "*Dasara*".

The project is expected to be released in 2025. Nani, who was last seen in "*Hi Nanna*", is currently filming for his next movie "*Saripodhaa Sanivaaram*", directed by Vivek Athreya. The actor also has another film with Sujeeth in the works. (PTI)



## Film music hardly producing big singing stars today, says singer Shaan

**MUMBAI, March 31:** The Indian music scene is undergoing a change and an artiste today doesn't have to depend on films to become popular, says singer Shaan. The vocalist, who broke onto the indie pop scene in late 1990s with albums *Love-ology* and *Tanha Dil*, said it seems to be the age of rappers or musicians like Guru Randhawa, Neha Kakkar and Badshah.

Arijit Singh is the "last big exponent" to come from films, he said. "All the big names today in music, they are either rappers or they have their own brand of music styles. Arijit Singh was probably the last big exponent who came in from film music. But a lot of them first got popular doing their own non-film music, like Guru Randhawa, Honey Singh, Badshah, King. But today, film music is hardly giving you the big singing star," Shaan told PTI in an interview.

The 51-year-old playback singer, known for film songs *Musu Musu Haasi Deu*, *Woh Ladki Hai Kahan*, *Chand Si-farish*, and *Jab Se Tere Naina*, said it's difficult to make fans listen to his non-film music.

"The only thing is that a singer like me, who's branding has become that of a Bollywood singer, it's very difficult to get out of that and for people to start listening to my non-film songs. But for others like Neha Kakkar, who came in from social media and then started get-

ting their film songs... Today, it's changing, a singer doesn't have to really rely to become popular through film music," he added.

Shaan also said he feels "under-utilised" in Bollywood. "Sadly, in the last 10 to 15 years, I've been much underutilised and not been a part of those big Bollywood songs, like I used to be. But at the same time, this could be of help. When you are constantly on a roll, there's no time to introspect, no time to work on your skills. You tend to keep going with the flow. At some point, you realise you're becoming mechanical, redundant. So I take this break, this little getaway as a good thing, that I get to work on my skill sets."

The singer recalled a recent instance when his song from Rajkumar Hirani's *Dunki*, starring Shah Rukh Khan, was dropped by the makers.

"I was thrilled that I got to sing a Shah Rukh Khan song, but for some reason, it was replaced by another song. So, these things. The song, *O Maahi* got on to become the popular song of that soundtrack, which is where my song was supposed to be slotted in," he said.

Instead, Shaan said he got the opportunity to collaborate with renowned percussionist Bickram Ghosh on his latest single *Tanhaaiyyan*. "I sang this beautiful song with Bickram Ghosh da. The music carries on, whether it's a film or not, and

every other day I'm recording a beautiful song."

*Tanhaaiyyan*, featuring Shaan and Ghosh, is produced under the latter's music label *Eternal Sounds*. The singer said his goal is to build a memorable discography. "It's a legacy that you leave behind, the idea is to keep making good music... that will hopefully transcend time. I'm glad we have *Eternal Sounds*, the name eternal itself says it all, it means we got to create something that is timeless and not something that people are listening to at clubs, or are dancing to at parties," he added.

Ghosh described Shaan as a fantastic singer who is in "tremendous" form. "We keep talking and sometimes I vent with him, and a bit of that he does too about what we should do to justify music because music has been under the baton of films for too long. Music should have its own life, and that's happening today with indie music," he added.

Singing, regardless of platform, brings him happiness, said Shaan. "For a singer, the biggest thrill is when you are behind the mic creating music. Nothing excites me more than that. I'm getting opportunities to do that a dime a dozen. So, I'm happy about it. That childlike passion and excitement, that fire in the belly is now more than ever before." (PTI)



# Look yourself in mirror and ask 'did I do my best': Bindra tells Paris-bound shooters

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** "Look yourself in the mirror before going to bed and ask 'did I do my best?'" This is what Olympic champion Abhinav Bindra told shooters aspiring to excel at the upcoming Paris Games during an interactive session here on Sunday.

During the session, India's first ever individual Olympic gold medallist answered queries and shared his experiences about competing at sport's grandest stage.

The session was held at Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range, as the team entered the crucial final three months of preparation. Bindra reminded the squad that "success is not a one-off event".

"Doing the right things consistently day in and day out is what leads to success."

On a query on how to maintain self-discipline, Bindra said, "You have to be brutally honest with yourself and everyday look yourself in the mirror before you go to sleep and ask yourself - did I do my best? If the answer is yes you will find you will have the result eventually."

India have won a total of 19 quota places in shooting for the Paris Olympic Games across rifle, pistol and shotgun disciplines, their highest quota haul ever. The session was organised by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), ahead of the first batch of

shooters departing later in the day, for equipment testing to Europe. Three such batches will leave in succession in April, besides a three-member women's air pistol squad and the shotgun squad competing at the final Olympic qualifiers in Rio and Doha respectively.

Later in April the first of four national Olympic selection trials for rifle and pistol shooters are scheduled at the same venue. This will be the first time a national trial for the sole purpose of picking the rifle and pistol Olympic squads will be conducted.

When asked what advice he would give a young Abhinav going back in time he surprised all by saying, "You



know I strongly believe that I could not achieve my full potential. I wish I had more balance in life and could have other hobbies. I almost dehumanised my pursuit.

"I would definitely tell my-

self to be kinder to myself. I feel I didn't pat myself on the back too often after I had achieved the goals I had set out to achieve.

"I feel that then you could recover better when you go

back to the shooting range and be mentally stronger in competition. If you have several pillars in your life, your base is stronger."

Small bore coach Manoj Kumar asked what tools he had developed to counter Olympic expectations to which the champion said, "You have to increase your self-awareness as a shooter. The changes that are happening around you, you have to acknowledge them."

On specific preparations ahead of the Beijing Olympic Games he said, "You know by that time it was my fourth Olympics and I had managed to totally detach myself from the outcome."

"I was totally focussed on the process. I wanted to do my best with every single shot. I never thought of winning or losing. I managed to stay at the present moment because the truth is in the present moment." He signed off by asking shooters not to train to get better in training, but to get better in competitions.

He urged them to not get into comfort zones in training and to challenge themselves constantly and make it harder.

The session was coordinated by the Beijing Olympic Games he said, "You know by that time it was my fourth Olympics and I had managed to totally detach myself from the outcome."

## Bopanna-Ebden clinch Miami Open title, return to world No. 1 ranking

**MIAMI (US), March 31:** Ace Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna rewrote his own record to continue to be the oldest ATP Masters 1000 champion as he and his Australian partner Matt Ebden clinched the men's doubles crown at the Miami Open here.

Continuing their fine run this year, the 44-year-old Bopanna and Ebden fought back from a set down to pull off an exhilarating 6-7(3), 6-3, 10-6 win over Croatia's Ivan Dodig and American Austin Krajicek at the Hard Rock Stadium on Saturday.

With the win, Bopanna surpassed his record created last year when he won the Indian Wells title at the age of 43, and also reclaimed the top spot in the doubles ranking.

"It's amazing. As long as you are doing well in these big events, it's what we play for," Bopanna said after the win.

"I want to do well in the Masters 1000s and the Grand Slams. It's good to keep that record going and keep giving everyone else a run for their money," added Bopanna, who won his maiden doubles Grand Slam title at the Australian Open earlier this year.

This was Bopanna's 14th ATP Masters 1000 final. Overall, it was the veteran Indian player's 63rd ATP Tour level final and 26th doubles title.

Bopanna also achieved a rare



feat as he became the second Indian after Leander Paes to reach the final of all nine ATP Masters events. Bopanna and Ebden, the top seeds for the tournament, tapped into their deep reservoir of experience to fetch the final six points of the summit clash. They had three set points on serve at 6-5 in the opening set but their second-seeded opponents ward off all three to

force a tiebreaker before taking a 1-0 lead.

"It's tough. These guys, they fight back in tough moments," said Ebden.

"Last time we played them it was similar, it's a bit of a seesaw. They return so well, make so many balls and we missed one or two shots when we were up [at the end of] the first set. They played a great tie-break,

and then we just reset."

Bopanna and Ebden then staged a comeback as they broke their opponent early in the second set which helped them level the game.

Like the opening two sets, the tiebreaker was also fought on an even keel with the reigning Australian Open champions emerging victorious.

Following the Australian

Open triumph, Bopanna climbed to the world No.1 spot in the ATP rankings, becoming the oldest player to do so. But slipped to the second spot in the doubles rankings after a quarter-final loss at the Dubai Championships and a round-of-32 exit at the Indian Wells Masters.

But with the win here, the pair will be back to the top spot. (PTI)

## Mirabai to return to action after 6-month injury layoff with eye on Olympic berth

**PHUKET (THAILAND), March 31:** Tokyo Olympics silver medallist lifter Mirabai Chanu will return to competitive action after a six-month injury layoff when she participates at the IWF World Cup to confirm her Paris Games berth here on Monday.

The World Cup is not only the final Olympic qualifying event but also a mandatory qualifier for the Paris Games.

Chanu, who has been recuperating from hip tendonitis she suffered during the Asian Games in September last year, has all but qualified for the Paris Olympics.

An appearance at the World Cup on Monday will be enough for her to seal her passage to Paris as the former world champion is ranked second in the women's 49kg

Olympic Qualification Ranking (OQR) behind China's Jian Huihua.

Under the 2024 Olympic qualification rules, the 2023 World Championships and the 2024 World Cup are compulsory events.

Apart from these two tournaments, a lifter must participate in at least three of the following events — the 2022 World Championships, the 2023 Continental Championships, the 2023 Grand Prix I, the 2023 Grand Prix II and the 2024 Continental Championships.

Chanu has fulfilled the criteria. She competed at the 2022 World Championship and the 2023 Asian Championships, finishing second and sixth respectively.

At the 2023 Worlds and Grand Prix II, she did not heave the barbell due to her injury but completed all the necessary formalities to remain eligible for the Paris Games. At the end of the World Cup, the top 10 lifters, who have met the criteria, will qualify for

Paris in their weight category.

The best three performances at the qualifying events will be taken into account for final assessment and Chanu's came at the 2022 Worlds where she lifted a total of 200kg (87kg+113kg).

The Manipuri lifter, who has struggled with injuries in the past two years, has registered an entry weight of 185kg, far from her personal best of 207kg (88kg+119kg).

Based on that she has been placed in Group B of the competition and is unlikely to be in medal contention. The lifters who register the highest entry weight are placed in group A, followed by B and so on.

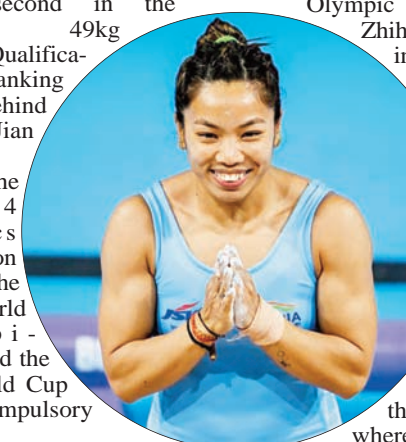
China's Huihua and Tokyo Olympic champion Hou Zhihui, who are fighting amongst themselves for a Paris berth, have entered the highest entry weight of 210kg alongside Ri Song Gum of North Korea.

The last time Chanu competed was at the Asian Games where her campaign ended in agony. The two-time Commonwealth Games champion suffered a dramatic fall on her back while attempting a clean and jerk lift, leading to her hip injury. She had to be carried out of the platform.

Coming off a long injury layoff, the 29-year-old is unlikely to attempt the much-awaited 90kg snatch lift or improve her clean and jerk effort.

"She is coming back from an injury, we will take it slow. She has already qualified so no point stretching her here. We want her to peak at the right time," head coach Vijay Sharma told PTI.

Chanu, who struggles with a back issue that affects her snatch, has been trying to breach the 90kg-mark since 2020. (PTI)



## Hardik Pandya can survive fans' anger: Boult, Chawla back embattled MI skipper

**MUMBAI, March 31:** Rajasthan Royals' pacer Trent Boult on Sunday backed his former teammate Hardik Pandya to 'block out white noise' after the Mumbai Indians skipper found himself at the receiving end of crowd's booing at Ahmedabad and Hyderabad in the ongoing IPL.

Pandya has taken over MI captaincy from Rohit Sharma this season upon his return from Gujarat Titans and the whole saga of change of leadership has not gone down well with the fans.

"It is something you cannot control, as professional sportspeople it is what you are exposed to in a way. You have to block out the white noise and focus on the job, (but) it is easier said than done,"

Boult told the media here at the Wankhede Stadium.

Boult said the booing will eventually die down and backed Pandya to not get bogged down.

"There are a lot of passionate fans in this country and speaking of Hardik specifically, he is one of my favourite Indian cricketers and I do not think the booing will hold out for too long. I am sure, he is one of those guys who can put it aside and focus on the job," Boult added. Meanwhile, Mumbai Indians' veteran spinner Piyush Chawla said the situation will change once the team, which has again made a disappointing start to the IPL losing the first two games, gets a

win in their kitty.

"Well, that you can't really help because you know, they are a crowd and whatever they are doing is beyond our control so we can't really say what they are doing," Chawla said.

Chawla claimed that Pandya has remained unaffected.

"The way Hardik has taken it...he is just focusing on the game, he is not even worried about what the crowd is doing and once we get a win under our belt, things will be totally different." The right-arm spinner said MI have also looked to focus on the job at hand rather than focussing on what the fans have been doing inside the stadium.

"You get used to it, because you know, whatever is happening, whatever people are doing in the crowd, you can't really help it because it's beyond our control."

"We just have to focus on our game and whatever they are doing, let them do. We just have to focus on our cricket," he said. However, Chawla hoped that the 'true' Mumbai fans would show up on Monday at the Wankhede Stadium to support the team in their first home game of the season. "At the end of the day it's about the team; it's not about the individual. I am really hoping when the crowd comes in tomorrow, they will support the team after the kind of start we had," he said. (PTI)

## Speed thrills and excites new pace sensation Mayank Yadav who found inspiration in jet planes

**LUCKNOW, March 31:** Speed thrills and excites India's latest fast-bowling sensation Mayank Yadav, a passion he cultivated since childhood when the sleek lines of jet planes, awe-inspiring force of rockets, and the raw power of superbikes captured his imagination.

The 21-year-old's 150kmph thunderbolts amazed one and all during his side Lucknow Super Giants' 21-run win over Punjab Kings here on Saturday.

Mayank (3/27) stole the limelight with his searing pace. In the 12th over of Punjab's innings, he bowled the season's fastest ball at 155.8 kmph.

His extra pace rattled Jonny Bairstow, Prabhsimran Singh and Jitesh Sharma and led to PBKS' downfall. He consistently clocked 150kmph and above on the speedometer dur-

ing his four-over spell, to be adjudged the player of the match.

"Even in normal life, apart from cricket, I love things which have speed with them. Whether it is a rocket, aeroplane or superbike, speed excites me. In my childhood, I liked jet planes and would get inspiration from them," said Mayank at the post-match press conference.

"I have never bowled 156kmph before this. I clicked 155kmph during Mushtaq Ali, but this is my fastest ball," added the pacer from Punjab Bagh in New Delhi.

Mayank had played just two List A games before he was picked by LSG ahead of IPL 2022. He did not play a single match in the first season and was ruled out of the next season with a torn hamstring.

After he recovered from the



injury, he played for North Zone in the 50-over Deodhar Trophy where he knocked out Rahul Tripathi's middle stump with a ripper. "Injuries are part of fast bowlers' life, they are your friends. I had two-three major injuries in the past one or one and a half years. Those were my setbacks."

"Last season also, I missed playing in IPL because of injury. I had side strain injury with rib fracture and that happened after Vizay Hazare. My effort is to give more attention to recovery and to myself, in training and physically."

It's natural that Mayank would get inspiration from a speed merchant -- South African great Dale Steyn.

"I look up to only one fast bowler, and that is Dale Steyn. He is my idol and I idolise him

a lot."

Talking about his game plan on Saturday, he said, "JL (head coach Justin Langer) or even Morne Morkel (bowling coach) did not say anything particular on what I need to work on. They know that along with pace my hard length ball is good."

"They just told me to keep the plan simple, use pace and bowl hard length balls as many as possible as well those which can be finished on stumps."

He said he did not feel any pressure or nervousness during his debut match.

"A lot of excitement was there in my debut. For the last two years, I have been visualising just one thing that, that is when I make my debut what will I feel when I bowl my first ball."

Everybody said there would be some pressure or nervousness

but I did not feel it at all.

"When my captain told me to bowl the first over, I felt inside me that I belonged to this place and there was a lot of confidence."

Highlighting his goals, Mayank said, "My aim is to always remain consistent and give away less runs to help the team. Pace is a plus point for me which I try to use in a good way."

Asked how he came to the limelight, he said, "Two years back, before the mega auction of the IPL, I was with Delhi team for Vijay Hazare against UP side, our assistant coach Vijay Dahiya sir saw me there."

"There he showed interest in me, he asked me videos of my bowling before IPL auction. From there he picked me, I think." (PTI)

# Mohit's masterclass, Miller's brilliance propel Gujarat Titans to win vs Hyderabad

**AHMEDABAD, March 31:** Dishing out an all-round show, Gujarat Titans brought down high-flying Sunrisers Hyderabad with a clinical seven-wicket win in the Indian Premier League (IPL) here Sunday.

Veteran seamer Mohit Sharma was at his deceptive best in the last over for his splendid figures of 3/25, while Afghan spin twins Rashid Khan and Noor Ahmad bossed the middle overs as GT restricted the marauding SRH to a modest 162/8 after Pat Cummins opted to bat.

SRH must be disappointed with themselves after putting on board an astonishing 277 for five in their last outing.

South African batter David Miller found his flair in his 44 not out from 27 balls to anchor the small chase despite suffering cramps and finished the game with a six off Jaydev Unadkat in the first ball of the final over.

Sai Sudharsan also lifted his game, top-scoring for GT with his 45 from 36 balls as GT won with five balls to spare.

GT now have won both their matches at home. Their only loss came against Chennai Super Kings in an away match.

SRH have suffered two losses and with one win they have two points from three matches.

GT had things under control in pursuit of the small target at their home venue and Wriddhiman Saha did his job to set the tone. He stepped out to Bhvishwar Kumar for a boundary, and then pulled Jaydev Unadkat over square leg.

But Saha could not convert his start and mistimed Shahbaz Ahmed to be dismissed for 25.

From going at nine runs per over, GT suddenly struggled to pace the



innings with Sai Sudharsan typically slow at one end.

Gill was looking fluent at the other end but Sudharsan was unable to rotate the strike and ate up a lot of deliveries, putting pressure on his skipper.

Gill eventually threw his wicket away, holing out to Abdul Samad at long on in a soft dismissal.

With Miller also struggling to get going, the Cummins-led side fancied their chances at the halfway mark where GT were 78/2, needing 85 from the back-10.

With 18 from 20 balls, the Tamil Nadu youngster Sudharsan once again found himself at the receiving end as he broke free against Unadkat in the 12th over, hitting the leftarm pacer for a boundary.

Miller too soon got into the act and the small target didn't help the cause for SRH.

Fresh from smashing a record 277 in their last game, SRH were going great guns with 56/1 inside the power-play but the young and experienced Afghan duo of Noor (1/32) and Rashid (1/33) turned the match on its head in the crucial 7-15th over phase.

Noor dismissed the in-form SRH opener Travis Head (19), while Rashid sent back explosive Heinrich Klaasen (24) before taking a splendid forward-diving catch at long-on to see the back of Aiden Markram (17).

Having dismissed the in-form Abhishek Sharma in the 10th over, Mohit returned to shine at the death by taking two in two balls in the final over -- Shahbaz Ahmed (22) and Washington Sundar (0).

The 35-year-old cleverly varied his pace, bowled wide yorker, slow off-cutters to stifle SRH in the final

over that saw three runs for three wickets, including the run out of Abdul Samad (29).

The 2014 Purple Cap winner and 2015 World Cup semi-finalist, Mohit who returned from the oblivion at GT two seasons ago conceded just one boundary -- a six -- in his four overs.

In the last five overs, SRH managed just 40 runs and lost five wickets.

After plundering runs at an astonishing pace in their last game, the Orange Army had little hesitation in opting to bat first and dictate the pace of the game with Head up front.

The Aussie left-hander kept charging in, while Mayank Agarwal (16) once again looked out of sorts before being dismissed by Azmatullah Omarzai.

Last match hero Abhishek

smashed Rashid for two sixes on both the sides and it revived memories of his last match partnership with Head.

But left-arm wrist spinner Noor bowled a superb first over to peg SRH back.

The in-form destructive SRH opener Head unleashed a slog sweep as the 19-year-old Afghan spinner tricked him with a wrong one. The ball pitched on his off-stump before sharply turning in to crash into the middle-stump.

Runs suddenly dried up with Rashid conceding just four runs from his second over as both the wrist spinners bowled superbly in tandem to squeeze SRH in.

A captaincy masterstroke by Gill to bowl Mohit the 10th over resulted in another wicket when the veteran seamer dismissed a well-set Abhishek (29).

The left-hander sliced it straight to Gill at extra-cover in what seemed a perfect set-up for the young Indian batter.

But Klaasen ensured that the lull does not stay longer as he charged the young Noor in his last over for two slog sweeps over midwicket boundary.

Rashid however had the last laugh as he cut short the innings of SRH six-hitting machine Klaasen in the 14th over.

The South African completely missed Rashid's googly to be cleaned up against the run of play.

In the next over, Rashid made all the difference with his splendid diving catch at deep to dismiss Aiden Markram (17).

Markram took charge of a Yadav slower delivery as Rashid at long on ran forward, adjusted at the last moment to take a stunning diving catch tumbling forward. (PTI)

## Struggling Mumbai Indians look for happy homecoming against Rajasthan Royals in IPL



**MUMBAI, March 31:** IPL's perennial slow-starters Mumbai Indians under new captain Hardik Pandya will hope for a happy homecoming when they take on a confident Rajasthan Royals at the Wankhede Stadium here on Monday.

Despite the change at the helm with Pandya replacing five-time title-winning skipper Rohit Sharma -- a move that has sparked brutal attack on the former -- Mumbai Indians have once again made a familiar disappointing start to their IPL campaign as they lost their first two matches.

A six-run defeat to Pandya's former team Gujarat Titans was followed by a walloping by Sunrisers Hyderabad who won the record run-fest by 32 runs in Hyderabad, with Mumbai Indians plummeting to the last spot in the 10-team points table.

These are still early days in the 17th edition of the T20 league but Pandya's Mumbai Indians will need to end their losing streak and improve their Net Run Rate which is the worst among all teams at -0.925.

Among the odds stacked up against them is the absence of Suryakumar Yadav, who remains on the sidelines as he is recovering from two separate injuries which have kept him away from the MI camp this IPL.

Even though Mumbai Indians enjoy a 4-1 head-to-head record in their last five meetings with Rajasthan Royals, the home side will have a tough task at hand given Sanju Samson's team has turned up all guns blazing to begin their IPL season with two wins.

A big score is due from Rohit who has provided strong starts to Mumbai but what they truly need is Pandya to get his decisions right. Pandya has evidently not used Jasprit Bumrah to the best way possible and Mumbai Indians will have a chance to iron out such flaws.

Bumrah and Piyush Chawla bring the element of experience to the table in the MI bowling attack which has shown trust on local boy Shams Mulani, who is relatively new at the IPL stage but immensely experienced when it comes to playing at the Wankhede Stadium.

The young Kwena Maphaka was at the receiving end of the carnage that SRH handed to Mumbai Indians in their last game but the 17-year-old South African will only learn from experience of the

hard ways that come to the bowlers' way in such a competitive T20 league.

On their part, Rajasthan Royals will look to keep ticking all the boxes after two wins at the start.

Samson remains dangerous in the early stages of the IPL while the immensely talented Yashasvi Jaiswal, who is yet to fire in this IPL, would be keen to get his first big score of this season.

Jaiswal is returning to his home ground where he had blazed a 62-ball 124 albeit for a losing cause in their last meeting here, and he will be eager to stamp his class. Riyan Parag is primed to continue his ascent as a mature middle-order batter, whereas for Mumbai, Tilak Varma, Tim David and Naman Dhir would aim to make the most of their positive starts.

Apart from having a long batting line-up which also boasts of the dangerous Jos Buttler at the top and Dhruv Jurel to provide finishing touches, it is their all-round bowling attack which puts forth a lot of promise.

While Nandre Burger has teamed up well with Trent Boult for early inroads, the spin duo of Ravichandran Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal can control the flow of runs in the middle.

Avesh Khan's control at the death along with Sandeep Sharma is Royals' forte and has been among crucial factors for Rajasthan's fine show so far.

### The Squads:

**Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Vishnu Vinod, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood, Suryakumar Yadav.

**Rajasthan Royals:** Sanju Samson (c), Abid Mushtaq, Avesh Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Jos Buttler (wk), Kuldeep Sen, Kunal Singh Rathore, Nandre Burger, Navdeep Saini, Ravichandran Ashwin, Riyan Parag, Sandeep Sharma, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Rovman Powell, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Trent Boult, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal, Tanush Kotian.

Match starts: 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

## Team Assam shines at 11th GSIF National Kettlebell Championship



**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, March 31:** Team Assam, under the aegis of the Kettlebell and Fitness Association (KFA), won 6 Gold (Akshat Baruah 2, Yunay Gupta 3, Biswajit Barman 1), 1 Silver (Biswajit Barman) and 1 Bronze (Indrani Tapati) medals in 11th GSIF National Kettlebell Championship / 6th WKSF India International Trophy 2024. The event was held from March 29 to 31 in Gurugram, India. The championship was organised by GSIF (Girevoy Sports India Federation)

## Babar Azam reappointed as Pakistan's white-ball skipper ahead of T20 World Cup

**LAHORE, March 31:** Star batter Babar Azam was on Sunday reappointed as Pakistan's white-ball captain, two months ahead of the T20 World Cup.

Babar replaces fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi as the T20 captain. The pacer has been removed after just one series which Pakistan lost 1-4 to New Zealand in January.

The decision to reinstate Babar was taken after a unanimous recommendation from the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) selection committee.

"Following unanimous recommendation from the PCB's selection committee, Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi has appointed Babar Azam as white-ball (ODI and T20I) captain of the Pakistan men's cricket team," the PCB said in a media release.

During a recent meeting in Lahore with PCB Chief Naqvi, Babar allegedly sought assurances about his tenure and asked to be appointed captain of the Test side as well.

However, a reliable source within the PCB disclosed that Naqvi clarified the board's stance,



indicating that while Babar would be given a proper run in the white-ball formats a decision on the Test captaincy will be made later.

Shan Masood is currently leading the red ball team.

"Naqvi made it clear to Babar that PCB will decide on the Test captaincy after appointing the red ball foreign coach and Pakistan has no Test commitments until after the World Cup," the source added.

Babar had stepped down as cap-

tain from all three formats after a disappointing outing at the ODI World Cup in India in November last year.

He had relinquished his role after the then PCB Chief Zaka Ashraf told him he would no longer be captain the white-ball formats and would only lead the Test team.

Under Babar's captaincy, Pakistan reached the final of the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia. The latest edition of the marquee event

will begin on June 1 in the USA and the West Indies.

The source said the announcement was made after selectors -- Muhammad Yousuf, Asad Shafiq, Wahab Riaz, Abdul Razzaq and Bilal Afzal -- met with Shaheen in the training camp in Kakul on Saturday evening and informed him that they wanted him to focus on his bowling and felt it was better if a batter leads the white ball teams.

Insiders revealed that Shaheen accepted the change and didn't protest much but pointed out that it was unfair on him to be judged on just one series.

According to the source, Sha-

heen's inability to effectively lead the Lahore Qalandars in the Pakistan Super League, resulting in their last-place finish, coupled with his own inconsistent performance, were key factors influencing the decision to replace him.

"The PCB Chairman had made it clear to the selectors that they must decide who should be the captain and also said they would be answerable for the performances of the national team in the future," the source added. (PTI)

## Mayank Yadav: God-fearing West Delhi boy from Sonnet Club stable

**NEW DELHI, March 31:** Mayank Yadav guarantees instant destruction of batting line-ups. But growing up with the aspirations and anxieties of ordinary Indians, he had his fair share of struggles while transforming from a frail 15-year-old to a frighteningly quick fast bowler.

His father Prabhu Yadav was always determined to embrace the struggles usually associated with the middle class, in order to see Mayank excel on the cricket field.

Life has changed overnight for the Yadav family from West Delhi's Punjabi Bagh with the 24 deliveries that their 21-year-old son bowled for Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL game against Punjab Kings on a Saturday evening.

Mayank has become the toast of the nation in 15 minutes flat and every Indian cricket fan would pray that he brings glory to the country for the next 15 years.

"If Ustaadji and Devender bhai had not been around, my son wouldn't have come this far. I wanted him to play cricket but they prepared him for all the best tests," Prabhu couldn't thank the late Tarak Sinha (Ustaadji) and current head coach (Sharma) of the famous Sonnet Club enough for their contribution in his son's development.

The 6 feet 1 inch tall Delhi boy, who faced issues with multiple injuries in his short career, turned heads with a 155.8 kmph delivery, the fastest in this edition of IPL.

"People watch IPL and they only saw Mayank yesterday but those who keep track



knew that in last year's Deodhar Trophy, he had bowled a delivery at 155 clicks. It was unfortunate that he suffered from hamstring injury and had to miss the entire Ranji season. I have been saying for past four years that this boy is special," an elated Devender, the man who also shaped the phenomenon called Rishabh Pant, told PTI.

"Last year, twice he called me before IPL games to say that 'sir, I would make my debut today,' and it didn't happen. Today I am very happy. He has made a start but has a long way to go."

The national selection committee led by Ajit Agarkar was keen on having a look at him during this year's Ranji Trophy which he was forced to sit out.

Devender recalled the time when Mayank's father, a small-time businessman with a shop in Delhi's Okhla, brought his son to the famous Sonnet Club when he was around 14.

"He looked very frail and didn't even have bowling spikes, but in Sonnet, if we find any boy to be special in terms of talent, kit and equipment is never a problem."

"At 15, with that weak physique of his, he could generate above average pace for his age-group. He has had his share of struggles but he always worked hard."

"He might look lean but he is very strong now with proper nutrition and regimented fitness. He is a pure vegetarian and an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna," Devender said.

Devender's most illustrious student Rishabh Pant wanted to rope in Mayank for DC but LSG didn't agree to a transfer.

His father had his share of problems during COVID. He was earlier dealing in electronics equipment but is now in the business of selling sirens used in police jeeps and ambulances.

"I told my son, 'beta aapka kaam hai cricket khelna aur baki jaddojehad jo hai, woh aapke baap ka kaam hai.' (Son, your job is to play cricket and your father's job is to face the challenges of life)," Prabhu said.

"Obviously, my dream is to see him wear the India shirt and represent the country for 15 years. He believes in Radha-Krishnan and I believe in God. Almighty has plans for him

and he will succeed," the proud father said.

His pace might have sent everyone for a tizzy but Devender recalled how he never allowed Mayank to bowl with 'Kanchaas', colloquial term for hard brick-like locally manufactured red balls often used in Delhi cricket.

"The kind of pace he has, I would always fear if he bowls with Kanchaas, he would end up hurting the batters with his raw pace. I always gave him SG balls, which are slightly softer and you play competitive cricket with SG balls," Devender, the former Delhi Ranji keeper, said.

Mayank's pace is certainly going to excite the national selectors but with processes in place, he would be integrated into the system after he consistently plays for one whole season.

"He is an exceptional talent and obviously, he is a candidate for exclusive pace bowling contract like Aakash Deep, Umran Malik or Vijaykumar Vyshak. He has to play the full IPL. But he is injury-prone and has to show that he can last a full season including Ranji Trophy."

"For the time being he would be seen as a white ball prospect unless he plays Ranji Trophy. But he needs to play India A and smaller bilateral rubbers first," a senior BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

On Mayank, England fast-bowling legend Stuart Broad gave some fine technical insights on 'Star Sports'. (PTI)

## Giants on whose shoulders future generations prospered: Dravid lauds class of Karnataka '74

**BENGALURU, March 31:** Warm spells of nostalgia washed across the room as members of the Karnataka team that won the 1974 Ranji Trophy bunched the audience into a time-capsule and took them back to an era where cricket and life were simpler.

Unassuming those days and players might have been, but the path found by champions like GR Viswanath, Syed Kirmani, Brijesh Patel, EAS Prasanna and BS Chandrasekhar has only broadened over the years through which several ace cricketers walked through.

None among them shone brighter than Rahul Dravid, former India captain and the team's current head coach.

"It was an inspiration for all of us. Right from our U15 and U17 tours, all we could hear was how Karnataka beat the mighty Bombay against all odds (in the semifinals back then)."

"It really opened the doors for Karnataka cricket, and also the rest of the country that it is possible to beat Bombay. It was the bedrock of everything that followed as on the shoulders of these giants Karnataka cricket prospered," Dravid said here in a function organised to felicitate the class of '74.

Karnataka ended Mumbai's streak in the semis by virtue of their

first innings lead, with Viswanath and Brijesh making hundreds while Prasanna and Chandrasekhar sharing nine wickets among them.

It was the first time in 15 seasons Mumbai failed to enter a Ranji Trophy final.

In the summit clash, Karnataka kept Rajasthan by 185 runs as skipper Prasanna returned with a nine-wicket haul to bag their maiden Ranji title.

Viswanath, in his typical humble way, reminisced how Brijesh tamed a solid Mumbai spin attack consisting of Padmakar Shivalkar, Eknath Solkar, Rakesh Tandon and Milind Rege.

"Brijesh was a slightly hesitant starter for the first few balls. But once he is set, he is a nightmare for bowlers, especially spinners. Good luck to bowlers," he said.

But these legends were not only fine players but were wonderful human beings and great ambassadors of the sport as well.

Dravid shared a couple of nuggets with the audience.

"GRV sir was my first manager. Once we went to Visakhapatnam for a match and the Andhra Cricket Association had arranged a passenger bus to pick us up from the railway station, some 20-25 kms away, and the bus driver and conductor suddenly got this idea. (PTI)