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'In Assam, there is no violence, and all communities and tribes are living peacefully' KA Assam's fastest developing district: CM

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 21: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday lauded Karbi Anglong's progress, declaring it one of Assam's fastest developing districts.
 Emphasising the state's tranquility, Sarma affirmed that Assam witnesses no violence, with all communities and tribes coexisting harmoniously.
 "Karbi Anglong is one of the fast developing districts in Assam. In Assam, there is no violence, and all communities and tribes are living peacefully," Sarma affirmed, echoing his commitment to the region's prosperity while addressing an election rally in Diphu's Tarabasa.
 Sarma underscored overwhelming support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, citing chants of 'Aap ki bar, Modi sarkar' reverberating across the state.
 "Everywhere I go, I hear people chanting 'Aap ki bar, Modi sarkar,' which shows there is strong support for Modi," Sarma reiterated,



showcasing the people's allegiance. Expressing contentment over Karbi Anglong's High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) results, Sarma commended the district's impressive 81% pass rate, signaling progress in educational outcomes.
 Regarding the implementation of Article 244(A) for granting Au-

tonomous State status, Sarma assured continued efforts, with MP Horensing Bey and Amarsing Tisso championing the cause in Parliament.
 Addressing concerns about evictions on PGR/VGR land in Kheroni West Karbi Anglong, Sarma pledged post-election consultations to resolve the matter, cautioning against further encroachments.
 On electoral prospects, Sarma exuded confidence, predicting a substantial vote share of 3 to 4 lakh for the BJP from the Diphu seat.
 In a subsequent rally at Dongkamukam, Sarma underscored the BJP's governance in Delhi, Dispur, and Diphu, highlighting the party's widespread influence.
 Acknowledging electoral reforms, Sarma revealed the creation of an additional MLA seat, 112 Amri LAC, alongside the existing 20-Baithalangso LAC in West Karbi Anglong.
 The rally witnessed the presence of notable figures including deputy speaker Dr Numal Momin, chief executive member Tuliram Ronghang, MLAs Rupsing Teron, Bidyasing Englung, Dorsing Ronghang, along with BJP-EKAD president Roland Killing and BJP-WKADC president Radip Ronghang, signifying unity and support within the party.

Shah holds roadshow in Assam's Silchar

SILCHAR, April 21: Braving rain, Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday led a colourful roadshow in Silchar, the most important town of Assam's Barak Valley bordering Bangladesh, for BJP candidate Parimal Suklabaidya.
 Accompanied by Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Shah was standing atop a decorated vehicle which had Prime Minister Narendra Modi's picture in front. The 2-km long roadshow began at the District Sports Association point in the heart of the town at 5 pm and covered Central Road, Premtala, Ambikapatty and Hospital Road before culminating at Radhamadhav Road.
 Shah was seen showering flower petals on people who were standing on both sides of the roadshow route braving rain. He also waved at the enthusiastic crowd that gathered along the way and also at the rooftops of houses and greeted people with folded hands. "Amidst a sea of supporters in the Silchar Roadshow," Shah said on 'X'.
 During the procession, cultural troupes of Dhamail, Bihu and Manipuri dancers performed along the way.
 Supporters were seen waving BJP flags and raising slogans like 'Modi-Shah Zindabad', 'BJP Zindabad', 'Bharat Mata ki Jai', 'Jai Shri Ram'.
 The 50-minute-long roadshow brought traffic to a halt with entry to the town through thoroughfares blocked. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Naba Sarania's nomination cancelled

KOKRAJHAR, April 21: The nomination papers of Kokrajhar MP Naba Kumar Sarania, who was looking for a third consecutive term, were cancelled on Sunday, officials said.
 Returning Officer Pradeep Kumar Dwivedi told reporters the nomination papers of Sarania were found invalid, and hence cancelled. "Out of the 16 nominations filed till the last day on April 19, 15 were found valid. The candidates who are willing to withdraw their nominations can do the same by 3 pm tomorrow," he said.
 The Kokrajhar constituency, which is reserved for Scheduled Tribe, will go to the polls in the third phase on May 7. The authority had adjourned the scrutiny for this seat that was scheduled on Saturday.
 Besides Kokrajhar, voting will take place in Guwahati, Barpeta and Dhubri in the third phase on May 7. The scrutiny for the remaining three seats was done on Saturday and altogether 37 nominations were found to be valid.
 Sarania, the chief of the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) who has been representing the constituency as an Independent since 2014, had filed a writ petition in the Gauhati High Court challenging the striking down of his ST. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM Modi takes swipe at Sonia Gandhi's Rajya Sabha entry

JAIPUR, April 21: In a veiled attack on Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said those who cannot win elections have "fled the field" and have come to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan.
 Addressing an election rally in Rajasthan's Jalore, Modi said the country is punishing the Congress for its "sins" and the party that had once won 400 seats is unable to find candidates to contest 300 seats in this Lok Sabha election.
 "Those who cannot contest elections, cannot win elections have fled the field. This time, they have come to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. The condition of Congress is so bad," Modi said.
 Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi is among the MPs elected to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan in February. Several Congress veterans have not been fielded in this Lok Sabha election, but the party has rejected suggestions that they were shying away from contesting.
 "In the first phase of voting, half of Rajasthan has punished Congress. Rajasthan, which is full of patriotism, knows that Congress can never make India strong," PM Modi said. He said the country does not want the conditions which



existed before 2014 to return.
 "The Congress has hollowed out the country by spreading termites of nepotism and corruption. And today, the country is angry with the Congress and is punishing it for these sins. The youths are so angry that they do not want to see the Congress' face again."
 Modi was addressing the public meeting in Bhnimal in support of BJP candidate Lumbaram Chaudhary. "The Congress has itself to blame for its present condition... The party that had once won 400 seats is unable to contest 300 seats on its own. Today, the condition of Congress is such that it is unable to find candidates."
 "They have formed an opportunistic INDI Alliance, (it is like) a kite whose string has been cut before it could fly," he said. Modi said it was an alliance only in name as its constituents were fighting against each other in many states. "In this (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Indian-origin mayoral candidate wants to run London like a 'seasoned CEO'

LONDON, April 21: Tarun Ghulati, the Indian-origin candidate in the race to challenge Sadiq Khan from winning a third term as Mayor of London, has said that the citizens of the UK capital have been let down by all the major political parties and he wants to run London like a "seasoned CEO" which delivers profits for all.
 The Delhi-born businessman believes his investment expertise is what London needs to revive its fortunes as the "global bank of the world" by attracting the investment it needs. The 63-year-old is standing as an Independent candidate among 13 contestants in the fray for the local elections on May 2, when Londoners will vote for their Mayor and also for members of the London Assembly.
 "I view London as a unique global city, akin to the 'global bank of the world' where diverse cultures converge to flourish," Ghulati said in a speech this week.
 "As Mayor, I will build London's balance sheet such that it is the premier choice for investment, safeguarding safety and prosperity for all its residents. I will transform and run London effectively and efficiently like a seasoned CEO. London will be a profitable corporate where profitability means the wellbeing of all. You will all be part of the journey. Let's do it for



our London, our home," he said.
 Safety on the streets of the city is among his other major priorities, with visible community policing and more officers patrolling on the beat on the agenda.
 "It is about having enough bobbies on the beat, having the resources for police officers to do their jobs; which means making the streets safe for women to walk at night, with muggers and burglars being caught and punished," he said.
 Scrapping some of the Labour Party incumbent Sadiq Khan's unpopular policies, such as the high costs associated with Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) charges

and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) across the city, also make up Ghulati's key policy planks.
 "We did not want ULEZ, LTNs or 20mph speed limits and many other poor policies... Climate change is happening and we need to mitigate its effects but that cannot be done by making everyone live 15 minutes from home or to penalise commuters in areas with little public transport. What changes we need to make must be paced with public opinion, not imposed in an arbitrary way on wallets coping with the cost of living," said Ghulati, who has called London his home for 20 years.
 He is equally scathing about the Conservative Party candidate for Mayor, Susan Hall, who he claims failed to block the Mayor's controversial policies despite being an Assembly member for London for many years.
 "I would not be a candidate for Mayor if the political candidates were doing what they should be doing. They have let us down. This is all about London and Londoners," he declared.
 Creating more affordable housing, minimising council tax, increasing focus on tourism to the UK capital and ensuring free school meals are among some of Ghulati's other focus areas. He claims to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Delhi HC to hear Kejriwal's plea against ED summons today

NEW DELHI, April 21: The Delhi High Court will on Monday hear chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's petition challenging the summonses issued to him by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with its probe into an excise policy-linked money laundering case.
 Kejriwal, arrested by the agency on March 21 after the high court refused to grant him interim protection from coercive action, has also challenged the constitutional validity of certain provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act with respect to arrest, questioning and grant of bail.
 The plea is scheduled for hearing before the bench of Justice Suresh Kumar Kait and Justice Manoj Jain. The AAP national convener had approached the high court in the wake of the ninth summonses issued by the ED asking him to appear before it on March 21. The high court bench on March 20 asked the ED to file its reply with respect to the maintainability of the petition.
 The next day, it asked ED to also respond to Kejriwal's plea seeking protection from arrest, saying "at this stage" it was not inclined to grant any interim relief. Kejriwal was arrested by ED later that evening and is presently in judicial custody. The federal probe agency has alleged (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bhupen asks Himanta to resign if Gaurav wins

GUWAHATI, April 21: Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah on Sunday asked chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who has been claiming that BJP will win all five seats of first phase polling, to resign if Gaurav Gogoi wins from Jorhat constituency.
 Addressing a press conference here, Borah also criticised Sarma over his dance moves in campaign meetings and said he should join films if he wants to entertain people.
 In almost all his campaign meetings, Sarma ends his speeches by dancing to BJP's theme song, being used since the last Parliamentary election -- 'Akou ebar Modi sarkar' (Modi's government, once more).
 "The CM is saying that BJP will win all the five seats of Upper Assam. I am directly chal-

lenging him: will he resign if Gaurav Gogoi wins from Jorhat?" asked the Congress leader.
 During the first phase on April 19, voting took place in Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Kaziranga, Sonitpur and Jorhat, from where Gogoi contested against sitting BJP MP Topon Kumar Gogoi.
 No BJP national figure came to campaign in Jorhat, and the entire campaign was led by the chief minister, who addressed multiple meetings and held several roadshows covering all the 10 assembly segments in the constituency.
 Several BJP state ministers like Pijush Hazarika and Jayanta Malla Baruah camped in Jorhat. Many MLAs also stayed there for a long period. "Sarma is telling a lie to the people of Assam. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Leaders of INDIA bloc are either in jail or bail: Nadda

HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA), April 21: Accusing the INDIA bloc as a group of dynastic politics, BJP national president J P Nadda on Sunday said the members of 'Ghamandia' (arrogant) parties are either on bail or in jail.
 He said if there was one party which has respect for democracy, it is the BJP as it allows ordinary people to rise and become leaders.
 "On the one hand, there is 'Ghamandia' alliance in the name of India and on the other, there is a democratic BJP

which allows people from ordinary families to rise and become leaders," Nadda said, addressing leaders of various communities here.
 The BJP has coined the term 'Ghamandia' to mock the opposition parties' alliance, which named themselves the INDIA bloc. The BJP president said Farooq Abdullah-Omar Abdullah, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed-Mehbooba Mufti, Prakash Badal-Sukhbir Badal, Chautala family, Mulayam-Akhilesh-Dimple Yadav family, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

People are absolutely fed up with politics of fear and tyranny: TMC MP CAA an overused political tool, says Sushmita Dev

SILCHAR, April 21: Senior Trinamool Congress leader Sushmita Dev claimed that the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is an "overused political tool that stands exposed for its ineffectiveness".
 In an interview with PTL, the Rajya Sabha MP alleged that a lot of Hindus were excited when CAA was passed in Parliament but now it has become "khoda pahar nikla chuha" (much ado about nothing) as people are being asked to submit passports and school certificates of Bangladesh.
 Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, while campaigning for the polls, has alleged that the anti-CAA stir

in Assam is "based on lies", and those who led it will be answerable to the people.
 "After bringing the law, the BJP-led Centre kept it hanging for four years as an ineffective piece of legislation and now they have made it an almost impossible option (for people) due to its rules and regulations," the former Silchar MP said.
 "During the updation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, we Bengali Hindus had to prove that we are Indians by submitting Indian school certificates and other documents but in CAA, we are being asked to submit documents from Bangladesh," she alleged.
 "The CAA, therefore, stands exposed... it is an overused political tool which is going nowhere," Dev said.
 CAA rules were notified on



March 11, over four years after it was enacted on December 11, 2019. It seeks to grant Indian nationality to persecuted Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian

immigrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who sought shelter in India before December 31, 2014.
 The TMC MP said that price rise is a major issue in polls, and people are "absolutely fed up with politics of fear and tyranny".
 "You cannot write freely on social media, you cannot speak out against the government... anger and frustration are growing. Contrary to the surveys that have come out, I believe people of the country are not happy with the current regime and a churning is underway in the entire nation," she claimed. Dev said that it was not (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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Direct tax collections exceed estimates in FY24; jump 18 pc to ₹ 19.58 lakh crore

NEW DELHI, April 21: India's net direct tax collections surged by a massive 17.7 per cent year-on-year to ₹ 19.58 crore in the fiscal year ended March 2024, surpassing even revised estimates by a wide margin, the tax department said on Sunday.

Net collections of income and corporate taxes, which make up for most of the direct taxes, in 2023-24 financial year exceeded the Budget estimates by ₹ 1.35 lakh crore (7.40 per cent) and the revised estimates by ₹ 13,000 crore.

The government had raised the target for direct tax collection in FY24 (April 2023 to March 2024) to ₹ 19.45 lakh crore in the interim Budget presented on February 1.

With this, the gross tax collection target as per the revised estimate stood at ₹ 34.37 lakh crore for FY24. While gross direct tax collections (provisional) for the FY 2023-24 rose 18.48 per cent to ₹ 23.37 lakh crore, net proceeds (after accounting for refunds) surged 17.7 per cent to ₹ 19.58 lakh crore, reflecting buoyancy in the economy and rise in income levels of individuals and corporates. Refunds aggregating to ₹ 3.79 lakh crore have been issued in



FY 2023-24, the CBDT said in a statement. "The provisional figures of Direct Tax collections for the financial year (FY) 2023-24 show that net collections are at ₹ 19.58 lakh crore, compared to ₹ 16.64 lakh crore in the preceding financial year i.e. FY 2022-23," it said, adding the Budget for 2023-24 fiscal had pegged the collections for the year at ₹ 18.23 lakh crore, which were revised to ₹ 19.45 lakh crore later.

"The provisional Direct Tax collections (net of the refunds) have exceeded the Budget Estimate by 7.40 per cent and Revised Estimates by 0.67 per cent," it said.

The gross collection (provisional) of Direct Taxes (before adjusting for refunds) for the FY 2023-24 stood at ₹ 23.37 lakh crore, showing a growth of 18.48 per cent over the gross collection of ₹ 19.72 lakh crore in FY 2022-23. The gross corporate tax collection (provisional) in FY 2023-24 was up 13.06 per cent to ₹ 11.32 lakh crore as compared to the gross corporate tax collection of ₹ 10 lakh crore of the preceding year.

The Net Corporate Tax collection (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at ₹ 9.11 lakh crore showed a growth of 10.26 per cent over the net corporate tax collection of ₹ 8.26 lakh

crore of the preceding year.

The Gross Personal Income Tax collection including Securities Transaction Tax (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at ₹ 12.01 lakh crore was up 24.26 per cent over previous year's collection of ₹ 9.67 lakh crore. The Net Personal Income Tax collection including STT (provisional) in FY 2023-24 at ₹ 10.44 lakh crore showed a growth of 25.23 per cent over preceding fiscal year's figure of ₹ 8.33 lakh crore. Refunds of ₹ 3.79 lakh crore have been issued in the FY 2023-24 showing an increase of 22.74 per cent over the refunds of ₹ 3.09 lakh crore issued in FY 2022-23, the statement added.

Even the indirect tax collection for FY24 has exceeded the revised estimates (RE) of ₹ 14.84 lakh crore by "a handsome margin", helped by a record GST mop-up, a top government official said.

CBIC chairman Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, in a letter to field officials, recently said, "I am happy to inform that the indirect tax collections for the Financial Year 2023-24, including Customs and Union Excise Duty have exceeded the Revised Estimates by a handsome margin." (PTI)

Apple may employ over 500,000 people in India over the next 3 years

NEW DELHI, April 21: iPhone maker Apple through its vendors is expected to employ over 500,000 people in India over the next three years, according to government sources.

At present Apple's vendors and suppliers employ 150,000 people in India. Tata Electronics, which runs two plants for Apple, is the biggest job generator.

"Apple is accelerating hiring in India. At a conservative estimate, it is going to employ five lakh people in the next three years through its vendors and components suppliers," a senior government officer told PTI.

When contacted, Apple declined to comment on the projection.

Apple has plans to scale up production in India by over five-fold to around \$40 billion (about 3.32 lakh crore) in the next 4-5 years.

According to market research firm Counterpoint Research, Apple led the India market with the highest revenue in 2023 for the first time, while Samsung topped the chart in terms of volume sales.

The firm in its recent report said Apple surpassed the 10-million-unit mark in shipments and captured the top position in revenue in a calendar year for the first time.

Apple's iPhone exports from India rose sharply to \$12.1 billion in 2023-24 from \$6.27 billion in 2022-23, representing a massive surge of nearly 100 per cent, according to trade intelligence platform The Trade Vision. (PTI)

Hero MotoCorp inaugurates assembly unit in Nepal

NEW DELHI, April 21: Two-wheeler major Hero MotoCorp on Sunday said it has opened an assembly facility in Nepal in partnership with its distributor CG Motors. The facility will have a capacity of 75,000 units per annum and will bring new investments and create job opportunities in the region, Hero MotoCorp said in a statement.

Four products, Xpulse 200 4V, Super Splendor, Splendor+ motorcycles and Xoom 110 scooter, which have been launched in the country, will be assembled locally at the new assembly facility located in CG Industrial Park in Nawalparasi, it added. "This is an exciting development for us, CG Motors and for Nepal. The state-of-the-art assembly unit will ensure that our world-class products will now be made in Nepal and available to customers across the country," Hero MotoCorp Chief Business Officer - Global Business Unit, Sanjay Bhan said. He further said, "The rapid expansion of the sales and service network will enable us to entrench the market with our world-class products and services." (PTI)

THDC India aims to make ₹ 12,000-cr coal-based thermal power project operational by Sept

NEW DELHI, April 21: State-owned THDC India Ltd aims to make its coal-based power plant operational by September 2024, marking an entry into the domestic thermal energy sector, a top company official said.

THDC India Ltd (THDCIL) is setting up a 1,320 megawatt (2X660 MW) Super Thermal Power Project (STPP) at Bulandshahr district in Uttar Pradesh (UP), the official said in reply to a query about the company's plans of setting up coal-based capacities.

At present, the Uttarakhand-based entity has an installed power generation capacity of around 1,587 MW, of which 1,424 MW is hydro, 113 MW wind and 50 MW solar.

When asked about the timeline of the project, the official said "The work is going on in full swing. We are confident of making the first unit of 660 MW operational by September this year and the second unit operational by March 2025. It is a project of around ₹ 12,000 crore."

Till January 2024, a sum of ₹ 9,428.30 crore has been spent on the Khurja Super Thermal Power Plant (KSTPP), the company official said, adding that around 85 per cent of the work has been completed.

The company is in the process of implementing an environment-friendly carbon capture technique

at the Khurja STPP, which will capture the Co2 emissions, the official added.

Sharing the details of the project, the official further said the foundation stone for the project was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 9, 2019. The project spreads over an area of 1,200,843 acres.

It is an integrated coal-based thermal power plant with linkage of operational Amelia coal mine located at Singrauli district, Madhya Pradesh, the official said.

Once completed, the plant will generate 9,264 million units (MUs) of power annually corresponding to 85 per cent plant load factor (PLF).

As per allocation of power by the Ministry of Power, 64.7 per cent of the power generated (854 MW) is to be supplied to UP and balance to other beneficiaries.

On the status of the project, the official said, "Recently, a milestone was achieved towards the commissioning of Khurja STPP with the engine rolling on railway siding (downline) from Danwar station to the plant yard. It will allow receiving coal rakes from Amelia coal mines to Khurja STPP through Danwar station."

Several other project related works like boiler light up of Unit 1, and aux boiler light up etc. have been achieved as per schedule, he added. (PTI)

Cost, speed top priority for logistics sector: Last-mile trends report 2024

NEW DELHI, April 21: Cost and speed has now become the top priority of the firms engaged in logistics business for the last-mile delivery of goods and growth of the sector, a report has said.

According to the Last-Mile Trends Report 2024, earlier the top priority was cost and satisfaction.

"In last-mile delivery now top priority is cost and speed. The needle has shifted from cost and satisfaction to cost and speed," it said.

The report was unveiled during 'The Last Mile Leaders Event' organised by technology platform FarEye in collaboration with Microsoft this week.

Kushal Nahata, Co-founder and CEO of FarEye, said that within the next five years, autonomous drones will handle 30 per cent of urban deliveries, reducing delivery times and costs dramatically.

The report was based on insights gathered from over 300

leaders across five continents, representing companies with a combined revenue exceeding USD 100 billion.

Out of 300 participants, over 50 per cent stated that they deliver the goods same day/next day.

The report also said that 80 per cent of supply chain leaders believe measuring the cost of delivery is a top priority.

FarEye has also launched an initiative, "last-mile innovation nexus", to help startups raise funds and receive mentoring from global experts in the logistics sector.

Gautam Kumar, COO & Co-founder, FarEye, said: "The initiative is a launch pad for startups to secure transformative partnerships. It is exciting to see the surge in the adoption of AI, robotics, and embedded data analytics, all geared toward enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of logistics operations."

Over 40 supply chain experts

from more than 20 countries, representing diverse industries including retail, logistics, postal, consumer packaged goods (CPG), and pharmaceuticals, came together at the event to explore the transformative potential of technology in driving cost reduction in the logistics sector.

Nahata added that with urban delivery traffic projected to increase carbon emissions by 32 per cent by 2030, prioritizing sustainability is non-negotiable.

The surge in electric vehicle adoption and government initiatives like the FAME scheme, reflects a visible shift towards greener logistics in India.

"As industry leaders, we must place sustainability at the front and centre, meeting environmental and stakeholder expectations. It's clear that sustainable logistics isn't just a choice; it's our collective responsibility and competitive advantage," he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Indian-origin mayoral

have canvassed from borough to borough across London to garner his required signatures to support his mayoral candidature. Ghulati also features in the official mini manifesto booklet, which costs each candidate GBP 10,000. The winning mayoral candidate will be responsible for all local issues affecting Londoners, from transport and policing to housing and the environment. (PTI)

Shah holds roadshow

The Silchar seat has been reserved as a Scheduled Caste (SC) constituency after a delimitation exercise last year. Suklabaidya is Assam's minister for excise, transport and fisheries and is locked in a triangular contest with Congress nominee Surya Kanta Sarkar and TMC's Radheyshyam Biswas. Polling will be held in the constituency in the second phase on April 26. (PTI)

Naba Sarania's nomination

(Plains) status by the State-Level Scrutiny Committee, but it was dismissed on Thursday. Following this, the MP filed the nomination as a member of the Rava community by submitting a certificate from the All Assam Tribal Sangha, issued on November 18, 1986.

"...the community field 'Boro' has been struck off and 'Rava' has been entered without any corresponding countersignature of issuing authority," the returning officer said in his order. Observing that the certificate looked "extremely doubtful", Dwivedi said it raised "grave apprehensions" about its genuineness.

The order also noted that Sarania had won the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from the Kokrajhar seat producing a certificate of the Boro-Kachari community that was struck down by the State-Level Scrutiny Committee recently. "A person cannot belong to two different communities and cannot hold two ST certificates of different communities," it added. (PTI)

PM Modi takes swipe

Lok Sabha election, there are twenty five per cent seats in the country where people of this alliance are busy finishing off each other, contesting elections against each other. "If there is so much fighting before the elections, then you can imagine how much more they will fight for the loot after the elections. Can we hand over such a big country to these people?"

Modi alleged that the Congress, which ruled for 60 years, had deprived "our mothers and sisters" of even "small things like toilets, gas, electricity, water, bank accounts". Referring to the rule of the Congress-led UPA, PM Modi alleged that people used to threaten the weak Congress-led government and everyone was busy looting the country. "No one cared about the prime minister. The government used to run with remote control. A leader of his own party calls a media meeting, tears up an ordinance passed by the cabinet and throws it away. Can the Congress party and its family, a symbol of instability, run the country?" Modi said.

Prime Minister Modi said the country does not want the conditions that existed before 2014 to return. He alleged that the previous Congress government in the state committed a scam in the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme and did not allow its work to be completed.

"Now our Bhajanlal government has come. It is also investigating the scam. If there was no Congress government here, by now we would have come very close to the target of providing water to every house."

He said, "We have to take the development of Rajasthan and the country to new heights. I have set out with this resolve. We have to make India the third-largest economic power in the world. We have to make 'Developed India-Developed Rajasthan'." "Modi has guaranteed that this son sitting in Delhi will bear the expenses of up to Rs 5 lakh for the treatment of elderly persons above 70 years of age in every family. "As a son, it is my responsibility to take care of my parents' health," he said.

There are 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan. The first phase of polling for 12 seats was held on April 19, while the remaining 13 will go to polls in the second phase on April 26. The BJP had swept the state in 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. (PTI)

Delhi HC to hear Kejriwal's

that the accused were in touch with Kejriwal for formulating the now-scrapped excise policy that resulted in undue benefits to them, in return of kickbacks to the AAP.

In the plea, Kejriwal has raised several issues, including whether a political party is covered under the anti-money laundering law. It alleged that the arbitrary procedure under PMLA was being used to create a non-level playing field for the general elections to "skew the electoral process in the favour of the ruling party at the Centre". Stating the petitioner is a "vocal critic" of the ruling party, a partner of the INDIA bloc, the plea claimed that the ED being in control of the Union government has been "weaponized". (PTI)

Bhupen asks Himanta to

Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal will lose badly from Dibrugarh only because of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. People have voted against him for his silent support of the CAA," Borah claimed. Sonowal is pitted against Assam Jatiya Parishad's Lurinjyoti Gogoi, who is a candidate of the United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA), formed in the state with 16 parties in line with the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). Aam Aadmi Party's Manoj Dhanowar, who could make inroads in the tea garden areas, may play a spoiler role in Dibrugarh. Borah claimed that the Congress will lead in 40 out of 48 assembly seats belonging to five Lok Sabha constituencies where voting took place in the first phase. On Sarma's election campaign, the Congress leader said: "Why does the CM dance in every meeting? He throws the mic and only dances. He does not speak about issues like price rise, unemployment, CAA, Assam Accord and labour wages." Borah claimed Sarma dances only to deviate people from real issues. He said, "Those dance moves are also not anything related to the dances of Assam. If he really wants to entertain, he should join films. Why is he in politics?"

Borah wondered if any other BJP CM anywhere in the country dances during the election campaign instead of talking about issues affecting the public. "He (Sarma) has lost his mental balance," he claimed. Asked about his dance moves, videos of which have gone viral, the chief minister in an interview with PTI had explained that Assam is culturally very rich and music has an important role in everyone's life.

"One of the communications with the people in Assam is music. People feel that whenever there is a song, there is some festivity. We want to convert the election into a festival. "If you see my election speech, I don't talk about Rahul Gandhi, I don't talk about Congress. I talk only about Modi and development of Assam. Add a little bit of festivity, a little bit of music there -- it becomes lively. So, it is a mode of communication," he had added. (PTI)

Leaders of INDIA bloc are

Lalu-Rabri-Tejashwi-Tej Pratap Yadav family, Mamata Bannerjee-Abhishek, KCR-KTR-Kavita, Karunanidhi-Stalin-Udayanidhi, Sharad Pawar-Supriya Sule, and Uddhav Thackeray-Aditya Thackeray were all dynastic parties. "Aren't Sonia-Rahul-Priyanka a family politics?" Nadda sought to know.

He said most of the members of the INDIA bloc are either on bail or in jail such as Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party supreme Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain and Telangana MLC K Kavitha.

Underlining that containing corruption was on top of the BJP's agenda, he told the gathering that Prime Minister Modi had said from the ramps of Red Fort that corruption is like robbing a poor man. The BJP will not tolerate corruption and action will be taken.

Slamming the Congress for its failure to contain poverty, he said former prime ministers such as the late Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi spoke about poverty eradication. However, it was the BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi that brought 25 crore Indians out of poverty, Nadda explained. Quoting the IMF, he said extreme poverty is less than one per cent in the country, which was achieved in the last 10 years. It was done with the motto "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas" (Everyone's development with everyone's cooperation) and the prime minister changed the political culture of the country.

"Today we have development, accountability, pro-responsive, pro-active governance and politics of report card. What was promised was given and more was offered. Modi has changed the politics. We can see the opposition's frustration, anger and attempt to divert from core issues," Nadda said. Speaking about farmers' welfare, he said that under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, 53 lakh people from Karnataka and 1.5 lakh from Dharwad are getting ₹ 2,000 every fourth month. The ₹ 2.5 lakh crore is directly deposited into the bank accounts of farmers due to the initiative.

The BJP president also hit out at the Congress party for waiving off the farm loans every ten years, which used to omit those who honestly cleared their loans and benefited the habitual defaulters.

Speaking about the economy, Nadda said all the major economies are in trouble "but, according to the IMF report, if there is any bright spot in the midst of gloomy economic scenario, it is India." "We were in the 11th spot when Modi came to power and now we are the fifth largest economy leaving behind Britain. If you elect Modi again, India will be the third major economy in the next two years," he told the gathering.

The BJP president said India is poised to become a big manufacturing hub. Boeing India Engineering and Technology Centre has been inaugurated in Karnataka, which is the first largest establishment of Boeing outside America. The largest helicopter manufacturing unit is being established in Tumakuru, he said, adding that new airports have been built in Mysuru, Shivamogga, Belagavi and Hubballi.

On the ruling Congress' allegation that Karnataka was not given its due share of devolution of taxes, he said the allocation of funds from the union government to the state has increased fourfold and the Central grant-in-aid increased three times. Nadda was here to campaign for Dharwad Lok Sabha BJP candidate Pralhad Joshi. Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka will be held in two phases - April 26 and May 7. (PTI)

CAA an overused political

possible for BJP to achieve its target of 400 seats as "the saffron party has reached its saturation point". "They are creating hype... I don't think they are going to cross the 200 mark. I hope I am right otherwise the country is in danger," she said. Accusing the BJP of "practically finishing" Bengali Hindus and Muslims of Barak Valley in southern Assam through neglect, she said the TMC's slogan, hence, is "fight for your dignity".

The TMC is contesting four Lok Sabha seats in Assam, including Silchar, where Dev asserted that "people are looking for an alternative". Dev said that TMC supreme and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee recently addressing a rally in Silchar in support of party candidate Radheshyam Biswas sent out a clear message that she has "serious electoral interest" in Assam. In the Silchar Lok Sabha seat, anti-incumbency against the BJP is high and people view TMC as a fresh option, the former MP who had represented the seat from 2014 to 2019 before losing the previous elections, claimed. Dev said Silchar has a history of deprivation in the last few decades, with the level varying from the days of the Congress to that of the BJP.

She claimed that unemployment, lack of infrastructure and poor connectivity with the rest of Assam and also with neighbouring states are major poll planks in the two Barak Valley constituencies of Silchar and Karimganj. On the party's plans for the 2026 assembly elections in Assam, she said, "In this Lok Sabha polls, we are contesting only four of the 14 seats in the state. So we are calling it a trailer. If all goes well, although I don't want to sound overconfident, we aim to give candidates in more than half of the total number of assembly seats."

Even Mamata Banerjee had said in the meeting that "this is a trailer, wait for the final, which means we will hoist the TMC flag in Assam", Dev asserted. Assam has a 126-member assembly, where TMC does not have any representation. (PTI)

Insurance regulator IRDAI abolishes age restriction on health insurance product

NEW DELHI, April 21: With a view to widen the market and foster adequate protection from healthcare expenses, insurance regulator IRDAI has removed the age limit of 65 years for individuals buying health insurance policies.

This marks a significant departure from the conventional constraints that limited individuals in securing comprehensive coverage.

By abolishing the maximum age restriction on purchasing health insurance plans, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) aims to foster a more inclusive and accessible healthcare ecosystem, ensuring adequate protection against unforeseen medical expenses.

As per the earlier guidelines, individuals were allowed to purchase a new insurance policy only till the age of 65. However, with the recent amendment, which has been



effective from April 1, anyone, regardless of age, is eligible to buy a new health insurance policy.

In a recent gazette notification, IRDAI said, "insurers shall ensure that they offer health insurance products to cater to all age groups.

Insurers may design products specifically for senior citizens, students, children, maternity, and any

other group as specified by the Competent Authority."

Besides, insurers have been mandated to offer health policies to individuals with pre-existing medical conditions of any kind.

Consequently, insurers are prohibited from refusing to issue policies to individuals with severe medical conditions like cancer,

heart or renal failure, and AIDS.

According to the notification, insurers are allowed to offer premium payment in instalments for the convenience of policyholders.

Travel policies can only be offered by general and health insurers, it said.

There is no limit on AYUSH treatment coverage. Treatments under systems like Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy will receive coverage up to the sum insured without any cap, it said.

Policyholders with benefit-based policies can file multiple claims with various insurers, enhancing flexibility and options, it said.

The proposed regulation seeks to handle the complaints and claims of senior citizens via a specialised channel, ensuring a more tailored and responsive approach to their requirements, it added. (PTI)

Heroin recovered in Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, April 21: The police have recovered heroin from a couple at Kara Rongpi in Karbi Anglong.

The accused have been identified as Philip Basumatary (22) and a young woman, Kikeusanu Keretsu. Basumatary is a resident of Sunday Market in Lahorjian in Karbi Anglong.

On Saturday evening the police intercepted a motorcycle bearing the registration number 'AS 01 BX 3933' and recovered two identical plastic cases containing heroin weighing 23.950 gms. In this case a couple has been apprehended.

Police officials that further investigations into the matter are on at present.

Village headman killed in West Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 21: In a tragic incident unidentified miscreants killed the village headman of Thepli Aram village under Jengkha Police Outpost in West Karbi Anglong district.

The victim has been identified as Rostom Tisso (65 years) of Thepli-Aram village.

According to the victim's elder son Mongol Tisso, on the evening of had gone to attend an election meeting organised by the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) in the village on Saturday. The meeting lasted up to 7 p.m. After the meeting Tisso along with another village headman Mohon Bey had headed out to their homes.

Later someone informed the deceased's family that he had been lying dead in a pool of blood by the roadside. The miscreants had reportedly beheaded the victim. The body has been sent for autopsy to the Diphu Medical College and Hospital here.

Gohain Baruah remembered for his unmatched contributions to enrich Assamese literature

Assamese literary icon Padmanath Gohain Baruah remembered in Sonitpur



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, April 21: Several organisations paid rich tributes to noted Assamese litterateur and the first president of the Asom Sahitya Sabha Padmanath Gohain Baruah on the occasion of his 78th death anniversary on Sunday.

The Tezpur Sahitya Sabha, Baan Theatre, Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sakhini Sabha, Padmanath Gohain Barua Sakha Sahitya Sabha and several other socio-cultural and literary organizations paid tribute to the literary icon during a daylong programmes organised in Tezpur on Sunday.

Gohain Baruah was a novelist, poet, lyricist, dramatist of excellence, analyst and a thought provoking writer. He was also the first chairman of the Tezpur Municipality Board.

As part of the daylong commemoration programme conducted by the former secretary of the Tezpur Sahitya Sabha, a book launching cum memorial lecture programme was also held at the Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Bhawan here. Two books were released by Bhupen Saikia, president of the Sonitpur Zila Sahitya Sabha and Bhubaneswar Saharia, president of the Tarun Asam Sangha.

Launching the short story collection titled 'Patar Aror Juj' authored by Maya Sarma, a veteran writer of Tezpur, Bhupen Saikia in his deliberation lauded the effort of the author and said that her stories always convey the distinctive qualities of a well read short story. Discussing the astounding journey of Edgar Allen Poe as founder of short stories Saikia said that the short story was the innovative creation of nineteenth century.

He also mentioned the contributions of Lakshminath Bezbarua as a short story writer and said that he published his first short story 'Seuti' in Jonaki. Further, he also remembered the notable contributions of Padmanath Gohain Barua in shaping the state's literary arena and the Assamese society as a whole. He felt aggrieved for not discussing the contributions made by Gohain Barua widely amongst the Assamese people and urged all to pay attention to that concern.

While launching the collection of limericks titled 'Akuki Limericks and Apodeeya Padya' by Hareswar Goswami, noted writer

including life and works of many stalwarts of Assamese Society along with his schoolmate Panindranath Gogoi," Sarma said.

Attending the programme, retired professor and editor of Assamese weekly Ganakantha, Pranjit Hazarik said that as Walter Scott, Padmanath Gohain Barua also contributed a lot to every segment of the Assamese literary world.

Putting an insightful and critical view on Gohain Barua's Shri Krishna, Dr Hazarika said, "Sahitya Kandari Padmanath Gohain Barua may not be great, but an important writer for the Assamese nation. Everyone should take the responsibility to attract the new generation towards enrichment of book reading culture."

Meanwhile, behalf of Gohain Barua's family Pari Gohain Barua and Sanjay Krishna Gohain Barua performed the tribute paying programme by lighting the ceremonial lamp at the portrait of Padmanath Gohain Barua. Retired principal of Darrang College, Abani Kumar Sarma, former vice president of Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Benudhar Kakati, Ruma Devi, former president of Baan Theatre Mahendra Nath Keot, literary pensioner Ram Chandra Chutia, internationally acclaimed photo artist Nalini Barua, retired professor Ramesh Chandra Goswami, Tezpur Sahitya Sabha secretary Dwijen Nath and president Ramesh Chandra Kalita, retired professor Kalpana Barua, veteran singer Kalpana Kalita, social worker and artist Tarulata Das, president of Chatak Anil Kumar Bhattacharya, noted lawyer Ananta Goswami, cultural activist Simanta Kakati, former secretary of Sonitpur Silpi Samaj Jayanta Barua and others also joined the programme by paying floral tribute to the literary doyen.

Husband stabs wife to death at Balijuri



HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 21: The police have arrested a man for stabbing his wife to death in the Dakhin Balijuri area of Biswanath Chariali.

According to sources, the accused, Thungi Santhal, a resident of Dakhin Balijuri had reportedly stabbed his wife, Joonmani Santhal to death at his residence on Saturday night. A heated argument broke out between the couple regarding a particular family issue. The furious husband, who had been drunk

RPF rescues 16 minors from trains, stations

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: The railway protection force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) successfully rescued 16 minors during its ongoing checking drives conducted from April 13 to 19 at different trains and railway stations.

During the period of 2023-24, 654 minors comprising of 409 boys and 245 girls and 69 women were rescued by RPF in coordination with the government railway police (GRP), Childline and NGOs. The rescued children and women were handed over to respective Childline, NGOs and GRP for further legal proceedings.

Also, during the same period a total of 12 human traffickers were arrested and 32 persons including 25 minor boys, four minor girls, two males and one female were rescued from them.

In an incident of on April 18, RPF team of Katihar, rescued three destitute minor boys at the Katihar railway station. Later, the rescued minors were handed over to their respective parents after proper verification. On April 16, RPF team of Chaparmukh, while conducting check in train the Deoghar - Agartala Express at the Chaparmukh Station rescued one runaway minor girl. Later, she was handed over to the Child Welfare Committee of Nagaon for safe custody.

Preventive measures are being taken to take action in case of children in need of care and protection, who are found in trains and railway premises. RPF carries on a relentless fight against criminals in protecting railway passengers, remains vigilant for suspected persons involved in human trafficking as well as the movement of children in a suspicious manner, travelling alone, without proper guardian etc.



PHE Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah campaigns for AGP-BJP alliance candidate Javed Islam at Dhubri on Sunday. UB Photos

Ram Navami celebrated at Margherita

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, April 21: A huge religious rally was taken out at the Margherita Dirok Tea Estate to celebrate 'Ram Navami' on Sunday.

Over 5000 people from the tea tribe community of the Dehing Tea Estate, Margherita Tea Estate, Namdang Tea Estate, Ledo Tea Estate, Segunbari and Dirok Tea Estate partook in the rally.

Since 2007 Ram Navami has been celebrated at the Dirok Tea Estate in Margherita in Tinsukia district every year. During the occasion a mass wedding ceremony was also organised for underprivileged youths of the tea tribe community this year, where a total of 31 couples got married.

Binud Munda member of the Ram Navami reception committee said that the festival, which began on April 17 concluded on Sunday with a huge religious rally attended by about 5000 people.

"Many people from the tea tribe community are getting converted to other religions. Through this festival we have tried to bring the brothers and sisters on one platform so that our civilization, culture, tradition and religious beliefs remain intact," said Munda.



SEEV cell to hold cycle rally in Diphu

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 21: The State Voter's Electoral Education and Participation (SVEEP) cell will organise a cycle rally featuring the state icon Rakesh Banik, Para-cyclist on April 22. The cycle rally, a collaborative effort by Diphu Election District, ASRLMS, ASNULMS, Women Justice Forum, Cyclist Association, NCC Diphu Government College, and Athletics Association and Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA), aims to engage and encourage citizens from various walks of life, including women, senior citizens, specially-abled individuals and daily wage labourers on the necessary to exercise their right to franchise. The rally, which is expected to draw a crowd of over 300 participants, will commence from the district commissioner's office here and proceed towards Diphu Market and culminate at the Gandhi Maidan. The event will kick off at 9 am from the DC office in the presence of district commissioner, Madhumita Bhagwati and Rakesh Banik. At Gandhi Maidam, attendees will have the opportunity to interact with the state icon, Rakesh Banik, who will also deliver a speech along with Karbi Anglong district icon and mountaineer Khorsing Terang, who was honoured with the Assam Gaurav award

Book released in Biswanath

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 21: Ti Din Kota Gaye a Nepali collection of stories compiled by eminent physician of Biswanath Chariali, Narayan Chandra Upadhyaya was released at a function held at the conference hall of Basanta Smriti Sangsthan on Sunday

The book was unveiled by Khemraj Nepal, a retired teacher and Sahitya Akademi's translation prize awardee writer. At the very outset of the programme, Tikaram Upadhyaya Nirvik lit the ceremonial lamp in front of the portrait of late Basanta Nepal and offered floral tributes followed by a welcome song performed by Prem Biswakarma.

Hanuman Janamotsav to be celebrated in Hojai

Three-day grand celebrations being held to mark Hanuman Janamotsav at Shri Laxminarayan Mandir



HT Correspondent
HOJAI, April 21: The Hanuman Janamotsav Samity under the aegis of Marwari Panchayat will hold the silver jubilee celebrations of the 'Hanuman Janamotsav' with a grand three-day celebration at the Shri Laxminarayan Mandir in Hojai from April 22 to 24.

The Shri Laxminarayan Mandir was established in 1935. The temple has the idol of Lord Hanuman, Shri Laxminarayan, Sri Ram along with Goddess Sita, Laxman and Hanuman, Lord Shiva along with his family. Outside the temple there is an idol of Mata Shitala, footprints of Ramdev and Lord Bhairav.

The programme will commence from April 22 at the temple with a Ramayan Paath at 10:30 am. This will be followed by a cultural procession, where a large number of enthusiastic women, men, children will participate. The cultural procession will be taken out from Balaji Engineering through J.K Kedia Road in Hojai. Artists, adorned as revered deities such as Hanuman, Shiva, Ram, Laxman and others, will

add a divine touch to the procession along with devotees carrying the flag of Lord Hanuman.

The venue in which the silver jubilee celebrations will be held will be illuminated with colourful lights and fluttering flags, heightening the festive spirit. On the next day on Mahapurnima, the events will commence with the ceremonial worship and Abhisekh of Lord Hanuman, followed by a grand Aarti scheduled marking the pinnacle of the spiritual engagements. In the evening, a dance performance by the children of the community will enthrall the devotees.

This will be followed by offerings being of laddos being made to the presiding deity. The concluding day of the celebrations will include a Hawan, Ponawathi followed by Aarti and Sunderkand Paath. Bhajans (devotional songs) will be sung by artistes Sweta Kaushik from Kolkata and Rahul Soni from Bhalgalpur. The Hanuman Janamotsav Samity has requested all the devotees to take part in the auspicious event.

SVEEP Icon Rakesh Banik visits Dima Hasao



HT Bureau
HAFLONG, April 21: With an aim of generating awareness among the voters of Haflong-ST Legislative Assembly constituency, state SVEEP ICON Rakesh Banik visited Dima Hasao district where Lok Sabha elections will be held during the second phase on April 26.

A cycle rally was organized by the Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) cell where around 700 ladies participated from different walks of life.

Rakesh Banik, the para-cyclist and state icon of Assam Election, 2024, created awareness among the voters through a cycle rally under SVEEP activities in the district. Requesting all the citizens to participate in this exercise of democracy he said, "I hope that each one of you will participate in the electoral process by exercising your democratic rights during the election time in order to establish a healthy government in the state".

The rally started from Haflong circuit house to the rotary of the district commissioner's office. The event was also attended by Shukram Chauhan, assistant commissioner and nodal officer of SVEEP Dima Hasao and Purabi Phonglo, deputy director of DIPRO and media and publicity cell.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Better remain silent, better not even think, if you are not prepared to act. - Annie Besant

India keeping eye on Middle East turmoil

As the 18th Indian Lok Sabha elections commence, India finds itself not only focused on domestic affairs but also keenly observing the escalating tensions between Iran and Israel. The repercussions of this conflict reverberate far beyond the Middle East, posing significant challenges for India's energy security, trade, and overall stability. Harsh V Pant, Vice President of Studies and Foreign Policy at the Observer Research Foundation, rightly underscores the gravity of the situation. India's stance in the unfolding scenario could necessitate tough decisions, as trade and energy security stand as pivotal concerns. The escalation of conflict could potentially jeopardize the welfare and economic stability of Indian citizens. Recent events, including drone strikes and retaliatory actions between Israel and Iran, have placed India in a delicate position. Swift calls for calm from Indian authorities, coupled with Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaisankar's proactive engagements with counterparts from both Iran and Israel, underscore New Delhi's profound apprehension regarding the situation. India's dependency on the Middle East for energy imports is substantial, with over 80% of its oil needs sourced from the region. With strategic oil reserves offering only a limited buffer, India's reliance on stable relations with Middle Eastern nations is imperative to secure its energy requirements.

Natural gas, a vital component of India's energy mix, further emphasizes the significance of stable relations with the Middle East. Given its efficiency and relatively cleaner burning compared to other fossil fuels, natural gas plays a crucial role in India's energy landscape. The Indian government's decision to refrain from immediate policy actions regarding the Israel-Iran conflict reflects a prudent approach. However, continued monitoring is essential, as further escalation could jeopardize India's interests, particularly in the Red Sea region. The capture of a cargo ship with Indian sailors by Iranian forces near the Strait of Hormuz underscores the direct impact of the conflict on India. While diplomatic efforts are underway for the safe return of the crew members, the incident highlights the tangible repercussions faced by India. The uncertain fate of agreements, such as the recent pact facilitating the travel of Indian construction workers to Israel, further underscores the potential ramifications of the conflict on India's bilateral relations. Talmiz Ahmad, a seasoned former Indian diplomat, provides valuable insight into the situation. While a full-scale war between Israel and Iran remains improbable, the broader implications of such a conflict on global stability cannot be discounted.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts to strengthen India's ties with Israel have been substantial, particularly in defence, agriculture, and technology sectors. However, maintaining a delicate balance between Israel and Iran remains paramount for India's broader strategic interests. Jon Alterman's assessment of the dwindling trade between India and Iran underscores the evolving dynamics in the region. India's cautious approach, avoiding taking sides in the conflict, reflects a pragmatic strategy aimed at safeguarding its interests amidst uncertainty.

Big US worry over reports of Russian capability in testing nuclear weapon in Orbit

By: Girish Linganna

On February 14 this year, Washington D.C. was filled with discussions about a potential Russian space weapon. Mike Turner, who leads the House Intelligence Committee, called on the White House to release information about this weapon, describing it as a significant threat to national security. Reports from U.S. media suggest it involves a Russian nuclear system related to space, which hasn't been deployed yet, but could pose a risk to U.S. and allied satellites.

Early reports were mixed, with some news sources mentioning a nuclear-powered spacecraft and others a nuclear-armed one. There are basically three possibilities being discussed: a ground-based "pop-up" nuclear weapon aimed at destroying satellites, launched only at the moment of need; a nuclear weapon permanently placed in orbit; or a nuclear-powered satellite, which isn't a bomb itself but uses nuclear energy to operate another type of device.

If Russia were to place a nuclear weapon in a complete orbit around the Earth, rather than a partial one that doesn't fully encircle the planet, it would be violating the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. Additionally, detonating nuclear weapons in space is prohibited under the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, which Russia has agreed to. Regardless of legal issues, such a weapon would cause widespread and random destruction.

On Earth, a nuclear explosion causes significant harm through intense radiation, a massive blast wave, fires, and radioactive fallout. However, in the vacuum of space, the primary threat is radiation. An explosion in orbit could generate an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) that might damage or disrupt the electronics in many satellites across a large portion of the sky.

In 1962, when the U.S. conducted a high-altitude nuclear test known as Starfish Prime, it didn't only impact the nearby satellites. The Earth's magnetic field also spread the radiation to satellites on the opposite side of the planet. This resulted in damage or destruction to about one-third of all satellites in low Earth orbit at the time.

If Russia were to carry out a similar high-altitude nuclear test today, it could impact the vast network of about 8,300 active satellites in low Earth orbit, affecting not only American satellites but also those belonging to Russia, China, and other nations. Additionally, such a detonation could pose risks to the International Space Station, which currently hosts three Russian astronauts, as well as China's Tiangong space station, which also has a three-person crew.

American military and intelligence satellites, especially those involved in nuclear command and control, usually have reinforced electronics to withstand such electromagnetic pulses. However, commercial satellites typically do not have this protection. Therefore, an attack like this might be more suited for rogue nations like North Korea and Iran, which have limited space assets to safeguard and might believe they have nothing to lose in a crisis.

Matthew Bunn from Harvard University mentioned to The Economist that Russia might

aim to send a nuclear bomb into orbit to reach geosynchronous orbit (GEO), which is about 36,000km above Earth. This is significantly higher than the lower Earth orbit (LEO), which is below 2,000km. This strategy could be to position the weapon strategically in a more distant and influential orbital band. Matthew Bunn notes that satellites in geosynchronous orbit (GEO) revolve around the Earth once daily, appearing stationary in the sky. This makes them ideal for tasks like broadcasting and missile warning. Many crucial U.S. military and surveillance satellites are positioned in this orbit. He also highlights that current nuclear missiles are unable to reach this high altitude. PBS News Hour reports another theory suggesting that Russia could be planning to launch a nuclear-powered satellite equipped with electronic warfare capabilities. An electronic attack aims to disrupt or manipulate the signals sent to or from a satellite, typically causing temporary and reversible interference. Both the United States and Russia, along with other nations, possess ground-based systems capable of conducting electronic warfare against satellites. Conducting electronic attacks from space is more challenging, but it could lead to more targeted and sustained attacks, particularly if the weapon can be positioned near the intended target.

According to a report by the Secure World Foundation, an NGO, Russia appears to be developing advanced space-based electronic warfare systems to complement its existing ground-based capabilities. This report, focusing on global anti-satellite abilities, was published last year. A 2019 article in the Space Review discussed Ekipazh, a nuclear-powered satellite built for electronic warfare. Dmitry Stefanovich from the Russian Academy of Sciences also mentioned Zeus, another nuclear-powered project aimed for 2030, which might have jamming capabilities.

Using nuclear reactors to power satellites is not new; the United States first did it in 1965, and the Soviet Union launched over 40 similar satellites. The main benefit of nuclear power is its ability to generate a lot of energy, which enabled Soviet satellites to operate more powerful radars. Today, nuclear power could let Russian satellites equip more potent jammers. According to The Space Review, Russian documents indicate that having nuclear reactors on satellites enables the use of jammers that can operate across a broad spectrum of frequencies. If positioned in highly elliptical or geosynchronous orbits, which keep a satellite over the same area of Earth for extended times, it could continuously disrupt electronic systems over large regions.

James Acton, an expert at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington, explained to The Economist one reason Russia might find this capability appealing. The expert notes that recently, the U.S. military has shown a growing interest in large satellite networks like SpaceX's Starlink, which Ukraine and its military have extensively used. He explains that these large networks, made up of thousands of satellites, can't be taken down one by one physically. However, attacking them with widespread electronic interference is a viable alternative. (IPA Service)

A decade of change and politics of performance

While releasing the Sankalp Patra of his party in its headquarters, the Prime Minister asserted a significant point. He indicated the present tumultuous situation emerging globally and for India, he insisted on the need of a stable government - a government that will be capable of fulfilling the aspirations of its people and play a supportive role by helping the world recuperate. Similar was the situation that the Covid pandemic brought all over the world.

While the developed world in the west sarcastically registered its skepticism on India's ability to help its population, which the west thought would face the worst level of calamity with the epidemic claiming lives; India had its leadership in Narendra Modi, who confidently with humility refused to import vaccines but under his leadership its efforts made it globe's most successful manufacturer of vaccines. While his regime decided to manufacture vaccines for India's humongous population, his move was in practice, a bold initiative that satiated his party's ideological stance of Swadeshi. His government firmly moved with its 'Vocal for Local' slogan.

India's manufacturing sector received a fresh vigor and the boom was so tremendous that the defense sector also received an unprecedented reception from across the globe. During the pandemic, the government's Make in India movement was deeply impactful that the Indian sub-

continent was vaccinated almost twice with the death rate being reduced noticeably. But the western world including the USA was seen literally limping and collapsing critically with millions dying.

India's vaccine Maitri was received with great jubilation as it helped the needy countries with vaccines. And the value in focus was purely humanitarian. India's diplomatic exchequer received a fresh impetus and it came out of the perilous impact of the disease. While unveiling the Sankalp Patra his words have resonated for the need of stability. In a democracy a government without a clear majority would be a disaster.

As he entered the national arena in 2014, there was unwavering doubt that had been lingering for long on the democratic efficiency of a multiparty polity. That the world thought it would be a lost case for India. Its democracy would fail to bless a single party with a majority. Probably this approach on the Indian scenario gave pundits across the world a giggle of satisfaction. Modi's entry changed everything.

India missed a hardworking leader with a vision and mission for decades. Those who came to hold the helm of affairs were confusingly held tighter by their coalition partners. The UPA regimes were surrounded by the party dynasty which confusingly pestered and disrupted the government under Manmohan Singh with its family hegemony. Modi had a variety of ma-



nipulative issues to deal with.

And the most prominent one was to alter the image that the global media had awarded him; the image of a scoundrel, the one they

villainously accused him for the Godhra riots. The US banned him and other countries had furrowed their brows as he took over. But he began his stint with a monumental mobilization for transformation, which the political pundits could not credibly predict. His decisions were historical and unprecedented. Starting from demonetization and stretching further by establishing a new GST regime, he remained in critics' eye for long.

Though these revolutionary initiatives invited voluminous criticism, the country was amazingly given a jolt as he succeeded in opening almost 50 crore new bank accounts, the segment of population that was left frozen from banking even after India's six decades of independence. Construction of about 12 crore toilets across the country had phenomenally helped a huge seg-

ment of the country's population, especially women. With his government's herculean distribution of cooking gas connection to 11 crore families, the scenario turned

vivid safeguarded by transparency. This was the period he established a special clan of electorate that he fondly calls his government's labharthis (beneficiaries).

Slashing intermediaries from almost everywhere, his first regime began a transparent system that a person could easily step into, if he was eligible.

Imagine how critical his decisions were! Never an ideologically sound BJP was perceived to have had the audacity to stitch an alliance with Mehbooba Mufti in Jammu and Kashmir. But the subsequent development in the most volatile Indian state proved his move in this regard was a well studied attempt to bring the situation of the state under control. Rest is history.

From the abrogation of Article 370 to the bifurcation of the state for administrative ease to the peace

mind of the minorities, especially Muslims. In glaring contrast to this is the inexcusable failure of the Congress and its allies to make even a mention of the CAA in its manifesto.

Moreover, the growing perception that there is no guarantee the elected Congress MPs would not defect to the BJP camp has badly dented the Congress-led UDF's image and credibility. Only left MPs would take up Kerala's causes effectively in Parliament. The voters are greatly impressed by this LDF guarantee. And this would reflect in the voting pattern in a big way. And it is this visible enthusiasm of the Kerala voters which prompted the Chief Minister to claim a pro-LDF wave in the State.

Another factor favouring the CPI(M) candidate in the constituency is the fact that the CPI(M) led in all the seven assembly segments that make up the Alathur Lok Sabha seat. Alathur is as good as in the LDF pocket. The only point of interest: the victory margin. Palakkad is another traditional Left stronghold, which the Congress wrested in 2019. The LDF has pulled out all the stops to win back the seat this time around. And it has fielded one of the party heavyweights A Vijayaraghavan from the constituency. Vijayaraghavan is extremely popular in Palakkad having represented it in 1989 elections by defeating Congress stalwart V S Vijayaraghavan, a three-time winner from the constituency.

A notable factor is that, while the Congress candidates won 18 seats with big majority, the party romped home the winner in Palakkad by the proverbial whisker. CPI(M) candidate M B Rajesh, currently a minister in the Pinarayi Cabinet, lost by a slender margin of 11,000 votes. Rajesh polled 3,876 lakh votes as against the winner V K Sreekandan who secured 3,99 lakh votes. A solid and well-orchestrated campaign has given the CPI(M) a clear edge in the constituency.

The BJP is also a force to reckon with in Palakkad. In 2019, Metroman E Sreedharan contested on a BJP ticket and gave a good account of himself. This time senior BJP leader C. Krishnakumar is in the race. Krishnakumar polled 2.185 lakh votes in 2019. The BJP, whose vote share has gone up from 3.7 per cent in 1989 to 21.44 per cent in 2019 is hoping to give both the LDF and the UDF a run for their money. But an upset victory for the BJP is highly unlikely, mainly for two reasons.

The party has angered the minorities with its aggressive anti-minority stance. Also the killing of and atrocities against Christians in Manipur has alienated the BJP from the community. Despite its ardent wooing, the Christians are in no mood to vote for the Hindutva party. Palakkad is set to send comrade A Vijayaraghavan to the Lok Sabha this time. (IPA Service)

POST BAG

Is religion relevant today?

Sir/Ma'am

The modern societies of the western world likes to proclaim itself to be multicultural and secular, and the direction seems to be a future without old-fashioned religious ballast where science is the tool for constant progress and prosperity, happiness for everything and everyone.

Yes, science has done a lot of good and made material prosperity, better healthcare, etc. possible. But, and here a giant question mark needs to be painted, at what price? And why isn't man "happier" anyway? Loneliness, mental illness escalates like never before, drugs and crime, acts of violence and vandalism, unsafe school environment, etc. Add to that the environmental destruction and terrorist threats.

According to statistics, approximately 80% of the world's people are still religious. However, in the "modern" western countries only a few percent of the population are professing Christians, immigration has brought in other religions as well, but most do not believe in God. 100 years ago the situation was the opposite. But, people still want to get married in the church and bury their dead there, why?

Traditions bring security, you might say, well, but why didn't 70 years of iron-fisted communism in the Soviet Union wipe out the Christian faith? Why is it estimated that around 100 million Chinese have become Christians in recent decades, in the midst of severe persecution? The answer is obvious, science cannot meet man's greatest and deepest need for the meaning of his existence, and there also seems to be a need for "life" that satisfies. To experience inner satisfaction, and now yet another concept that science does not master, namely "peace". Materially rich and successful celebrities take drugs in search of this peace and life, only to be met with a devastating emptiness. This is precisely where the Christian faith steps in and delivers. The explanation is not scientific, it is "supernatural", i.e. above the order of nature or science. Jesus Christ seems to present his heavenly powers, his life in real, astonishingly effective.

God as the Almighty Creator does not seem to need to consult science and its researchers but does what is necessary, and on the Cross the divine blood of Jesus really flowed to reconcile, cleanse and forgive man so that the way can be open to this heavenly life, eternal life and a peace "that passeth all understanding" as the Bible itself puts it. Thus, Jesus can be the answer to how we can get meaning and life that satisfies, as he Himself said "I am the way, the truth and the life". Believe it or not, I am one, like those two billion others worldwide that have found "the truth that sets you free".

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What to know about thyroid disease and dry eyes

By: Christine Richardson

The thyroid is a small gland in the front of the neck that secretes hormones. Thyroid diseases cause the gland to produce too much or too little of these hormones. These diseases cause a range of symptoms, some of which affect the eyes. Doctors refer to this as "thyroid eye disease" (TED).

Dry eye is a condition in which the eyes do not make enough tears or the tears evaporate too quickly. This can result in symptoms such as eye pain, blurred vision, and sensitivity to light.

This article outlines the link between thyroid diseases and dry eye and describes some of the first signs of TED. We also list some different types of thyroid diseases and their risk factors. Finally, we discuss some home remedies and other treatments for dry eye due to TED.

Is there a link between dry eyes and thyroid diseases?

Thyroid diseases can cause a variety of symptoms, some of which may affect the eyes. Scientists and medical professionals do not fully understand the mechanism through which thyroid disease may affect the eyes. However, it seems that people with thyroid disease have an increased risk of the following:

- fewer nerve fibers within the cornea, which is the clear layer that protects the iris and lens and focuses light onto the retina at the back of the eye
- reduced sensitivity in the cornea
- reduced tear production and rapid tear evaporation, both of which may contribute to dry eye
- bulging of the eyes, which can also contribute to dry eye

Further studies are necessary to better understand how thyroid diseases may cause or contribute to dry eye.

What are the first signs of TED?

Some of the most common signs and symptoms of TED include:

- eyelid swelling
- eye pain

- excessive tears
- blurred vision
- double vision
- photophobia, which is sensitivity to light

If a person has a diagnosis of thyroid issues and experiences any of the above eye symptoms, they should contact their doctor or make an appointment with an eye doctor, or "ophthalmologist." Doctors will work to diagnose the eye condition and provide appropriate treatments.

Types of thyroid diseases

There are three levels of thyroid gland functions: euthyroid, hyperthyroid, and hypothyroid. Euthyroid gland function means that a person's thyroid functions normally, hyperthyroidism is when the thyroid gland produces too many hormones, and hypothyroidism is when it makes too little.

Other diseases may cause or contribute to thyroid disease. These include Graves' disease (GD) and Hashimoto's disease (HD).

Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism is the medical term for an overactive thyroid gland, meaning the thyroid produces too much of the thyroid hormones thyroxine and triiodothyronine.

Symptoms associated with hyperthyroidism include:

- heart palpitations
- tremors
- anxiety
- sweating
- heat intolerance
- weight loss
- sleep disturbances
- fatigue

Hypothyroidism

Hypothyroidism is the medical term for an underactive thyroid gland, meaning the thyroid does not produce enough thyroxine and triiodothyronine.

Some symptoms of hypothyroidism include:

- lethargy
- fatigue
- constipation
- weight gain
- cold intolerance
- dry skin
- changes to the voice

Graves' disease



GD is an autoimmune condition that can cause hyperthyroidism. In GD, antibodies stimulate the thyroid gland to produce too much thyroid hormone.

The symptoms of GD are similar to those of hyperthyroidism. They may include:

- rapid heart rate
- irregular heartbeat
- palpitations
- tremors
- anxiety
- nervousness
- sweating
- muscle weakness
- fatigue
- irregular periods in females
- frequent bowel movements
- weight loss
- hair loss

Hashimoto's disease

HD is an autoimmune disease that causes hypothyroidism. In HD, the immune system attacks the thyroid gland, causing it to swell. This may result in a lump or "goiter" in the throat.

Other possible symptoms of HD include:

- slow heart rate
- high blood pressure
- weight gain
- constipation
- abnormally heavy or prolonged periods in females
- dry skin
- brittle nails
- facial swelling
- decreased sweating
- cold intolerance
- peripheral neuropathy
- muscle cramps
- joint pain
- hair loss
- sleep apnea
- lethargy

- fatigue
- depression
- memory loss
- dementia

Risk factors for thyroid diseases

Certain factors can increase a person's risk of developing thyroid diseases. We outline these below.

Risk factors for hyperthyroidism

Factors that can increase a person's risk of developing hyperthyroidism include:

- **Graves' disease**
 - excessive iodine intake
 - high levels of the hormone human chorionic gonadotrophin in the body, which may occur during early pregnancy, or in cases of multiple pregnancies
 - thyroiditis, which is inflammation of the thyroid gland
 - pituitary adenoma, which is a benign tumor of the pituitary gland
 - thyroid cancer

Risk factors for hypothyroidism

Factors that can increase a person's risk of developing hypothyroidism include:

- **Hashimoto's disease**
 - previous thyroid treatments, such as surgery or radioactive iodine therapy
 - lack of dietary iodine
- **Problems with the pituitary gland**
 - use of certain medications, such as:
 - lithium, which doctors may prescribe for depression or bipolar disorder
 - amiodarone, which people may take to treat an irregular heartbeat

- interferons, which people may take to treat hepatitis C or certain types of cancer

Treatments for dry eye due to TED

In many cases of TED, treating thyroid disorder will not alleviate the dry eye. As such, a person will require additional treatment to manage dry eye and associated symptoms.

A doctor will typically recommend a multistep approach to treatment, depending on the severity of the dry eye.

Primary treatment options typically include changes to the environment, such as:

- eliminating exposure to direct airflow or fans
- using humidifiers in the home
- wearing sunglasses outdoors
- reducing screen time

Secondary treatment options typically include medications to treat the dry eye and any associated conditions. Medications may include the following:

- eye drops
- ocular lubricants
- anti-inflammatory medications
- oral antibiotics
- nighttime ointment or moisture goggles
- therapeutic contact lenses
- intense pulsed light therapy
- amniotic membrane grafting

Home remedies and tips for managing dry eyes

There are various home remedies and tips for managing dry eyes. Some options include:

- using an indoor humidifier to add moisture to the air and help prevent the eyes from drying out
- using an air filter to remove potential eye irritants from the air
- applying warm compresses to the eyes
- staying hydrated
- eating a sufficient amount of omega-3 fatty acids, which may help to reduce inflammation associated with dry eyes

Other potential causes of dry eye

There are many potential causes of dry eye besides thyroid issues. A 2021 re-

view Trusted Source highlights some of the more common causes. We outline these below.

Lifestyle and environmental factors

The following lifestyle and environmental factors may cause or exacerbate dry eye:

- excessive computer or screen usage that causes reduced blinking
- exposure to certain environmental factors, such as:
 - chemical fumes
 - cigarette smoke
 - pollution
 - low humidity

Medical conditions

Certain underlying medical conditions may also result in dry eye. Examples include:

- excessive or inadequate amounts of vitamins, especially vitamin A
- ocular allergies
- skin conditions, such as eczema and rosacea
- autoimmune or connective tissue conditions, such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus

• graft-versus-host disease, which is a complication of any organ transplant surgery that involves an abnormal immune response to cells or tissues from a donor

Medications and medical procedures

The following medical treatments may also increase the risk of dry eye:

- Certain medications, including:
 - non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
 - antihistamines
 - systemic hormones
 - diuretics
 - antidepressants
 - anxiolytics
 - benzodiazepines
 - antihypertensives, which are medications for managing high blood pressure
 - anticholinergic medications, which block the action of the neurotransmitter "acetylcholine"
 - eye surgery, including:
 - cataract surgery
 - corneal transplant
 - refractive surgery
 - eyelid surgery

Outlook

Thyroid eye disease commonly lasts between 6 months and 2 years. A person should seek treatment for dry eyes and other TED symptoms as soon as possible to reduce the risk of complications. Complications from persistent dry eyes can be mild or severe. Some individuals experience constant redness and irritation. However, some more extreme symptoms include:

- infectious keratitis, which is infection-induced inflammation of the cornea
- eye ulceration
- scarring, which may lead to vision loss

Dry eyes can also impact an individual's overall sense of well-being. Anyone who experiences dry-eye symptoms should make an appointment with their doctor, regardless of whether they have a thyroid issue. A doctor will work to determine the cause of the dry eye and develop an appropriate treatment plan.

Summary

There are two main types of thyroid hormone imbalances: hyperthyroidism, in which the thyroid gland produces too much of its hormones, and hypothyroidism, in which the thyroid gland does not produce enough of them. Both types can affect the eyes. Doctors refer to thyroid-related eye diseases as "thyroid eye disease" (TED).

Thyroid eye disease may include dry eye, which a person can experience as eye pain, blurred vision, or photophobia. Treatment will typically incorporate environmental changes, such as eliminating exposure to direct airflow, using humidifiers in the home, and wearing sunglasses outdoors.

Doctors may also recommend medical treatments, such as eye drops, eye ointments, or therapeutic contact lenses.

A person should seek medical attention for dry eye as soon as symptoms develop. Doing so will help to reduce the risk of serious complications, such as permanent eye damage and vision loss. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Who owns a scientific invention?: The truth about ORS



By: Kiran Kumbhar

A few days ago a popular X account repeated an oft-cited piece of misinformation: Dilip Mahalanabis "never patented his" ORS formula. This is a piece on how science and scientists' work are distorted in the social media jungle these days.

In 2022 when Mahalanabis died, the news took me back to years ago when I was an aspiring public health student. I had come across a 2009 interview of him and another stalwart, Dhiman Barua, in the WHO's Bulletin. In it he recounted his pioneering 1971 work in Bangaon, Bengal.

However, I was uncomfortably lurched back to the present upon reading some of the supposed tributes ppl were paying to Mahalanabis. Alongside thoughtful commentaries, a lot of what was written or shared contained toxic nationalism and incorrect, often blatantly wrong, information.

Besides, all the major media outlets reshaped the same few details of his life and work, offering few glimpses of Mahalanabis as an individual. In many commentaries, it was difficult to gauge whether it was Mahalanabis the person or ORS the solution that was being commemorated.

The tributes, obituaries, and commentaries on Mahalanabis got me wondering about how we approach science and history, how we commemorate the dead, and how society and politics intersect with science.

First and foremost, I was surprised by the unfortunate erasure of the long history of the development of oral rehydration therapy (ORT), including the involvement of many researchers and institutions both Indian and international.

Firstpost gushed about how Mahalanabis "never patented his ORS solution", and a popular account on X spread the blatantly false information that he "invented the ORS sachet". Mahalanabis was a genius. And like every genius he stood on the shoulders

of and rubbed shoulders with other geniuses. As my own memory of coming across Barua and Mahalanabis together indicated to me, ORT was a massive innovation behind which were the mammoth efforts of many.

The original 1973 paper in which Mahalanabis laid out the details of the spectacular ORT work in Bangaon, was written jointly with four other experts. At the start of the article, they cited much earlier research & fieldwork on which their work was based.

For example, they wrote that the "effectiveness of oral glucose-electrolyte solutions" had already been demonstrated in hospitalized patients, and that the ingredients and proportions in the solution they used were derived from previous research.

Clearly, ORS – or for that matter the "ORS sachet" – was not "invented" by Mahalanabis, and neither was ORS "his" (or of any single researcher's) to patent.

In fact, far from being the product of the stereotypical lone genius scientist working alone away from the messiness of the world, ORT/ORS was the product of multiple researchers and organizations toiling deeply in the world's diarrhoea trenches.

In recent decades, historians and other scholars have worked to dispel the myth of the typical "lone genius" portrayal of great scientists: The journal Nature for instance, published an article titled "Einstein Was No Lone Genius" in 2015.

Some of these efforts are part of larger initiatives towards "decolonizing" modern science and its narratives, with scholars showing how it is incorrect to assume that only white European/American male researchers were responsible for the major modern-era scientific advancements.

Considering these recent progressive directions in thinking about science, it was jarring to witness the extreme Indian/Hindu nationalistic content of some popular tributes paid to Mahalanabis. The erasure of the

collective efforts of researchers across the globe was striking.

One consequence of the misinformation in these obituaries, was that people were left with really little idea of what it is that makes Mahalanabis so important. The 1994 history of ORT by Joshua Ruxin provides useful contextualization of his work.

By 1970, it had been demonstrated that ORT worked well in stable, hospital settings under expert supervision, but these studies were inadequate to convince the mainstream medical and public health communities of the feasibility and effectiveness of large-scale ORT treatment.

In their own words, what Mahalanabis et al accomplished was to provide "confirmation of the effectiveness" of ORS in a "field trial... [where] extremely adverse logistic and administrative conditions prevailed".

Once again, let it be remembered that Mahalanabis even himself (with his co-authors) laid no claim to having "invented" ORT/ORS — their claim to fame was for having demonstrated the effectiveness of employing locally-produced ORS treatment in a large-scale field setting.

Another historical aspect that needs revisiting is the oft-repeated claim that ORS was termed by a 1978 Lancet editorial as the (or among the) "most important medical advance" of the twentieth century. However, the Lancet said nothing of the sort.

What a 1978 editorial ('Water with Sugar and Salt') did say: "The discovery that sodium transport & glucose transport are coupled in the small intestine, so that glucose accelerates absorption of solute and water, was potentially the most important medical advance this century."

It is true that as a general rule, trend-setters in fields like public health receive far less media acclaim than those in other areas in science and medicine: one saw, for example, surgeons rather than public health experts being overwhelmingly invited to TV studios during COVID.

This common bias against supposedly "unglamorous" fields could be one of the main reasons why many of us stumbled upon Mahalanabis and his work only after his death.

Nevertheless, if we are genuinely interested in learning about and celebrating such stalwarts and their achievements, then propagating misinformation and false histories under the agenda of nationalism and even decolonisation, is certainly a sad way to do that. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Prostate Enlargement - Symptoms and Treatment

By: Dr. H. S. Bhatyal

Prostate is a small walnut shaped gland in men that sits just below the bladder and surrounds the urethra (tube carrying urine outside the bladder). Prostate has various functions - seminal fluid secretion (component of semen), hormone production and regulates flow of urine. Prostate enlargement issues are common in men especially > 50 yrs. of age and 50% patients would develop some prostatic symptoms. Symptoms could be bothersome, disrupting quality of life.

Symptoms

1. Obstructive symptoms - Hesitancy, thinning of urine stream, intermittency, incomplete emptying of bladder, overflow incontinence (passing urine without knowledge)

2. Irritative symptoms - Increased frequency, urgency (difficult to control urine), involuntary passing of urine,

pain during passing urine

3. Haematuria - Blood in urine (rarely)

Severity of symptoms may vary from person to person, some may carry on, others may find it difficult as it impacts daily activity & sleep.

Diagnosis

1. Physical Examination - Digital rectal examination : USG of kidney, ureter and bladder area is mandatory to check the size of prostate, abnormal texture, bladder volume, residual urine after passing urine and state of kidneys

2. Blood Test - PSA : Marker of prostate cancer Neglecting the symptoms may lead to large volume of urine in the bladder-resulting in recurrent UTI, bladder stones formation and deterioration of kidney function.

Treatment

Treatment primarily depends on type of symptoms

1. Lifestyle changes

Limit tea coffee, alcohol in-



take, decreased fluid intake in evening

2. Medical management

For medical management following medications are prescribed to settle the condition

- **Relaxation of prostatic muscles and bladder neck** - Alpha blockers-Alfuzosin, Tamsulosin & Silodosin
- **Decrease the size of prostate** - Finasteride, Dutasteride (this is given in elder patients with large prostates)
- **Irritative symptom treatment** - Solifenacin, Darifenacin, Mirabegron

3. Minimally invasive

treatments - Laser Vaporisation of prostate, TURP, Bipolar TURP, HoLEP (Holmium laser)

4. Urolift, Rezum Therapy

(modalities need to be established)

5. Robotic simple prostatectomy

The surgery is done for very large sized prostates

6. Open prostatectomy

This procedure is very rarely done now a days. (The author is the Senior Director & HOD - Urology & Renal Transplantation, BLK-Max Super Speciality Hospital, New Delhi)

Enhancing gynaecological care with robotic integration

By: Dr. Neelam Banerjee

In recent years, the field of gynaecology has witnessed a remarkable transformation with the introduction and widespread adoption of robotic technology. Robotics in gynaecology involves the use of advanced robotic systems to assist surgeons in performing minimally invasive procedures with greater precision and control.

This transformative approach has revolutionized the way gynaecological surgeries are conducted, offering numerous benefits to both patients and healthcare providers.

Traditional open surgeries often require large incisions, leading to longer recovery times, increased pain, and higher risk of complications. In contrast, robotic-assisted procedures involve smaller incisions, allowing for quicker recovery, reduced postoperative pain, and minimal scarring.

As a result, delicate procedures such as hysterectomies, myomectomies, and ovarian cystectomies can be carried out with improved outcomes and lower risk of complications.

This not only enhances the overall patient experience but also reduces the burden on healthcare resources by decreasing hospital stays and rehabilitation periods.

Robotic technology also provides surgeons with enhanced precision and dexterity during complex gynaecological procedures. The robotic system consists of small, specialized instruments that are controlled by the surgeon via a console.

These instruments can rotate and manoeuvre with greater flexibility than the human hand, enabling surgeons to perform intricate tasks with utmost accuracy.

As a result, delicate procedures such as hysterectomies, myomectomies, and ovarian cystectomies can be carried out with improved outcomes and lower risk of complications.

Furthermore, robotics offers improved visualization capabilities, this enhanced

visualization is particularly beneficial for procedures involving intricate anatomical structures or confined spaces, where precision is paramount.

By providing surgeons with a clear and detailed view of the operative field, robotic technology facilitates more accurate tissue dissection, better identification of critical structures, and reduced risk of damage to surrounding tissues.

Another significant advantage of robotic surgery is that surgeons can perform a wide range of complex surgeries that were previously deemed unsuitable for minimally invasive approaches.

This includes procedures such as radical hysterectomies for gynaecological cancers, fertility-sparing surgeries for benign conditions, and pelvic floor reconstructions for pelvic organ prolapse.

Robotic surgery has emerged as a powerful tool in the field of gynaecology, offering a range of benefits.

As technology continues to advance and robotic systems evolve, the future holds even greater promise for the integration of robotics in gynaecological care. (The author is a Senior Consultant at the Gynaecology Endoscopy and Robotics, Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida)

At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, according to Palestinian Health Ministry

Israeli strikes on southern Gaza city of Rafah kill 18, mostly children, as US advances aid package

RAFAH (GAZA STRIP), April 21: Israeli strikes on the southern Gaza city of Rafah overnight killed 18 people, including 14 children, health officials said Sunday, as the United States was on track to approve billions of dollars of additional military aid to its close ally.

Israel has carried out near-daily air raids on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million has sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. It has also vowed to expand its ground offensive to the city on the border with Egypt despite international calls for restraint, including from the US.

The House of Representatives approved a \$26 billion aid package on Saturday that includes around \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza. The first strike killed a man, his wife and their 3-year-old child, according to the nearby Kuwaiti Hospital, which received the bodies. The woman was pregnant, and the doctors managed to save the baby, the hospital said.

The second strike killed 13 children and two women, all from the same family, according to hospital records. An airstrike in Rafah the night before killed nine people, including six children.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed



over 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, devastated Gaza's two largest cities and left a swath of destruction across the territory. Around 80% of the population have fled their homes to other parts of the besieged coastal enclave, which experts say is on the brink of famine.

The conflict, now in its seventh month, has sparked regional unrest pitting Israel and the U.S. against Iran and allied militant groups

across the Middle East. Israel and Iran traded fire directly earlier this month, raising fears of all-out war between the longtime foes.

Tensions have also spiked in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The Israeli military said troops "neutralised" two Palestinians who attacked a checkpoint with a knife and a gun near the southern West Bank town of Hebron early Sunday. It was not immediately clear if they were killed. No Israeli forces were

wounded.

At least 469 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Most have been killed during Israeli military arrest raids, which often trigger gunbattles, or in violent protests.

The war in Gaza was sparked by an unprecedented Oct 7 raid into southern Israel in which Hamas and

other militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel says militants are still holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets to call for new elections to replace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a deal with Hamas to release the hostages. Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until Hamas is destroyed and all the hostages are returned.

The war has killed at least 34,049 Palestinians and wounded another 76,901, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count but says at least two-thirds have been children and women. It also says the real toll is likely higher as many bodies are stuck beneath the rubble left by airstrikes or are in areas that are unreachable by medics.

Israel blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the militants fight in dense, residential neighbourhoods, but the military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children. The military says it has killed over 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence. (AP)

Voting for Maldives parliament, watched by India and China

MALE (MALDIVES), April 21: Maldivians voted in parliamentary elections on Sunday, in a ballot crucial for President Mohamed Muizzu, whose policies are keenly watched by India and China as they vie for influence in the archipelago nation.

Both countries are seeking a foothold in the Maldives, which has a strategic location in the Indian Ocean.

Muizzu's election as president last year sharpened the rivalry between India and China, with the new leader taking a pro-China stand and acting to remove Indian troops stationed on one of the country's islets.

Securing a majority in Parliament will be tough for Muizzu because some of his allies have fallen out and more parties entered the race.

Six political parties and independent groups are fielding 368 candidates for 93 seats in Parliament. That is six more seats than the previous Parliament following adjustments for population growth.

About 284,000 people were eligible to vote and tentative results were expected to be announced late Sunday.

Muizzu's election campaign theme for president was "India out", accusing his predecessor of compromising national sovereignty

eighty by giving India too much influence.

At least 75 Indian military personnel were stationed in the Maldives and their known activities were operating two aircraft donated by India and assisting in the rescue of people stranded or faced with calamities at sea. Muizzu has taken steps to have civilians take over those activities.

Relations strained further when Indian social media activists started a boycott campaign of Maldives tourism. That was in retaliation for three Maldivian deputy ministers making derogatory statements about Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for raising the idea of promoting tourism in Lakshadweep, India's own string of islands similar to the Maldives.

According to recent Maldives government statistics, the number of Indian tourists has fallen, dropping that country from being the top source of foreign visitors to No. 6.

Muizzu visited China earlier this year and negotiated an increase in the number of tourists and inbound flights from China.

In 2013, Maldives joined China's "Belt and Road" initiative meant to build ports and highways to expand trade — and China's influence — across Asia, Africa and Europe. (AP)

IMF team to visit next month to negotiate new bailout package: Pak Finance Min

ISLAMABAD, April 21: Pakistan's Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said that an IMF team is expected to visit Islamabad next month to negotiate a new long-term bailout package to secure a staff-level agreement for the cash-strapped country by mid-July.

Speaking to the media after his week-long visit to Washington, the minister said the contours of the new International Monetary Fund programme will shape up later.

"We will start getting into the granularity of the programme by mid-May," Dawn News quoted Aurangzeb as saying on Saturday.

Cash-strapped Pakistan has made a formal request to the IMF to seek the next bailout package in the range of USD 6 to USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing.

Addressing journalists at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington, Aurangzeb expressed the hope that the global lender's board of governors would convene to consider the last tranche of the current programme by the end of this month, with the final instalment released shortly thereafter.

In earlier statements, Aurangzeb had said Pakistan would prefer a long-term, preferably a three-year programme. However, when asked at Saturday's briefing, Aurangzeb said he would not speculate on the size or the duration of the programme yet. Earlier, Aurangzeb said that Pakistan can repay its debt to Beijing only after completing the second phase of the multi-million dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The minister's candid remarks followed discussions with key financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, alongside senior US officials in Washington this week. Explaining his stance on this sensitive issue, Aurangzeb said: "The CPEC was a champion project for Pakistan and a lot of infrastructure was created during its first phase. Now, what's supposed to happen was for us to go into CPEC Phase 2, which was and remains the way we monetise that in-

frastructure because that's where the special economic zones come in."

The minister elaborated that through these special economic zones, Pakistan would attract further Chinese investment.

Emphasising the necessity of completing this process, the minister said: "There's a lot of discussion about how you are going to repay the debt, that's how it was supposed to happen."

He expressed gratitude to the Chinese government and banks for their assistance in debt servicing and noted: "But ultimately, these debts have to be paid. And that's only going to be there when we get phase 2 going in real earnestness."

In an earlier meeting with Chinese Finance Minister Lan Fo'an in Washington, Aurangzeb commended China's invaluable contribution to Pakistan's development through initiatives like CPEC.

He discussed Phase-I's focus on infrastructure building and Phase-II's emphasis on special economic zones and relocation of Chinese private-owned companies, said a statement issued by the finance minister's office.

Aurangzeb expressed gratitude for Chinese support, particularly its SAFE deposits, and informed his Chinese counterpart about Pakistan's broader IMF programme and its interest in accessing the Chinese bond market with a Panda Bond. China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) is the Chinese government's foreign exchange and international trade agency of the People's Bank of China.

On Saturday, Aurangzeb met representatives from S and P Global and Fitch Ratings and shared his country's positive indicators under the IMF's Stand-by Arrangement (SBA).

He also highlighted the ongoing reforms in taxation, energy, and privatisation across short-medium and long-term horizons.

Additionally, the minister discussed the alignment of the World Bank's agenda with government priorities, including climate change and digitalisation. (PTI)

Russia warns Pakistan of banning rice imports over phytosanitary concerns

KARACHI, April 21: Russia has warned Pakistan that it would ban rice imports again if Moscow's phytosanitary concerns are not addressed in future consignments after a quarantine organism was detected in the rice consignment.

The warning came after Russia's Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (FSVPS) issued a notification regarding violations of international and Russian phytosanitary requirements over a shipment of rice imported from Pakistan.

Dated April 2, the notification highlights the presence of a quarantine organism, "Megascia scalaris (Loew)," in the rice consignment.

Pakistan's trade representative at its embassy in Russia was asked to carry out an immediate investigation into the matter.

The Russian authorities have written to the Pakistan embassy to prevent such violations and ensure all Pakistani rice exporters follow phytosanitary standards to ensure the safety of agricultural products traded between the two countries. (PTI)

Polling begins on 21 national and provincial seats in by-elections in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, April 21: Polling began on Sunday on 21 national and provincial seats in the by-elections in Pakistan amidst tight security and suspension of cellular and internet services in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan to maintain law.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan, voting began at 8 am and would continue without any break until 5 pm with the provision that voters present within the premises of polling stations would be allowed to cast votes even after the expiry of official timing.

The general elections were held across the country on February 8 to elect representatives for the national assembly and four provincial assemblies.

Polls were however cancelled for one National Assembly seat, two Punjab Assembly seats and one seat of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

Apart from these, candidates who won more than one seat opted for only one after elections, leaving the Election Commission of Pakistan to organise by-election on 21 seats, including five national

and 16 provincial assembly seats.

A day earlier, the federal government announced that cellular services will remain temporarily suspended in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan during the by-elections. The request for suspension was made by the ECP.

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) in a statement said the decision was taken to safeguard the integrity and security of the electoral process.

By-elections are being held on two seats of National Assembly each in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and one seat in Sindh while polling began on twelve seats of Punjab Assembly and two each of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan assemblies.

In Punjab, NA-132 (Kasur) and NA-119 (Lahore) were vacated by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz while Shehbaz also gave up two of his provincial assembly seats in Lahore.

The prime minister retained his NA-123 seat in the National Assembly.

Elaborate security measures

have been taken by authorities to control the law and order situation with deployment of regular army troops to maintain peace during the day-long process of by-elections.

The ECP had asked the federal government to approve the deployment of Pakistan Army and Civil Armed Forces (CAF) troops to keep peace.

The federal government endorsed the move and announced the use of armed forces' units as a quick response force.

The Ministry of Interior in its notification issued on Friday said the CAF and Pakistan Army units would be used as second and third tiers of security and they would be available with immediate effect till April 22 in all 21 constituencies.

"The exact number of troops, date/period, area and mode of deployment would be worked out by the ECP in consultation with all concerned stakeholders based on ground requirement/assessment. The date of de-requisitioning of the said deployment will be decided subsequently after mutual consultation among all stakeholders," the notification said. (PTI)

2 Japanese navy helicopters crash in the Pacific Ocean during training; 1 dead and 7 missing

TOKYO, April 21: Two Japanese navy helicopters carrying eight crew members crashed in the Pacific Ocean south of Tokyo during night-time training in a possible collision, leaving one dead while rescuers on Sunday searched for seven others missing, the defence minister said.

The two SH-60K choppers from the Maritime Self-Defence Force were carrying four crew each and lost contact late Saturday near Torishima island, about 600 kilometres south of Tokyo, Defense Minister Minoru Kihara told reporters.

The cause of the crash was not immediately known, but officials believe the two helicopters "highly likely" collided before crashing into the water, Kihara said.

The navy chief of staff, Adm. Ryo Sakai, said training involving the

SH-60s will be suspended until the cause of the crash is determined and preventive measures are adopted.

Rescuers recovered a flight data recorder, a blade from each helicopter, and fragments believed to be from both choppers in the same area, signs that the two SH-60Ks were flying close to each other, Kihara said.

Search and rescue efforts for the missing crew were expanded Sunday with the deployment of 12 warships and seven aircraft. Japan coast guard patrol boats and planes also joined the operation. US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel offered his country's to help with the search and rescue.

"We will stand together, side by side, with our friend and ally, Japan. My thoughts are with the crew members, and their families and friends

during this challenging time," he wrote on the social platform X.

The twin-engine, multi-mission helicopters developed by Sikorsky and known as Seahawks were modified and produced in Japan by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. They were on nighttime anti-submarine training, Kihara said. One lost contact at 10:38 p.m. and sent an automatic emergency signal a minute later.

Only one distress signal, called an emergency locator transmitter, was heard — another sign the helicopters were near the same place, because their signals use the same frequency and could not be differentiated, Kihara said. One helicopter belonged to an air base in Nagasaki, and the other to a base in Tokushima prefecture. Officials were interviewing the pilot of a third aircraft that also par-

ticipated in Saturday's training, Kihara said. The SH-60K aircraft is usually deployed on destroyers for anti-submarine warfare, but is also used for search and rescue and other missions. Japan has about 70 of the modified helicopters.

Saturday's training only involved the Japanese navy and was not part of a multinational exercise, defense officials said. Japan, under its 2022 security strategy, has been accelerating its military buildup and fortifying deterrence in the southwestern Japanese islands in the Pacific and East China Sea to counter threats from China's increasingly assertive military activities. Japan in recent years has conducted its own extensive naval exercises as well as joint drills with its ally the United States and other partners. (AP)

Scotland Yard chief under pressure over antisemitism row



LONDON, April 21: The Scotland Yard chief is under growing pressure on Sunday amid an antisemitism row during a pro-Palestinian protest march in London, with former UK home secretary Suella Braverman among those calling for his resignation.

Sir Mark Rowley, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, is in the firing line after Britain's largest police force rendered two apologies to an antisemitism campaigner for calling him "openly Jewish". Rowley "personally" reiterated the force's apologies as London Mayor Sadiq Khan and UK Home Office, in charge of the city's policing, said the force was right to apologise.

"I personally reiterate our apology from earlier this week. Today, as with every other day, our officers will continue to police with courage, empathy and impartiality," said Rowley.

But he has now been summoned to a meeting with UK Policing Minister Chris Philp, who has said he was "deeply concerned" by the force's handling of counter-protesters at pro-Palestinian rallies.

"No one should be told their religion

is provocative, nor an innocent person threatened with arrest solely because of someone else's anticipated unreasonable reaction," said Philp.

In a video on social media, Campaign Against Antisemitism chief executive Gideon Falter — wearing his Jewish yarmulke cap — is seen being told by a Met Police officer that he is worried about the reaction to his presence at the march.

"The video posted by the Campaign Against Antisemitism will further dent the confidence of many Jewish Londoners, which is the opposite of what any of us want," said Met Police Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist in a statement following the incident last weekend.

"The use of the term 'openly Jewish' by one of our officers is hugely regrettable. It's absolutely not the basis on which we make decisions, it was a poor choice of words and while not intended, we know it will have caused offence to many. We apologise," he said.

Twist went on to highlight a trend at the demonstrations in London, in protest against the Israel-Hamas conflict, where those opposed to the main protests appear along the route to express their

views.

He added: "The fact that those who do this often film themselves while doing so suggests they must know that their presence is provocative, that they're inviting a response and that they're increasing the likelihood of an altercation."

"They're also making it much more likely officers will intervene. They don't do so to stifle free speech or to limit the right to protest, but to keep opposing groups apart, to prevent disorder and keep the public — including those taking part in or opposing the protest — safe."

However, the campaigner at the centre of the row accused the force of "victim blaming" following the incident.

"Instead of addressing that threat of antisemitic violence, the Met's policy instead seems to be that law-abiding Jewish Londoners should not be in the parts of London where these marches are taking place. In other words, that they are no-go zones for Jews," said Gideon Falter.

He received the backing of Suella Braverman, who in her former role as home minister was in charge of the police force.

"I've seen too much fear and even more favouritism in the policing of pro-Palestinian protests," writes the Indian-origin ex-minister in 'The Daily Telegraph'.

"It gives me no pleasure to say this, but after such a litany of failure and a wholesale refusal to change, the Met commissioner needs to accept responsibility. And he must go," she declares.

There has been widespread protest marches and demonstrations in London, especially over weekends, since the Israel-Hamas conflict broke out in October last year. The Met Police's handling of these protests, which often result in several arrests, has been under the scanner as many of these gatherings get heated.

"We welcome the Met Police's apology, and recognise the complexities of policing fast-moving public protests, but simply being Jewish — or of any other race or religion — should never be seen as provocative. Anyone of any religion should be free to go about their lives and feel safe doing so," a UK Home Office spokesperson said. (PTI)

Police took control of the situation after a brief struggle Imphal based women organisation lambasts govt



IMPHAL, April 21: A powerful women based organisation in Imphal lambasted the government for not ensuring 'free and fair' election in the first phase of the Lok Sabha held on April 19.

A chaotic scene erupted at Khwairamband Keithel in the heart of Imphal, the main business hub of Manipur, after the police attempted to foil a press conference planned by the women vendors on Sunday. The press conference was to be hosted by the Khwairamband Ima Keithel Coordinating Committee. However, it was stalled by a police team who arrived minutes ahead of the press conference.

The women vendors, who protested against the action of the police, had a heated argument with the police, resulting in the eruption of the chaotic scene. With reinforcement, the police took control of the situation after a brief struggle.

Talking to the reporters while the women vendors were still confronting with the police, convener Laishram Mema of Khwairamband Ima Keithel Coordinating Committee questioned if there is still democracy in Manipur. The convener of the organisation strongly criticised the way the election for the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency was conducted on April 19 while asking if it was conducted in a free and fair manner. "What was the motive behind sending free hands to the armed youths to disturb the poll process and why the armed security personnel guarding the polling stations remained as mute spectators?" she asked.

EVMs placed in strong rooms under strict surveillance in Mizoram

AIZAWL, April 21: All Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) used in Mizoram Lok Sabha polls have been sealed and kept in designated strong rooms under strict surveillance, a senior election official said on Sunday.



Poling for the lone Lok Sabha seat in the northeastern state was held on April 19, while the votes will be counted on June 4. Mizoram Additional Chief Electoral Officer H Lianzela said that the EVMs and the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines were brought from all polling stations to the designated strong rooms in Aizawl and 10 other district headquarters by polling officials on Friday and Saturday. He said that there are 40 strong rooms in the state, one each for one assembly constituency, which are guarded by security forces to prevent any unauthorised access or tampering, he said. Votes will be counted on June 4 along with the rest of the country, he said. The election department has set up 13 polling centres, including 3 in Aizawl, across the state.

There are 40 counting halls, one each for one assembly segment. Post-poll scrutiny of EVMs and VVPAT machines was held on Saturday. The election department said that a total of 56.87 per cent polling was recorded in the Lok Sabha polls, excluding those voted through postal ballots and the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS). Of the total 8.56 lakh electorate, 4.87 lakh exercised their franchise,

it said. More than 3,500 police personnel and 12 companies of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) were deployed in the Lok Sabha polls and polling was held under a peaceful atmosphere, the department said. Six candidates, one each from ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), main opposition Mizo National Front (MNF), Congress, BJP, People's Conference (PC) party and an independent candidate are in the fray. (PTI)



Chief electoral officer of Meghalaya Dr BDR Tiwari addressing media, informing about polling process. UB Photos

Sit in demonstration against firing in Imphal

IMPHAL, April 21: A sit-in demonstration staged in Imphal's Singjamei on Sunday registered a strong protest against a gun attack by armed miscreants at the house of a leader of Imagi Meira, a women-based pressure group, on the Saturday night.



Two motorcycle-borne youths opened fire some rounds of guns at the house of Imagi Meira convener, Th Sujata at Singjamei Thokchom Leikai under Singjamei police station of Imphal West district on Saturday night, around 9.20 pm. No casualty was reported in the firing that came hours after the convener addressed a press conference denouncing the incidents of violence, threats and intimidations of voters and political party workers during the April 19 poll of the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency. Voting at several polling stations across the valley districts were marred due to the unlawful activities of the armed miscreants. Noting seriously the incidents,

Th Sujata had, during the press conference held on Saturday, demanded immediate actions to nab the armed miscreants. She had also set a three-day deadline to the government and the concerned authorities to translate into action the demands raised by the pressure group. Hours after she had addressed the press conference, two armed miscreants opened fire at her house at Singjamei Thokchom Leikai.

After the shooting incident, a team from Singjamei police station came to the house and took stock of the situation. A case was registered against the unknown persons. While relating the firing incident at his house with the earlier press conference she had addressed, Th Sujata sought to find out the culprits who attacked her residence while talking to the media today. She further demanded that resolving any issue with her or the

pressure group she led through dialogue. Meanwhile, members of the Imagi Meira and residents of Singjamei Thokchom Leikai today staged a sit-in-protest denouncing the gun violence. The firing incident had disturbed the peace and tranquility of the locality, a local leader taking part in the protest said, while urging not to repeat such violent acts in the locality again in future. (NNV)

Civil Services Day CM Rio lauds dedication of civil servants to public service

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: Chief minister Neiphiu Rio greeted civil servants on Civil Services Day. In a message, he lauded the dedication of civil servants to public service, which contributes to our Nation's progress. Chief minister Rio hoped that they remain committed to upholding the dignity and integrity of the Nation. The Government of India celebrates National Civil Services Day on April 21 every year in India every year to acknowledge and honour the work of civil servants engaged in public service who are the backbone of the nation's administration. This day commemorates the address by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the first home minister of independent India where he referred to civil servants as the steel frame of India.

Nagaland CM and Dy CM rally behind NPF candidate in Manipur LS poll campaign



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio and deputy chief minister Taditui Rangkau Zeliang, leaders of the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), a coalition partner of the BJP and the regional Naga People's Front, participated in Lok Sabha election campaigns in Manipur on Saturday. The two NDPP leaders addressed the campaign event at Maram Bazaar in Manipur's Senapati district, which borders Nagaland to the north. They lent their support to NPF

candidate Kachui Timothy Zimik, who is contesting in the multi-cornered race for the Outer Manipur Parliamentary seat reserved for scheduled tribes. The election for this seat is scheduled for April 26. During his speech, the Nagaland chief minister emphasized the importance of preserving Naga traditions among Nagas residing both in Manipur and Nagaland. He urged voters in Manipur to cast their ballots in favor of the NPF candidate, aiming to realize the longstanding aspirations of the Nagas for the benefit of future generations. Senapati district, comprising three assembly segments - Mao, Karong, and Tadubi, will also go to the polls on April 26. It boasts 142,688 voters across 220 polling stations, making it the district with the largest electorate among the eight districts covering 13 assembly constituencies. The 13 assembly segments, including Jiribam AC, Tengenoupal AC, Phungyar AC, Ukhrul AC, Chingai AC, Karong AC, Mao AC, Tadubi AC, Tamei AC, Tamenglong AC, Nungba AC, Tipaimukh AC, and Thanlon AC, fall under the Outer Manipur PC and will vote on April 26. In addition to the NPF candidate Kachui Timothy Zimik, other contenders for the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat include INC's Alfred Kanngam Arthur (Palm), and Independent candidates Alyson Abonmai (Diamond) and S Kho John (Trumpet).

Meghalaya: HNLC maintains silence over peace talk with govt



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: The future of peace talks between the Meghalaya government and the banned Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) remains uncertain as the militant outfit has not responded to the government's recent appeal. The Meghalaya government wanted to resume dialogue after HNLC's top leaders missed the last round of talks. Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong reiterated the government's commitment to peace and urged the HNLC to "re-

Power outages likely as theft cripples Likimro Hydroelectric Project

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: Parts of Nagaland may face power disruptions following the collapse of a transmission tower near Kiphire district. According to the Power Department, the incident occurred at the 66kV Kiphire-Likimro Transmission Line, a crucial link for the Likimro Hydroelectric Project (HEP). The collapse reportedly took place owing to an alleged theft of tower parts. The executive engineer of the Transmission Division stated the department is working to rectify the situation and urged the public to refrain from such actions. The police have been approached to investigate the incident. The 66kV Kiphire-Likimro Transmission Line collapses near Pungro town in the Kiphire district.

Speeches & promises of INDI alliance, nothing but mere drama: Tripura CM

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Sunday said that the people of the state have realized that the speeches and promises made by the INDI alliance for the elections are nothing but mere drama. "When PM Modi visited Agartala, he said 'picture abhi baki hai.' We can assume what awaits us when Narendra Modi will take charge again as PM," he said. The chief minister also noted that before 2014, there were significant concerns about the country's future. He claimed, "Under the UPA government's rule, corruption was rampant. Our soldiers were attacked, and our parliament itself came under attack. An unstable situation prevailed. However, after Narendra Modi assumed office as Prime Minister in 2014, the country's situation changed rapidly. He demonstrated effective governance." "We witnessed how China encroached on our territory during the UPA government's tenure. But when Narendra Modi took office, no one dared to encroach on our land. PM Modi emphasized that without developing the Northeast, overall national development is not possible. He introduced the HIRA Model and Act East Policy," said Saha. Saha also highlighted PM Modi's focus on the welfare of the people through various development schemes. "The INDI alliance claims that there is no democracy, but we see them holding rallies and giving speeches where no one comes to listen, as people have understood that their promises are merely theatrical", he remarked.

Fresh poll only in six polling stations was against the number demanded by the Manipur Congress and RPI (Athawale). 11 polling stations in inner constituency in Manipur recommended for repoll

HT Bureau
IMPHAL, April 21: Amid hordes of condemnations pouring in on the incidents of violence at various polling stations on poll day, the chief electoral officer (CEO) Manipur on Saturday recommended repoll in eleven polling stations in Inner Parliamentary constituency. The polling stations recommended in Inner Parliamentary constituency for fresh polls were 3/11 Moirang Kampu Sajeb Upper Primary School, 5/31 Khongman Zone 5, 10/1 Iroisemba Upper Primary School (Eastern Wing), 10/6 Iroisemba Upper Primary School (Western Wing), 10/7 Iroisemba Upper Primary School (Middle Wing), 18/22 Kaidem Makha, 3/21 S Ibobi Primary School, 4/43 Bamon Kampu Upper Primary School, 4/46 Irlilbung High School (South Wing), 4/45 Irlilbung High School (South wing) and 4/44 Pioneer Academy (Bamon Kampu). Citing interruption by mobs during the polling that led to the destruction of EVMs in these polling stations, the CEO Manipur office made the recommendation for fresh



polls, in a letter to the Election Commission of India (ECI) on April 19, the poll day itself. The CEO office made the recommendation based on a report submitted by the Returning Officer (RO) of the Inner Manipur Parliamentary.

The RO stated that the polls taken on April 19 in these polling stations were vitiated to such an extent that the results of the poll there cannot be ascertained. The fresh poll only in six polling stations was against the number demanded by the Manipur Congress and RPI (Athawale).

The MPCC had demanded fresh polls in as many as 36 polling stations while the RPI (A) in 20 polling stations where they alleged malpractices like proxy voting and disturbances by armed miscreants during the poll hours. The MPCC demanded fresh polls in three polling stations in Heingang Assembly segment and Khurai Assembly segment, four in Kshetrigao AC, five in Thongju AC, six in Keirao AC and one each in Andro AC and Yaikul AC. Amid incidents of violence, the voting for the Inner Manipur Parliamentary seat was held on Friday along with 15 Assembly segments falling under Outer Manipur Parliamentary seat with an overall 68.62% voter turnout record. The office of the chief electoral officer (CEO) Manipur said it has recorded an overall turnout of 68.62 % at 5 pm. It added that in the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency, 72.32% voter turnout was recorded while 61.98 % in the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency. (NNV)

Modi caused 'unprecedented decline' in worker wages; INDIA govt will ensure higher growth: Cong

Citing Center for Labour Research and Action data, Ramesh said real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022

NEW DELHI, April 21: The Congress on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has caused an "unprecedented decline" in worker wages adjusted for price rise and said that an INDIA coalition government will return the country to a higher growth trajectory.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said multiple data sources, including the Modi government's own official statistics, are unanimous in showing the simple fact that workers can buy less today than they could 10 years ago.

A combination of slow wage growth and back-breaking inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages, he said in a statement.

"Labour Bureau's Wage Rate Index (Government Data): Between 2014 and 2023, real wages for labourers have stagnated, with clear declines in real wages in Modi-II," he said.

Ramesh also pointed out that the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Statistics said that under former prime minister Manmohan Singh, real wages for agricultural labourers grew at 6.8 per cent each year.

"Under PM Modi, real wages for agricultural labourers declined by -1.3 per cent each year," he said.

"Periodic Labour Force Survey Series (Government Data): Average real earnings over time have stagnated between 2017 and 2022 across all employment types - salaried workers, casual workers, and self-employed workers," he said in a statement.

Citing Center for Labour Research and Action data, Ramesh said real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022.

Brick kilns involve intensive labour and are a low-paying work of last resort for India's poorest, he pointed out.

"Stagnant wages underpin the economy's poor performance under PM Modi: Real wages for India's people have stagnated since the PM came to office," the Congress leader said in the statement.

"Stagnant real wages have dragged down consumption growth as revealed by the NSSO's Consumption Expenditure Survey which showed a decline in rural consumption for the first time in almost 50 years (and which the



Modi Sarkar tried to suppress)," he said.

With slowing consumption growth and deepening fear, the private sector no longer has an incentive to invest in the economy, Ramesh argued.

"Investment in India has dropped to historic low levels, threatening our long-term growth: Investment as % of GDP (10-year average) was 33.4% under the

UPA but just 28.7% under Modi. FDI as % of GDP rose from 0.8% in 2004 to 1.7% in 2014 under Manmohan Singh's stewardship. It has fallen to just 1.5% of GDP as of 2022," the statement read.

He further pointed out that manufacturing as a percentage of GDP (10-year average) fell from 16.5 per cent in UPA to 14.5 per cent under Modi and the gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in

India, or the total investment in fixed assets, averaged 32 per cent for the 10 years of Manmohan Singh, while the GFCF under Modi has been below 29 per cent for 10 years.

"Together, all these factors are dragging down economic growth and causing an unemployment crisis," Ramesh said.

"In the economy, all good things go together. The UPA performed strongly on real wages for workers, private-sector investment, and consumption growth, enabling 7.5% real GDP growth rates, compared to the Modi Sarkar's 5.8% average," he said in the statement.

"On June 4, when the INDIA coalition comes to power, we will return India to a higher growth trajectory," Ramesh asserted.

Tagging his statement, he said on X that workers today can buy less today than they could 10 years ago.

"The Modi Sarkar's Dus Saal Anyay Kaal have been defined by: Slow wage growth. Back-breaking inflation. Prime Minister Modi has caused an unprecedented decline in worker wages adjusted for price rise," Ramesh said. (PTI)

If Congress and allies win, there will be riots, atrocities: Amit Shah

KATIHAR, April 21: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday charged the Congress-led opposition with being soft on terror and indifferent towards the uplift of deprived castes, and alleged that their return to power could cause "riots, atrocities and poverty".

Addressing an election rally in the Katihar Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar, the former BJP president also credited his party with having given the nation, in Narendra Modi, its "first OBC prime minister" who has "put an end" to dynasty politics.

"Modi wiped out Naxalism and reined in terrorism. When the Congress was in power, terrorists struck at will and nobody could muster the courage to retaliate. In contrast, the attacks in Uri and Pulwama were followed quickly by surgical strikes and Balakot airstrikes. Our security personnel went across the border with Pakistan and the terrorists were bumped off in their own hide-outs," said Shah.

He also slammed Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for taking exception to raising the issue of abrogation of Article 370 in poll rallies outside Jammu and Kashmir, saying "it is a matter concerning the whole country".

"People from Rajasthan and Bihar have shed their blood fighting the insurgency there. Now Kashmir has been fully integrated with the rest of the country," he said.

In his speech that lasted barely 15 minutes, Shah, who spoke in the presence of Chief Minister Nitish

Kumar, the JD(U) president, also dwelt at length on the alleged anti-OBC stance of the Congress, which has sought to reach out to the backward classes with the promise of caste census, besides forming alliances with parties like the RJD that have roots in the Mandal movement.

"The Congress slept on the Kaka Kalelkar Commission report and when recommendations of Mandal Commission were implemented, it opposed the same for years," alleged the BJP leader, who added it was under Modi that the OBC Commission was granted constitutional status.

"Not only is Modi the first OBC PM, but he also heads a cabinet in which 35 per cent of the ministers come from backward classes. This has all been made possible by the BJP," said the home minister, who urged voters of Katihar to vote for JD(U) MP Dulal Chandra Goswami and help the PM secure a third consecutive term in office.

"If you go with the RJD and the Congress you will have to contend with riots, atrocities, poverty and food shortage. If you vote for the NDA you will continue to reap the benefits of the double-engine government," said Shah.

Shah said that Nitish Kumar brought electricity to the remotest of villages in Bihar.

"But the INDI alliance wants to take the state back to the lantern age," said the BJP leader, referring to the poll symbol of the RJD. (PTI)

BJP targeting me, Abhishek; we are not safe: Mamata

KUMARGANJ (WB), April 21: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday alleged that the BJP is targeting her and her nephew and TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and they do not feel safe.

Her allegation came a day after the Leader of Opposition in the assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, said that there would be a "big explosion" on Monday which would shake the TMC and its top brass.

"The BJP is targeting me and Abhishek, we are not safe, but we are also not afraid of the saffron party's conspiracy. We urge everyone to be on guard against a conspiracy against TMC leaders and the people of West Bengal," she said.

The TMC supremo was addressing an election rally at Kumarganj in Balurghat Lok Sabha seat in favour of party candidate and state minister Biplab Mitra.

Responding to Adhikari's remark, the TMC supremo said, "There is a traitor who joined the BJP to protect his family and ill-gotten wealth. Let me tell him, his threat to trigger a chocolate bomb explosion is treated with contempt by us," Adhikari, a former TMC minister, defected to the BJP ahead of the 2021 assembly elections in the state.

"If you have courage, come up with truths, come up with facts. I guess it takes time for you to fully build up a false narrative, to fully hatch the conspiracy. But rest assured we are ready to counter," she said. "We will counter him by bursting firecrackers. For us firecrackers are unravelling discrepancies in PM Care Fund and 'jumla' of crediting ₹ 15 lakh in every citizen's bank account. He only ped-

dles falsehood," she said.

The BJP is bringing in outsiders to the state to foment trouble.

Banerjee accused the Narendra Modi government of painting independent institutions such as Doordarshan in saffron hues, and claimed that the BJP "appropriating that colour" is an insult to sacrifices made by monks and spiritual leaders of the country for ages. She wondered how the logo of Doordarshan could be painted in saffron during elections, alleging it was done to suit the BJP's "religion-based vote bank politics and agenda".

"Why did the DD logo suddenly turn saffron? Why were official residences of army personnel painted in saffron? Why was the uniform of police in Kashi (Varanasi) changed to saffron?" she questioned.

The chief minister claimed that if the BJP returns to power, there will be no more elections in future and religious rights of several communities will be at stake.

At another meeting in Balurghat, the Lok Sabha constituency of BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar, Banerjee said the Covid vaccination certificate only had the photograph of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "He only believes in self-publicity. He believes in making tall claims and himself listening to his words," she said.

Accusing Majumdar of keeping mum on non-payment of 100 days' work to the poor labourers of villages and non-release of Awaz Yojana funds by the Modi government, she said "Your (Majumdar) party leaders are asking bosses in Delhi to stop payment to the poor." (PTI)

Democracy will end if 'Modi-Shah sarkar' returns to power: Kharge

SATNA (MP), April 21: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday claimed that democracy will end in the country if the "Modi-Shah sarkar" returns to power, launching an attack on the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance.

Targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah while addressing a public meeting in Madhya Pradesh's Satna district, Kharge said they will also scrap the Constitution.

"They will scrap the Constitution scripted by Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. If you want to keep it alive, the right to vote for women, labourers and farmers, then vote for the Congress and its 'panja' (hand) symbol," he appealed to the voters.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi was scheduled to address the rally in Satna but his visit was cancelled as he took ill, a party leader said earlier, adding that Kharge would fill in for him.

The Satna Lok Sabha seat will go to polls in the second phase on April 26.



"Democracy will end if Modi-Shah's government returns to power," Kharge claimed addressing the public meeting held in support of Congress candidate Siddharth Kushwaha.

Accusing PM Modi of telling lies, Kharge said the PM keeps talking about "Modi ki guarantee" without taking his party's name. "He had said that if he became the prime minister, ₹ 15 lakh would be given to every person by bringing back the black money stashed abroad. Did you get it," he asked.

Modi had also told the young people of this country that 2 crore jobs would be generated every year,

said Kharge continuing his criticism of the PM.

"Now 10 years have gone. Did you all get 20 crore jobs... Ask the BJP about their 20 crore jobs (promise). Ask them where is Rs 15 lakh when they come seeking your votes," the senior Congress leader said.

Kharge said Modi had promised to double farmers' income but that too has not happened.

Listing out the prices of cooking gas cylinders, milk, flour and pulses when the Congress-led UPA was in power before 2014, Kharge said rates of these commodities have skyrocketed in the past ten years.

"These are Modi's acche din (good days). This man always says I will bring acche din. He tells so many lies. That's why I call him 'jhothon ka sardar'," Kharge said.

The country's unemployment rate is the highest in the past 45 years but there is no account of it, he said.

Kharge also claimed that the country's assets like airports, roads, land, public sector undertakings and

big factories are being sold to "two buyers".

"Who are these two men? Adani and Ambani are buyers. Who are the sellers? Modi and Shah," Kharge said.

Loans worth ₹ 16 lakh crore of rich people have been waived but the loans of poor farmers are yet to be written off, he said. Farm loans of ₹ 72,000 crore were waived under the leadership of former prime minister Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi.

Kharge also slammed PM Modi and Union minister Shah for taking those into the BJP fold who were "corrupt" till they were in other parties.

It seems Shah has a "big laundry with a washing machine to wash those who are corrupt" before inducting them into the BJP, the Congress leader claimed.

Besides Satna, Rewa, Tikamgarh, Khajuraho, Damoh and Hoshangabad seats will vote in the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls on April 26. (PTI)

No one can stop implementation of CAA in West Bengal: Rajnath

MALDA (WB), April 21: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday asserted that the BJP delivers on its promises, and maintained that no one can stop implementation of the CAA in West Bengal. He said the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 is not meant to take away anyone's citizenship, but is a law for granting Indian citizenship to people displaced from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan on religious grounds.

"The Congress, Trinamool Congress or the Left parties make promises during elections that are not fulfilled, but the BJP delivers on its promises," he said, addressing a rally here in support of BJP candidate from Malda Uttar constituency, Khagen Murmu. He asserted that no one can stop the implementation of CAA in West Bengal, along with the rest of India.

"Mamata didi says she will not allow CAA in her state. Why is she trying to hoodwink the people of West Bengal," Singh said. The Centre had in March implemented the CAA, notifying the rules four years after the law was passed by Parliament to fast-track citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants

from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014. Singh said that India is treated with respect under the Narendra Modi-led government, unlike under previous dispensations.

"When we say something in an international forum, it is listened to with respect," he said, adding that Modi's pledge is to turn India into a developed country by 2047. Singh said promises like abolishing Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and constructing the Ram Temple in Ayodhya have been fulfilled, and that there are indications of the coming into being of a 'Ram Rajya'.

The defence minister said the BJP government at the Centre has also delivered on its promise of abolishing 'triple talaq'. "We can not only bring to book terrorists inside our territory, but if anyone tries to attack our unity and pride from outside, we can dare to go beyond our borders to teach them a lesson; this is our strength," Singh said.

Slamming the TMC, he alleged that only extortionists, criminals and the corrupt have flourished in Bengal after the party came to power. (PTI)

Health ministry asks states, UTs to act strictly against hospitals involved in illegal transplant

NEW DELHI, April 21: The Union health ministry has asked all states and UTs to investigate any violations and take appropriate action, including suspension of registration, against hospitals performing illegal organ transplants, officials said on Sunday.

In a letter to all states and UTs, Dr Atul Goel, Director General of Health Services (DGHS), Government of India, urged all states and Union Territories to ensure regular collection and sharing of data of all transplant cases, including those of foreigners, with the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO) on a monthly basis.

The ministry's direction comes over two weeks after an organ trafficking racket, involving Bangladeshi nationals, being run in Haryana and Rajasthan was busted.

Referring to media reports mentioning commercial dealings in organs involving foreign citizens, Dr Goel stated, "It has also been noted from the registry of NOTTO that there has been a surge in the number of organ transplants of foreigners in the country, which calls for monitoring of such transplants by the state or UT government authority concerned."

Goel, in the letter issued on April



10, directed that appropriate authority of the state appointed as per the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994, should investigate the transplant cases of foreign nationals in their respective states.

He also asked the officials to take appropriate actions whenever a breach of any provision of the Act or any of the rules made thereunder are noted.

"Investigate any violation of the THOTA, 1994 and rules thereunder and take appropriate action including suspension of registration for performing Organ Transplant, of the hospitals involved in illegal activities," the letter said.

"It should be ensured that a unique NOTTO-ID for both donor and recipient is generated by the hospital from NOTTO website (www.notto.mohfw.gov.in), in all

cases of organ transplant, whether from a living donor or deceased donor," the letter said.

Besides NOTTO-ID being mandatory for considering allocation of organ in case of deceased donor transplant, this ID in case of a living donor transplant, shall also be generated at the earliest, at least within 48 hours of the transplant surgery, the ministry said, it added.

The letter called for devising a

system of regular inspection of the registered transplant or retrieval hospitals by the state appropriate authority, so as to maintain on-site monitoring of their activities, quality of transplantation, post operative follow-up of donor and recipient and outcome of the transplantation.

"Time and again, letters have been written to states for sharing of data related to organ donation and transplantation with NOTTO. However, complete data is still not being received. It is again requested to ensure regular collection and sharing of data of all transplant cases, including those of foreigners, with NOTTO on monthly basis," the ministry said. The health ministry also asked all states and UTs to submit an action-taken report on the instructions within 15 days.

On April 4, a joint team of CM flying squad, Gurugram health department and police busted a gang that got kidney transplant done for money in two private hospitals in Jaipur, according to officials.

The racket was busted following a raid at a hotel in Gurugram where a Bangladeshi national was found who had undergone a kidney removal procedure at a hospital in Jaipur under "suspicious" financial arrangements, they had said. (PTI)

'Kejriwal ko insulin do': AAP workers protest outside Tihar jail

NEW DELHI, April 21: Carrying insulin, the workers and leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party protested outside the Tihar jail in west Delhi on Sunday and demanded that insulin be given to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who is suffering from diabetes.

Delhi cabinet minister Atishi and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Sanjeev Jha were present at the protest site. Scores of party workers carrying placards saying 'Kejriwal ko insulin do' sang 'Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram' outside the jail.

"This is not a protest. The people of Delhi are worried about the health of Chief Minister Kejriwal who is diabetic. They have sent insulin for him," she said. Atishi alleged there is a "conspiracy" to harm Kejriwal.

"The Tihar administration had said they have specialist doctors but yesterday they wrote to AIIMS for a diabetologist. Kejriwal has been in judicial custody for nearly 20 days but they are asking for a diabetologist now.

"This shows there is a conspir-

acy. His sugar levels are high and denying him insulin is dangerous for his health," she said.

The Tihar administration, earlier in the day, said appropriate senior specialists from AIIMS provided consultation to Kejriwal through video conference on Saturday.

"After a 40-minute detailed consultation, Kejriwal was assured that there was no serious concern and was advised to continue with the prescribed medicines, which will be evaluated and reviewed regularly," a jail official said. The video conference was organised by the Tihar jail administration on a request by Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal.

Apart from a senior specialist from the hospital, medical officers of Tihar were also on the call. The AIIMS specialist was provided with a complete record of CGM (Glucose Monitoring Sensor) and the details of diet and medicines being taken by Kejriwal.

"Neither the issue of insulin was raised by Kejriwal nor was it suggested by the doctors," the official added. (PTI)

Tirthankaras' teachings of non-violence getting new relevance as wars break out: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, April 21: Teachings of Indian Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance at a time when "many countries are getting into wars", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday and asserted that India is making a place for itself as "Vishwa Bandhu in a divided world".

Addressing the 2,550th Bhagwan Mahaveer Nirvan Mahotsav here, Modi also said India is now projecting the principles of truth and non-violence on the global fora as a solution to the problems in the world, and its cultural image is playing a big role in it as well.

The prime minister also released a commemorative stamp and a coin on the occasion and thanked the Jain community for their blessings.

He said his government put emphasis on promoting heritage as well as material development when it came to power in 2014 at a time when the country was engulfed in despair, a swipe at the previous UPA dispensation.

He cited his government's promotion of Indian heritage like yoga and Ayurveda, asserting that the country's new generation now believes that self-pride is its identity. He praised the dance drama 'Vartaman Mein Vardhaman' that was showcased on the occasion and said the dedication of the youth towards the values of Bhagwan Mahaveer is a sign of the nation moving forward in the right direction.

Modi also bowed before the Jain saints present at the event and conveyed his best wishes to all on the auspicious occasion of Mahaveer Jayanti on Sunday.

In his address, he said the "teachings of



our Tirthankaras have gained a new relevance in the time when, globally, many countries are getting into wars".

Tirthankaras are gurus or preachers of Jainism.

Modi recalled the philosophies such as Anekantavada and Syadvada that teach people to look at all the aspects and embrace the views of others too.

Today, humanity is expecting peace from India in these times of conflict, he said. The "new role" of this "New India"

is being credited to India's growing capabilities and foreign policy. "But, I want to tell you that the our cultural image has a big role in it," he said.

"Today we put forward the principles of truth and non-violence with full confidence on the global fora. We tell the world that the solution to global problems is found in the ancient Indian culture and tradition. This is why India is making a place for itself as 'Vishwa Bandhu' in a divided world", the prime minister added.

He mentioned India's initiatives such as Mission LiFE for combating climate change and the vision of 'One Earth One Family and One Future' along with a roadmap of One World-One Sun-One Grid and International Solar Alliance.

During his address, Modi also paid tributes to Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Maharaj who passed away in February and recalled his recent meeting with him, saying "his blessings are still guiding us". Referring to the Lok Sabha polls, he

said a big festival of democracy is happening "and, the country believes from here a new journey into future will also begin".

The prime minister also suggested to the audience that they should use their franchise early in the day and added in a lighter vein that saints have links to lotus, a flower often used in holy events which also is the BJP's poll symbol.

"We are celebrating Bhagwan Mahaveer's Nirvan Diwas even after 2500 years and I'm sure that the nation will continue to celebrate his values for thousands of years to come", he said.

He asked people to follow the teachings of Bhagwan Mahaveer as revival of those values is the demand of the time.

The prime minister said that Jainism is the path of 'jin' or the victorious.

The event is a rare occasion and is happening at the beginning of 'Amrit Kaal', Modi said, adding the country is working to make centenary year of freedom a "golden centenary".

Prime Minister Modi underlined that the idea of 'Amrit Kaal' is not merely a resolution but India's spiritual inspiration.

"For India, modernity is its body, spirituality is its soul. If spirituality is removed from modernity, anarchy is born," he said.

Modi said India is emerging from the period of corruption and despair as more than 25 crore Indians have come out of poverty. Union ministers of state for Culture Arjun Ram Meghwal and Meenakshi Lekhi were also present on the occasion among other dignitaries and saints from the Jain community. (PTI)

Sluggish progress on climate finance at World Bank, IMF meetings

NEW DELHI, April 21: The annual World Bank and IMF meetings have wrapped up without a concrete plan to mobilise the trillions of dollars needed to fight climate change, in a year where agreement on New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) or a new climate finance goal will be the key issue at the United Nations climate conference (COP29) in Azerbaijan.

NCQG is the new amount developed countries must mobilise every year from 2025 onwards to support climate action in developing countries. Rich countries are expected to raise more than the USD 100 billion they promised to provide every year from 2020, but repeatedly failed.

A recent analysis revealed that financial flows into developing countries turned negative in 2023, with these nations paying out more in debt servicing than they received in external financing.

Discussions between G7 and G20 finance ministers on the sidelines of the spring meetings that wrapped up on Saturday touched on providing finance to developing countries for meeting climate and development objectives.

The Vulnerable Group of Twenty Countries (V20) called for increased concessional finance for climate-vulnerable nations, and urged G7 and high-emitting G21 countries to safeguard the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit.

The Intergovernmental Group of Twenty-Four on International Monetary Affairs and Development (G24) called for reforms to ensure timely assistance to vulnerable nations and urged reform of the G20 Common Framework to support countries in debt distress.

World Bank president Ajay Banga expressed hope that donor contributions could add up to an additional USD 100 billion to the poorest countries through its lending arm, the International Development Association (IDA). The Bank had earlier launched a bid to add more financing to its portfolio to support low-income countries with very low-cost financing and grants. Shareholders are expected to pledge to the IDA before the replenishment conference in December.

While Banga reiterated the Bank's commitment to ramp up climate-aligned finance, he said the Bank has no plan to stop investments in gas projects.

IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva noted during her opening press conference that the global economy had lost USD 3.3 trillion since 2020. She said that the poorest countries spend over 14 percent of their budgets on debt payments, with interest rate hikes pushing up debt servicing costs. A new report by the Debt Relief for Green and Inclusive Recovery Project (DRGR) revealed that 47 emerging and developing market economies may not be able to spend needed funds for climate adaptation and development without risking default in the next five years.

Discussion on international taxation for climate action took place on the sidelines, with the first sherpa meeting of the International Tax Task Force launching the first phase of its work to help countries fulfill Paris Agreement commitments. Launched at COP28 and co-chaired by Kenya, Barbados, and France, the task force's aim is to advance options for international levies to raise revenues for the fight against climate change, and to support development and nature. (PTI)

JNU has problem of 'freeloaders', says VC Pandit; cites overstaying students, illegal guests

NEW DELHI, April 21: Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has a problem of "freeloaders" -- both overstaying students and illegal guests -- and the administration is now tightening the noose on them, according to its Vice Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit. In an interaction with PTI editors at the agency's headquarters, Pandit said she has issued strict instructions to the hostel administration not to allow any student to stay in hostels beyond five years.

In response to a question on allegations of JNU having seen freeloaders stay on campus at the cost of taxpayer money, Pandit said, "You are absolutely right, we have a problem of freeloaders." Herself an alumna of the university, the 61-year-old said the issue was there even when she was a student but it has increased now.

"When I was there, we had many students who stayed over but the num-

ber of such students was very low... JNU creates certain illusions too... certain students... want everything free and subsidised... even the Lok Sabha canteen is costlier than the JNU canteen but in our times, teachers were very strict," she said.

"The professor supervising my research told me if you don't complete it in four-and-a-half years, you are out. I knew he wouldn't sign my fellowship extension... I think this has changed over the years. Certain professors permitted such extensions and that's how the number has gone up today," Pandit said. Pandit pursued her MPhil and PhD from JNU from 1985-1990 after finishing her master's degree from Presidency College in Chennai.

"There are also people on campus who are illegal guests, who are not even students of JNU but come here and stay. They are either preparing for UPSC or other exams... for them, JNU

is the cheapest place to stay... in southwest Delhi, where can you get such an accommodation with greenery, spread over 2,000 acres and with such dhabs and cheap food," she asked.

On the steps being taken by her administration to address the issue, Pandit said, "Now we are trying to bring this down to a large extent... it is very difficult for us to get into the rooms... we still do it while sticking to the norms. We also appeal to the good sense of the students and ask them to at least inform if they are bringing a guest."

"We have also tightened the hostel administration to not allow any student to stay beyond five years. We are now making ID cards compulsory... we tell students to carry ID cards at all times and produce them when asked for. We are asking students to report as well since there are students who don't like these outsiders," she added.

JNU had in 2019 issued a list of

pending mess dues from 207 residents amounting to over Rs 2.79 crore, creating an uproar from various quarters. The students' union had then termed the move as an attempt to threaten students. The university also saw massive protests in 2019 when it introduced a fee hike.

The allegations of "freeloaders" on the campus were also raised after the 2016 sedition controversy over "anti-national" slogans raised at the university that led to the arrest of the then-students' union president Kanhaiya Kumar, along with others.

Several online petitions were then started to stop funding JNU with taxpayers' money. The administration's attempts to push for CCTVs on campus and make carrying IDs compulsory have been met with resistance from the students' union, which has been accusing the university brass of converting the campus into a "jail". (PTI)

Exhibition displays artworks by children with autism

NEW DELHI, April 21: Autistic children exhibit their artistic talent in an ongoing art exhibition here in the national capital. The week-long exhibition, being held at Hotel JW Marriott, Aerocity, in collaboration with NGO Arts and Souls Foundation, showcases over 60 abstract artworks by 20 budding artists -- half of which are already sold.

"This initiative provided a valuable platform for children with autism to highlight their artistic abilities and raise awareness for the autistic community. The event not only highlighted the remarkable talents of these young individuals but also fostered a more inclusive environment."

"We are committed to supporting such initiatives that empower

children and contribute to the well-being of our community," said Sharad Datta, general manager of JW Marriott New Delhi, Aerocity, in a statement.

Autism is a lifelong neurological condition that manifests during early childhood, irrespective of gender, race or socioeconomic status. April, globally, is marked as a month dedicated to Autism Awareness, aiming to foster understanding and acceptance for individuals with autism.

Besides highlighting the talent of children with autism, the art exhibition also motivates visitors to participate in an immersive painting session, unleashing their artistic spirits by translating their emotions onto canvases with vibrant colours and expressive strokes. (PTI)

Hubballi murder: Accused's father apologises to Neha's family



HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA), April 21: Demanding maximum punishment for his son, the father of 23-year-old Fayaz, who allegedly killed the daughter of a Congress councillor inside a college campus in Hubballi, has apologised to the victim's family and said his son should be given strict punishment. Baba Saheb Subani, a school teacher and Fayaz's father told media on Saturday that he came to know about the incident around 6 pm on Thursday and was completely shocked and shattered with his son's act.

"He (Fayaz) should be punished in a way that no one dares to do such a thing in future. With folded arms, I apologise to Neha's family members. She was like my daughter," he said with teary eyes.

Subani said that he and his wife have been living separately for the past six years and that Fayaz stayed with his mother and called him whenever he needed money. He last spoke to his son about three months ago.

Fayaz's father recalled that around eight months ago, Neha's family had called him to inform that his son was troubling their daughter.

Admitting that his son made a mistake, he said that Fayaz and Neha loved each other and were in a relationship.

"Fayaz told me he wanted to marry her but I refused it by folding my hands," he added.

Condemning his son's act, Fayaz's father said that no one should commit any such atrocities against women.

"I request the people of Karnataka to forgive me. My son has done wrong. He will be punished by the law of the land and I welcome it. My town has got a black mark because of my son. People of

Munavalli (Fayaz's hometown) please forgive me. You raised us. Please forgive me," he cried with folded hands.

However, the victim's family has been demanding that the accused be hanged to death and only then will their daughter's soul rest in peace. They maintained that their daughter was not in a relationship with Fayaz and said the accused stabbed Neha because she rejected his proposal.

There were protests in several parts of the state demanding capital punishment for Fayaz, who has been arrested in connection with the incident that occurred on April 18. The alleged murder of the daughter of the city corporation councillor on her college campus has sparked widespread condemnation and protests.

The issue has snowballed into a political slugfest between the ruling Congress and opposition BJP in Karnataka. While the ruling party has tried to project it as an "incident with a personal angle", the saffron party suspects "love jihad" and said that it points to the "deterioration of law and order" in the state.

Neha was allegedly stabbed to death on the campus of BVB College on Thursday.

The accused Fayaz Khondunak, who fled the scene, was arrested by police subsequently.

Neha was a first-year MCA student and Fayaz was her former classmate.

According to a senior police officer, Fayaz allegedly stabbed her multiple times. During interrogation, he claimed that the two had been in a relationship but she had been avoiding him of late.

"It needs to be corroborated and verified, but he was arrested immediately," the officer said. (PTI)

India bats for designing regional ocean observations to better understand deep ecosystems

NEW DELHI, April 21: Amid challenges posed by climate change, India has made a strong pitch for designing region-specific ocean observations for forecasting and roping in NGOs to harness traditional knowledge for better understanding of deep-sea ecosystems.

At the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona earlier this month, India also called for people-centred multi-hazard early warning systems and designing adaptation planning strategies to increase coastal resilience.

The Indian delegation to the Conference was led by Earth Sciences Secretary M Ravichandran and

comprised experts in the area of ocean studies, including T Srinivasa Kumar, Director of the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS).

Ravichandran also urged integration of ocean observation systems across platforms in accessible and usable formats, bringing focus on use of science for policy and decision making by coastal cities and a greater emphasis on region specific ocean observations.

India had convened the Indian Ocean Regional Decade Conference in Hyderabad in February to deliberate on ocean decade challenges and steps to address the same.

At the Barcelona conference, India also stressed on increasing bio-geo-chemical and coastal observations and the need to reinvigorate ocean data management

programs such as the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE), the digital twins and capacity development hub initiatives.

Ravichandran also stressed on the need to design regional projects such as ocean forecasting that demonstrate the end-to-end operational ocean value chain to user communities.

He also underscored the need to align existing and future initia-

tives with the UN Ocean Decade Challenges

Ravichandran said there was a need of bringing traditional knowledge through involvement of NGOs, local communities, and industry partners in ocean literacy and other related programs.

The United Nations had proclaimed 2021-30 as the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development to stimulate knowledge generation to reverse the decline of the state of ocean systems and catalyse new opportunities for sustainable development of the massive marine ecosystem. (PTI)

Numismatics book explores rich history of Indian coins

MUMBAI, April 21: A book tracing the evolution of Indian currency through the ages, based on a meticulously curated collection by Indian American numismatist Dr Navin C Shah, was launched here recently.

Shah, a Maryland-based urologist who is the founder, former president, and trustee of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPIO), was present at the launch, along with Ashok Hinduja, Chairman of Hinduja Group of Companies.

Shah told PTI that the book, "Coins of India: Circa 6th Century BC - 2022 AD", explores the rich and diverse history of Indian coins, and offers a glimpse into the country's fascinating past.

The book is about Shah's collection of over 2,600 rare coins, representing several dynasties, Mughals and British rule.

"Our history has no monetary value. We have not preserved our rich and glorious cultural legacy for the new generation. No one bothers about the intrinsic value of the coins and their rule in history and culture," Shah said.

"The book is a comprehensive guide to the rich history of Indian coins, describing the evolution of coinage itself and showing its significance in economic history, the evolution of Indian currency through the ages as well as the cultural and political history of the



pective period," he said.

Numismatist Manish Verma, who works with the Hinduja Foundation as the curator of its antiquity collection, is the book's author.

The book meticulously unravels the evolution of Indian coinage and its profound impact on the nation's economic, cultural, and political fabric across the ages, Shah said. The book contains 327 coin images and illustrations, each accompanied by insightful commentary and maps illustrating India's numismatic journey.

Each coin showcased in the

book narrates a compelling tale, from the old dynasties to the contemporary era, and serves as a timeless portal to the past that transcends the boundaries of time and space, Shah said.

"The exploration of Indian coinage is a captivating odyssey through time, revealing the intricate tapestry of our civilization," he said.

"Through numismatics, we embark on a journey that transcends mere currency and delves into stories of conquests, trade, and societal transformations," he said.

Hinduja said he has always admired Shah's "exceptional assortment of Indian coins spanning 600 BC to 2022 AD"

Shah said the book will act as a reference manual for historians and numismatists, taking them on a captivating journey through Indian history.

Verma said coins play a crucial role as a source of historical information.

"Through these coins, the diverse culture of our country is reflected. They have witnessed the rise and fall of the rulers and the

victory and defeat of the state empires," Verma said.

He described Shah's coin collection, on which the book is primarily based, as truly exceptional, as it includes representative coins from all dynasties and series spanning from 600 BC to 2022 AD.

Most of the coins are in remarkable condition, and the special attraction is punch-marked coins of various Janapadas, he said.

"Acquiring such a vast and diverse collection of coins would be nearly impossible for an individual, especially from a different professional background," Verma noted.

"The collection provides a glimpse into the Indian coinage tradition," he said.

"Shah's collection can be a standalone exhibition that will show the history and culture of India through the medium of coins," he added.

Verma said the book shows the significance of coins in the economic, cultural and political history of the respective period.

The book also dwells on the history of Indian coinage tradition, coin minting techniques, and features of Islamic coins.

Hinduja Hospital CEO Gautam Khanna and Hinduja Foundation president Paul Abraham also attended the book launch at P D Hinduja Hospital & Medical Research Centre. (PTI)

Zendaya says she and Tom Holland once got out of getting a speeding ticket



LOS ANGELES, April 21: "Euphoria" star Zendaya says she and Tom Holland once dodged a speeding ticket after the traffic police recognised her partner from their "Spider-Man" movies.

The two-time Emmy winner made the revelation on the talk show "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" where she stopped by to promote her upcoming romantic sports drama "Challengers".

Zendaya recalled she and Holland, who co-starred in three "Spider-Man" films, were once getting late for a spin dance class.

While Holland played Peter Parker/ superhero Spider-Man in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Zendaya played Michelle/MJ.

"Tom and I were rushing to a spin class ... with my mother. I was not going to do the spin class. He was going to do the spin class because I don't do that. But we were going a little fast because we were running late," she said.

But when they were pulled over for speeding, they were able to dodge the ticket.

"They recognised that he was Spider-Man, and we were fine. We got a warning, and everything was OK," the actor added.

Zendaya and Holland, both 27, were first romantically linked in 2021 when the paparazzi took photos of them kissing in a car in Los Angeles.

Two months later, Holland made their relationship official on Instagram when he shared a photo of the two of them on Zendaya's birthday. "My MJ, have the happiest of birthdays. Gimme a call when your up," the caption read. (PTI)

'Do Aur Do Pyaar' not a film about infidelity: Director Shirsha Guha Thakurta



MUMBAI, April 21: Infidelity is a "loaded term" and that's not what her film "Do Aur Do Pyaar" is about, says director Shirsha Guha Thakurta, who has delved into the realities of urban relationships in her feature debut.

"Do Aur Do Pyaar" follows Kavya and Ani, played by Vidya Balan and Pratik Gandhi, a married couple who falls back in love with each other despite indulging in extramarital affairs after a trip to Ooty brings back memories.

Guha Thakurta, who has been an ad filmmaker for 15 years, said she has attempted to tell a story about growing out of love without attaching any connotation to it.

Guha Thakurta, who has been an ad filmmaker for 15 years, said she has attempted to tell a story about growing out of love without attaching any connotation to it.

"It's not a film about infidelity, it's about love. If it's not working for you anymore, you're in your right to find love where you do. The word infidelity has a connotation that is not really positive. Infidelity is a loaded term. We have tried to make sure people don't see it (infidelity) as something we are either promoting or calling it wrong or right," the debutante director told PTI in an interview here.

"Urban relationships go through this (growing out of love). I don't think we speak enough about what happens when love becomes old. These are interesting and important questions that we as society need to ask or accept what our reality is," she added.

"Do Aur Do Pyaar", also starring Sendhil Ramamurthy and D'Cruz, released on Friday. The romantic comedy received good reviews from critics but got a slow start at the box office.

What is heartening, Guha Thakurta said, is that some people picked up on the nuances in the film.

"Some wrote that, 'We don't judge any of them'. For me, that was one of the biggest things we've tried," the 40-year-old said.

"It was important to not make it sad and see the light hearted ness of it, because it can get serious. The whole film shouldn't be like that. Then you're making some serious statements and people might not want to even watch it," she added.

Guha Thakurta said the makers Applause Entertainment and Ellipsis Entertainment Production had already decided to cast Balan as Kavya when she boarded the film. (PTI)

Malayalam hit 'Manjummel Boys' to stream on Disney+ Hotstar

NEW DELHI, April 21: Malayalam survival thriller "Manjummel Boys" will have its digital premiere on Disney+ Hotstar, the streaming platform has announced.

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

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

Disney+ Hotstar shared the update about the movie's premiere on Saturday evening. It will announce the release date on the platform later.

"The boys are coming soon on Disney+ Hotstar. #ManjummelBoysOnHotstar #ManjummelBoys #DisneyPlusHotstar #ComingSoon," the streamer said in the post.

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

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



'The Office' follow-up series adds Domhnall Gleeson, Sabrina Impacciatore to cast



LOS ANGELES, April 21:

The new iteration of classic sitcom The Office has found its first two cast members in British actor Domhnall Gleeson and The White Lotus star Sabrina Impacciatore. ADVERTISEMENT Sources told entertainment news outlet Variety that Impacciatore and Gleeson are attached to the project, which remain in development at Universal Television. The two actors will be part of an ensemble cast, like the beloved American mockumentary series, which starred Steve Carell,

Rainn Wilson, John Krasinski and Jenna Fischer, among others.

The Office, which was a remake of the British series of the same title, ran on NBC from 2005 to 2013. The updated take comes from The Office creator Greg Daniels, who has partnered with Michael Koman, best known for the reality show Nathan for You.

No platform is yet attached to the project as the studio wants to make sure the take is right before setting it up at a network or a streamer. (PTI)

There's more hunger in me: actor Rajkummar Rao

MUMBAI, April 21: It has been 14 years for Rajkummar Rao in the movies and the actor says he continues to be hungry for challenging roles quite like his upcoming film "Srikanth", in which he plays the visually impaired industrialist Srikanth Bolla.

The actor, who made his film debut with 2010's Love Sex Aur Dhokha, has carved a niche for himself with films across genres like Shahid, Trapped, Bareilly Ki Barfi, Newton, Stree, and Monica, O My Darling, among many others.

In Srikanth, Rao essays the role of the titular industrialist who pursued his dreams despite his visual impairment, ultimately founding Bollant Industries. Directed by Tushar Hiranandani,

the film will hit the screens on May 10.

"I don't really plan. Whatever character, film I'm doing at that moment, that's (becomes) my dream role. I'm only focused on that character and that story. I'm sure there's much more ahead for me."

"Like, two-three years ago I didn't know that I would be able to do 'Srikanth', but it happened. (Today) There's more hunger in me as an actor, and there's more fire. There'll be way more challenging characters (coming) my way," the National Award winner told PTI in an interview here.

Asked if he would like to do an action film or a potboiler movie, Rao said he didn't have any such desire.

"But if somebody offers me a

film like that with a great story attached to it and somebody sensible is making it, then I don't mind it," he added.

The 39-year-old actor, who has been part of critically-acclaimed biographical projects like Shahid, Omerta and Bose: Dead/Alive, said there is a "duty" towards the real-life character he plays on screen.

"In biopics, you're portraying a real-life character. Some people know that character, if not all. So, there's always that comparison. If you hit it right, you'll get a lot of love because people would be like, 'Wow, he's actually recreated the same person for us on screen'."

"But if we hit it wrong, then there's a big problem. It's not a responsibility, but there's some duty towards the person whose life

you're portraying because he has his people around who know him for such a long time. So, there's some kind of duty towards his life," he said.

Rao was Hiranandani's first choice to play the lead role in "Srikanth" and the actor said he was a bit scared initially to take up the role.

"I love challenges. And, something that scares me excites me even more. And 'Srikanth' did that to me. I've never played a visually impaired man before. I didn't know if I would be able to do it."

"But that's the fun where you push yourself out of your comfort zone. There was so much research that had to be done. Whenever I get an opportunity like that, I totally cherish it," Rao said. (PTI)



Candidates Chess: India's Gukesh takes sole lead after outwitting Alireza

TORONTO, April 21: Teenaged Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh shot into sole lead after defeating Firouzja Alireza of France in the 13th and penultimate round of Candidates' Chess tournament here, his quest for the extraordinary placing him on the cusp of becoming the youngest ever world championship contender.

If the 17-year-old from Chennai emerges victorious at the Candidates, he will take on China's Ding Liren for the world champion's crown.

In the women's event, Humpy Koneru drew with Anna Muzychuk while Vaishali Rameshbabu got the better of Lei Tingjie. The 22-year-old Vaishali has now registered four consecutive wins in her last four games.

Needing a win to go ahead after the other overnight leaders, Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi and American Hikaru Nakamura played out a quick draw, Gukesh was awarded for his perseverance as he capitalised on a late blunder by Alireza in a difficult situation.

Gukesh took his tally to 8.5 points out of a possible 13 to emerge a half point ahead of Nepomniachtchi, Nakamura and Fabiano Caruana of the United States.

R Pragganandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi share the fifth spot on six points apiece

with Firouzja on 4.5 and Abasov has 3.5 points.

Of the three players in pursuit, Caruana defeated Pragganandhaa in a hard-fought game while Gujrathi could only get a draw with Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan.

Gukesh will next meet Nakamura who plays white in the last round game and Caurana will have the advantage of the favourable colour against Nepomniachtchi.

While anyone among the four players can win the event, the odds are hugely in favour of Gukesh as the pundits believe that a draw might just be enough to see him emerge as the youngest ever contender for the world championship match.

In the women's section, Zhongyi Tan took a full point lead over nearest rival and compatriot Tingjie Lei following a draw with top seed Russian Aleksandra Goryachkina.

R Vaishali spoiled the party for Lei by scoring a fine victory while Koneru Humpy and Nurgul Salimova of Bulgaria drew with Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine and Kateryna Lagno of Russia respectively.

Just a draw away from clinching the crown, Lei is in second spot on 7.5 points. Goryachkina, Lagno, Humpy and Vaishali are on 6.5 points, sharing



the third spot as Salimova and Muzychuk share the seventh spot with five points apiece.

Made for big games

Gukesh, by consent, is made for big games on his day and the 13th round was no different. Playing the white side of a Berlin defense out of a Ruy Lopez, Gukesh went for a line known to have a sound reputation with little risk for white.

Alireza equalized comfortably but then started to show some ambition in the middle game that led to king side weakness. The Frenchman fell under

time pressure too under the first time-control but did well to keep a tangible position.

It was on the 47th move that Alireza finally faltered and allowed Gukesh to reach a winning rook and minor piece endgame. Gukesh knocked down a few pawns en route to finishing the technicalities in style. The game lasted 63 moves.

Ian Nepomniachtchi decided against taking much risk even as Nakamura chose a rare variation as black in another Ruy Lopez of the day.

The Russian had reasons to be pleased

as his position was preferable in the middle game but the absence of any real threats did not leave much to be desired. Nakamura drew wide repetition in a mere 26 moves.

Pragganandhaa was outdone out of a Rossolimo opening as white against Caruana. The American launched a dangerous looking attack on the king side after the players castled on different flanks and Pragganandhaa parted with a rook for a knight to stay afloat.

The nature of the position however remained difficult and with the clock ticking away, the defense was always difficult to find. The longest game of the day ended after 89 moves.

Gujrathi faced the Petroff defense as white against Abasov. The Azerbaijani has stuck to the same opening as black against the King pawn and in his final black game too, he decided to employ the same set-up.

Gujrathi went for one of the main lines and a couple of minor pieces got changed in a symmetrical pawn structure. The game got a little spiced up on the 14th move and white got an optical advantage with better control in the centre.

However, as things happened, Abasov neutralized white's initiative by just keeping his position intact. Gujrathi improved and carried on for some time be-

fore realising there was not much to hope for. The game lasted 31 moves and ended through repetition.

In the women's section, the trading of queens ensured that black did not get any chance in the game and a draw was a just result between Zhongyi Tan and Goryachkina.

After a rather subdued 7th to 9th round where she lost three in a row, Vaishali continued with her demolition act to score her fourth victory on the trot. The Indian is in with a chance to finish in top three if she can pull off another win in the final round.

Zhongyi Tan has her task cut out against Muzychuk, while Tingjie has a tough nut to crack in Humpy. Vaishali meets Lagno and Goryachkina is up against Salimova.

Results round 13 (Indians unless specified): Vidit Gujrathi (5) vs Nijat Abasov (Aze, 3); D Gukesh (7.5) vs Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 4.5); R Pragganandhaa (6) vs Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 7); Ian Nepomniachtchi (Fid, 7.5) vs Hikaru Nakamura (Usa, 7.5).

Women: Zhongyi Tan (Chn, 8.5) drew with Aleksandra Goryachkina (Fid, 6.5); Koneru Humpy (6.5) drew with Anna Muzychuk (5); R Vaishali (6.5) beat Tingjie Lei (Chn, 7.5); Nurgul Salimova (Bul, 5) drew with Kateryna Lagno (Fid, 6.5). (PTI)

Indian 20km race walkers produce disappointing performances



ANTALYA (TURKEY), April 21: Indian athletes failed to make an impact in the prestigious World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships on Sunday as none

of them came up with reassuring performances ahead of the Paris Olympics in July-August.

All 10 athletes on show in the 20km events -- five each in men's

and women's sections -- dished out below-par timings with Servin Sebastian being the only Indian to finish in the top-20 but he too was way off the timings he has set this year.

Ram Baboo, the latest to achieve the Olympics men's 20km race walk qualification standard clocking a personal best of 1:20:00 in the Dudinka 50 Meet in Slovakia, exited around the 2km mark, while Sebastian, Vikash Singh, Paramjeet Singh and Suraj Panwar, who have also met the Olympics qualifying standards, performed way below potential despite conducive weather in the Mediterranean seaside town.

Sebastian clocked 1:21:39 seconds, way off the Paris qualification time of 1:20:10 and the time of 1:20:03 he had set at the Indian Open Race Walking Competition on way to meeting the Olympic qualifying standard in January.

Vikash Singh, who came up with his season's best performance of 1:21:59 here, finished 23rd while Suraj Panwar, with a time of 1:24:09, was a distant 40th among 76 athletes to finish the event.

The fifth Indian in the fray, Arshpreet Singh, finished 66th clocking a dismal 1:33:39.

In women's 20km race walk, none of the five Indian contenders for Paris berths could come anywhere close to the Olympic cut-off timing of 1:29:20, with Pooja Kumawat being the best finisher at 42nd with a time of 1:40:27.

Manju Rani and Mokavi Muthurathnam were close at 43rd and 44th, clocking 1:40:31 and 1:40:33 respectively.

The other two Indians, Raman-deep Kaur (1:42:12) and Payal (1:42:32) finished 49th and 50th respectively in an event where 63 athletes completed the race.

The performance of the 20km race walk athletes will be of major concern for the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), given that they have to select the team for Paris out of the seven male athletes, who have met the Olympic qualifying standards, by June.

Each national federation can only send a maximum of three athletes in the men's 20km race walk event and achieving the entry standard is just one part of the Olympic qualification. The difficult part is selecting the team, made even more difficult with Sunday's performance.

There is, however, some hope from the pair of Priyanka Goswami and Akshdeep Singh who are expected to earn a Paris quota place in the gruelling Mixed Race Walk event, scheduled later in the day.

Both Akshdeep and Priyanka have already qualified individually for Paris 2024 after meeting the qualifying standards in the men's and women's 20km race walk, and securing a Mixed team spot at the Olympics will be the icing on the cake for them.

The other Indian pair in the Mixed event is Munita Prajapati and Paramjeet Singh. (PTI)

Balraj Panwar secures India's first quota in rowing for Paris Olympics

NEW DELHI, April 21: Balraj Panwar secured India's first Paris Olympics quota in rowing by finishing third in the men's single scull event of the 2024 World Asian and Oceanian Olympic and Paralympic Qualification Regatta in Chungju, South Korea on Sunday.

The 25-year-old Indian Army rower, who narrowly missed out on a bronze in his maiden appearance at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last year, clocked 7:01:27 minutes to finish third in the 2000m race and seal the quota.

In the men's single scull, the top five make the Olympics cut. In the men's lightweight double sculls, where India participated at the last Olympics in Tokyo, the country failed to qualify.

In an event where the top-two earn the quota, the Indian duo of Ujjwal Kumar and Arvind Singh finished third.

India will thus have a solitary entry in rowing at the quadrennial extravaganza slated from July 26.

Arjun Lal and Arvind Singh represented the country in men's lightweight double scull at Tokyo Olympics and returned with an 11th place finish.

The Asian Qualifiers were held simultaneously with the Asian Rowing Cup where India won a gold medal courtesy the duo of Salman Khan and Nitin Deol in men's double scull event.

A day after their achievement, Panwar, who hails from Karnal in Haryana, put up a dominant show



after a slow start.

In the first 500m leg, Panwar was lying third behind eventual gold medalist Vladislav Yakovlev of Kazakhstan and Hong Kong's Hin Chun Chiu.

But Panwar used his power to race ahead and grab the lead, passing the halfway mark (1000m) with a timing of 3:25.51.

He held on to his lead till the penultimate stretch of 1500m, which he crossed with a timing of 5:12.67, three seconds ahead of his Hong Kong rival.

But Yakovlev produced a superb recovery in the final lap and took the top spot with a timing of 6:59.46 seconds.

Indonesia's Memo Memo also finished within 7 minutes to get past Panwar and take the second spot. (PTI)

Maintaining weight will be a challenge for next four months: Vinesh

BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN), April 21: Locking the Olympic quota would put Vinesh Phogat at ease for a few days but the fiery Indian wrestler says maintaining weight having dropped to the lowest class of 50kg will be a huge challenge in the build-up to the Paris Games.

Vinesh dished out an impressive show at the Asian Olympic Qualifiers, where she did not concede a single point in an easy draw and sealed her third consecutive Olympic quota.

Vinesh, 29, lost crucial mat-time for one and a half years due to the protest against former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and in that period, Antim Panghal secured a quota place in 53kg category -- a pet weight division of Vinesh.

The most successful woman wrestler from the country had no option but to switch the weight category to ensure that she does not miss the bus to Olympics.

"I will have to manage my weight a lot better. I have brought myself down to 50kg after so long so I will try and maintain this as much as I can. It's not easy for me not to put on weight because my muscle mass is very high," Vinesh said after winning the 50kg quota for India.

"Because of that, I gain weight easily. It doesn't matter how fit I am. I still gain weight because I have a lot of muscle mass. I just want to control my weight. I have four months left, and every day is very important," she was quoted as saying by official UWW website.



"I did the weight switch because I didn't have any option, not out of happiness. But I won a quota for my country in the 50kg category. I am happy that I can go to the Olympics. Whether I go in the 50kg category or in the 53kg category, that will be decided in the trials, but, whatever it is, I won a quota for my country."

Vinesh has already suffered heartbreaks at the Rio Olympics and Tokyo Games where she was eliminated quite early despite being a medal favourite.

Now she wants to complete the unfinished business.

"I just want to try my best. It's been 20 years since I've been wrestling. I just want an Olympic

medal. Everyone is working for that."

Vinesh had claimed that she fought depression and was even struck by COVID-19 and add to that the prolonged protest and legal battle against the then WFI chief, the mental pressure was immense.

She still came out and performed in Bishkek.

"It was difficult but when you win, everything becomes worth it. I will say that I will be at peace for four to five days, but my main target is the Olympics. I will try to do what I couldn't do in the last two Olympics. I can do better at this Olympics."

Vinesh dismissed the view that it was an easy job for her in Bishkek since strong wrestlers were not part of the competition.

"Competition is competition. It is not that only if China and Japan are competing alongside you that it becomes a competition. Everyone becomes strong on the mat."

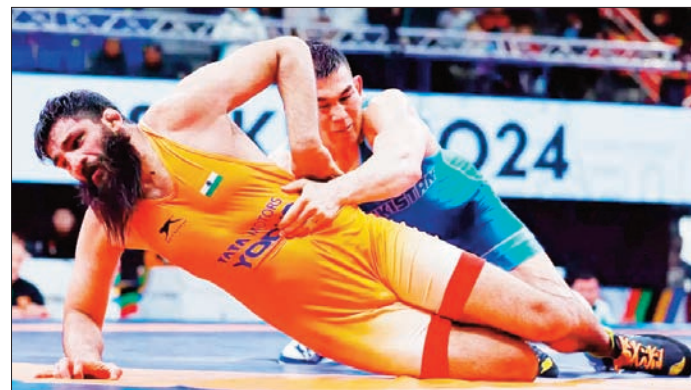
She is one of the most accomplished woman wrestlers from India with two Worlds medals, several Asian and Asian Games titles to her name.

Now she is determined to add that missing Olympic medal to her bulging trophy cabinet.

"It's taken so much hard work and struggle. I have been away from the mat for 1-1/2 years. I have come back after an operation. Many people have suggested that I should not go in the 50kg category because I could get injured again."

"But I did not have any option. It was a do-or-die situation. I chose the die option". (PTI)

Flop show by India's Greco Roman wrestlers at Asian Qualifiers



BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN), April 21: India's Greco Roman wrestlers cut a sorry figure at the Asian Olympic Qualifier here on Sunday as none of them could secure a berth for the Paris Games.

Sunil, competing in 87kg category, was the only Indian who managed to win a bout while others were eliminated after losing their first rounds.

Sunil beat a tough Japanese rival Soh Sakabe 5-1. The Indian got the opportunity from 'Par Terre' position and logged four points with two gut wrench moves.

In his quarterfinal against Uzbekistan's Jalgasbay Berdimuratov, the Indian saved himself brilliantly after being lifted by his rival from ground position, and even led the bout for some time.

Twice the points awarded to him were taken back after the Uzbek camp successfully challenged the referee's decisions. Eventually, Sunil lost 2-4 to bow out of the race for qualification.

Ashu's challenge in the 67kg category lasted less than two minutes. He lost his qualification bout to Uzbekistan's Abror Atabaev by technical superiority.

The Uzbek held the Indian in a firm grip from just above the waist and pushed him down for a take-down move, and from there it was one-way traffic with Atabaev employing consecutive gut wrench moves to coast to win.

Sumit (60kg), Vikas (77kg), Nitesh (97kg) and Naveen (130kg) also fell in the first round.

The last time Indian Greco Roman wrestler competed in Olympics was in 2016 when Ravinder Khatri and Hardeep Singh featured in the Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro.

So far India have got four quotas for the Paris Games, all earned by women wrestlers.

There is one last chance to win quotas at the World Qualifiers, scheduled to be held in Turkey from May 9. (PTI)

Manu, Anish on course for second successive trials win



NEW DELHI, April 21: Manu Bhaker and Anish Bhanwala set themselves on course for a second successive win in the ongoing Olympic Selection Trials 1 & 2, topping their respective qualification rounds at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting range here on Sunday.

Manu shot an aggregate of 585 in the women's 25m pistol in T2 qualification to lead the five-woman field into the final in pole position. The Olympian had won the T1 trials on Saturday.

Esha Singh followed her in second with 581, while Simranpreet Kaur Brar was third with 577.

Abhidnya Ashok Patil with 572 and Rhythm Sangwan, the second Paris Olympic quota holder in the field along with Manu, with 566, brought up the rear.

In the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol T2, odds-on favourite Bhanwala continued to dominate proceedings, topping the qualification round with a score of 582.

His fellow Paris quota holder Vijayveer Sidhu was second with 580, while Bhavesh Shekhawat was third on the same score as Vijayveer, but with lesser inner 10s.

Ankur Goel (573) and Adarsh Singh (571), barring a miracle in the final two trials in Bhopal, look out of the reckoning.

As things stand, Manu and Esha in the women's pistol and Anish and Vijayveer in the men's RFP are likely to take the flight to Paris from these events. (PTI)

Salt's explosion, Iyer's composure propel KKR to 222/6 against RCB

KOLKATA, April 21: Opener Phil Salt's aggressive 48 and skipper Shreyas Iyer's composed fifty set the tone as Kolkata Knight Riders amassed a formidable 222 for six despite a significantly enhanced bowling display by Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their IPL match here on Sunday.

On a day when Sunil Narine (10, 15 balls) failed to get going, Salt, the world's No. 2 T20I batter, was on fire smashing three sixes and seven fours to give KKR an explosive start, which later was exploited to the hilt by Iyer (50, 36b, 7x4, 1x6). Andre Russell (27 not out, 20b) and Ramandeep Singh (24 not out, 9b) gave the home side some late impetus.

However, the under-fire RCB bowling unit made a spirited effort to reduce KKR to 75/3 at the end of power play, as KKR lost four wickets in 26 balls in that crucial middle-phase.

Venkatesh Iyer (16) and Rinku Singh (24) failed to convert their starts as RCB kept chipping away at the KKR batting order.

But Iyer held his nerves to produce his 20th IPL fifty, his first



Salt's explosive start helped KKR reach 222/6 against RCB.

fifty this season, as KKR kept moving along. He got out in the next ball after reaching 50 in 35 balls.

Russell was unusually quiet during his 27 from 20 balls (4x4). It was Ramandeep Singh's cameo of 24 from nine balls with two fours and two sixes that lifted them to their third successive 200-plus total at the Eden Gardens.

Mohammed Siraj bowled wisely with his yorkers and wide yorkers for his 1/40, while Cameron Green was the best among RCB bowlers returning with 2/35.

Yash Dayal also picked 2/56 but was gone away too many runs. Fresh from his maiden T20 century, Narine struggled to get going as RCB bowlers kept him quiet

with a mix of yorkers both at his pads and outside off.

Narine took eight balls to get off the mark, and Dayal nailed him with a toe-crushing yorker leaving him in pain in the second over.

But it was business as usual for Salt as KKR went past the 50-run mark in 3.5 overs.

The Englishman was particularly ruthless against Lockie Ferguson in the fourth over that yielded 28 runs. Salt dealt only in boundaries, smacking the New Zealand pacer for two sixes and four fours in one over.

Siraj finally brought an end to Salt's assault, dismissing him two runs shy of a well-deserved fifty as the right-hander failed to clear square leg boundary to be caught by Rajat Patidar.

Dayal's twin breakthrough of Narine and Angkrish Raghuvanshi in the last power-play over put the home team in disarray, even as their 12-plus run rate was a big respite. Narine was beaten by a slow ball and ended up skying a catch to Kohli at long on, while it was Green's blinder of a catch that yielded Raghuvanshi's wicket. (PTI)

MI eye revenge against RR in reverse fixture



JAIPUR, April 21: A resurgent Mumbai Indians will need to address their bowling woes as they look to exact revenge on table-toppers Rajasthan Royals in their reverse fixture of the Indian Premier League here on Monday.

With three wins in last four games, MI have hit the recovery road to reach sixth spot in the points table after a poor start this season, while RR are on a rampaging run as they occupy the top spot with 12 points.

The five-time champions survived a late onslaught from Ashutosh Sharma to eke out a nine-run win over Punjab Kings in the last game.

It was once again Jasprit Bumrah, who was left to do the heavy lifting as he stood out with his three wickets. The star India pacer shone with the new ball and then returned to produce a breakthrough, and he did all this without conceding much.

With 13 scalps, Bumrah tops the list of the most wickets this IPL. He also has the second-best economy of just under six runs but while he has been on the mark, his bowling colleagues have struggled.

Gerald Coetzee, too, has made an impact with 12 wickets but has gone for runs. But Akash Madhwal and skipper Hardik Pandya have been inconsistent.

While Shreyas Gopal has taken a wicket each in the three games he has played so far, MI also need to

use the experience of veteran Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammed Nabi as a bowler.

In batting, former skipper Rohit Sharma's scintillating century, albeit in a losing cause, has been the highlight, while Ishan Kishan has been inconsistent. Hardik, too, hasn't made much of an impact so far, while Tilak Verma has done moderately well. A huge positive for MI is Suryakumar Yadav's return to form. His 53-ball 78 against PBKS was the cornerstone of MI innings and on his day he can destroy any attack.

The last time MI faced the RR bowling unit, they looked like a rabbit caught in the headlights, as Trent Boult removed three of their top-order batters for naught and the veteran left-arm pacer will again be a massive threat.

Avesh Khan has been entrusted with the responsibility of bowling at the death and he has done well. Kuldeep Sen, too, showed his skills but he needs to work on his economy. With 12 wickets, leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal has been RR's most valuable player in the bowling department, though off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has struggled.

For RR, Riyan Parag has been the batter of the season. The young Assam batter has reinvented himself and his 318 runs is one of the reasons why RR find themselves at the top of the pecking order.

While the batting has revolved around him, skipper Sanju Samson

too has produced some fine knocks for the team, aggregating 276 runs so far.

England's Jos Buttler single-handedly chased down a 200-plus total to win RR their last match against Kolkata Knight Riders but the form of fellow opener Yashasvi Jaiswal has been a matter of concern as he has failed to capitalise on his starts.

Shimron Hetmyer has also hit top gear when needed, rescuing the team against PBKS the other day.

Teams (from):

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dubey, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger, Tanush Kotian, Keshav Maharaj.

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikaya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammed Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Verma, Harvik Desai, Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood. (PTI)

We are not getting too far ahead of ourselves: Head



NEW DELHI, April 21: Riding on explosive starts, Sunrisers Hyderabad may have won four games on the bounce this IPL season, but their swashbuckling opener Travis Head says "we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves."

SRH crushed Delhi Capitals by 67 runs in their most recent match here on Saturday, following sensational knocks from their in-form openers Travis Head (89) and Abhishek Sharma (46).

SRH have made a habit of posting big totals this season, going past 260 for the third time on Saturday.

"It is very enjoyable. It is nice to be here and play well, and it is hard not to smile and enjoy yourself with the batting order that we have got, and the order is working well through the first seven, so it is very enjoyable," Head told JioCinema.

Batting first, Hyderabad scored their fourth 200+ innings this edition by scoring 266 runs, while Delhi were bowled out for 199 runs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. This was SRH's fifth win of the season.

Head also spoke on SRH's momentum and positive energy around the team.

"We will take it easy for a minute. I think it was Murali's (Muttiah Muralitharan) birthday a couple of days ago, so we have a party for him tomorrow night, so that will be enjoyable.

"I think it's a nice group, we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves. Obviously, we are excited. We have got four wins on the bounce now, we are playing well, and the energy is always better when you are winning.

"The environment is really good. That's what Dan (Daniel Vettori) and Pat Cummins are going to bring. If there is a loss here or there, a couple of poor performances, that's okay. We are showing how good we can be.

"As long as we can keep instilling that confidence around how well we are playing, I guess the ceiling is as high as it wants to be," Head said.

Former India pacer Zaheer Khan praised Jake Fraser-McGurk (65 runs) and T Natarajan (4/19). Jake Fraser-McGurk raised hopes of an improbable win for DC with his blazing innings.

"Today, the line was way outside the off-stump. He has shown that he can open up that area as well and put bowlers under pressure, especially when he is able to generate power on his shots on the back foot to get the ball over the ropes.

"I mean, everyone's noticing his talent and keeping an eye on him, and how he is going to evolve with experience," Zaheer said. (PTI)

Abhay Sharma set to be appointed Uganda head coach ahead of T20 World Cup debut

NEW DELHI, April 21: Former First-Class cricketer Abhay Sharma is set to be named as head coach of Uganda national team ahead of its debut in the upcoming T20 World Cup.

Sharma has the experience of donning the fielding coach's role of India A and India-19s and also worked with the Indian women's cricket team. The 54-year-old's last coaching stint came with the Delhi Ranji team.

In November, Uganda had become the last team to qualify for the T20 World Cup in the USA and the West Indies in June. Namibia were the other outfit which qualified for the ICC event from the Africa Qualifier.

"Abhay Sharma has been offered the head coach position with the Uganda national team. He is expected to take charge soon," a source told PTI.

Uganda will begin their World Cup preparations with a fortnight-long training camp in Sri Lanka next week, where they will also play practice matches

against local teams.

The World Cup will be the biggest ever, in terms of participants, till date with an unprecedented 20 teams taking part. The other associate nations that will be seen in action include hosts USA, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Scotland, Canada and the Netherlands.

The 20 teams will be divided into four groups of five. The top two teams in each group will move to the Super Eight phase, where the remaining teams will be split into two groups of four.

The top two in each group will then make their way to the semi-finals, followed by the final.

Uganda will play their T20 World Cup league games in Guyana and Trinidad. They will open their campaign against Afghanistan in Guyana on June 3 before facing PNG and West Indies at the same venue on June 5 and June 8.

They play their final league fixture against New Zealand in Trinidad on June 14. (PTI)

PCB chief takes note of Ehsanullah's prolonged injury, orders probe

LAHORE, April 21: Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi has ordered a probe into its medical team's handling of young fast bowler Ehsanullah, who is yet to recover from an elbow injury that has plagued him since last year.

The PCB announced on Sunday that an independent panel of medical experts would analyse if the medical case of Ehsanullah was handled properly by the PCB's medical support staff.

The independent panel constitutes notable names of the medical profession including Prof. Dr Javed Akram, Prof. Dr Rana Dilawaz and Prof. Doc Mumraiz Naqshbandi.

The board will recommend future courses of action for proper treatment following the probe.

A reliable source on the board said that Naqvi had had enough over this particular case after Ehsanullah was sent to London to see an elbow injuries specialist. He indicated that the bowler might require another surgery to recover completely from the injury that has plagued him since last year.

Ehsanullah emerged as a promising

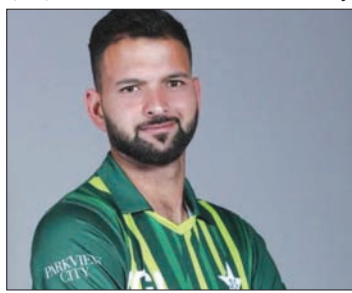
prospect for Pakistan in last year's Pakistan Super League. He also played a couple of T20 internationals and ODIs for his country but then sustained the elbow injury.

He was put under treatment by the PCB's medical and health sciences support panel which first tried treating him through rehab and then recommended a surgery that was carried out in a Lahore hospital.

Unfortunately even after the surgery Ehsanullah didn't make a recovery from the injury and was forced to pull out of this year's PSL for Multan Sultans, who later took permission from the PCB to get another opinion in London. The interesting thing is that after hue and cry was raised over why it was taking so long for

Ehsanullah to make a complete recovery, the head of the PCB Medical Panel, Dr Sohail Saleem defended the diagnosis and treatment of the fast bowler.

He insisted that it takes several months for an athlete to recover from an elbow injury. But apparently the PCB Chairman has a different view of the matter. (PTI)



Amir enjoying team support on comeback

RAWALPINDI, April 21: Pacer Muhammad Amir says he is feeling comfortable on his comeback to Pakistan national set up after four years and credits goes to senior players, including captain Babar Azam, for giving him the confidence to play again at the international level.

Amir retired from all international cricket in late 2020, unhappy with the attitude of his former coaches Misbah ul Haq and Waqar Younis but has again made a comeback to the national team on the insistence of the current board set-up and management.

Amir, who took two wickets in the win over NZ on Saturday night, said he felt more fit and energetic now compared to when he retired.

The seasoned southpaw pacer said that sides did well when they had good bowling partnerships and he felt that playing with Naseem Shah and Shaheen Shah Afridi was good for the Pakistan team.

He also appreciated the fact that seniors in the team were



doing their best to create a friendly and happy environment in the dressing room which would help the team in the build up to and in the World Cup.

"I am also happy to see the way the players have supported me on my comeback because of the pressure which was there on me," he said.

He acknowledged Shaheen

and Babar for their support.

"When you're playing for your country, you can't explain the feeling. There was pressure, of course, because I was coming back after four years. The credit goes to the boys, Shaheen and Babar, for the way they gave me confidence," Amir said.

Talking to the media at the Pindi stadium after Pakistan's

big win in the second T20 International against New Zealand on Saturday night, Amir said the sort of experience and talent the team had there should be no excuse for doing badly in the WC in June.

"I am ready to play any role for Pakistan and I have really enjoyed playing for my country again after so long," he said.

Amir is the only player in the Pakistan squad in this series to have won not one but two ICC titles as a player. He played decisive roles in Pakistan winning the World T20 Cup final against Sri Lanka in England in 2009 and then against India in the 2017 Champions Trophy at the Oval.

The series against NZ is a third lease of life for Amir as a Pakistan player as he was fast tracked into international cricket back in late 2016 few months after he completed a ban for his role in the 2010 spot fixing scandal. At that time it was thought that Amir's career was over. (PTI)

You cannot always rely on Virat Kohli, Varun Aaron tells his former team RCB

NEW DELHI, April 21: It's high time India's domestic players step up for Royal Challengers Bengaluru this IPL season and reduce the dependence on Virat Kohli, former India pacer Varun Aaron said on Sunday.

Kohli has been the standout performer for RCB this IPL season and is the current Orange Cap holder with 361 runs in 7 innings. His strike rate is 147.34, with the highest score being 113 not out.

Speaking to Star Sports, Aaron said, "It's just that RCB are not finding the rhythm, the domestic players are just not stepping up."

The 34-year-old Aaron, who announced his retirement from first-class cricket earlier this year, added, "If you have to be anywhere at the top of the table or the middle of the table at this point of the table, you have to have domestic players who are firing and you cannot always rely on Virat Kohli.

"The other guys have to step up and also all their money, is sitting in the dug-out. You can't spend that much cash on players and not have them play."

In 2014, Aaron was bought by Royal Challengers Bangalore for Rs 2 crore, and

was retained by the franchise ahead of the 2016 auction.

Australia's former skipper in the limited overs formats, Aaron Finch feels RCB needs an explosive middle-order batter who can complement Kohli.

"He's (Kohli) scored a lot of runs everywhere. He's a modern day great. And I think the fact that he's getting runs and RCB are still not making it is a positive sign in one degree. "It's that when Virat is playing well, that genuinely carries the rest of the players with him. "They just need to find a partnership with him, they need to find an explosive middle order player who is in form. Lomror has been in and out, so it's got all the makings of an epic game," Finch said.

RCB are playing Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens on Sunday.

Speaking of Travis Head's blazing 89-run knock for Sunrisers Hyderabad against Delhi Capitals in Delhi on Saturday, Finch said the left-handed opener has taken the "fear of failure out of his mind".

"It's always been in him, the ability to play like this. I guess the freedom to express himself and be able to deal with the ups and downs of playing such an aggress-



sive and high-risk brand of cricket, I think has just released him to a new level.

"And I think if you look back at the World Cup final, he kept playing his shots even when there were wickets falling

around him, the ball was moving. Because he's taken the fear of failure out of his mind.

"If he misses out five or six times in a row, it doesn't bother him because he