

WORLD

- Maldivian Prez Muizzu's pro-China party secures 'supermajority' in parl polls
- Pakistan's ruling PML-N win majority of seats in by-elections

NATION

- Modi makes 'redistribution of wealth' charge against Cong again
- HC order on Bengal school jobs 'illegal', will challenge it: Mamata

Two held over bribery charges in Kamrup

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 22: Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC), Assam on Monday apprehended lot mandal for allegedly demanding bribe for the Marjari related works, said an official statement.

The lot mandal identified as Anup Kumar Choudhury posted at the office of circle officer, Nagarbera Revenue Circle in Kamrup district. "A complaint was received at this DVAC alleging that Anup Kumar Choudhury, lot mandal of office of the Circle Officer, Nagarbera Revenue Circle of Kamrup district in conspiracy with Hajrast Ali, gaon pradhan of Khameri gaon, had demanded ₹ 15,000 as bribe from the complainant for Marjari related works," the statement added.

The statement further claimed that unwilling to pay the bribe, the complainant approached this Directorate for taking necessary legal action against the above-mentioned public servants.

"Accordingly, a trap was laid on Monday by a team from the DVAC in the office of the circle officer. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

More than 2,000 criminal cases against MPs, MLAs decided in 2023: SC told

NEW DELHI, April 22: Special courts for trial of criminal cases related to Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly decided more than 2,000 cases in 2023, the Supreme Court has been informed.

In an affidavit filed by senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, who has been appointed amicus curiae in a PIL seeking expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs/MLAs, said that more directions are needed for speedy adjudication of pending trials and their investigation under strict monitoring by the respective high courts, as there are around 501 candidates with criminal cases who are contesting the Lok Sabha elections in the first two phases.

Referring to a report of NGO 'Association of Democratic Reforms for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 Phase I and Phase II', Hansaria, assisted by advocate Sneha Kalita, said that out of 2,810 candidates (Phase I - 1618 candidates and Phase II - 1192 candidates), 501 (18 per cent) candidates have criminal cases against them, out of which, 327 (12 PC) (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Third phase of polls in Assam: Five withdraw nominations 47 candidates in fray for four LS seats

GUWAHATI, April 22: Altogether 47 candidates are in the fray for the four Lok Sabha constituencies that will go to polls in the third and final phase in Assam on May 7, an official statement said on Monday.

Five candidates -- three in Kokrajhar and two in Dhubri -- withdrew their nominations on the last day, it said.

Among the 47 candidates, highest number of 14 will be contesting from Barpeta seat, followed by 13 in Dhubri, 12 in Kokrajhar and eight in Guwahati.

Altogether 52 valid nominations were filed for the four seats of third phase, out of five withdrew their papers.

In the Guwahati constituency, BJP's Bijuli Kalita Medhi is expected to be locked in a direct fight with Congress' Mira Borahakur Goswami, with the saffron party looking to re-



tain the seat.

The minority-dominated Dhubri seat is likely to witness a triangular contest between AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal, seeking to return to the lower house for the fourth consecutive term, Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain and NDA nominee Zaved Islam of the

ticket this time.

Kokrajhar is also likely to witness a contest among three key contenders - NDA's United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) nominee Jayanta Basumaty, Congress' Garjen Mushahary and Bodoland People's Front's (BPF) Kampa Borgoyary.

The nomination of the incumbent Kokrajhar MP Naba Kumar Sarania was rejected following the striking down of his Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

He had been representing the seat reserved for ST as an independent since 2014.

Out of 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state, polling in the first phase for five constituencies was conducted on April 19, while it is scheduled for another five seats on April 26.

In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one each from the state. (PTI)

Surrender or face bullets, Shah warns Naxalites

Narendra Modi has eliminated terrorism from country: HM



RAIPUR, April 22: Union home minister Amit Shah on Monday asserted the Narendra Modi government has eliminated terrorism from the country as he issued a stern warning to Naxalites in Chhattisgarh, asking them to surrender or else they will be rooted out from the state in two years.

He said in the last four months alone, 90 Naxalites were neutralised in Chhattisgarh under the BJP government, comments coming after 29 Maoists were gunned down by security forces in an encounter in Kanker, which is part of the Bastar region, on April 16.

Addressing an election rally in Kanker town, around 150km away from the encounter site, four days ahead of the second round of Lok Sabha polls, Shah took on the Congress and asked party MP Rahul Gandhi to explain what four generations of his family have done for the

poor in Chhattisgarh when they were in power.

The BJP stalwart maintained Congress leaders did not attend the January 22 consecration of Lord Ram idol at the Ayodhya temple due to vote bank politics and referred to then-PM Manmohan Singh's statement that "minorities have first right to India's resources" to hit out at the rival party. The Union minister hailed PM Narendra Modi, saying he has brought a huge transformation in the country in the last ten years and has outlined an "agenda for the next 25 years".

"Narendra Modi ji has eliminated terrorism from the country, while Naxalism is on the verge of eradication. Mahadev app brand Bhupesh Baghel government did not take action against Naxalites," Shah said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Karbi Anglong gears up for 2nd phase of LS polls



HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 22: The District Commissioner (DC) and District Election Officer (DEO) of Karbi Anglong, Madhumita Bhagawati, on Monday brief the media on the preparedness of the Karbi Anglong election district for conduct second phase of Lok Sabha election for 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency in Assam on April 26.

The DC said that the conduct of voting and other electioneering process is almost ready. She also informed that under 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency there are a total of 8,92,789 voters out of which male voters is 4,45,084 and female voters is 4,47,705.

Karbi Anglong Election district alone covered two LA segments, i.e., Diphu and Howraghat with 3,62,181 voters out of which male voters is 1,79,305 and female voters is 1,82,813. Total Polling Stations is 448, out of which in Diphu

'More power, direct funding of TTAADC by Centre; key issues of tripartite agreement'

AMBASSA, April 22: Tipra Motha president Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawl on Monday said direct funding of the TTAADC by the Centre and giving more powers to the tribal council are the key main issues of the tripartite agreement signed by the party with the central and state government.

Tipra Motha, which was the main opposition party after the Tripura Assembly election 2023, signed an agreement with the Centre and the state government in March 2023 after a series of discussions with Ministry of Home Affairs officials.

Days after signing the agreement, Tipra Motha joined the BJP-led government in Tripura.

"Direct funding of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) by the Centre and empowerment of the autonomous district council are among the major points in the agreement inked with the Centre," Hrangkhawl told PTI.

The direct funding to the autonomous council (TTAADC) by the Centre is a long pending demand of political parties, he said.

"We want the tribal council to have its own police organization to be headed by Additional DGP or IGP rank officer, land rights so that the TTAADC could issue pattas to the people as part of empowerment



process," he said.

"If we implement these issues in accordance with the agreement, the indigenous people will notice something good is going to happen for them," he said.

Hrangkhawl said the Tipra Motha will insist that the Centre announce a joint working group to take forward the tripartite agreement after the Lok Sabha election.

"We wish Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma to be made chairman of the proposed joint working group comprising representatives from the Centre and the state government to meet the aspirations of the indigenous people," he said.

Asked why Tipra Motha chose BJP as an ally, he said, "We believe only the Union government could address our problem - constitutional guarantee for the rights of indigenous people. Since the BJP is in power in Delhi and in state, they can address our problems. The double-engine government also attracted Tipra Motha."

To a query on the difference between the accord signed by Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) an outlawed group with the Centre in 1988 and the present one, Hrangkhawl said the TNV accord was signed following an intense arms struggle while the tripartite agreement (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IPS officer Nalin Prabhat takes charge as NSG DG

NEW DELHI, April 22: Nalin Prabhat, a 1992-batch IPS officer, on Monday took charge as the new director general (DG) of federal counter-terrorism and counter-hijack commando force NSG.

Prabhat, 55, was handed over the traditional baton of the 'black cats' force by IPS officer Daljit Singh Chawdhary at the National Security Guard (NSG) headquarters here.

Chawdhary had been handling the additional charge of the NSG DG since March.

The new DG is a three-time police gallantry medal winner and has headed the specialised anti-Naxal police force 'Greyhounds' of Andhra Pradesh, his cadre state.

He is the 25th DG of the NSG, which was raised in 1984 as a federal counter-terrorist force to undertake surgical commando operations to neutralise terrorist and hijack threats. Its commandos are entrusted with protecting some high-risk VIPs.

Prabhat has been serving as the additional DG of the CRPF, heading its formation in Jammu and Kashmir, just before this posting.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) last week issued orders for Prabhat and said his posting as the NSG chief will be effective "from the date of joining the post and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP accuses opposition of 'appeasement' politics

NEW DELHI, April 22: The BJP alleged on Monday that the opposition has resorted to blatant appeasement politics, anti-Hindu agenda and joining hands with anti-India forces in desperation, as it is becoming clear that the ruling NDA will reach its target of winning over 400 seats in the Lok Sabha polls.

Its spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia cited the murder of Neha Hiremath (23), daughter of Congress councillor Niranjan Hiremath in Karnataka, and claimed that the state government is not taking appropriate action due to the religion of the accused.

Fayaz, who allegedly stabbed the victim on a college campus, has been arrested by the police. Bhatia said Niranjan Hiremath has stated that he had given to police names of eight persons who were allegedly involved in his daughter's murder but none of them has been arrested and that the CBI should probe the case. "Her father is himself saying that he has lost faith in the police but chief minister Siddaramaiah is shielding the accused," the BJP spokesperson alleged. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong manifesto represents voices of deprived, backward: Party spokesperson

GUWAHATI, April 22: Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete on Monday asserted that the party's manifesto represents the voices of the deprived and underprivileged and questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's problem with it.

Criticising Modi for his remark against the manifesto, she said he should use words "befitting his position and age". During a poll rally in Rajasthan on Sunday, the PM had suggested that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth of people to Muslims and cited former PM Manmohan Singh's remark that the minority community had the first claim on the country's resources.

Modi had also alleged that the Congress plans to give people's hard-earned money and

valuable to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children".

"Our manifesto bears the imprint of aspirations of dalits, women, youth, farmers, labourers and students. We don't know what else Modi sees in it," Shrinete, who also heads the party's social media and digital platforms, said.

"I want to ask him what is his problem with our manifesto. If the BJP-led NDA government failed to fulfil its promises, it is not our problem," she said. Shrinete highlighted the party's pledges regarding job creation, women's welfare, and support for farmers.

"These are promises by the Congress and we will keep it. It is not BJP's jumla", she said. Questioning BJP's 'Modi ki guarantee', the AICC leader added, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The success of Operation Meghdoot is a matter of pride for all of us' Rajnath visits world's highest battlefield Siachen

LEH/NEW DELHI, April 22: Siachen is India's capital of "courage, grit and determination", defence minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday after carrying out an on-the-ground review of the security situation at the world's highest snow-clad battlefield.

Addressing soldiers at a forward post at an altitude of 15,100 ft, Singh lauded the "iron-clad" will of the Indian Army soldiers deployed in the icy cold glacier and said that their bravery will forever be an inspiration for future generations.

The defence minister described Siachen as a symbol of India's sovereignty and de-

termination. He said that just as Delhi is India's national capital, Mumbai is the financial capital and Bengaluru is the technology capital, Siachen is the "capital of courage, grit and determination." The Siachen glacier in the Karakoram range is known as the highest militarised zone in the world where the soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds.

Singh's visit to Siachen came over a week after the Indian Army marked the 40th year of its presence in the strategically key region following the 'Operation Meghdoot'.

The defence minister described the operation, which



was launched by the Indian Army in Siachen on April 13, 1984, as a golden chapter of the country's military history. "The success of Operation Meghdoot is a matter of pride

for all of us," he said.

The defence minister was accompanied by chief of the Army Staff Gen Manoj Pandey, general officer commanding-in-chief of Northern Com-

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Sustained growth of 7 pc feasible for India: RBI MPC member Shashanka Bhide

NEW DELHI, April 22: Sustaining the economic growth momentum of 7 per cent in 2024-25 and beyond is feasible on the back of favorable monsoon, higher farm productivity and improved global trade, RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member Shashanka Bhide said on Monday.

During 2023-24, the economy is likely to record a growth rate of near 8 per cent on account of good performance of manufacturing and infrastructure sectors.

"(India's economic) Growth in the current year is likely to be supported by agriculture with a favourable monsoon and improved global trade. Sustaining the growth momentum of 7 per cent seems feasible," he told PTI.

Bhide further said that in the long-term, the need for productivity improvements will remain the key factor to achieve food price stability. Asked what are some of the headwinds he is wary of, Bhide said one area of concern is the global environment.

"The slow pace of recovery in global demand on one hand and supply chain disruptions on the other hand...if the ongoing geopolitical conflicts are not resolved



quickly, (it will) pose significant challenge in terms of demand as well as input prices. "We should also be prepared for minimising the adverse impact of extreme weather events on output," he said.

Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised India's growth projection to 6.8 per cent for 2024 from its January forecast of 6.5 per cent citing bullish domestic demand conditions and a rising working-age population.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) also raised India's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7 per cent from 6.7 per cent earlier, saying the robust growth

will be driven by public and private sector investment demand and gradual improvement in consumer demand.

Asked what is the long-term solution for high food prices, Bhide noted that one aspect of high food inflation in the recent years has been the impact of weather conditions on the perishable commodities such as vegetables.

According to him, although such price spikes may be short-term, their impact is significant.

As many have pointed out, Bhide said processing and preservation of commodities that help in their storage would be a part of the

solution in the longer term, just as the supply-side measures that help raise crop resistance to adverse weather.

While noting that the investments in market infrastructure, modernisation of markets for agricultural commodities to help improve supply response to changing demand conditions would also reduce the excessive price spikes, he said. "In the long-term, the need for productivity improvements will remain the key factor to achieve food price stability."

The eminent economist observed that inflation has remained above the policy target for several countries. "There are also differences in the growth conditions, with some countries experiencing significant slowdown while some experiencing reasonable positive momentum," he said, adding that the priority towards bringing down inflation rate to the target appears to be keeping the monetary policies restrictive.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has recently said the baseline projections show inflation moderating to 4.5 per cent in 2024-25 from 5.4 per cent in 2023-24 and 6.7 per cent in 2022-23. (PTI)

Rupee rises 7 paise to close at 83.37 against US dollar

MUMBAI, April 22: The rupee rises by 7 paise to close at 83.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday on positive domestic markets and a soft American currency.

Forex traders said a decline in crude oil prices also supported the local unit.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.40 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.32 and a low of 83.45 against the greenback.

The domestic unit finally settled at 83.37 (provisional) against the dollar, 7 paise higher from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee appreciated by 8 paise to close at 83.44 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias amid easing of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East which improved global risk sentiments. Retreating US Dollar and crude oil prices may also support the rupee.

"However, any fresh aggressions in the Middle East may cap sharp upside. Investors may remain cautious ahead of PMI and inflation data from the US this week. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 83.10 to ₹ 83.60," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent higher at 106.17.

US Dollar eased as the tensions between Israel and Iran seem contained over the weekend. The Dollar still managed to stay above the 106 mark on a hawkish US Federal Reserve, Choudhary added.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.69 per cent to USD 86.69 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 560.29 points, or 0.77 per cent, to settle at 73,648.62. The Nifty rose 189.40 points, or 0.86 per cent, to close at 22,336.40 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Friday as they purchased shares worth ₹ 129.39 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Asian shares shrug off Wall St blues as China leaves lending rate unchanged

BANGKOK, April 22: Markets in Asia apart from Shanghai's were broadly higher Monday, shrugging off the blues on Wall Street after big technology stocks logged their worst week since the COVID crash in 2020.

Oil prices fell while US futures advanced.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng led the region, gaining 1.8 per cent to 16,516.63. But the Shanghai Composite index shed 0.4 per cent to 3,051.76 after the People's Bank of China kept its 1-year and 5-year loan prime rates unchanged.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 added 1 per cent to 37,438.61 and the yen weakened further. The US dollar rose to 154.76 yen from 154.59 yen, trading at levels not seen since 1990.

The Kospi in South Korea jumped 1.3 per cent to 2,626.55. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 surged 0.9 per cent to 7,638.30.

On Friday, the S&P 500 dropped 0.9 per cent to close out its third straight losing week. It ended at 4,967.23, which is 5.5 per cent below its record set late last month.

That's its longest such streak since September, before it broke into a romp that sent it to a string of records this year. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.6 per cent to 37,986.40, and the Nasdaq composite fell 2 per cent to 15,282.01. The market's worst performers included several stocks that had been its biggest stars.



Super Micro Computer lost more than a fifth of its value, dropping 23.1 per cent. The company, which sells server and storage systems used in AI and other computing, had soared nearly 227 per cent for the year coming into the day.

Nvidia, another stock that has surged to dizzying heights due to Wall Street's frenzy around artificial-intelligence technology, also gave up some of its big recent gains. It slumped 10 per cent and was the heaviest single weight on the S&P 500, by far, because of its huge size.

Tech stocks in the S&P 500 broadly lost 7.3 per cent this week for their worst performance since March 2020 as some global giants reported discouraging trends. ASML, a Dutch company that's a major supplier to the semiconductor industry, reported weaker-than-expected orders for the start of

2024, for example.

The larger threat was a dawning, dispiriting acknowledgement sweeping Wall Street that interest rates may likely stay high for longer. Top Fed officials said this week that they could hold interest rates at their high level for a while. That's a letdown for traders after the Fed had signalled earlier that three cuts to interest rates could be possible this year.

High rates hurt prices for all kinds of investments. Some of the hardest hit tend to be those seen as the most expensive and which make investors wait the longest for big growth, which can make tech stocks vulnerable.

Fed officials are adamant that they want to see additional proof inflation is heading down toward their 2 per cent target before lowering the Fed's main interest rate, which is at its highest level since

1.02 per cent.

Utilities emerged as the only laggard. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were trading with gains. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Friday.

"Global equities were mostly higher on Monday as a relief rally was underway as geopolitical risks subsided," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.80 per cent to USD 86.59 a barrel.

"The Indian market extended last Friday's relief rally as Middle East tension saw some respite, though the situation remains fluid. The recovery was broad-based across sectors, with renewed interest in mid and smallcaps," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Oil prices showed some relief but are still at elevated levels, he added. (PTI)

Markets sustain winning streak Sensex jumps over 560 points, Nifty tops 22,300-level

MUMBAI, April 22: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty climbed nearly 1 per cent each on Monday amid a rally in Asian and European markets, decline in Brent crude oil prices and buying by foreign investors.

Extending its previous day's rebound, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 560.29 points or 0.77 per cent to settle at 73,648.62. During the day, it advanced 679.47 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,767.80. The NSE Nifty went up by 189.40 points or 0.86 per cent to 22,336.40.

From the Sensex basket, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement, Wipro, ICICI Bank, Infosys, HCL Technologies and Asian Paints were the major gainers. NTPC, JSW Steel and HDFC Bank were the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.26 per cent and midcap index rallied 0.93 per cent. Among the indices, consumer durables advanced 2.53 per cent, industrials (1.93 per cent), capital goods (1.65 per cent), telecommunication (1.17 per cent), financial serv-

ices (1.04 per cent) and consumer discretionary (1.02 per cent).

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Ather energy CEO observes rising preference for premium vehicles

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 22: Tarun Mehta, the Co-founder & CEO of Ather Energy, recently highlighted a significant trend reshaping India's two-wheeler market. Mehta noted a discernible shift towards premium motorcycles and scooters, indicating a growing preference for higher-end alternatives over entry-level models.

While addressing this evolving trend, Mehta underscored the acceleration in preference towards premium bikes with engine capacities exceeding 110cc, alongside a rapid surge in premium scooter sales. Over the past five years, the market share of >110cc bikes has risen from 43% to 52%, while scooters wit-

nessing a similar trajectory, climbing from 25% to 47%. The CEO emphasized that this transition encompasses both traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles and electric vehicles (EVs). Notably, the premium segment of the 2W EV scooter market is experiencing notable growth. Mehta attributed this trend to India's rising per capita GDP, suggesting a further acceleration in the premiumization of the market.

Moreover, Mehta stressed that this shift is not exclusive to metropolitan hubs like Bangalore, Delhi, or Mumbai but is reflective of a nationwide phenomenon. Consumers in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are also exhibiting similar aspirations and purchasing behaviors, highlighting a broader societal trend towards prioritizing quality and premium features in their purchases. This shift underscores the imperative for companies to adapt their strategies to align with the evolving preferences of Indian consumers.

Mehta's remarks serve as a clarion call for businesses to focus on catering to the needs of a consumer base increasingly inclined towards premium offerings. By doing so, companies can position themselves strategically to capitalize on the burgeoning opportunities emerging from this market shift, ensuring sustained growth and relevance in the dynamic landscape of India's two-wheeler sector.

2001.

Because interest rates look unlikely to offer much help in the near term, companies are under even more pressure to deliver growth in profits.

Netflix sank 9.1 per cent despite reporting stronger profits for the latest quarter than expected. Analysts called it a mostly solid performance, but the streaming giant disappointed some investors by saying it will stop giving updates on its subscriber numbers every three months, beginning next year.

Helping to limit the market's losses was American Express, which rose 6.2 per cent. It reported stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Fifth Third Bancorp rose 5.9 per cent after it likewise topped expectations.

In the oil market, US benchmark crude oil shed 92 cents to USD 81.30 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It gained 12 cents on Friday, to USD 82.22 per barrel.

A barrel of Brent crude gave up 95 cents to USD 86.35 per barrel. On Friday, it pulled back to USD 87.29 after briefly leaping above USD 90 overnight on worries about fighting in the Middle East. Iranian troops fired air defences at a major air base and a nuclear site during an apparent Israeli drone attack, raising worries in the market. But crude prices pared their gains as traders questioned how Iran would respond. (AP)

Contd. from Page 1...

Surrender or face bullets,

He was referring to the previous Congress rule and the alleged involvement of former CM Baghel in the Mahadev betting app scam. Highlighting the state BJP government's success in tackling Naxal insurgency after assuming office in December, Shah pointed out that in the last four months, 90 Naxalites were neutralised in the state. While 123 Naxalites were arrested, 250 others surrendered (during this period), he added.

Under Modi's leadership, Naxalism has been eliminated from states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, the Home Minister said. "Elect Modi ji for a third term and the menace (of Naxalism) will be rooted out from Chhattisgarh in two years," he asserted. "As long as there is Naxalism, tribal brothers and sisters will not have access to electricity, schools, ration shops and hospitals. I would like to tell them (Naxalites) to surrender, otherwise the result of the fight is certain. We will finish them. We will root out them from Chhattisgarh," he said. The Home Minister hit out at the Congress, saying the grand old party believes minorities have the first right over the country's resources, while the BJP firmly feels this right belongs to the poor, adivasis, Dalits and backward. Recently, the Congress party got offended when the PM spoke about its manifesto and asked why it wanted to conduct a survey of properties of all citizens, the senior BJP leader said.

"I want to ask the Congress whether its manifesto mentions a survey or not? Rahul baba should make it clear. Their PM Manmohan Singh had said (in 2006) the minority has first right over the resources not adivasis and Dalits. But we say the poor, adivasi, Dalit and backward have first right to over the resources of the country. They (Congress) have eyes on 'math' (monastic institution), mandir and properties of everyone and where this money will go?" he added. Taking a dig at the opposition INDIA bloc over the clash that occurred during its Ranchi rally in Jharkhand, Shah said if they can't keep their own house in order, then how will they maintain unity in the country?

"Elect Modi ji for a third time and the country will become the third largest economy in the world," he emphasised. Shah noted that after being in a tent for 500 years, Ram Lala celebrated his birthday on Ram Navami on April 17 in the grand temple at Ayodhya inaugurated in January. "Ever since the Ram temple was demolished, crores of people have sacrificed their lives. Many people were martyred with the hope Ram Lala would be installed in his temple one day, but for years, the Congress kept on raising questions over Ram Lala's birthplace.

"After Modi ji became PM for a second term, he laid the foundation stone (in 2020) of Ram Mandir (in Ayodhya) and then presided over its (idol) consecration ceremony," Shah said. The former BJP president lashed out at the Congress for not attending the consecration ceremony. "Congress leaders were invited but they did not attend the consecration ceremony just for vote-bank politics," he said.

Shah maintained the Modi government is committed to the development of Chhattisgarh, where the BJP came to power in December 2023 after a five-year Congress rule. "During the Sonia-Manmohan government (2004-2014 UPA rule), only ₹ 77,000 crore was given to Chhattisgarh, but Modi ji has given ₹ 3,20,000 crore in the last ten years. Besides, funds were given for construction of roads, airports and laying railway lines," the BJP leader noted. Shah said Modi has resolved to make India a developed nation by 2047, and tribals, Dalits, youth, poor, farmers and women will be the biggest beneficiaries when that status is achieved. The BJP has fielded Bhojraj Nag from Kanker which will go to polls on April 26 along with two other seats. (PTI)

Karbi Anglong gears up

election process. SP of Karbi Anglong also informed on traffic plan and said EVMs and VVPATs will be kept and counting done at Inter-State Bus Terminus (ISBT), 5th Miles Diphu-Manja Road. To avoid traffic snare in front of ISBT traffic will be diverted.

Vehicles from Diphu going to Dillai, Bokajan, Dimapur and Silonijan will have to take Birla-Hapjan road with right diversion from in front of Diphu Presbyterian Church. Likewise vehicles from Manja coming to Diphu will have to take Rongplimplan via Hapjan-Birla road or Manja via Disama-Taralango road.

'More power, direct funding

was achieved through purely democratic way. "The two accords are completely different. The TNV accord is the result of bloodshed and violence while the tripartite agreement is very open and approaching to all. I still believe weapons are not the final solution to any problem," he said. The 81-year-old leader, however, "made it clear that the greater Tipraland, the core demand of the party will remain in place as we want to move forward step by step." More than 500 armed cadres of TNV led by self-styled leader Bijooy Kumar Hrangkawl laid down arms before the then Special Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) P.P. Srivastava in Dhulai district's Govindabari area on August 13, 1988, following hectic parleys with the Rajiv Gandhi government. (PTI)

IPS officer Nalin Prabhat

up to 31.08.2028 i.e. date of his superannuation or until further orders, whichever is earlier". The NSG draws its commands from the Army and various Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) like the CRPF, BSF and ITBP. (PTI)

Two held over bribery charges

Nagarbera Revenue Circle, in Kamrup district. Hajarat Ali, gaon pradhan of Khameri gaon, was caught red handed in the office immediately after he accepted ₹4,000 as part of demanded bribe from the complainant in conspiracy with Choudhury," it added. The tainted bribe money has been recovered from his possession and has been seized accordingly, in presence of independent witnesses. Later, in the same trap operation, Choudhury was also apprehended for demanding the bribe and accepting it through the gaon pradhan, in conspiracy with him. "In this connection, a case has been registered in ACB Police Station," the statement concluded.

More than 2,000 criminal

are serious criminal cases (punishable with imprisonment of 5 years and more). "The same was the position in 2019 Lok Sabha elections in which out of 7928 candidates, 1500 candidates (19%) had criminal cases, out of which 1070 candidates (13%) were serious criminal cases. However, out of 514 elected members of 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024), 225 members (44%) had criminal cases against them.

"Thus, the candidates with criminal cases have won more seats than candidates without criminal cases. In this context, it is necessary that this court may pass further orders for expeditious disposal of pending trials and investigation under strict monitoring by the respective high courts," the affidavit said.

Hansaria, who is assisting the court in the PIL filed by Ashwini Upadhyay for speedy disposal of cases against the lawmakers, said, "It may be noted that in view of the direction issued by this court in the present proceedings, the steps taken by the respective high courts, and expeditious hearing by the special court MP/MLA, more than 2000 cases have been decided in the year 2023. However, a large number of cases are pending, and many of them are for a long period." He gave a tabular chart based on the information received from different high courts, under which as on January 1, 2023 there were 4,697 criminal cases against the lawmakers and 2,018 cases were decided last year. The affidavit said 1,746 fresh criminal cases were filed in 2023 against the MPs/MLAs and therefore total of 4,474 cases remain pending as on January 1, 2024.

The maximum, 766 cases out of 1,300, as on January 1, 2023 were adjudicated by the special courts in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, which had 105 cases at the start of last year, disposed of 103 cases by December 31, 2023.

Some of the big states, like Maharashtra, decided 232 cases out of 476 cases against MPs/MLAs as on January 1, 2023, West Bengal 13 out of 26, Gujarat 30 out of 48, Karnataka 150 out of 226, Kerala 132 out of 370, and Bihar decided 171 cases out of 525 cases. Hansaria said though a number of cases are decided, a large number of cases are still pending trial for a long period. "It is thus necessary that the High Court may call for a report from the presiding officers of the Special Court MP/MLA of all those cases which are pending for 3 or more years with reason for long pending along with a copy of the order sheet of last one year.

"It may be clarified that only a copy of the order sheet is to be sent and not the entire case file so that the trial is not affected. The High Court may thereafter, pass appropriate orders on micro examination of each case with a positive direction that a trial may be completed within one year," he said.

He sought direction from the apex court for creating a model website on the pattern of National Judicial Data Grid for uploading of real time information on the progress of the trial of cases against lawmakers. (PTI)

BJP accuses opposition

While BJP president J P Nadda met the victim's family members, no senior Congress leader such as Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vaidya or the chief minister met them, he said. The BJP spokesperson claimed that some people who raised 'the Jai Shri Ram' slogan during a Ram Navami procession were beaten up and said that there is a "jungle raj" in Karnataka. Bhatia alleged that the Congress manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls seems to be inspired by Pakistan's founder MA Jinnah as it speaks of strengthening personal laws.

Will the practice of triple talaq, which was banned and made a criminal offence by the Modi government, be brought back, he asked and also attacked the Congress for its leader P Chidambaram's assertion that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act will be repealed if the INDIA bloc comes to power. As the BJP's graph rises during the polls and it becomes clear that the ruling National Democratic Alliance will reach its target of over 400 seats, the opposition, especially the Congress, is turning desperate, Bhatia claimed. (PTI)

Cong manifesto represents

"They could not give jobs, double income of farmers and control prices of essential commodities and fuel. How will people believe in their so-called guarantee." "The PM's remarks and the choice of words are not befitting his position and age. It is tarnishing the chair of the Prime Minister," she said.

"People will vote for a big change and signs are already visible after first phase of polling. BJP will be wiped clean in the south and reduced to half in the north," she claimed. She also raised concerns about the neutrality of the Election Commission, urging it to ensure fair polling amid reports of irregularities. (PTI)

Rajnath visits world's highest

"Our soldier is no less than any protecting deity," he said. "In the times to come, when the history of national security is written, the acts of bravery and iron-clad will of our soldiers in the icy cold glacier will be remembered with pride. It will forever be an inspiration for future generations," he said.

Singh's visit to Siachen came over a week after the Indian Army marked the 40th year of its presence in the strategically key region following the 'Operation Meghdoot'. After carrying out aerial reconnaissance, the defence minister landed at the forward post and was given a detailed brief on the operational readiness in the Siachen Glacier and the prevalent security situation. He also discussed the aspects associated with the operational challenges with the commanders on the ground. "Visited a forward post in Siachen. Had a wonderful interaction with the brave Army personnel who are guarding our nation in extremely challenging conditions," Singh said on 'X'. "I laud their courage and professionalism, in the line of duty," he said.

The defence minister also laid a wreath at the Siachen War Memorial as a mark of tribute to the fallen heroes who made the supreme sacrifice in service of the nation. Singh had visited Leh on March 24 and celebrated Holi with the troops. He was scheduled to visit Siachen, but it was postponed due to adverse weather conditions. From Leh, the defence minister had spoken with the soldiers posted in Siachen over phone and told them that he would soon visit the world's highest battlefield and interact with them. Singh fulfilled his promise with Monday's visit despite his busy schedule, the ministry said in a statement. (PTI)

DDSA suspends Debojit Dutta from president's post

Dutta suspended from president's post after arrest of his wife on child abuse case

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 22: Dibrugarh District Sports Association (DDSA) has suspended DDSA president, Debojit Dutta from the post of president after his wife was arrested for allegedly physically torturing their minor housemaid.

On April 20 in a meeting held at DDSA office, the office bearers of the association decided to Dutta from the post of president.

Dutta has been absconding after the arrest of his wife Boby Kalita. His wife was arrested on April 14 by the Dibrugarh police after a case had been registered at the Dibrugarh Police Station. "On April 12, Dutta and his wife Boby Kalita came to our office. After they stepped outside our office, his wife was picked up by police. When we went to the Dibrugarh Police Station, we were told that his wife had been arrested and her husband had been absconding," said a member of Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Dibrugarh.



According to the member, the minor girl was brutally tortured and sometimes they locked her in the room and went to Guwahati.

"The victim told us that she was brutally tortured by the wife of Dutta and when she complained to the husband, he didn't bother to listen. The girl didn't know her ad-

dress properly. She only told that she was brought by someone," said the member.

The police have been registered a case against the accused under sections 352/342/326/374/506/34 of the Indian Penal Code and section 75/79 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 and 2014 Amended

Child Labour Act, 1986.

"Even after so many days, why has Dutta not been arrested? How could he managed to run away?" said a senior citizen.

Additional superintendent of police (crime) Sibal Agarwal said, "Dutta has been absconding. We are trying our best to find out his whereabouts. As per law we will take action."

According to reports, the doctor had purchased the girl, who hails from the neighbouring state of Arunachal Pradesh in 2013 from a person and since then the girl has been living with the couple.

Sources said that it might be a case human trafficking.

"Many tribal girls were involved in human trafficking after they were lured with offers of good jobs. Most of them were trafficked from Arunachal Pradesh. A human trafficking network has been working and supplying girls to other states on the pretext of providing jobs," said a source.

SVEEP holds cycle rally in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 22: To promote awareness on adult franchise the State Voter's Electoral Education and Participation (SVEEP) cell organised a cycle rally in Diphu on Monday.

State icon Rakesh Banik, a para-cyclist and district icon Khorsing Terang along with women, youths and NCC cadres from schools and colleges participated in the programme.

The Karbi Anglong district administration, Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLMS), Assam State Urban Livelihood Mission Society (ASULMS), Women Justice Forum, Cyclist Association, NCC Diphu Government College, Athletics Association and Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) participated in the rally.

The rally that began from the district commissioner's office proceeded towards Diphu Market and ended at the Gandhi Park, Diphu bus stand. The participants displayed placards with slogans like 'My vote is not for sale' 'If you don't vote you lose the right to complain' and 'Belief in the power of your vote during the rally.'

In a short interaction with the participants the state icon, Rakesh Banik said election is an important event in a democracy in choosing a right and unbiased candidate, who would stand for the cause of the people. Election is conducted for creating a healthy democracy.

Taking his own example Banik, who is a differently abled individual with one of his legs amputated due to an accident, said life is harsh. There is challenge in life. Every person has to struggle and there is no person here who has not undergone any difficulties in life. On the voting day voters should come out to cast their valuable vote.

District icon Terang urged the voters to cast their valuable votes to choose the correct candidate, who will raise their voice on the issues and problems of the region in the Parliament.

Body recovered

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 22: Locals discovered a body lying in shallow grave in the Sootea area in Biswanath district on Monday.

According to sources, the village headman and some local residents smelt something stale near a land belonging to Numal Mura early during the day. When they reached the spot from where the smell was emanating, they discovered the decomposed body in a shallow grave covered by garbage. They soon informed the police. A team of police personnel reached the spot and recovered the body from the grave in the afternoon. The body was later sent for autopsy, the report of which is awaited. The deceased has been identified as Dayal Mandal, a resident of Bholaguri in the southern part of Sootea. He had reportedly gone missing for the past nine days. His family had reportedly also verbally informed the Sootea police about his disappearance.

Meanwhile, the family members and the Sootea police had continued to trace the whereabouts of Dayal. On the other hand, sources said that no one has seen Mura since the day Mandal had disappeared. Police are currently investigating the matter.

Muslims, Christians join saffron party in Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

BAKALIA, April 22: The BJP claimed that a large number of people from the Muslim and Christian community have joined the party in a public meeting held at BJP Langpher Mondal office.

They were welcomed by the chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang. He said all communities are welcome to join BJP and expressed confidence that its candidate for 6- Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency, Amarsing Tisso will win. The winning margin will break the last election result. Diphu MLA, Bidya Sing Englang, chairman of the Minority Development Board, Habib Mohammad Choudhary and others also addressed the poll campaign.

Hanuman Janamotsav celebrations begin in Hojai

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, April 22: The Hanuman Janamotsav began at the Laxminarayan Temple and the Shiv Bari Hanuman Temple in Hojai on Monday with a colourful procession, where hundreds of devotees took part. An atmosphere of devotion and gaiety prevailed in the town. From dawn, devotees were seen thronging and standing in serpentine queue at different Hanuman temples to worship and appease Lord Hanuman. While Laxminarayan Temple will celebrate the occasion with a three-day long programme, the Shiv Bari Hanuman Temple will celebrate the Hanuman Janamotsav with a two-day programme. "Every year the committee organises the Hanuman Janamotsav celebrations on a large scale because we have faith in Lord Hanuman and this year we are holding the silver jubilee celebrations. So it is special to us," said Manoj Kejriwal, convener of the Hanuman Janamotsav Samity of the Shri Laxminarayan Mandir. "On this sacred day, we seek the blessing of Lord Hanuman by chanting various devotional hymns and prayers, such as Hanuman Chalisa and reading holy scriptures like the Ramayana," Pankaj Garodia, a devotee said. On the other hand, the celebrations has also began in Gupta Patty Hanuman temple, Narsingh Sthan Hanuman Temple, Dangoria Bari Hanuman Temple, Amtola Hanuman Temple, Kedia Puram Hanuman Temple and Telibasti Hanuman Temple.

Rajya Sabha MP participates in public meeting ahead of LS polls in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 22: Rajya Sabha MP, president of Asom Nagarik Somaj and former journalist Ajit Kumar Bhuyan and secretary of the Asom Nagarik Somaj, Paresh Malakar participated in a public meeting in connection with the ongoing LS polls at the premise of Nagaon Nonoi Panikhati Masjid on Monday.

Bhuyan while speaking on the occasion advocated the need for restoration of democracy as well as its Constitution in the country with adequate electoral participation in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing the media ahead of the public meeting on Monday, MP Bhuyan said that the ruling BJP has squeezed the neck of the democracy of the country and also torn the pages of the country's Constitution.

The ruling saffron party tries to



cross the electoral gaps by terrorizing and polarising the people, he said adding that BJP is a communal party.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is worried that the Bharat Joro Yatra has succeeded in the first

phase of the elections, Bhuyan added further.

Referring to the earlier strategy of the ruling BJP, which rejected the Muslim votes, he said that the same BJP is currently looking for Muslim votes.

Chief election officer visits Morigaon

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, April 22: Chief electoral officer of Assam, Anurag Goel visited Morigaon district under Nagaon Lok Sabha constituency on Monday to take stock of preparations in view of the second phase of Lok Sabha election on April 22.

In a meeting convened at the conference hall of the deputy commissioner's office in Morigaon, Goel discussed key election management aspects with the district election officer and district commissioner Devashish Sharma, superintendent of police Hemanta Kumar Das, additional district commissioners, and other officers responsible for different election cells of Morigaon election district.

In the meeting topics ranged from

Chief election officer visits Nagaon to inspect election preparedness

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 22: Anurag Goel, the chief election officer of the state today visited Nagaon to inspect the electoral preparations as well as other activities related to second phase of Nagaon parliamentary constituency which is scheduled to be held on April 26 here.

During his visit, Goel also inspected the strong rooms installed at Nagaon Govt Boys' HS School, Nagaon Govt Girls' HS School and Nagaon Dawson HS and Multi Purposes School respectively and advocated for a free, fair and transparent election in the constituency.

He was accompanied during his visit to the strong rooms by District Election Officer cum District Commissioner, Nagaon Narendra Kr Shah, Superintendent of Police, Swapnanil Deka and other officials from various election cells of Nagaon election district here, an official press note added here.

strong room management to webcasting, GPS systems, and EVM management, with a focus on ensuring smooth operations and timely reporting for the upcoming polling on April 26th.

The meeting was attended by the chief executive officer of the Zilla Parishad, Ruth Lienthang, district development commissioner Siddhartha Goswami, additional district commissioners, Pallavi Kachari, Sangita Borthakur, Biman Das, Sulakshana Borpatragohain and Pranjal Borua, election officer Jagriti Kalwar and officials from the district administration. Following the meeting, Goel inspected various election facilities including the strong room, receiving, dispatching, and transit centers at the District Education and Training Institute.

Morigaon district administration creates awareness through 'Sarathi Baidew'

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, April 22: The Morigaon district administration along with the District SVEEP Cell are creating awareness on the right to franchise through the 'Sarathi Baidew' programme among rural women voters of the district. The programme has been undertaken as part of the Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) campaign.

Under the Sarathi Baidew programme help desks have been set up, where women voters can identify and verify their names in the voter list. These help desks, run by members of women self-help groups, aim to educate these voters to the helpline number 1950 and https://voters.eci.gov.in, while also raising awareness about EPIC and voting rights.

Awareness rallies have also been organized by women at various blocks and gram panchayat levels. Furthermore, attractive wall paintings with awareness slogans adorn the walls of the district commissioner's office premises. Special election related Bihu songs composed by the SVEEP Cell are being played in public places to promote voting among the public.

3 withdraw nominations in Kokrajhar LS constituency

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 22: Three candidates have withdrawn their nomination papers for contesting in the Lok Sabha elections from the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency.

With the withdrawal of three candidates from the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha, 12 candidates are in fray for the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, the elections to which will be held on May 7.

Earlier, 16 candidates had filed nominations for the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency. Meanwhile, sitting MP Naba Kumar Sarania's candidature was rejected by the returning officer due to invalid ST caste certificate.

Monday was the last day of withdrawal of nominations.

The candidates who have withdrawn their nominations are Sailendra Nath Brahma (independent), Nandadev Brahma (independent) and Ghanashyam Das of GSP.

The prominent candidates who are in fray to contest the upcoming Parliamentary elections from the constituency are Joyanta Basumatary

(NDA), Kampa Borgoyary (BPF), Binita Deka (GSP), Ranjay Kumar Brahma (Independent).

Meanwhile, Joyanta Basumatary, NDA candidate has expressed his confident that he is will win from the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency.

Basumatary said, "People cutting across different communities are coming forward to extend support to the NDA alliance candidates in the Lok Sabha elections. The NDA alliance government in Bodoland Territorial Region and the state government are working dedicatedly towards the welfare and development of the common masses. The NDA alliance will win more than 400 seats across the country to form the government at the Centre for the third consecutive under the leadership of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi."

The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region and UPPL president, Pramod Boro said that the NDA alliance candidates in the state will win over 12 seats including Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency. He said that people choose the NDA alliance, and accordingly people are extending their full support to NDA candidates.

Siripuriya Dikhow bridge collapses in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent



SIVASAGAR, April 22: A major beam of the Siripuriya Dikhow RCC bridge, which is under construction, has collapsed as numerous pile structures supporting it were swept away by rising water level of the Dikhow river following downpours in Upper Assam recently.

The incident took place on Sunday. The local people have demanded an inquiry alleging foul play by the Trishul Constructions and said that tardy construction works have led to the incident.

Executive engineer, Anupam Hazarika of Lok Nirman department said, "The damage was caused by the unexpected torrential rain, which caused a sudden rise of the water level that eroded the portion of soil underneath the piles. As the bridge rests on stressed cables, the damage is not very severe and can be repaired soon. The columns are in good shape and the prestressed girder will soon be repaired while our firm is keeping an eye on the development closely."

Aaranyak celebrates 'World Earth Day' by engaging school children

Experts educate children on ways to minimise plastic use to save environment

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 22: Aaranyak, has organised outreach programmes for school children to mark the 'World Earth Day, 2024' in the Dibrugarh and Kokrajhar districts as well as in the West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya on Monday.

The theme for this year's 'World Earth Day' is 'Planet versus plastic'.

School kids from the Kakojan Habi LP School, near the Dehing Patkai National Park, participated in an awareness programme organised by Aaranyak and British Asian Trust in collaboration with the Dehing Patkai National Park authority with support from Darwin Initiative (Biodiversity Challenge Funds). In another occasion, the team from Aaranyak organised another outreach programme for students in the Kachugaon division of the Raimona National's central range. The programme was organised by Aaranyak in collaboration with the Raimona National Park authority and the Wildlife Trust of India.

27 students participated in a drawing contest in Dibrugarh highlighting various aspects of nature and harmful effects of single use plastic and how their use can be reduced to protect the environment. The members of Aaranyak also engaged the students in discussions about plastic waste and co-

existence between humans and elephants.

On the other hand, 20 students attended the outreach event held in West Garo Hills of Meghalaya, which was organised by Aaranyak and the British Asian Trust with support from the Darwin Initiative (Biodiversity Challenge Funds). These two areas of Dibrugarh and West Garo hills are affected by the burgeoning conflict between human beings and wild elephants and multifaceted approaches have been adopted by Aaranyak to mitigate the conflict. The 'World Earth Day' is celebrated on April 22 every year to raise public awareness about environmental issues and promote sustainability in the world. This campaign reminds individuals and communities of the importance of protecting our planet and inspires them to take action.

Our Kokrajhar correspondent adds: Along with rest of the state, the NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati joined in the celebration of 'World Earth Day' by organising a plantation drive at its premises on Monday.

The NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati in Kokrajhar has committed itself towards a sustainable planet and accordingly planted more than 50 saplings on the occasion amidst the presence of its officials and staffs. The NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati senior management led by K C Muraleedharan, CGM

and business unit head planted saplings of varied types at its plant premises. Speaking on the occasion, Muraleedharan said how NTPC as a group company is focusing on inspiring governments, businesses, and citizens to combat climate change. He also highlighted the efforts of NTPC towards creating a healthier planet for its stakeholders.

Induri S Reddy, GM (O&M), Asutosh Biswas, GM (operation) along with Somnath Bhattacharya, AGM (BE and In-charge EMG and Ash Utilization) and heads of departments and employees also participated in the plantation drive.

Our Nagaon correspondent adds: Prakritipremi Manch, Assam, a pioneer environmental organization of the state celebrated the 'World Earth Day' as well as its 22nd foundation day on Monday in Nagaon.

On the occasion the organization also carried out a massive plantation drive at Sonai - Kushi hills near Jagiroad along the Assam-Meghalaya border. The organization planted over 800 seedlings of 42 species of various plants consumed by wild elephants living in the forest of the state. They included plants like palm trees, banana, neem, mango, berries, elephant apple, jackfruit and others. "The wild elephants living in the forests favour over 122 species of food plants," said Hitesh Sharma, pres-



ident of Prakritipremi Manch.

The conflict between man and elephants has been increasing day by day in the state due to shortage of food in the forest. Wild elephants often enter into the areas of human habitation from the forest in quest of food and create panic among the people. As per a census conducted in 2017, there were over 4.5 million elephants in the world.

There are 27,312 Asian elephants in India among which over 5,700 elephants reside in the forests of the state. The programme was attended by Dhananjay Talukdar, Dhiraj Pator, Partha Pratim Gautam, Ratan Medhi, Jon Bordoloi, Prasad Deuri, Dharmendra Bordoloi, Nitul Deka, Kamalashyam Bordoloi, other dignitaries and other members of the organisation.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Absence sharpens love, presence strengthens it.
-Thomas Fuller

TMC in Assam elections

In the lead-up to the Assam elections, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) under the leadership of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had embarked on an ambitious campaign to challenge the dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state. However, recent developments have highlighted the uphill battle the TMC faces in making significant inroads. Despite high-profile rallies and efforts to project itself as a credible alternative to the BJP, the TMC suffered a setback with the resignation of two prominent leaders in Hailakandi district. The defections, described as a 'landslide' by local media, underscore the challenges of establishing a foothold in a new political landscape. The decision of these leaders to join the Congress reflects a broader sentiment favouring the traditional party, particularly in the face of BJP's stronghold in Assam. Their rationale, citing the Congress as the only viable challenger to the BJP at the national level, underscores the strategic importance of alliances and unity within the opposition. The TMC's struggle in Assam raises questions about its long-term prospects in the Northeast, with analysts speculating on the party's ability to navigate the complex political dynamics of the region. Mamata Banerjee's campaign in the Barak Valley, marked by a notable absence of criticism towards the BJP and its policies, has drawn scrutiny and contributed to the challenges faced by the party in the state.

Meanwhile, the BJP, led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, appears confident in consolidating its position in Assam. The lack of cohesive opposition, particularly due to rivalry between the Congress and the TMC, has provided an advantage to the ruling party, further solidifying its electoral prospects. Looking ahead, the Congress has an opportunity to capitalize on the TMC's setbacks and strengthen its position in Assam. The upcoming elections present a chance for the party to demonstrate effective leadership and forge alliances that can effectively challenge the BJP's dominance in the state. The evolving political landscape in Assam highlights the complexities and challenges facing opposition parties, particularly the TMC, in their efforts to challenge the BJP's hegemony. As the state gears up for elections, the dynamics of alliances and strategic manoeuvring will play a crucial role in shaping its political future. The recent resignation of two prominent Trinamool Congress (TMC) leaders in Assam's Hailakandi district has dealt a blow to the party's aspirations of emerging as a formidable force in the state.

The leaders' decision to join the Congress underscores a strategic shift, with a focus on aligning with a more established opposition entity perceived as better positioned to challenge the BJP. This development not only reflects a loss for the TMC but also signifies a potential gain for the Congress, especially in light of the upcoming elections. As Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma continues to consolidate the BJP's position in the state, the lack of a united opposition front poses a significant advantage for the ruling party. The rivalry between the Congress and the TMC further complicates the opposition's efforts, leaving room for the BJP to strengthen its electoral foothold. In this context, the upcoming elections present a crucial opportunity for the Congress to capitalize on the TMC's setbacks and forge alliances that can effectively challenge the BJP's dominance in Assam. As political dynamics continue to evolve, strategic manoeuvring and coalition-building will be pivotal in shaping the state's electoral landscape.

Maryam Nawaz has set the right tone for improving India-Pak relations

By: Tirthankar Mitra

Post a tumultuous national election in Pakistan, a diplomatic overture from this western neighbour towards India was being awaited. And now that it has come, even though from an unlikely quarter, it is welcome.

For even though it is not from the Pak foreign minister, the source of its issuance is certainly the power behind the throne. An olive branch was extended towards India when Maryam Nawaz, chief minister of Punjab spoke to about 3000 Sikh pilgrims at Kartarpur Sahib recently.

As she invoked the cultural and linguistic commonalities on both sides of the border that exists between India and Pakistan, the message ought to have travelled far beyond the ears of the men and women who had gathered at a place of worship they had heard much about. Indeed it was more for the knowledge and information of the mandarins of the Ministry of external affairs in New Delhi.

For it emanated right from the lips of Maryam Nawaz. She is not only the chief minister of Punjab, but also the heir apparent of three time Pakistan prime minister, and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) chief Nawaz Sharif.

The Punjab chief minister speaking of friendship with India, religious tolerance and celebrating Eid, Holi and Baisakhi together is a leader of substance. Her pedigree apart, she heads Pakistan's largest province and much of this country's political, cultural and military elite is Punjabi.

So Maryam is ideally suited to speak for her country. Hard economic and geo-political realities which Pakistan faces lie behind her words. She has made her appeal at a most opportune moment for Pakistan. Rawalpindi and Islamabad are faced with increasingly restive borders with Afghanistan and Iran. The Pak army too is looking for stability in the eastern front. A less than belligerent India will be only too welcome by the force which calls the shots in Pakistan.

In this backdrop, Maryam's words should be marked. In fact,

her appeal should not be dismissed as emotional outpourings. A look at the stumbling blocks in the bilateral ties reveals abrogation of Article 370, has been Pakistan's source of objection on the Kashmir issue. It will get India nowhere by shouting from the rooftops that the "abrogation" is an internal matter and Pakistan has no business to discuss about it.

It was part and parcel of Pakistan's foreign policy to raise red flags in the Kashmir issue. Even if it has got it nowhere except some rabble rousing, come elections. The present government has not acquired enough traction to dissociate from it. President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the Army (not quite on this order) have voiced similar sentiments on Kashmir.

Terrorism for India and Kashmir for Pakistan remain both sides' core concerns. Some quiet back channel diplomacy is the need of the hour. It may restore trade relations, perhaps a low-hanging diplomatic fruit but a break through all the same. An example may be cited that way back in 2014, Pakistan showed interest in importing power from India. It came in the wake of the then Pakistan prime minister's visit. The previous year. Of late, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar said "Pakistan businessmen want trade with India".

The nay sayers with long memories may point out that the power deal was scuppered by the Pak army though GAIL was receptive to the idea of supplying gas across Wagha border. A rejoinder may be issued stating that back channel diplomacy has led to 2021 cease fire along the Line of Control which has mostly held.

More than 75 years have gone by after Punjab was divided in 1947. Despite Partition and ears being fought between two countries, many on both sides of the border continue to feel the bond. Common culture and identity constitute Punjabiyat. India is going through its parliamentary elections. Meanwhile, no stone should be left unturned to lay the ground to move the needle forward thereafter. (IPA Service)

In the second phase on April 26, BJP to meet bigger challenges than first

In the middle of campaign for second phase of Lok Sabha election 2024 scheduled for April 26, a considerable rise in political heat is felt in 13 states where 87 Lok Sabha constituencies are going to poll. The reason being, higher stake for BJP due to INDIA bloc's mounting challenge to their candidates in almost all constituencies. The comparative ease of PM Narendra Modi during the first phase of election campaign, seems to have already disappeared.

Altogether 102 constituencies of 21 states and UTs were scheduled to go to poll on April 19, of which high stake constituencies for BJP were 5 in Assam, 4 in Bihar, 1 in Chhattisgarh, 1 in Jammu and Kashmir, 6 in Madhya Pradesh, 5 in Maharashtra, 12 in Rajasthan, 1 in Tripura, 8 in Uttar Pradesh, and 3 in West Bengal. These are altogether 46 out of which BJP found itself in very close contest in about 20 seats with the INDIA bloc candidates.

On the basis of the election campaigns in the first and second phase, a pattern has clearly emerged. Closer the possibility of contest, higher the stakes for BJP and INDIA bloc, and larger the number of phases of elections. There seems to be clear link between the number of phases of election in a state, and the corresponding stakes of the BJP. Thus there were only 10 states out of 21 states and UTs in the first phase where BJP had higher stakes.

All these 10 states – Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal – and in Karnataka, BJP will have even higher stakes than in the first phase. BJP's stakes are most high in Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal where there would be elections even in the third phase on May 7, for which last date of final nominations is April 19, the day on which first

phase of elections is scheduled.

Assam is a high-stake state for BJP where elections for 14 seats are scheduled in first three phases. Five seats will go to poll in the first phase, another 5 in the second phase, and the rest 4 in the third phase. Since INC had established its upper hand in one of the seats in the first phase, and offering closer contests in another two, BJP's stakes have become higher in the second phase of election in Darang-Udalguri, Diphu, Karimganj, Silchar, and Nagaon. There seems to be three cornered contests in all these seats. In Darang-Udalguri, contest is among BJP, INC, and Bodoland People's Front (BPF). In Diphu, the contest is among BJP, INC, and Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC).

In Karimganj and Nagaon, contest is among BJP, INC and AIUDF. In Silchar, contest is among BJP, INC,

and TMC. Contests are closer than expected in all seats, and hence outcomes are more uncertain. BJP had won Karimganj seat in 2019 by a margin of only 38,389 votes, and the runner up was AIUDF. BJP had also won Silchar by 81,596 votes and runner up was INC candidate. INC seems to have upper hand in even Nagaon. Since Darang-Udalguri and Diphu, are new constituencies as per the delimitation order of 2023, the respective strengths of political parties are untested, however, in both the constituencies INC is lately gaining strength.

In the Hindi heartland state Bihar, remains one of the toughest states for BJP and NDA where elections are scheduled in all seven phases. NDA seems to have gained upper hand in the first phase, but situation becomes tough in the second phase, since INDIA bloc candidates are stronger.

The five seats going to poll in second phase are Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Bhagalpur and Banka.

Kishanganj was won by INC in 2019 while JD(U) had won Katihar by a margin of only 57,203 defeating INC candidate. JD(U) had also won Purnia by defeating INC, and Bhagalpur and Banka by defeating RJD candidates. Since JD(U) had first raised hopes among backward classes by getting Caste Census conducted against the will of the BJP, and now backtracking by joining hands with the BJP, OBC voters have become apprehensive against NDA.

Now INDIA bloc (INC and RJD) is pitching on Caste Census and respective share of reservation according to their population. OBCs are gravitating towards INDIA bloc candidates, reports indicate.

Chhattisgarh is another Hindi heartland state where three constituencies – Rajnandgaon, Mahasamund, and Kanker – are scheduled for election in second phase. BJP had won Kanker by only 6,914 votes in 2019, and Mahasamund by 90,511 votes defeating INC candidates, that too in the height of Pulwama wave. BJP had also won Rajnandgaon seats by 1,11,966 votes.

The recent Vidhan Sabha election 2023 has shown a 5.17 per cent decline of BJP's vote share which came down to only 46.27 per cent as against 42.23 per cent of INC. In one-on-one fight with INC candidates, all these three constituencies are witnessing closer contests making outcome uncertain.

Chhattisgarh is a difficult state for BJP and elections would be held here in three phases, 7 in the last phase. In the first phase, INC seemed to have an upper hand in lone seat Bastar which was scheduled for poll on April 19.

Madhya Pradesh is the third Hindi heartland state, where 6 constituencies are scheduled to poll. These are – Tikamgarh, Damoh, Khajuraho, Satna, Rewa, Hoshangabad and Betul. The state

is scheduled for poll in four phases.

Due to rejection of nomination of SP candidate in Khajuraho seat, which went to the party as per seat sharing with Congress, AIFB is contesting as part of INDIA bloc. All these seats were won by BJP in 2019, and the party seems to have upper hand this time too, but INDIA bloc is still contesting with great zeal.

Rajasthan is fourth Hindi heartland state where 13 seats are going to poll in the second phase which would conclude the election in the state, since 12 were scheduled for poll in the first phase. This is a state where there is very close contest, since difference of share of votes between BJP and INC was only 2.06 per cent in Vidhan Sabha election 2023.

BJP's vote share had come down by 17.38 per cent compared to 2019 election, and hence the state presents a great challenge to the party.

NDA had won all 25 seats from the state, BJP 24 and RLP 1. RLP has already deserted BJP. NDA is thus running a very high risk of losing several seats in the state. The constituencies scheduled for poll in the state are – Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Pali, Jodhpur, Barmer, Jalor, Udaipur, Banswara, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand, Bhilwara, Kota, and Jhalawar-Baran.

Another key state having high risk for BJP is Uttar Pradesh, where elections are scheduled in 7 phases. Eight constituencies of Western Uttar Pradesh will be going to poll in the second phase. These are Amroha, Meerut, Baghat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr, Aligarh and Mathura. INDIA bloc is giving tough fight to BJP in Amroha, Meerut, Baghat which BJP may find tough to retain. BJP candidates are finding tough challenges in all 26 constituencies in Western Uttar Pradesh though the state BJP leadership is exuding confidence about winning most of the seats. The Congress and SP workers at base level have been op-

erating at their optimum capacity to defeat the BJP candidates.

Karnataka and Kerala are the two states in South India, going to poll in second phase. All the seats 20 seats in Kerala would poll in this phase, where BJP and NDA may not be even able to open their account. As for Karnataka, half of the Karnataka's 28 seats would poll. BJP has very high stakes since the party had won 25 seats in 2019. BJP and JD(S) are contesting together against the ruling INC in the state.

BJP is running a very high risk of losing Gulbarga, Koppal, Bellary, while in Chikkodi, Bagalkot, Raichur, Bidar, Haveri, and Davangere the party is facing great challenge in retaining them. Only in Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwad, Uttar Kannada, and Shimoga, BJP seems to have an edge. BJP had won all these 14 seats in 2019, which seems to be in great trouble this time.

West Bengal remains most contentious state for BJP, since TMC has been offering them tough fight. Darjeeling, Raiganj, and Balurghat. Will go to polls in the second phase. If BJP found it difficult in retaining its Cooch Behar seat in the first phase, it is finding same difficulty in Raiganj and Balurghat. BJP had won Raiganj in 2019 with a margin of only 60,574 and Balurghat by a margin of only 33,293 votes. In Darjeeling, the BJP candidate is facing a party rebel, present MLA of an assembly under the Lok Sabha constituency. This rebel candidate is popular. There is every possibility that he would cut into the votes of the official BJP candidate.

BJP will thus have very tough week ahead before second phase of election on April 26. INDIA bloc seems to have an edge in this phase also, as it had an edge in the first phase chiefly on account of South Indian states – in the first phase it was Tamil Nadu, and in the second phase these are Karnataka and Kerala. (IPA Service)

Climate finance landscape: Challenges, commitments, and paths forward

By: Dipak Kurmi

The intertwining of the climate crisis with financial turmoil has become glaringly apparent. The brunt of this crisis falls heavily upon developing nations, small island states, and the least developed countries, despite their minimal contribution to the issue. These regions face recurrent onslaughts of climate-induced disasters, a stark consequence of the affluent nations' historical carbon emissions.

More than ten years ago, several affluent nations pledged to generate \$100 billion annually by 2020. This funding was designated to assist developing nations in financing climate action, transitioning away from fossil fuels, and safeguarding their populations against escalating climate-related catastrophes. This commitment was made within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). To date, the objective remains unmet as the collective efforts have fallen short of the target. In 2021, developed nations provided and mobilized a total of \$89.6 billion in climate finance for developing countries, marking a 7.6% uptick from the previous year, as outlined in the OECD's sixth assessment report issued recently.

As time progresses, the repercussions of climate inaction have surged dramatically. Projections indicate that escalating temperatures, intensified rainfall, and more frequent extreme weather events will lead to an annual destruction worth \$38 trillion by mid-century. Additionally, a recent study published in the journal Nature highlights that by 2049, the world could face a staggering 19% permanent average income loss globally due to these climate impacts. Disparities in income reduction are expected, with the United States and Europe facing an approximate 11% decrease, while Africa and South Asia may experience a significantly higher reduction of 22%, according to the report's findings.

In recent decades, the sovereign debt of low and middle-

income nations has soared, climbing to a staggering US\$ 3 trillion. Alarmingly, 93% of the 63 countries identified as most vulnerable to climate change find themselves either in a state of debt distress or at risk of it.

As the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank convene for their spring meetings in Washington, DC, mounting pressure is evident for the restructuring of debt owed by developing nations. A report released by the Debt Relief for Green and Inclusive Recovery project underscores the urgency, revealing that 47 emerging and developing countries confront the prospect of insolvency within the next five years if they intensify their efforts toward climate and development objectives.

Simon Stiell, the executive secretary of UNFCCC, highlights the immense challenge governments face in prioritizing investments in renewables or climate resilience amidst depleted treasury resources. With debt servicing surpassing health expenditures, the inability to acquire new loans, and the looming threat of poverty, the situation is dire. Experts assert that this sovereign debt crisis impedes the ability of the global south to embark on a just transition to a greener economy, emphasizing the urgent need for trillions of dollars in funding. The upcoming U.N. climate summit scheduled for November in Baku, Azerbaijan, marks a pivotal moment for nations to unite and establish a New and Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG). This financial commitment holds paramount importance as the climate pledges of numerous developing countries hinge on its provision. According to recent UN analysis, these conditional promises, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), could significantly influence the trajectory of global warming, potentially making the difference between a 2.4°C and 2.2°C increase by the century's end.

Acknowledging the glaring insufficiency of the \$100 billion benchmark, India has urged developed nations to step up

and commit a minimum of \$1 trillion annually to support developing countries as part of the negotiations for the NCQG on climate finance. These discussions are currently underway at a pivotal UNFCCC meeting in Colombia this month. India's proposal outlines a timeframe of 10 years, with distinct annual mobilization targets for each five-year period, aligning with the cycles of updating the Nationally Determined Contributions.

Climate finance can originate from either direct contributions between countries or via intermediaries such as major international financial institutions (IFIs), including multilateral development banks (MDBs) like the Asian Development Bank or the European Investment Bank. Notably, around 40% of the climate finance disbursed by developed nations has been channeled through these multilateral institutions.

Over the years, international financial institutions (IFIs) have faced criticism for falling short in addressing the magnitude of global challenges. Calls for reform of these entities have intensified, aiming to align the distributed funds more closely with climate aspirations, especially in developing nations. A recent G20 report proposed that multilateral development banks (MDBs) could substantially boost their lending by "several hundreds of billions of dollars" in the foreseeable future. Additionally, experts advocate for the alignment of MDB activities with the Paris Agreement, emphasizing the need for these institutions to gradually divest from fossil fuel infrastructure investments. The Climate Policy Initiative's recent report, "Global Landscape of Climate Finance 2023," suggests that although challenging, closing the climate funding gap is theoretically feasible. This is particularly evident when considering the vast sums allocated to global military spending, estimated at \$2.2 trillion in 2022, or the substantial \$11.7 trillion in emergency fiscal measures announced worldwide in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Bangladesh makes decisive moves against Kuki-Chin ARMED struggle

By: MA Hossain

The Bangladesh government has garnered significant experience in countering insurgency activities in the Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT). Through operations like 'Operation Dabanal' the Bangladesh Armed Forces have effectively neutralized separatist armed groups. After the peace treaty, to date, 'Operation Uttaron' has aimed to uphold law and order and improve the living standards of the Jumma people. With over two decades of such operations, the resurgence of another insurgency movement in that particular region would be a daydream if not wild dream. The Kuki Chin community, rooted in the Sino-Tibetan Bawm origin, comprises members of the same tribes who are known by different names and live in close proximity to the borders of Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India.

Their pursuit of autonomy and cultural recognition is historically grounded. Initiatives such as the Chin Hills Regulation of 1896 in Burma and agreements like the Panglong Conference Agreement of 1947 and the Mizoram Peace Accord of 1986 aimed to recognize the unique identity and autonomy of the Kuki-Chin community but remain unfulfilled. The ZO Reunification Organization's advocacy for reunifying Kuki-Chin and Mizo tribes underscores the challenges faced by displaced individuals across these regions.

The emergence of Kuki-Chin armed groups has introduced further complexity to the geopolitical landscape in this region. Global powers exploit internal grievances

and regional conflict dynamics with Kuki-Chin groups to achieve their geostrategic interests. Western powers have a keen interest in the mineral-rich "Golden Triangle" famed for this hilly range. The United States has expressed solidarity with Muslims in Arakan for an independent state. Furthermore, Christian missionaries contribute to demographic shifts in CHT and Mizoram by converting local indigenous populations to Christianity, potentially leading to demands for a Christian majority state, like the way it happened in Sudan.

Meanwhile, China employs a 'Positive Diplomacy' approach to counter the USA's 'China Containment Policy' in the Indo-Pacific region. China is exploiting the US allies and exposing USA not as a trustworthy partner to undermine US influence. China's success in the Middle East challenges US allies in Asia, compelling India, a close ally of the USA, to navigate strained situations as it finds itself almost surrounded by China's allies. India is compelled to remain a neutral nation, not tilted too much towards the US.

In the end, the Kuki-Chin are fighting against the Indian government, demanding autonomy in Myanmar, and exerting soft pressure on the government of Bangladesh. Therefore, it is quite understandable which external actors are behind the Kuki-Chin National Front. The Bangladesh Armed Forces have gained global recognition for their peace-building and peace-enforcing efforts under the UN umbrella. It is crucial to recognize the Kuki-Chin movement as an political threat. Relying solely on military action

is unlikely to yield fruitful results and may instead entrap security forces in the intentions of insurgents. This challenge requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing diplomatic efforts, political initiatives, and military strategies, to effectively mitigate the escalation of such extremist activities. Compared to the neighbouring states in the region, Bangladesh faces relatively lesser threats from this community. Therefore, the government's diplomatic endeavours need to be intensified to ensure the safety and security of the Kuki-Chin community within the country. It is imperative for our diplomatic efforts to ensure that no other nation provides patronage, harbours, or funds Kuki-Chin terrorist groups.

The executive and legislative administrations in Chattogram need to forge close collaborations with the less developed indigenous tribes in their respective areas. They can propose special development projects to the government, where Bangladesh Army can extend its capabilities to play a pivotal role in implementing those initiatives. Reports indicate that the Bangladesh Army's Engineering Corps is actively enhancing communication systems in the region.

To further bolster development efforts, the government should seek increased funding from foreign investment partners, focusing on areas such as education, communication, and tourism. This approach will create more job opportunities for locals, contributing to socio-economic uplift.

Local administration and security forces must instill confidence within the less devel-

oped indigenous tribes. Continuation of military operations to apprehend wrongdoers is essential. However, given the complexity of military operations in CHT due to limited intelligence, a comprehensive and intelligence-driven approach, in tandem with political manoeuvre, can yield positive outcomes. Collaboration between Bangladesh's intelligence agencies and their counterparts in neighbouring countries is imperative to counter this political threat. The Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) has conveyed their demand to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, clearly stating that they don't seek independence but autonomy. Thus, it's a purely political movement, not a separatist one. Therefore, the government and state machinery must handle the situation with utmost care to prevent it from escalating into a separatist movement.

Efforts should be led by political leaders to integrate Kuki-Chin people into mainstream national politics, thereby abandoning armed conflict. It is also necessary to ensure that no local politician has the opportunity to exploit Kuki-Chin terrorist groups for mere political gain. Only criminals and terrorists should be dealt with using extreme force. Drawing upon its expertise in peacekeeping and counterinsurgency operations, the Bangladesh Army should adopt a multifaceted approach, combining military action with diplomatic engagement and fostering political dialogue with aggrieved ethnic groups. Regional leaders must act decisively to prevent destabilization of regional stability before it escalates further. (IPA Service)

Mine but not really mine: Why ‘owning’ digital items doesn’t feel the same

By: Rebecca Mardon

Our possessions – the things we view as “mine” – play an important role in our lives. Beyond their functionality, they can serve as poignant reminders of cherished memories. They can symbolise not only who we are, but also who we used to be, and who we aspire to become.

From faded photo albums to treasured jewellery passed down through generations, each possession has a tale to tell. But how do our relationships with our possessions differ when they only exist digitally?

Our music, films, books and photographs are increasingly accessed via digital platforms rather than stored on our shelves. Do these digital items really feel like “mine” in the same way that physical possessions do? And can they become as personally meaningful?

I interviewed 25 people multiple times over seven years, tracing their evolving relationships with their digital possessions. My research found that people often experience a weaker sense of ownership over their digital possessions and perceive them as less meaningful than their physical counterparts.

Woven through my participants’ stories were narratives of disappointment – their digital possessions frequently failed to meet their expectations. Here are three key ways these possessions can disappoint us:

1. Restrictions

We develop a sense of ownership over objects by exerting control over them, whether through simple tasks like cleaning our car and organising our bookshelves, or more intentional customisation. However, unexpected restrictions can reduce our sense of control over our digital possessions.

My participants encountered restrictions on how digital items could be customised and displayed, and on whether items could be passed on to or shared with their loved ones. For instance, while music-lover Eve could freely arrange her vinyl records, her digital music organisation was restricted by iTunes’ display options:

My digital music is ... kind of mine, kind of not [...] I don’t feel ownership to the same extent as my records. I

haven’t been able to put my stamp on the collection in the same way, everything’s just automated and generic. iTunes organises it, not me. So, it doesn’t feel as personal ... it doesn’t feel mine in the same way.

The rigid structure imposed by the platform left Eve feeling frustrated, and diminished her sense of ownership.

Instability

Possessions are often valued for their enduring nature, which allows them to serve as repositories of memories and meaning.

My participants often assumed that their digital possessions would mirror the stability of their tangible possessions. However, companies frequently retain the power to modify or delete digital items, rendering our digital possessions unstable.

For instance, David became frustrated when the covers of his Kindle ebooks were unexpectedly replaced with new versions reflecting recent TV or film adaptations: How do you stop Kindle from updating the covers? They don’t need you to give them access, because they gave themselves access to all of your possessions the second you signed up ... and if they can change the covers, it makes you worry about what else they’re able to do, whether one day they’ll just disappear altogether.

David is right to be concerned. Amazon famously came under fire for remotely deleting copies of ebooks from users’ Kindle devices. More recently, in December 2023, PlayStation users were shocked to learn of the company’s plans to delete purchased TV shows from their libraries, though the move was later reversed due to backlash.

Such incidents highlight the instability of digital possessions, leaving users wary of forming deep attachments.

Invisibility

Participants yearned for the types of serendipitous encounters prompted by their physical possessions, lamenting their digital possessions’ inability to evoke unexpected moments of reminiscence. Their digital content was often largely invisible when not in use – hidden within devices and easily forgotten.

Alice observed that the physical books on her shelves unexpectedly caught her eye, evoking fond memories. In contrast, her ebooks lacked

visibility and were therefore unable to remind her of the important moments they were associated with:

They’re just not “there” like my other books are. They’re, like, in the depths of my Kindle, hidden away ... They don’t remind you they’re there in the same way that [physical] books do. When I’ve finished a book on the Kindle, it’s just archived and discarded, and I doubt that I’d look at it again.

Alice refused to let the memories associated with her favourite stories fade. Instead, whenever an ebook developed special significance, she purchased a physical copy to display prominently on her bookshelves, where it could attract her attention and prompt unexpected nostalgia.

Avoiding disappointment

My research revealed that digital possessions often fail to provide the control, stability and visibility that we have come to expect from our possessions. This can prompt us to lower our expectations, to avoid future disappointment.

My participants frequently resolved that digital products would never be truly “mine” and couldn’t develop the personal significance of their physical counterparts. Many consciously distanced themselves from these items, avoiding strong attachments. Others, like Alice, turned to physical items to replace or complement their digital possessions. This may explain, in part, the resurgence of analogue formats, such as vinyl records.

However, while our digital possessions often fall short, many of us yearn to establish a deeper sense of ownership over these items and to forge more meaningful connections with them. Through thoughtful design, companies can transform digital possessions from sources of disappointment to sources of delight. For instance, limiting unnecessary updates can increase stability, making us less anxious about becoming attached to digital items.

Facilitating the types of transfers consumers are accustomed to in the offline realm (for instance, allowing users to pass on a finished ebook to a friend) can enhance users’ sense of control. And giving digital objects greater visibility through enduring displays and push notifications can enable them to prompt the unexpected moments of reminiscence that people miss in the digital realm. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

How can parents safely introduce their children to news and current affairs?

By: Elise Waghorn

While much attention has been drawn to the detrimental impact of violent video games on children’s developing brains, there has been relatively little discussion regarding the negative effects of news and current affairs programs children are exposed to.

When people consume news and current affairs, it’s hard to escape tragic events, from natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and events that include loss of human life. But do we stop to consider what distressing media is doing to our kids?

How children are impacted

Research undertaken by the Audience Research Department of the Netherlands Broadcasting Corporation found young children who are exposed to news and current affairs programs can be impacted so much that they start viewing the world as a scarier place. Research was undertaken through random telephone interviews with 537 Dutch children, with 48.2% of respondents stating they a fear reaction to watching adult news.

The study found children aged between 7-12 were most afraid of interpersonal violence and natural disasters such as fires, accidents and other disasters. Researchers from the study even found children’s symptoms are like a trauma response – including intruding thoughts (memories that pop into a child’s head, nightmares, repeated discussion around events), avoidance (refusal to talk about news events, or to participate in school activities) and changes to arousal and reactivity (increased irritability and anger outbursts, difficulties in concentrating).

Even subtle exposure needs to be monitored

Even when children are playing in the background, if adults have the news on, children can be listening in.

Children under the age of seven might not understand the content, which can cause confusion, therefore raising worry and anxiety. This is because children under the age of seven do not have

the brain function to mentally manipulate information, and can’t see things from another point of view. Older teens, meanwhile, generally gain much of their news content from the internet and social media, meaning some parents are not aware of how much, or what, they are exposed to. However, due to their age, they are able to have a greater understanding of different perspectives.

Getting the balance right

According to psychological therapist Annie Gurton, different age groups require different strategies when it comes to consuming news and current affairs:

1. children under the age of seven may perceive televised events as live occurrences, leading them to believe traumatic incidents are recurring when they see repeated broadcasts. They are likely to be greatly disturbed by images depicting suffering, crying, or violence

2. between 7-12, children tend to grasp that news reports convey events that have already taken place. They are increasingly capable of empathising with victims, and may get anxious about the safety of themselves and their family when encountering distressing stories

3. teenagers aged 13 and older tend to exhibit heightened emotional responses to distressing events, often experiencing fear and deep concern for their and their family’s safety. They may project such events into the future and worry about potential risks.

However, they are also capable of reasoning and understanding statistical explanations, which can provide reassurance and alleviate their anxieties.

There is no magic timeframe for parents to introduce their children to news and current affairs, however it is important that we consider not just the age, but the maturity and understanding levels of the individual child.

However, we do know it’s important for children to take a break from the coverage. Setting a viewing limit of 30-60 minutes before encouraging children to get up and do something else is impor-

tant.

Chat about it
A perfect opportunity to support children to know more about the world, without exposing them to the potential downside of the news, is to teach them about why you need to censor their viewing.

This can help teach children to regulate their emotions, by expressing themselves when they see things that are upsetting. This might include empathising with young children under the age of seven by saying something like: “I know you really want to watch the news, but some media can report events that are not safe for you to hear.”
For an older child, it could be: “I am happy for you to watch the ‘good news’ stories but other events that are televised we need to watch together.” The Raising Children Network has some fantastic tips for parents of school-age children when it comes to distressing news events:

1. **turn off and take a break** – this might mean allowing families 30 minutes to catch up on the main headlines, but then getting up and doing something else

2. **age-appropriate information** – children will cope better if they have age-appropriate information given to them. For example, during fire season, you might talk to your children about how due to the extreme heat, the ground gets very dry, resulting in an increase of fires. This is why we have total fire ban days to reduce that risk.

3. **talk to your children** – explain, at an age-appropriate level, what they have watched and allow for open communication about what has happened. Allow them to ask questions and reflect

4. **monitor your children’s reactions to the news** – ask them how they’re feeling and share how you’re feeling.

A great first step into the world of news and current affairs for children is programs like the ABC’s “Behind The News”, as parents and kids can watch together and discuss afterwards. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Has Shark Tank India changed India’s attitude towards startups?

By: Varun

India’s startup ecosystem has experienced a remarkable evolution over the past decade, witnessing a surge in entrepreneurial activity and technological innovation. This growth has been fuelled by various factors, including increased access to capital, supportive government policies, and a shift in societal attitudes towards entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, the recent introduction of Shark Tank India has added another dimension to the startup landscape, providing aspiring entrepreneurs with a platform to showcase their ideas and attract investment. In this blog, we’ll delve into the influence of Shark Tank India on India’s startup culture, comparing it with the past and present landscape.

The past: Challenges and beginnings

In the past, India’s startup ecosystem faced numerous challenges, including bureaucratic hurdles, limited access to funding, and a lack of support infrastructure. Despite these obstacles, a few pioneering startups

emerged, laying the groundwork for future innovation and entrepreneurship in the country. However, the startup ecosystem was still nascent, with few success stories to inspire aspiring entrepreneurs.

The present: A flourishing ecosystem

Fast forward to the present day, and India’s startup landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. With the emergence of technology-enabled startups across various sectors, India has established itself as one of the world’s most dynamic hubs for innovation. Access to capital has improved significantly, with record levels of funding being poured into startups, and supportive government initiatives like Startup India on India’s startup culture, comparing it with the past and present landscape.

The impact of Shark Tank India
Shark Tank India, the Indian adaptation of the globally acclaimed reality show, has emerged as a game-changer in the startup ecosystem. The show provides aspiring entrepreneurs with a unique opportunity to pitch their business ideas to a panel of seasoned in-

vestors, known as “sharks,” in hopes of securing investment to scale their ventures. The influence of Shark Tank India on India’s startup culture can be observed in several ways:

Visibility and Exposure: Shark Tank India has provided unprecedented visibility and exposure to startups, allowing them to showcase their ideas to a nationwide audience. This exposure not only helps startups attract investment but also serves as a marketing platform, raising awareness about their products or services.

1. **Validation of Ideas:** Being selected to pitch on Shark Tank India serves as validation for entrepreneurs and their ideas. The endorsement from seasoned investors adds credibility to startups, making it easier for them to attract further investment and partnerships outside the show.

2. **Education and Learning:** Shark Tank India offers valuable lessons in entrepreneurship for both participants and viewers. Through the feedback and insights provided by the sharks, aspiring entrepreneurs gain valuable knowledge about

pitching, negotiation, and business strategy, which can be applied to their own ventures.

3. **Catalyst for Growth:** Securing investment on Shark Tank India can be a significant catalyst for the growth of startups. The infusion of capital enables startups to scale their operations, expand their reach, and accelerate their growth trajectory, turning their entrepreneurial dreams into reality.

In conclusion, Shark Tank India has emerged as a powerful catalyst for India’s startup culture, providing a platform for aspiring entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into successful ventures. By combining entertainment with entrepreneurship, the show has inspired a new generation of innovators and further fuelled the growth of India’s vibrant startup ecosystem.

As India continues on its journey towards becoming a global powerhouse in innovation and technology, initiatives like Shark Tank India will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in shaping the future of entrepreneurship in the country. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Medical myths: All about allergies

By: Tim Newman

In brief, an allergy is an unusual or exaggerated immune response triggered by a particular substance. Symptoms often include itchy eyes, wheezing, and sneezing. For many people, allergic reactions are uncomfortable and unpleasant, but they can be life threatening for others.

According to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), up to 60 million people in the United States experience allergies each year.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 20% of people worldwide have an allergic condition.

One of the most common allergies – hay fever – affected an estimated 19.2 million adults in the U.S. during 2018, and this figure is likely to rise.

“Allergies are currently on the rise in the U.S.,” explained Dr. Omid Mehdizadeh, an otolaryngologist and laryngologist at Providence Saint John’s Health Center in Santa Monica, CA.

He told Medical News Today that “scientists believe the increasing prevalence of environmental allergies is due to changing weather patterns and increasing pollen blooms in the U.S.”

Considering their prevalence, understanding and dismissing the myths associated with allergies is an important task. Here, we tackle 11 such myths.

1. Allergies only develop in children

One persistent myth is that once you reach adulthood, you don’t develop any more allergies. This is untrue.

One study, for instance,

looked at the prevalence of food allergies in 40,443 adults in the U.S. At the time of the survey, 10.8% of participants had a food allergy.

The authors found that in around half of these individuals with food allergies, at least one of these food allergies developed during adulthood.

2. There are no treatments for allergies

In general, the best way to minimize allergic reactions is to avoid triggers, whether a particular food or a type of animal. There are no cures for allergies.

However, certain treatments can effectively reduce the symptoms. For instance, decongestants can relieve the nasal symptoms of allergies, while antihistamines and nasal steroid sprays can also be effective.

Additionally, allergy immunotherapy can help reduce allergies. The American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology states:

“Immunotherapy involves giving gradually increasing doses of the substance, or allergen, to which the person is allergic. The incremental increases of the allergen cause the immune system to become less sensitive to the substance, probably by causing production of a ‘blocking’ antibody, which reduces the symptoms of allergy when the substance is encountered in the future.”

3. Food allergies and food intolerances are the same

This is not true: food allergies and food intolerances are different. When someone experiences a food allergy, it is driven by their immune system, usually associated with the action of Immunoglobulin E (IgE).

During an IgE-mediated im-



mune response, IgE binds to receptors on specific cells, including mast cells and basophils. These cells then produce histamine and other compounds, causing symptoms to appear very rapidly.

On the other hand, intolerances do not involve the immune system, and symptoms take longer to appear. And while intolerances are not life threatening, food allergies can be in some cases.

4. Allergies are for life
Thankfully, this is a myth. Although some allergies do persist for life, as Dr. Mehdizadeh told MNT, “Some allergies may simply dissipate with age.”

Whether an allergy diminishes over time can depend on the allergen. The authors of a review on food allergies explain: “Although most children ‘outgrow’ allergies to milk, egg, soy, and wheat, allergies to peanut, tree nuts, fish, and shellfish are often lifelong.”

5. Peanut allergies are the most serious

Although peanut allergies are common – affecting an estimated 6.1 million people in the U.S. – and can certainly be

dangerous, there is no way to rank allergy severity. Some individuals might have only a mild reaction to peanuts but, for others, it could spark anaphylaxis.

Although certain foods, such as tree nuts, shellfish, and eggs, account for most allergies, virtually any food can trigger a reaction. The severity of the reaction depends on an individual’s immune system.

6. Colds and allergies are the same

Although colds and allergies can share certain symptoms, including a blocked nose and runny eyes, they are different. Symptoms of a cold are caused by an immune response to viruses, while allergies are an immune response to an allergen.

Another important difference is that colds tend to last around 1–2 weeks, whereas allergies can, in some cases, last a lifetime.

7. Short-haired cats and dogs don’t trigger allergies

This is not true. For some people, certain breeds may be less likely to trigger allergies but there are no hard and fast rules. Allergies are not triggered by an animal’s hair – they are set

off by dead skin cells (dander), saliva, and urine.

Additionally, as the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI) explains, “pet hair or fur can collect pollen, mold spores, and other outdoor allergens.”

8. Hypoallergenic breeds

Many people believe that certain cat and dog breeds are “hypoallergenic,” meaning they do not trigger allergies. However, this is a myth. As the AAAAI explains: “Contrary to popular opinion, there are no truly ‘hypoallergenic breeds’ of dogs or cats. Allergic dander in cats and dogs is not affected by length of hair or fur, nor by the amount of shedding.”

9. Continuous exposure to animals reduces allergies

There is a common theory that if someone with an animal allergy spends time with that type of animal, the allergy will slowly improve. But this is not the case. In fact, some pet owners can gradually become allergic to their pets over time.

Dr. Mehdizadeh explained to MNT:

“Once the immune system is

primed or sensitized to an allergen, for instance, a pet, an individual remains allergic if they are exposed to high amounts of pet hair or dander.

The idea of immunotherapy or ‘allergy shots’ and desensitization only work under the guidance of an allergist, and when exposed to an allergen in small and gradually increasing amounts.”

A related point, outlined by the authors of a paper on pet allergies, is that “early introduction of pets at home may reduce the likelihood of developing” an allergy in the first place.

In other words, if pets are brought into a home when children are young, they may be less likely to develop allergies to those animals as they age.

10. Allergies aren’t serious

Thankfully, for many people, allergies are uncomfortable and inconvenient but not dangerous. However, for some individuals, an allergic reaction can culminate in anaphylaxis.

Anaphylaxis is a severe and, in some cases, life threatening allergic reaction. During this event, a large amount of histamine is released into the body, causing an inflammatory response.

Symptoms can include difficulty breathing, wheezing, stomach pain and cramps, diarrhea, anxiety, swelling of the feet, hands, lips, eyes, and sometimes the genitals, and loss of consciousness.

Even allergies that might be considered relatively minor, such as seasonal allergies, can cause significant issues. Hay fever can result in reduced quality sleep and, therefore, daytime sleepiness.

In turn, this can make it more

difficult to focus at work, increasing the risk of absenteeism or workplace accidents.

One 2012 study investigated the impact of hay fever on the “health-related quality of life” of 616 participants. They concluded that hay fever “impairs work productivity in a greater magnitude” than hypertension and type 2 diabetes.

Another study from 2009 investigated the broader effects of seasonal allergy, concluding that hay fever “has a significant negative impact on sexual function and can result in sleep disturbances and fatigue.”

11. Flowers cause hay fever

Perhaps surprisingly, this is a myth. Hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, is caused by airborne pollen.

Flowers tend to produce large, sticky pollen, which does not fly through the air easily — flowers are designed to attract insects and fasten pollen to their bodies rather than release it into the air.

The major causes of hay fever are lighter pollen from grasses and trees.

Summary

Allergies are surprisingly common, and they vary from relatively minor to life threatening. It may be because of this prevalence and variety that so many myths are associated with them.

Their counterintuitive nature might also play a part — after all, why should one’s immune system react to a peanut or a peach?

Although there is still no cure for allergies, scientists continue their voyage of discovery. One day, they will surely find a way to blunt their impact on the world’s populations. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Maldivian Prez Muizzu's pro-China party secures 'super majority' in parl polls

Provisional results have shown that only three women candidates secured seats out of the 93 constituencies in the 20th People's Majlis

MALE, April 22: Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's party won 71 seats and secured a "super majority" in parliamentary elections, preliminary results suggested on Monday, a victory seen as a strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the archipelago nation.

Muizzu-led People's National Congress (PNC) won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively, which is more than two-thirds of the Parliament, landing the party an easy supermajority with the power to amend the Constitution.

Local media, which has described his party's win as a "super-majority", said the PNC is set to celebrate its landslide victory here on an artificial beach on Monday night.

The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by former president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as a pro-India leader, held 65 seats in the previous parliament but won only 15 seats this time, Mihanaru, a news website, reported. Muizzu, 45, known for his pro-

China leanings, has said that he wants to reduce India's influence in his country.

In the 2019 elections, the then-ruling MDP won a super majority in Parliament, with 64 seats while the then-opposition PPM-PNC coalition won just eight.

The Democrats, as well as Adhaalath Party, failed to win any seats at all.

A total of 368 candidates were in the fray, including 130 independent candidates, 10 candidates from Jumhoory Party (JP), 39 from The Democrats, Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) 4, Adhaalath Party (AP) 4, and Maldives National Party (MNP) 2 nominees in the parliamentary election in Maldives, which has a strategic location in the Indian Ocean.

About 40 in numbers -- 10.76 per cent -- of the candidates were women.

Provisional results have shown that only three women candidates secured seats out of the 93 constituencies in the 20th People's Majlis.

Fathimath Saudha from the ruling PNC won the Faafu Nilandhoo constituency, Asma Rasheed from the PNC won the Maafanu Medhu constituency, and Anara Naem, an independent candidate, won the Kaafu Huraa constituency.



Saudha is a family member of Muizzu. Asma and Anara have previously served as MPs in the 18th People's Majlis.

With about 75 per cent of the eligible voters casting their ballots, Sunday's election saw a record-low voter turnout, provisional results suggested.

A total of 284,663 people were eligible to vote, but only 215,860 exercised their franchise.

The turnout was 81.32 per cent in the 2019 parliamentary elections, with 215,053 out of 264,446 eligible voters coming to vote.

PNC Chairperson and Special

Advisor to the President Abdul Raheem Abdulla said the results showed that Maldivians did not want the country to be driven into political unrest again.

Raheem said the reason for PNC's super majority in Parliament was the solid policies put forth by Muizzu.

Raheem, who won the Fonadhoo constituency seat, said his win showed that Maldivians had paved the path for Muizzu to fulfil the targets of his presidency.

"The people have proved that they will not leave the country forever at the mercy of political

squabbles, and challenges," he said.

Raheem said Maldivians had learned over the past five months that President Muizzu is a leader who will not forget the pledges he makes.

"The people have immense trust in President Muizzu," he said.

Regarding MDP's loss, Raheem said the party failed to show tangible results despite winning the presidency twice.

Meanwhile, main opposition MDP in a statement said despite their loss in Sunday's parliamentary election, they will remain steadfast in their role of holding the government accountable and ensuring that democratic principles are upheld.

Congratulating the winning candidates, the party called on them to uphold democratic values and work for the people's benefit.

"As one of the key responsibilities of parliamentarians is to hold the government accountable, this party is confident that all who won [yesterday's] election will work to do so without hesitation," the statement read.

Fayyaz Ismail, the opposition MDP Chairperson, congratulated the PNC for Sunday's success in parliamentary elections in a post on X: "Whilst today's result is dis-

appointing this is a moment to reaffirm our commitment and work even closer with our communities."

"MDP's MPs will be ready to work with the government for the betterment of our democratic values and to hold it accountable as a responsible opposition," the former economic minister said.

MDP President and former foreign minister Abdulla Shahid said the party's MPs "will uphold the responsibility entrusted to you with utmost determination".

"We may not win every time. But today we can hold our heads high, and be proud of the work we did," Shahid added.

The ruling coalition -- PNC and Progressive Party of Maldives -- said it will invite all Maldivian citizens to the ceremony it will host here on the Henveiru Artificial Beach on Monday to celebrate their indisputable win in the parliamentary election.

The PNC said a special event named "Welcome - to the People's Nation's Majlis" will be held on Monday night for the people to commemorate and express their gratitude for the win.

The election in the Maldives also came amidst deteriorating ties between the archipelago nation and India since Muizzu, 45, as-

sumed power in November last year. During last year's presidential election, he had maintained a strident anti-India stand.

While India was forced to withdraw most of its military personnel manning three aviation platforms in the country, Muizzu travelled to China in January and met top Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping.

China and the Maldives also signed a defence cooperation agreement and several other infrastructure development projects.

The Maldives, India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), occupies a special place in its initiatives like "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the "Neighbourhood First Policy" of the Indian government.

On the other hand, China is expanding its footprints in IOR through its 'debt trap' diplomacy and 'String of Pearls' approach, a strategic initiative to create a network of military and commercial establishments in countries falling on the Indian Ocean.

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

Pakistan's ruling PML-N win majority of seats in by-elections for national and provincial assemblies

ISLAMABAD, April 22: The ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) got the lion's share in the key by-elections by winning at least two National and 10 provincial assembly seats, according to the unofficial results on Monday.

By-elections were held on Sunday on 21 National and provincial assembly seats amidst tight security and suspension of cellular and internet services in specific districts of Punjab and Balochistan to maintain law and order.

Two seats each of the National Assembly in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and one seat in Sindh, while twelve seats of the Punjab Assembly and two each of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan assemblies were up for grabs.

Major political parties including the PML-N, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed Sunni Itehad Council (SIC) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) participated in the by-polls. However, Jamiat



Ulema-e-Islam Fazl of Maulana Fazlur Rehman boycotted the polls.

The Election Committee of Pakistan (ECP) has yet to issue the final results but private media channels shared the outcome based on the results of individual polling stations.

According to the Dunya News channel, the PML-N won two National Assembly seats while one each was grabbed by PPP, SIC and

porter of the PML-N was killed after a clash with PTI voters in the Narowal area of Punjab. However, overall law and order was kept under control.

Earlier, the general elections were held across the country on February 8 to elect representatives for the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies. But polls were cancelled for one National Assembly, two Punjab Assembly and one seat of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly respectively.

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. He, however, retained his NA-123 seat in the National Assembly.

Apart from these leaders, candidates who had won more than one seat opted for a chosen seat after the elections, leaving the Election Commission of Pakistan to organ-

ise by-elections on 21 seats, including five National and 16 provincial assembly seats.

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

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) issued a statement, saying that the decision has been taken to safeguard the integrity and security of the electoral process.

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

The Punjab government had also asked the federal government to suspend mobile internet services in the province's 13 districts and tehsils on April 21 to maintain law and order. (PTI)

First illegal migrants' flight to take off for Rwanda in 10-12 weeks: UK PM Sunak



LONDON, April 22: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday announced that the first flight with illegal migrants will take off for Rwanda in 10 to 12 weeks "come what may" and claimed that all the preparation has been made for the process once the long-delayed legislation passes through Parliament.

Stressing that he would not be giving out "sensitive operational detail" during a Downing Street briefing, the British Indian leader revealed that chartered commercial flights have been booked, an airfield has been identified and hundreds of escort officials trained to fly out the first set of migrants to Kigali while their asylum claims are processed.

The press conference came as the government said Parliament will be sitting overnight on Monday for as long as it takes for the controversial Safety of Rwanda Bill to pass through all its stages to become law. The bill, which seeks to prevent legal challenges by declaring Rwanda a safe country in law, has faced hurdles due to the House of Lords demanding amendments -- something Sunak blamed on the Opposition Labour Party.

"No ifs, no buts, these flights are going to Rwanda," Sunak told reporters.

"The first flight will leave in 10 to 12 weeks. Of course, that is later than we wanted but we have always been clear that processing will take time and if Labour peers had not spent weeks holding up the Bill in the House of Lords to try to block these flights altogether we would have begun this process weeks ago," he said.

"I can confirm that we have put an airfield on standby, booked commercial charter planes for specific slots and we have 500 highly trained individuals ready to escort illegal migrants all the way to Rwanda with 300 more trained in the coming weeks. We are ready. Plans are in place. And these flights will go come what may. No foreign court will stop us from getting flights off," Sunak added.

After the first flight takes off, Sunak said he expects a "steady rhythm" of such journeys over the course of the following months to meet his pledge for the policy to act as a deterrent and "stop the boats" of illegal migrants landing on the country's shores.

"The priority is being able to deliver a regular rhythm, a drum beat of multiple flights a month over the summer and beyond because that is how you build a systematic deterrent and that is how you will stop the boats," said Sunak.

Asked if the UK would consider leaving the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) if the European court attempts to block such flights, Sunak did not rule out the possibility: "Now is the time for the flights to go and I am not going to let a foreign court, given all of that, block us from getting flights up and this deterrent up and running."

The press conference followed his meeting with the government's Illegal Migration Operations Committee, which is to operationalise the government's flagship policy of cracking down on illegal migration ahead of a general election expected in the second half of the year. (PTI)

Iranian Prez Raisi and Pak PM Sharif agree on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism months after tit-for-tat air strikes

ISLAMABAD, April 22: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi Monday agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism as they discussed ways to promote cooperation between their countries, months after the two neighbours carried out tit-for-tat air strikes against alleged terrorist hide-outs on rival lands.

Raisi, the first head of state of any country to visit Pakistan after the February 8 general elections, was welcomed by PM Sharif at the Prime Minister House where the Iranian leader inspected the Guard of Honour. During their talks, President Raisi and Prime Minister Sharif agreed on joint efforts to eradicate terrorism, state-run Radio Pakistan reported. It added that the two leaders also held discussions to increase trade and communication links between their countries. Addressing a joint press conference, Iranian President Raisi said that the existing bilateral trade volume was "not acceptable" and added that Iran and Pakistan have decided to increase the trade volume to USD 10 billion. "We are committed to strengthening relations at high levels...Economic and trade volume between Iran and Pakistan is not acceptable. We have decided as a first step to increase trade volume between our two countries to \$10bn," Raisi said.

On his part, Sharif called for strengthening Pak-Iran ties despite challenges. "We have to keep this relationship strong despite the challenges we both face," he said. Sharif said he had detailed discussions with President Raisi on "religious, cultural, diplomatic, investment, and security matters" during their meeting. He described Raisi as an "ocean of political intelligence and wisdom", and said Iran would progress further under his leadership. "Pakistan and Iran can prosper and our borders can see progress," Sharif said, expressing

hope that the shared border can adapt for trade and business.

He expressed hope for the relationship between the neighbours to be "firm and stable", noting that today was an opportunity to "make this friendship a happy and prosperous one".

Prime Minister Sharif and President Raisi planted a tree on the lawn of the Prime Minister House as the world marked Earth Day on Monday. Sharif was quoted as saying that the entire nation welcomed the Iranian president's visit while Raisi expressed gratitude to the premier for the warm welcome accorded to him. Radio Pakistan reported, Raisi, who arrived in Pakistan on a three-day official visit to promote cooperation, was accorded a warm welcome at the Islamabad Airport and was received by Housing Minister Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada and Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran Mudassar Tipu, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on social media platform X. The Iranian president is accompanied by his spouse and a high-level delegation comprising the foreign minister and other members of the Cabinet and senior officials, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. Soon after Raisi's arrival, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar called on the Iranian president in Islamabad, where they discussed bilateral relations as well as regional and global developments, Radio Pakistan reported.

Raisi and Dar "emphasised the importance of enhanced efforts to further consolidate bilateral relations in diverse fields", it said, adding that they also "affirmed commitment to peace and constructive dialogue for resolving regional challenges". President Raisi has an extensive programme in Pakistan and is scheduled to meet President Asif Ali Zardari, Senate Chairman Yusuf Raza Gilani and Speaker of the National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq. (PTI)

Israeli Military Intelligence Chief resigns over Hamas attack, calls for probe

JERUSALEM, April 22: Israel's Military Intelligence chief Major General Aharon Haliva resigned on Monday, taking responsibility for his unit's failures during the unprecedented October 7 Hamas attacks on the Jewish state. Haliva is the first General of the Israeli army's general staff to leave his position due to the failures that led to the massive attack by the Palestinian militant organisation Hamas and the subsequent war in Gaza.

In his resignation letter written in Hebrew, Haliva said, "The Intelligence Division did not live up to the task we were entrusted with. Throughout my duties, I knew that alongside authority comes heavy responsibility."

The General said he would like to "take responsibility" for what happened on October 7 and promised to do his best to complete as many of the war's goals as possible.

Haliva also called for the establishment of a state investigative committee, "that can probe and find out in a thorough, in-depth, comprehensive and precise manner all the factors and circumstances that led to the difficult events". At the same time, Haliva in the letter expressed his high appreciation for the performance of the Military Intelligence Directorate's personnel in the war.

Confirming Haliva's resignation, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in a statement said, "In a decision with the Chief of Staff and with the approval of the Minister of Defence, Major General Aharon Haliva will conclude his role and retire from the IDF after appointing a successor through an orderly and professional process."

"The Chief of Staff thanked Major General Aharon Haliva for his service over 38 years in the IDF, during which he contributed significantly as a fighter and commander for the security of the state," it said.

Meanwhile, reacting to the MI Chief's resignation, Opposition Yesh Atid Party member, Vladimir Beliak, in a post on X demanded the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"The IDF Intelligence Directorate head was wise to resign. A state inquiry committee must be established without delay. The Prime Minister must resign immediately, regardless of the establishment of a state inquiry committee," he wrote.

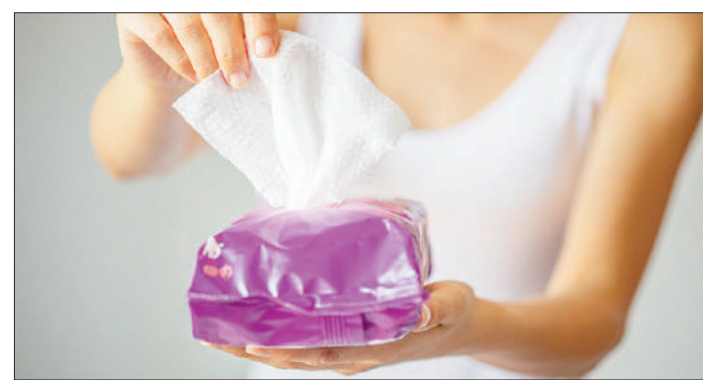
While several senior officials have accepted responsibility for the failures of October 7 in which about 1,200 Israelis were killed in the terror attack launched by Hamas in Israeli territory and close to 250 people taken hostages, Netanyahu has evaded responsibility, often avoiding a direct answer to such questions raised by scribes. Quoting a survey by Israel Democracy Institute, The Times of Israel newspaper in a report on Monday said that 62 per cent of Israelis, both Jewish and Arab, believe it is time for those responsible for the failures of October 7 to resign from their positions. Technology and intelligence, two of the strong pillars of the Israeli security apparatus, collapsed in the crucial test on October 7 and many around the globe have questioned the much-publicised image enjoyed by the Jewish state in these two fields, the report said. (PTI)

Wet wipes containing plastic to be banned from sale in UK

LONDON, April 22: Wet wipes containing plastic will be banned from being sold in the UK following legislation to be tabled in Parliament soon, the British government announced on Monday, as the world marked as Earth Day.

UK Environment Secretary Steve Barclay said the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will table the legislation for England before Parliament's summer recess in July. The devolved regions of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are expected to follow on with their legislation later in the year to make it a UK-wide ban as part of an aligned approach.

"Wet wipes containing plastic are polluting our waterways and causing microplastics to enter the environment," said Barclay. "DEFRA will introduce legislation before the summer recess to crack down on this unnecessary source of pollution, following our successful single-use carrier bag



charge and ban on microbeads in personal care products... Plastic-free wet wipes are readily available, and several retailers have already stopped selling wet wipes containing plastic," he said. The minister said it was part of a "step change" needed to protect the country's waterways from pollution.

"The ban builds on a raft of actions already taken to protect our waterways and hold water companies accountable -- including accel-

erating investment, putting water company fines back into the environment and quadrupling the number of inspections of water company sites," he added.

According to DEFRA's Beach Litter Monitoring Data for 2015-2020, an average of 20 wet wipes were found per 100 metres of beach surveyed across the UK.

Once in the water environment, wet wipes containing plastic can accumulate biological and chemical pollutants, increasing the risk

of harm to the animals and humans who encounter them. Banning them is expected to reduce plastic and microplastic pollution and reduce the volume of microplastics entering wastewater treatment sites when wrongly flushed.

The ban follows a public consultation on the issue, which showed overwhelming support for such a move. The law will be introduced via secondary legislation under the UK's Environmental Protection Act 1990, with 95 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposals.

An 18-month transition period will start from when legislation is passed to allow businesses time to prepare. Following consultation with industry, the ban will not include the manufacture of these products, in line with other recent single-use plastic bans.

"Boots removed all wet wipes containing plastic from sale in stores and online last year as part of our long-standing commitment to sustainability and working with suppliers and customers to reduce the use of plastic," said Steve Ager, Chief Customer and Commercial Officer at Boots, one of the UK's largest retailers of such products.

"We are pleased to see the government now taking action as a ban on all wet wipes containing plastic will have a much bigger impact than retailers taking action alone," Ager said.

The government said it will continue to encourage manufacturers to move to a position where all their wet wipes are plastic-free.

Some exemptions will be factored in to ensure that wet wipes containing plastic remain available where there is no viable alternative -- such as for medical disinfectant purposes. DEFRA said it will review the need for these exemptions regularly.

Earth Day is an annual event held on April 22 to demonstrate support for environmental protection. (PTI)

ECI orders repoll in 8 polling stations in Arunachal

76.44 per cent of the total 8,92,694 voters exercised their franchise on April 19

ITANAGAR, April 22: Election Commission of India has ordered repolling in eight polling stations in Arunachal Pradesh where EVM damage and violence were reported during polling to simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls on April 19, an official said.

The Commission in an order on Sunday declared the polling in the eight polling stations as void and ordered fresh polling on April 24 from 6 am to 2 pm, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Liken Koyu said in a communique.

The polling stations where repoll would be held include, Sario in Bameng assembly constituency in East Kameng district, Longte Loth under Nyapin assembly seat in Kurung Kumey, Dingser, Bogiya Siyum, Jimbari and Lengi polling booths under Nacho constituency in Upper Subansiri district.

Repoll will also be held in Bogne and Molom polling booths under Rungong assembly constituency in



Siang district, the communique said.

An estimated 76.44 per cent of

the total 8,92,694 voters exercised their franchise on April 19 to elect 50 MLAs for the 60-member as-

sembly in the northeastern state. The ruling BJP had already won 10 assembly seats unopposed. (PTI)

Seven cadres of underground groups of Kukis, Nagas, and Meiteis arrested



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 22: Ahead of the second phase of elections to the Outer Manipur Parliamentary constituency reserved for scheduled tribes, Assam Rifles, and Manipur police launched a series of combing operations along the Manipur Myanmar border resulting in nabbing of seven insurgents of different outfits with the recovery of a huge case amount and arms and ammunition, officials said here on Monday.

Under the directive from the headquarters Inspector General of

Assam Rifles (south), the joint team of the central and state forces renewed their efforts in the counter-insurgency campaigns at the Kangkum village of Manipur's Kamjong district bordering Myanmar on the east on Monday.

The operations succeeded with the nabbing of five insurgents of the hills and valley underground groups.

Acting on specific intelligence of the presence of cadres in the general area Kangkum village, Kamjong District, Manipur, Assam Rifles launched an operation re-

sulting in the apprehension of five hardcore cadres affiliated with the proscribed Kanglei Yaul Kanna Lup (KYKL), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak, (PREPAK), and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muiva (NSCN-IM).

An amount of Rs 1,86,720 was also recovered from them.

In yet another operational action, based on specific input concerning the presence of armed miscreants carrying out extortion activities along the Churachandpur-Sangaikot road, Assam Rifles, and police launched counter-insurgency campaigns on April 20 and apprehended two cadres of the United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF) with one 9mm Pistol, ammunition, and other stores.

The arrested cadres of the different outfits along with the recovered items were further handed over to Manipur Police for legal actions, the officials added.

Notably, the second phase of Lok Sabha elections will be held on April 26 in the 13 assembly constituencies of eight districts bordering Myanmar, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Assam.

Manipur: Fisherman drowns in Loktak Lake during storm

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 22: A fisherman lost his life after drowning in the Loktak Lake in Manipur, police said on Monday. As per officials, the incident took place on Sunday during a storm.

Khwaikram Thoi (54) from Ithing Awang Leikai, tragically drowned in Loktak Lake, Bishnupur district during the massive storm.

The incident occurred during a storm that swept across the area early in the morning.

According to Thoi's family, he ventured out on the lake around 5 am to retrieve his fishing nets.

While other fishermen sought refuge in their Phumsangs (floating huts) as the storm intensified, Thoi reportedly attempted to reach his nets when the weather seemed to calm slightly.

Despite warnings from other fishermen to wait for the storm to subside completely, Thoi proceeded on the water.

When the storm cleared and other fishermen ventured out again, Thoi's boat was found empty.

A search ensued, and Thoi's body was discovered underwater.

The Keibul Lamjao Police Station has registered a case regarding the incident.

Re-poll concludes at 11 polling booths in Manipur peacefully with 81.60% voter turnout

IMPHAL, April 22: Re-polling in 11 voting stations for Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency spread across Imphal East and Imphal West districts concluded peacefully on Monday.

The re-polls which were conducted under tight security measures registered a high voter turnout of 81.60%, according to the office of the chief electoral officer (CEO) Manipur.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) had ordered for re-polls at these 11 polling stations on Saturday after the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were damaged by mob violence and vitiated to such an extent that the results of the poll there cannot be ascertained.

The polling stations where the voting held today are Sajeb (A), Khurai Thongam Leikai, Bamon Kampu (North-A), Bamon Kampu (North-B), Bamon Kampu (South West), Bamon Kampu (South East), Khongnam Zone-V (A), Iroshemba, Iroshemba Mamang Leikai, Iroshemba Mayai Lekai,



and Khaidem Makha.

Tight security measures were put in place in all the polling stations with the deployment of Central Armed Police personnel along with armed state police personnel.

From the first hour of the voting, voters were seen in queues in most of the polling stations waiting for their turn to cast their vote. By 11 am, overall voter turnout was registered 37.54% followed by 55.76% at 1 pm. It increased to 73.05% at 3pm and then the CEO office put the final

voter turnout at 81.60%.

Top officials of the election conducting authorities in these two districts also took stock of the security arrangement and voting processes at some of the polling stations along with top police officers of each district while the voting was in progress.

A total of six candidates are in the fray for the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency which the voting was held on April 19. The counting of votes will be held on June 4. (NNN)

Nagaland CM advisor calls on Australian Consul-general

KOHIMA, APRIL 22: Advisor to Nagaland the chief minister and chairman of Investment & Development Authority of Nagaland, Abu Metha called on Australian Consul-General, Hugh Boylan in Kolkata on Monday. He was accompanied by Chairman of TaFMA, Theja Meru.

An official statement said the meeting is a follow-up of Boylan's recent visit to Nagaland during which he called on the Chief Minister, the Governor and the chief secretary of Nagaland.

It was informed that the meeting discussed various issues related to strengthening bilateral ties and future collaborations including possibilities of investment opportunities and cultural exchanges. (NNN)

UDP pushes for regional party unity in Meghalaya

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 22: The United Democratic Party (UDP) in Meghalaya has renewed its call for all regional parties in the state to unite.

The party believes a stronger regional force would be better positioned to address local issues and negotiate with the central government.

UDP general secretary Jimino Mawthoh expressed that the party's performance in the recent Assembly elections, and the anti-Congress/NPP vote division in the Shillong Lok Sabha constituency, could have been stronger with regional unity.

Mawthoh downplayed the ideological differences between regional and national parties, suggesting they largely focus on similar issues.

He emphasized the importance of a unified regional voice in understanding and navigating central-state relations.

The UDP acknowledged its past efforts to unite regional parties, achieved to some extent with the HSPDP under the Regional Democratic Alliance umbrella. Mawthoh extended an invitation to other parties with similar goals to join the effort. He expressed concern about the negative campaigning tactics witnessed during the recent Lok Sabha polls, including personal attacks between political leaders.



FIR against NPP leader over 'exploitation, mockery'

SHILLONG, April 22: Activist Jaynie Sangma has filed an FIR against an NPP leader, Kritenberth R Marak, for alleged exploitation and mockery of a differently-abled person.

In the complaint filed with Tura police station on Monday, Jaynie said, "I am writing to formally lodge a complaint against Kritenberth R. Marak for his reprehensible actions involving my cousin, Milam N Sangma, who is a differently-abled individual. It has come to my attention that Marak, for his amusement and political mockery, coerced Mr. Sangma to put on a scarf of the NPP and manipulated him into participating in a video without his informed consent."

In the video which Marak had widely circulated on social media, he mocks Sangma and the voters who support the Congress.

"Sangma, due to his disability, was unaware of the context and

implications of the video being made. This act by Marak not only disrespects the dignity of my cousin but also demonstrates a clear intent to demean and exploit him for political purposes. Moreover, since the incident happened on the evening of April 18, one day before the polls, it clearly is a violation of the model code of conduct," she said.

According to the activist, such behaviour is not only morally reprehensible but also potentially violates the legal rights of differently-abled individuals as protected under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. As per Section 7 (2) of the RPwD Act, any person who believes that an act of abuse, violence, or exploitation has been committed against a person with a disability may report such incidents, she said. (NNN)

Voter who complained about proxy vote faces FIR in Manipur

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 22: An FIR has been lodged against a voter accusing him of damaging an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) at S Ibohi Primary School within polling station 3/21 in the Khurai Assembly Constituency of Manipur.

He was identified as S Surajkumar, a resident of Khurai Thongam Leikai.

He reportedly found himself in a confusing situation after being informed that his vote had already been cast by unidentified persons.

However, he complained but instead, he faced actions from officials present at the polling station.

Surajkumar raised questions regarding the actions taken by the officials, arguing that he was simply seeking to exercise his fundamental rights as a voter.

Surajkumar recounted when officials inside the polling station failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for the alleged pre-casting of his vote. This alleged irregularity led to some individuals entering the polling station and causing damage to the EVM in protest against what they perceived as electoral injustice.

Surajkumar clarified that no harm was intended towards the polling officials during the incident, attributing the turmoil to their alleged negligence in adhering to electoral guidelines.

He also opposed the FIR filed against him, instead calling for a repolling of station 3/21 to rectify the situation and ensure fairness in the electoral process.

Heavy rains to lash Arunachal, Assam and Meghalaya till April 26

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 22: All the states in the northeast are expected to get heavy rains and thunderstorms in the next five days.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), a rain-inducing cyclonic circulation lies over Assam, while another can be seen over Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, a north-south trough can also be witnessed from Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal.

The combination of these phenomena together will create some exceptional precipitation over the seven sister states this week.

In line with these predictions, light to mod-



erate amounts of rain or snow are expected in most parts of Arunachal, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura from Monday to Thursday (April 22-25).

The spell is expected to clear out after this, only affecting a few areas of these states (excluding Arunachal) from Friday to Saturday (April 26-27).

The IMD has also forecast thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds to affect the seven states during this forecast period.

The IMD has issued a warning of heavy rains with a possibility of thunderstorms over some sections of Assam and Meghalaya on Monday, Tuesday and Friday, and over Arunachal till Friday (April 22-26).

Isolated very heavy falls (115.6 mm-204.5 mm) could also drench Arunachal Pradesh on Tuesday.

Illegal infiltration of Bangladeshis challenge in Tripura: BSF official

In 2023 influx of Rohingya illegal migrants and Bangladesh nationals has increased in the state



AGARTALA, April 22: Cross-border crimes, especially illegal infiltration, have emerged as the biggest challenge for the BSF in guarding the India-Bangladesh border in Tripura, a top official said on

Monday. He said altogether 1,018 illegal infiltrators were detained while crossing the international border in the last one-and-a-half years. "Cross-border crimes, smug-

gling of contraband items and infiltration have emerged as the biggest challenge for the troops to guard the 856 km borderline with Bangladesh," BSF IG, Tripura frontier, Patel Pijush Purusottam Das, said at a press conference.

"During 2023, the influx of Rohingya illegal migrants and Bangladesh nationals has increased in the state. They are using the northeastern state as a corridor to reach different destinations in India. A well-established network of touts exist across the border which facilitate illegal migration," Das said.

A special operation was launched by NIA with the active assistance of BSF in November and December last year and 29 agents involved in illegal migration were arrested for their alleged involvement in human trafficking, he said. "Prominent infiltration routes have been identified. This has considerably reduced the influx," he said.

The IG said the BSF has taken initiatives to complete the fencing

work on the border and deploy technological solutions.

"Currently, the Single Row Fence (SRF) work is in progress at eight gaps in stretches. The BSF has also taken initiatives at the local level to plug the nullah and culvert gaps to prevent illegal activities," he said.

The paramilitary force has also installed smart surveillance systems to enhance the border domination in most smuggling and infiltration-prone areas, the IG said.

Claiming that the BSF maintains good relations with its Bangladesh counterpart BGB, Das said six pending development projects were settled at the DG-level talks and out of which three projects are from the northeastern state.

"During 2023 concurrence from BGB regarding the construction of SRF on 11 patches in the Indian territory within 150 meters of international border, six fencing gaps have been removed so far and the process is on for the remaining unfenced spots," he added. (PTI)

VPP expels another member

SHILLONG, April 22: Voice of the People Party (VPP) on Monday expelled its MLA candidate and working president from Mairang for alleged anti-party activities.

Shanlang Warjri, who was an MLA candidate from Mairang, and Kherup Sing Thabab, who is the working president of Mairang Circle were served with expulsion notices by the executive committee of the party.

In the notices, chairman of VPP disciplinary committee Dr Kara H Shen said, "As directed by the executive committee, we, the undersigned, wish to inform you, that the party, has taken serious note of your statements, actions and behaviour which is unbecoming for a member of the party. After thorough consideration and review of your actions, statements and behaviour, it has become evident that your conduct is inconsistent with the values and principles of our party. Your behaviour and actions have brought disrepute to the party and undermine our collective efforts to uphold the integrity and promote our agenda."

"This act of indiscipline on your part has left us with no option but to expel you from the party with immediate effect," he stated. (NNN)

Manipur police refrains from election duties in fear of lives



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 22: Many Manipur police who were assigned for election duties staged a demonstration at Imphal on Monday and refused to resume their duties in Tamenglong district which will go to the elections for the Outer Manipur Parliamentary constituency reserved for scheduled tribes on April 26.

These striking police personnel in the Meitei community fear for their lives to render their election duties in the Tamenglong district as at their best individual/personnel they have to pass the Kangpokpi district predominantly inhabited by the Kukis.

The ongoing communal violence between the Kukis and Meiteis cost the lives of over 222 individuals including 9 policemen in the state.

The Manipur government has issued an order for 260 police personnel for election duties in Tamenglong of which 197 belong to the Meitei community.

On Monday, these 197 police personnel assigned for election duties staged a demonstration in front of the Ghanapriya Women's College, Imphal refusing to report to the concerned officials.

Police personnel tasked with the election duties in Tamenglong said, "We are not refusing our bounden duties. We are requesting the officials concerned to allot the election duties at the less vulnerable district/locations."

For the second phase of elections, Manipur will go to the poll on April 26 in 13 assembly segments of eight districts located in the border areas of this strife state.

The first phase of elections for the Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat and Outer Manipur LS seat in 47 assembly segments was held on April 19 with 72 per cent voting.

For the Outer seat, a total of four candidates — Indian National Congress, Naga People's Front, and two independents are in the electoral frays.

'Congress was set to hand over the wealth of others to infiltrators and those who have more children'

Modi makes 'redistribution of wealth' charge against Congress again

ALIGARH (UP), April 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday accused the Congress again of planning to redistribute people's property if it is voted to power, but stopped short of saying that the wealth would go to Muslims.

Addressing an election rally in western Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh, a constituency with a sizeable Muslim population, Modi accused the opposition Congress and the Samajwadi Party of following a policy of "appeasement" and yet doing nothing to uplift the socio-economic condition of the community. In contrast, he cited the enactment of a law against instant triple talaq and an increase in the Haj quota as moves during the BJP government's term to help the community.

On Sunday, the prime minister had triggered a political row by claiming that the Congress manifesto promised "redistribution" of wealth after conducting a survey.

Citing former prime minister Manmohan Singh's 2006 remark on Muslims having the "first claim" on the country's resources, Modi said in Rajasthan's Banswara that the Congress was set to hand over the wealth of others to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children".



In Aligarh Monday, Modi repeated the point about redistribution of wealth, saying he wanted to "alert" people about the "intentions" of the Congress and the opposition INDIA bloc.

"The Congress 'shahzade' (prince) says if his government comes, they will investigate who earns how much and how much property they have. Not only this, he further says the government will take over the property and redistribute it. This is what their election manifesto is saying," he claimed, referring to Rahul Gandhi.

"Just think, our mothers and daughters have gold. This is 'stridhan' (women's property). It is considered sacred, even the law protects it. But now they are eyeing a change in law and snatching the property of our mothers and sisters," he said.

"These people have their eyes on their 'manglasutras'," Modi added, accusing the opposition of trying to "steal" the gold women possessed. He claimed that the opposition planned to conduct a survey of the property owned by salaried people. "If you own two homes, it will snatch one - the

Congress will go that far," he said. "This is Maoist thinking... this is communist thinking. By doing this they have ruined so many countries. Now the Congress and the INDI Alliance want to implement the same policy in India," the prime minister said.

But, unlike in the Rajasthan speech that triggered the opposition charge of "hate speech", Modi stopped short of saying that the wealth will be distributed among Muslims. He also did not refer to Manmohan Singh's statement made nearly two decade back.

He said the Congress and the SP followed a policy of "appeasement" without doing anything for the social and economic progress of Muslims, and also referred to the Pasmanda Muslims - the backward sections among the community. "The lives of a number of daughters were ruined due to triple talaq. We made a law against it and made the future of the daughters secure," he said.

Attacking the opposition, he said the 'parivarwadi' people have created empires by "looting" people and not giving anything to the poor from their "immense wealth".

"Now their eyes have fallen on the property of people of the country. The Congress considers it as

their birthright to loot people's wealth," he charged.

The PM said the people of Aligarh had put a lock on dynastic politics, corruption and the appeasement practised by the two "shahzade". The reference was to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, who are fighting the Lok Sabha elections as allies.

He referred to law and order in Uttar Pradesh and the security situation on the country's borders earlier when "our brave sons were martyred every day".

"Today all this has stopped. Earlier, terrorists used to explode bombs, serial blasts took place. Even Ayodhya and Kashi were not spared. Bomb blasts used to happen every day in big cities, now there has been a full stop on serial bomb attacks," he said.

"What we did in 10 years is just a trailer, we have to do a lot of work," he said.

The prime minister said he will work constantly for the country. "Modi is born for 'mehnat' (hard work), not 'mauj' (enjoyment)."

Aligarh will vote on April 26 in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections. UP has 80 parliamentary constituencies, the highest number among all states.

HC order on Bengal school jobs 'illegal', will challenge it: Mamata

'People aligned with the BJP are given important positions... and whatever suggestions the BJP sends from its party offices are being passed as judgments'



RAIGANJ, April 22: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday termed as "illegal" the Calcutta High Court order cancelling all appointments made through a 2016 teacher recruitment test, and said her government will challenge the verdict.

Banerjee, while addressing an election rally at Raiganj in North Bengal, also accused BJP leaders of influencing certain judicial decisions.

"The court verdict cancelling all recruitments is illegal. We stand by those who lost jobs. We will ensure you get justice, and challenge the order in a higher court," she said.

The Calcutta High Court on Monday ordered the cancellation of all appointments made through the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools, declaring it "null and void".

Later, addressing another rally at Karandighi, Banerjee asserted, "It is not mandatory to accept all verdicts. We will challenge the order in the Supreme Court. This order was passed as per the BJP's instructions amid the elections."

Accusing the saffron party of manipulating the judicial system, Banerjee said: "It has turned the courts into their extended party offices. If the BJP files a PIL, prompt action is taken and people are sent to jail. No action is initiated when others file."

In an apparent reference to former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay joining the BJP after resigning, Banerjee commented, "The connection is evident and visible to all."

The chief minister also blamed the central government for compromising a section of the judiciary.

"People aligned with the BJP are given important positions... and whatever suggestions the BJP sends from its party offices are being passed as judgments," she alleged.

In its order, the high court also directed the West Bengal School Service Commission (SSC) to initiate a fresh recruitment process.

Over 23 lakh candidates had appeared for the SLST-2016 for 24,640 vacant posts.

A total of 25,753 appointment letters were issued against the vacancies, said Firdaus Shamim, a lawyer for some of the petitioners.

Banerjee asserted that she would continue to fight for people's rights.

"I am not concerned about legal actions against me. If they want to punish me, file a defamation case or send me to jail, I am prepared. But, I will not bow my head while fighting for the rights of people," she said. "The teachers should not worry. I am with you through thick and thin. Our government has another 10 lakh jobs ready," Banerjee added. (PTI)

'No civilised nation decides citizenship on basis of religion'

KANNUR (KERALA), April 22: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Monday that no civilised nation in the world has made religion the basis of citizenship, and the BJP-led union government's contentious Citizenship Amendment Law is against the secular values of the country.

When everyone came forward protesting against the CAA and to safeguard secularism, the Congress did not raise any significant protest against the BJP government's move, he alleged.

As Lok Sabha polls are just four days away in the state, Vijayan was addressing an election meeting in Mattannur, in this northern district.

"No civilised nation has decided citizenship on the basis of religion. No country divides refugees on the lines of their religion," Vijayan said.

India is making religion the basis of deciding citizenship. It is destroying secular values, he charged.

While several national leaders, including those from Communist parties, were arrested for protesting against the CAA in New Delhi years ago, no Congress leaders were among them, Vijayan alleged.

The CM accused the 18 Congress-led UDF MPs from the state of attending a feast hosted by the party president on the day when the national capital had witnessed the fiercest agitation against the CAA.

Vijayan further asked why the Congress, which is claimed to be a secular party, cannot oppose the RSS agenda being implemented in the country. (PTI)

Oppn leaders slam Modi's 'redistribution of wealth' remark

NEW DELHI, April 22: Opposition leaders on Monday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his comments made at an elections rally in Rajasthan, with some leaders also appealing to people to reach out to the Election Commission of India.

In a post on X, Communist Party of India (Marxist) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said while the prime minister's remarks are atrocious, the silence of the Election Commission is worse. "This is atrocious! The silence of the Election Commission is more atrocious!! Modi's inflammatory speech is a gross violation of the Model Code of Conduct and Supreme Court pronouncements on Hate Speech," Yechury said.

"Merits strictest action and contempt of Court," he said.

The CPI (M) leader hoped the Supreme Court will take note of the incident and initiate action.

"Hope the Supreme Court takes suo motu cognisance of this incendiary speech and issues Modi a contempt of Court notice followed by strictest punishment," he said.

Party sources said that a petition signed by "concerned citizens," will be sent to the Election Commission later in the day. Trinamool Congress leader Saket Gokhale also appealed to the people to write to the Election Commission over Modi's remarks.

In a post on X, the TMC Rajya Sabha MP shared the email id of the Chief Election Commissioner, and urged people to write to him, stating that the poll panel does not listen to the Opposition. "Election Commission ignores the Opposition and has kept giving a free pass to Modi and the BJP. During elections, the EC is not accountable to political parties. But - they're accountable to the people of India," Gokhale said. (PTI)

Leverage cutting-edge tech to better deliver government services: PMO official

NEW DELHI, April 22: Digital revolution has presented unprecedented opportunities to enhance efficiency, transparency and responsiveness of government services, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Pramod Kumar Mishra said on Monday.

Addressing the Central Training Institution Workshop, Mishra stressed on the need to change the structure of training imparted to civil servants and said capacity-building initiatives will have to go beyond traditional training structures to meet the challenges of the changing times.

"The transformation of government will happen only when the right attitude and skills reach every employee," he said, adding that the digital revolution has presented unprecedented opportunities to enhance efficiency, transparency and responsiveness of government services. "From e-learning platforms and virtual classrooms to data analytics and artificial intelligence, we must leverage cutting-edge technologies to empower our civil servants and optimise decision-making processes," he said.

At the outset, Mishra high-



lighted that India is standing at a pivotal juncture in its journey towards socio-economic development and global prominence.

He said the government's focus is on good government, citizen-centricity, future readiness and performance enhancement.

Mishra said the overall approach of capacity building must be imbued with citizen centricity at its core and every aspect and component of capacity building must be examined for its relevance, not only in the present context but also keeping in mind the long-term goals and vision of Viksit Bharat at 2047. The capacity-building

ecosystem should ensure that civil servants are prepared to partner with and add to this growth trajectory, he said.

"For today's aspirational India, the government has to be a facilitator. From a regulator we have to become a supporter. And for this, the deep-rooted beliefs and attitudes have to be changed. As custodian of a vast human resource, for the government of India, this is the biggest challenge," he said.

Mishra said training institutes can help realise this idea of creation of a capacity building ecosystem that will deliver on the vision of Viksit Bharat.

"Each of them brings strengths and expertise which can be valuable for the entire bureaucracy. Hence, there remains scope to create a more harmonious capacity-building ecosystem," Mishra said, adding that the capacity-building ecosystem needs system-level strengthening.

"Many of our civil servants perform exceptionally well today, but an institutional and well-considered approach to capacity building can enable every civil servant to shine and perform optimally," he stated. Mishra said that the Capacity Building Commission (CBC) is developing the 'Karmayogi Competency Model', an indigenous Public Human Resource Management Framework to harmonise definition and understanding of competencies.

The CBC is also developing the Amrit Gyaan Kosh, which will be a repository of the best practices of public administration in the form of case studies and other material used for training in institutes, he said. Mishra urged the training institutes to embrace quality improvement in their training design. (PTI)

Court directs AIIMS to constitute medical board to examine Arvind Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, April 22: A Delhi court on Monday directed the AIIMS to constitute a medical board to examine Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to determine whether he needs insulin to control his blood sugar levels and said the home-cooked food that the politician was consuming was different from the diet chart prepared by his doctor.

Special Judge for CBI and ED cases Kaveri Baweja passed the order while declining Kejriwal's plea for video consultation with his doctor in the presence of his wife.

Kejriwal had alleged he was not being administered insulin in jail leading to "alarming" rise in his blood sugar levels.

The ED had claimed on Friday the AAP leader was consuming sugar-laden food like mangoes and sweets on a regular basis to create grounds for medical bail. Kejriwal responded sharply, accusing the central anti-money laundering agency of acting "petty" and "politicising" what he ate.

The court on Monday ordered all necessary medical treatment to be provided to Kejriwal, arrested in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise scam.

The court ordered the AIIMS director to consti-

tute a medical board comprising endocrinologist/diabetologist to examine Kejriwal. The board will decide whether he should be administered insulin and also take a call on the diet and exercise plan he needs to follow, the court said. It said there shall be no deviations from the diet plan prescribed by the medical board.

In its order, the court said the detailed list of food he consumes "ecologically shows that the food items which are being provided as home cooked food, are quite different from the diet prescribed by his own doctor".

The court also responded to a nonchalant remark by Kejriwal's lawyer that "Aam aadmi aam nahi khayega to kya mushroom khayega". The judge said mushrooms had been prescribed by Kejriwal's own doctor, whereas there was no specific recommendation for eating mangoes.

"This court is also unable to fathom as to why the family of the applicant has been sending various articles against his medically prescribed diet i.e. mango, sweets, also puri etc.," the judge said.

The court said it was apparent that the jail authorities have a well-developed infrastructure for providing requisite health care to the inmates.

Political war of words over Thrissur Pooram continues in Kerala

THRISSUR (KERALA) April 22: Kerala on Monday continued to witness heated political war of words over alleged police high-handedness in Thrissur Pooram festivities with the Congress party alleging a secret agenda to destroy the annual spectacle ahead of Lok Sabha polls.

The grand-old party alleged that there was a clear direction to the police to disrupt the Pooram festivities and that it was to facilitate BJP's victory in this central Kerala constituency in the elections.

Senior Congress leader and Thrissur Lok Sabha candidate K Muralaeeharan also demanded a judicial probe into the developments which happened post-Pooram to find out whether the police were allegedly used for political gains to disrupt the festival. His criticism came a day after the Pinarayi Vijayan government announced that they would transfer the Thrissur city police commissioner and the assistant commis-

sioner after getting permission from the Election Commission.

"The transfer of police commissioner is to cheat people. His removal is temporary and he will surely be reinstated in the same position after the polls," Muralaeeharan told the media here.

He said the BJP cyber campaigners have already propagated that their candidate Suresh Gopi had intervened into the issues and resolved them. "The undercurrent is very clear...Would a commissioner have that much courage? So, there was a directive to disrupt the Thrissur Pooram," the leader alleged.

He further accused the CPI (M) and the BJP of using the Pooram as a cover for the trading of votes.

"The Congress-led UDF will surely win the Thrissur constituency in the LS polls. But if the BJP comes second, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will be responsible for this," he added. (PTI)

INSV Tarini with women officers returns home after 2 months

NEW DELHI, April 22: Indian Naval Sailing Vessel Tarini carrying two women officers has returned home triumphant after undertaking a "historic transoceanic expedition" that lasted nearly two months during which they faced challenges posed by heavy winds and rough seas.

The expedition was undertaken in "double-handed mode" by Lt Cdr Dilna K and Lt Cdr Roopa A, women officers of the Indian Navy.

"Their exceptional journey marks a historic milestone as they become the first from India to accomplish such a feat," the Navy said in a statement on Monday. The two officers now prepare for their next monumental voyage, a circumnavigation of the globe (Sagar Parikrama -- IV expedition) on INSV Tarini scheduled to commence in September this year, it said.

The INSV Tarini had embarked on the expedition from INS Mandovi, Goa to Port Louis, Mauritius on February 28, showcasing 'Nari Shakti' in the maritime domain, officials earlier said.

It has "returned triumphant to her base port at Goa on April 21 after a historic transoceanic expedition of nearly two months duration", the Navy said.

The expedition was flagged off from Goa by circumnavigator and their mentor Cdr Abhilash Tomy (retd).

"After 22 days of navigating through the unpredictable elements of the Indian Ocean, INSV Tarini



arrived at Port Louis, Mauritius, on March 21. This historic moment was celebrated with a series of events where the officers had the privilege of interacting with government officials from the Mauritius

Coast Guard and the Indian High Commission," the statement said.

In a gesture of camaraderie and collaboration, the vessel also undertook a "training sortie" with person-

nel from the Mauritius Coast Guard, strengthening bilateral ties and fostering goodwill between the two maritime nations, it said.

Following a hectic schedule at Port Louis, Lt Cdr Dilna and Lt Cdr Roopa prepared to embark on their return journey to Goa.

Departing on March 30, the officers faced continuous challenges posed by heavy winds, adverse sea states, and rough seas. Their indomitable spirit and steadfast resolve propelled them forward, guiding INSV Tarini safely back to Goa, the Navy said.

Their accomplishments underscore the Indian Navy's commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women in the maritime domain. Undeterred by the challenges encountered during their expedition, "the officers demonstrated exceptional seamanship and resilience, embodying the spirit of adventure and exploration", it added.

This remarkable achievement will not only inspire but also pave the way for future generations of personnel especially women in the Indian Navy to volunteer for challenging maritime adventure activities, the Navy said.

INSV Tarini was flagged in by Commanding Officer INS Mandovi and Naval Station Commander North Goa at the boat pool of INS Mandovi, in presence of naval personnel and families of Station Mandovi, symbolising the collective achievement and camaraderie within the Indian Navy, it said. (PTI)

Mangrove pitta bird population rises in Odisha's Bhitarkanika

KENDRAPARA (ODISHA), April 22: Officials have reported an increase in the population of mangrove pitta birds during the latest bird census at Bhitarkanika National Park in Odisha's Kendrapara district. Forest officials on Sunday released the mangrove pitta bird census report, which pegged their population at 218. This marks an increase of 39 compared to the previous census.

Forest officials had sighted 179 mangrove pitta birds in 2023 during the first census of the species in Bhitarkanika.

The census was carried out on Saturday by around 80 forest personnel under the supervision of the forest range officers of Dogramala, Rajnagar, Mahakalapada, Gahirmatha, and Kujang forest ranges of the park.

The mangrove pitta are colourful birds which have a black head with brown crown, white throat, greenish upper parts, buff under-parts and reddish vent area. It feeds on crustaceans, mollusks and insects, said Subhadarshani Pradhan, a mangrove pitta researcher.

This non-migratory resident bird, scientifically known as Pitta megarhyncha, thrives in Bhitarkanika, with its breeding season spanning from April to August. The abundance of fish and the distance from human habitation make Bhitarkanika an ideal breeding ground for these colourful birds, he added. (PTI)

12 members of royal families contesting Assembly, Lok Sabha elections in Odisha

Biju Janata Dal had fielded eight members from royal families followed by BJP three and Congress one

BHUBANESWAR, April 22: Twelve members of different royal families in Odisha are contesting the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections seeking votes of commoners.

Elections to the 21 Lok Sabha constituencies in Odisha and 147 Assembly segments will be held simultaneously in the state from May 13 to June 1.

The ruling Biju Janata Dal had fielded eight members from royal families followed by BJP three and Congress one.

Ten members of the royal families are contesting Odisha Assembly elections while two are in the fray for Lok Sabha polls.

The BJD has fielded 28-year-old Sulakshana Geetanjali Devi, granddaughter of veteran leader late A N Singhdeo of Dharakote as its candidate for the Sanakhemundi assembly constituency.

A law degree-holder, Geetanjali is the fifth member of the Dharakote royal family to contest assembly election. Her grandfather A N Singhdeo was elected from the Surada constituency four times - 1967, 1971, 1977 and 1995 - as an MLA and in 1989 as the MP of Aska Lok Sabha constituency.

Her grandmother Shanti Devi and father Kishor Chandra Singhdeo had also been elected from the seat in the 1990 and 2004 elections respectively.

Her mother Nandini Devi had won from Sanakhemundi seat in



2014. This time, Geetanjali will contest against Congress's sitting MLA Ramesh Chandra Jena in the May 20 election.

"I have been inspired by my grandfather, mother and father to join in the politics to serve the people. I thanked the chief minister for giving me the opportunity to serve the people of the constituency," said Geetanjali, who is the chairperson of the panchayat samiti of Dharakote.

The BJD has also fielded Chinmayananda Srirup Deb, son of Usha Devi, royal scion of Chikiti to contest from Chikiti Assembly segment.

Srirup Deb, son of Usha Devi, Urban development minister, is the third member of the Chikiti royal family to make electoral debut from his mother's seat Chikiti. His

grandfather Sachidananda Deo was elected in the seat in 1971, while his mother Usha Devi won five times in a row since 2000.

Deb who worked in a multinational IT company for over two decades and then started his own business after quitting the job.

"I have also been working with my mother in politics since 2018," said 48-year-old Deb. To provide service to the people and to make Chikiti a model constituency is his aim to enter politics," he added.

The BJP has also fielded Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo from the Bolangir Lok Sabha seat. She hails from the Bolangir royal family. Her husband senior BJP leader KV Singh Deo has also been fielded by the saffron party from the Patnagarh assembly segment.

Sangeeta has been elected from the Bolangir Lok Sabha seat four times in the past.

The BJD has also fielded Kaliesh Narayan Singh Deo, two-time MP from Bolangir, this time to contest from the Assembly segment. The saffron party has fielded Malavika Keshari Deo, wife of former MP Arka Keshari Deo in Kalahandi Lok Sabha seat. The royal couple joined the BJP in 2023 after quitting the BJD, after being denied ticket in 2019. Arka is the son of Bikram Keshari Deo, Kalahandi royal family scion and BJP leader, who had won the seat thrice.

The BJD has also fielded Bamanda "Rani" Arundhati Devi, who is the wife of erstwhile Deogarh king and BJP's Sambalpur MP Nitesh Ganga Dev, as its Deogarh Assembly candidate.

Pushendra Singh Deo, another member of the royal family has been fielded by BJD in the Dharmgarh assembly seat.

The BJD has also fielded Sanjukta Singh to contest from the Angul Assembly segment. She replaced her husband and sitting MLA Rajanikant Singh who is the scion of the Angul royal family.

The regional outfit has also fielded Pratyusha Rajeswari in the Nayagarh assembly segment while Pratap Deb, a member of the Aul royal family, will fight for the Aul seat for BJD.

The Congress has fielded Sumita Singh Deo, a member of the

Dhenkanal royal family for the Dhenkanal Assembly seat.

Prahallad Sinha, a political analyst said royal families still commend respect from villagers. The people still have faith that royal family members will address their problems and raise their issues in proper place.

However, Bolangir royal family member and senior BJP leader KV Singh Deo said: "I have never been considered as a member of a royal family. People have showered their love and affection on me and my wife who has been elected to Lok Sabha four times."

Bamanda queen Arundhati Devi says: "I feel always connected to the people. Therefore, people have loved our family."

Sinha said according to the political history of Odisha, royal families of Bolangir and Kalahandi have wielded immense political clout as former rulers of princely states and had taken leadership of the state's first regional outfit, the Ganatantra Parishad.

Former ruler of Patna (now Bolangir) royal family member Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo, was chief minister of Odisha between 1967-71 and former Maharaja of Kalahandi Pratap Keshari Deo was the driving force behind the Ganatantra Parishad, which was regarded as the biggest rival of the Congress in the 1950s and early 1960s, said Sinha. (PTI)

EC go ahead given to deal with issue: Centre to SC on financial aid for Karnataka drought

NEW DELHI, April 22: The Centre on Monday told the Supreme Court that the Election Commission has given clearance to it to deal with the issue raised by Karnataka regarding financial assistance for drought management.

A bench of Justices B R Gvai and Sandeep Mehta was hearing a plea filed by the Karnataka government seeking a direction to the Centre to release financial assistance from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to the state for drought management.

"The Election Commission has cleared the government to deal with this question. I think it will be done expeditiously," Attorney General R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, told the bench.

He told the bench that the matter could be taken up next week. "This should all be done amicably...we are having a federal structure," the bench observed, while adjourning the matter.

While hearing the plea on April 8, the apex court had observed let there not be a "contest" between the Union and the state.

The Attorney General and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who were appearing for the Centre, had told the bench they would seek instructions in the matter.

The petition has also sought to declare that the Centre's action in not releasing the financial assistance for drought management as per the NDRF is "ex-facie violative" of the fundamental rights of the people of the state guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.

It said the state is reeling under "severe drought", affecting the lives of its people and for the Kharif 2023 season, which starts in June and ends in September, a total of 223 out of 236 taluks are declared as drought-affected. The plea said 196 taluks are categorised as severely affected and the remaining 27 as moderately affected.

"Cumulatively for kharif 2023 season, the agriculture and horticulture crop loss have been reported in more than 48 lakh hectares with the estimated loss (cost of cultivation) of ₹ 35,162 crore," the plea, filed through advocate D L Chidananda, said. It said the assistance sought from the Centre under the NDRF is ₹ 18,171.44 crore.

It said the state is constrained to move the apex court against the "arbitrary actions" of the Centre in denying the financial assistance for drought management to Karnataka under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the manual for drought management updated in 2020. (PTI)

Karnataka govt to hand over student murder case to CID, to set up special court: CM

SHIVAMOGGA (KARNATAKA), April 22: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said his government has decided to hand over the Hubbali student murder case to the Crime Investigation Department and set up a special court for its speedy disposal. Neha Hiremath (23), daughter of Congress Councillor of Hubbali-Dharwad Municipal Corporation Niranjan Hiremath, was stabbed to death on the campus of BVB College on Thursday. The accused Fayaz Khondunaik, who fled from the scene, was arrested by the police subsequently.



Neha was a first year Master of Computer Application (MCA) student and Fayaz was earlier her classmate. "The Hubbali incident, we have decided to give it to the CID. We will set up a special court for it. Charge sheet has to be filed in a time-bound manner and the case has

to be disposed of, so a special court (will be constituted)," Siddaramaiah told reporters, adding, "I strongly condemn Neha's murder."

Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara said the CID will submit its report in 12 days.

"The CID team will go to Hubbali today and take over the case from the district police," the minister said. He said some people have suspected the involvement of more people.

"Whatever the case may be, the CID will investigate and submit its report in 10 to 12 days. We have set

this deadline. They cannot take months together to investigate it. I am confident that the parents of the victim will get justice and the truth will come out," Parameshwara said.

Meanwhile, in response to a question, the chief minister said, "I have not been able to go to her (parent's) residence. Our district in-charge minister and party workers had gone. Also H K Patil (Law Minister) is going. I will go when I go there (Hubbali)."

Siddaramaiah said cases of crime have come down during Congress rule. "In 2023 (Congress rule) it was 1,295 (crime cases), from 2019-2022 during four years of BJP it was -- 1,300, 1,318, 1,342, 1,370 respectively," he said.

The murder case, which has sparked widespread outrage, snowballed into a political slugfest between ruling Congress and opposition BJP. While the ruling

Drunk father-son duo push man off terrace of hotel in UP's Bareilly

BAREILLY (UP), April 22: A 27-year-old youth was seriously injured after he was allegedly pushed off the first floor of a five-star hotel here by a businessman and his son in an inebriated condition, police said on Monday. The injured man is undergoing treatment in a hospital, while the police have registered a case against the father-son duo and efforts are on to nab them, they added.

The victim, Sarthak Agarwal, had gone to attend an engagement ceremony at a hotel in the city's Izzatnagar area on Saturday evening, the police said citing Sanjay Agarwal, a businessman dealing in chemical supply.

Textile businessman Riddim Arora and his father Satish Arora, residents of Janakpuri, were present at the same function, they said.

Late in the night, the father-son duo in an inebriated condition allegedly abused Agarwal and even

beat him up when he objected, the police said.

Later they pushed him off a terrace on the first floor of the hotel, leaving the man seriously injured. They also tried to throw his friend Nandikar when he tried to save Agrawal, they added.

According to the victim's father, Riddim had kicked and punched his son even after he fell unconscious and tried to shoot him dead.

His friends admitted the injured Sarthak to SRMS Medical College.

Izzatnagar SHO Jaishankar Singh said based on Sanjay's complaint, an FIR was registered against the accused duo on Sunday under Indian Penal Code sections of attempt to murder, assault and intimidation.

On Monday morning, a raid was conducted to arrest the accused persons but they were not found at their home. (PTI)

Quadruple murder: Son gave ₹ 65 lakh 'supari' to eliminate parents, brother



GADAG (KARNATAKA), April 22: The Gadag police have cracked the mystery behind four murders that took place on April 19, with the arrest of eight people, including kinpin Vinayak Bakale, who allegedly gave a contract ₹ 65 lakh contract to assassinate to eliminate his parents and brother Karthik Bakale.

The plot went awry and the parents survived. However, Karthik Bakale and the family's close relatives were hacked to death in the early hours of April 19.

Karthik (27), Parashuram Hadimani (55), Lakshmi Hadimani (45) and Akanksha Hadimani (16) were found murdered at Dasara Oni in Gadag, police said.

Karthik was the son of BJP leader Prakash Bakale and Sunanda Bakale, who is the vice-president of Gadag-Betageri City Municipal Council.

Police sources said Karthik's marriage had been fixed, which the Hadimans had come to attend.

Since the jewellery, valuables and cash were intact in the house, police doubted that the motive was not robbery but something else, police sources said.

They said that a property dispute among the siblings was suspected to be the reason behind the murder as Prakash was to give all his properties to Karthik, which irked Vinayak, who allegedly decided to wipe out his parents and brother.

On Monday, Inspector General of Police (North Zone) Vikas Kumar told reporters that they had arrested Vinayak Prakash Bakale (35), Fairuz Khazi (29), Jishan Khazi (24), all from Gadag; twin brothers Sahil Ashfaq Khazi (19), Sohail Ashfaq Khazi (19), Sultan Jilani Sheikh (23), Mahesh Jagannath Salunke (21) and Waheed Liyaqat Bepari (21), all from Miraj in Sangli district of Maharashtra.

Vinayak had given a ₹ 65 lakh contract to Fairuz, who arranged vehicles and weapons and carried out surveillance, Kumar said.

The assassins broke into the house thinking that only three people were present, the IGP said, adding that the targets were Vinayak's parents and brother.

The agreement between Vinayak and the contract killers was such that the proceeds of the loot after killing the trio would belong to the contract killers.

"Vinayak gave the contract to eliminate his parents and brother Karthik. Fairuz organised the entire gang. It was a short term plan. But as Prakash Bakale raised an alarm, the panicked assailants fled the spot. Otherwise he was also a target," IGP Vikas Kumar said.

He said that four of the accused were caught in Miraj while others were nabbed in Gadag.

The police officer said Vinayak tried to escape when he was caught. (PTI)

'Delhi Police's case founded on wrong assumption': Court acquits 3 persons of MCOCA charges

NEW DELHI, April 22: A court here has acquitted three persons who were accused of running an organised crime syndicate and charged under stringent provisions of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA), saying the Delhi Police's case was "founded on a wrong assumption".

The court observed that the confession statements of the accused, which are admissible as evidence under MCOCA, did not help the prosecution's case, nor did it prove the charges against them.

Additional Sessions Judge Pulastya Pramachala was hearing a case against Satender alias Baba, Ajeet and Rahul, who were accused of running an organised crime syndicate, which included collecting intelligence, conveying threats and using violence.

The gang led by Baba, which was involved in heinous crimes like attempt to murder, dacoity, robbery, criminal intimidation and illegal arms possession, had established such a notorious image that people were terrified, merely when their names were mentioned, the prosecution claimed.

The court noted that according to the Delhi Police's final report, the three accused were prosecuted based on the charge sheets filed against them earlier in previous cases.

"Prosecution in this case did not refer to any immediate cause of action alleging continued unlawful activity by the accused persons. Accused persons were charge-sheeted only based on their involvement in past cases, which were taken as instances

of continued unlawful activity," the court said.

In its order passed earlier this month, it said the prosecution's stand did not meet the legal requirements for invoking MCOCA and the Delhi Police's case was "founded on a wrong assumption".

"Even otherwise, as per evidence on the record, except for the evidence in the form of confessional statements of the accused persons, there is no incriminating evidence for their involvement in the unlawful activity," the court said.

It noted that at the time of recording their confessional statements, the magistrate concerned had asked each accused whether they made the statements, to which they replied in the negative and said that they were illiterate and police had obtained their signature on some unknown documents.

"They signed such documents out of fear because they were threatened by police to be implicated in cases. This scenario shows that all the accused persons literally disowned the claim of the police that they had voluntarily made confessional statements before the respective officers of the rank of deputy commissioners of police (DCPs)," the court said.

It said the trio were produced before the magistrate on the same day when they made the statements.

"It is difficult to presume that a person having volunteered to make a confessional statement about crimes committed by him, would deny having made such statement with the passage of some minutes or hours," the court said.

'Covert': Former RAW, ISI chiefs come together for sequel of bestselling 'The Spy Chronicles'

NEW DELHI, April 22: After the success of "The Spy Chronicles", AS Dulat and Asad Durrani -- the ex-spy chiefs of India and Pakistan -- have now joined hands for its sequel "Covert: The Psychology of War and Peace", which they co-wrote with psychiatrist Neil K Aggarwal.

The book, scheduled to release on April 29, takes the reader right into the head of the two spymasters as it delves into their personal and professional trajectories that moulded them in the early years. It is published by Harper Collins India.

In what was billed as a one-of-its-kind book, the two former spy chiefs in "The Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI and the Illusion of Peace", released in 2018, touched upon some thorny issues between the neighbouring countries, including terrorism, particularly the 2008

Mumbai attack, Kashmir and the influence of intelligence agencies.

"In 2021, Sundeep Wasekar's offer to get General Durrani and me to join in a discussion on 'The Spy Chronicles', moderated by Neil K. Aggarwal, led to this book on 'The Psychology of War and Peace', which has virtually turned out to be Part 2 of 'The Spy Chronicles'."

"...I have known and engaged with General Saheb for some years now, but it has been a fascinating interaction with Neil. One can lie to the world, but not to oneself -- and to a psychiatrist, even less!" Dulat said in a statement.

Moderated by Aggarwal, the discussion in the book turns to the domain of international relations, exploring why the governments of India and Pakistan collaborate in certain areas, but not in others. What emerges is a forthright

honest appraisal of the peacebuilding process between the two nations that appear inherently hostile to each other but share so much in terms of history and cultural identity, informed the publishers.

"The Spy Chronicles" itself was like a bolt from the blue: two former intelligence chiefs from chronically hostile countries, joining hands and banging heads to make some sense of our bilateral madness, was nothing short of a potential train wreck. And when Dr Aggarwal got us together to compose this book and pampered us as peace psychologists, it must have been an irony of history," added Durrani.

The dialogues in "Covert" reveal a deep camaraderie between Dulat and Durrani, who have headed the intelligence operations for their respective countries. But more importantly it claims to pro-

vide deep insights into the shadowy world of negotiation and subterfuge.

According to the publishers, it is an "eye-opener" and a "must-read" for anyone invested in peace and amity in South Asia.

"Circumstances have prevented Dulat and Gen Durrani from meeting in person for years. But aided by the technology of video conferencing, in 'Covert' they speak to a masterful interlocutor, Neil K. Aggarwal, about India, about Pakistan, about what holds the two nations together and what tears them apart, and the psychology behind it all," said Udayan Mitra, executive publisher, HarperCollins.

While Durrani has also written "Honour Among Spies" (2020), Dulat's previously authored books include "Kashmir: The Vajpayee Years" (2015) and "A Life in the Shadows" (2022). (PTI)

11 dead, 28 injured in separate accidents in Khargone, Seoni, Maihar in 24 hours

KHARGONE/SEONI/MAIHAR (MP), April 22: Eleven persons died and 28 were injured in separate accidents in the past 24 hours in Madhya Pradesh's Khargone, Seoni and Maihar districts, police said on Monday.

Two persons were killed and 11 injured in Khargone, seven died and 16 were injured in four accidents in Seoni and two persons lost their lives and one received injuries in Maihar, officials said.

In Khargone, 65-year-old Taj Bi and her 48-year-old son Aamin were killed on the spot and 11 persons sustained injuries after a car collided with a sports utility vehicle on Bistan Road under Kotwali police station limits at 2:30am, an official said. (PTI)

RANA DAGGUBATI'S SPIRIT MEDIA, TINKLE COMICS ANNOUNCE SUPERHERO GRAPHIC NOVEL 'MINNAL MURALI'

MUMBAI, April 22: Spirit Media, Rana Daggubati's production banner, and Tinkle Comics have launched a graphic novel "Minnal Murali", based on the superhero from 2021's Malayalam film starring Tovino Thomas in the title role. The announcement was made on Sunday at the Mumbai Comic-Con event here.

Directed by Basil Joseph, "Minnal Murali" followed the story of a tailor called Jaison Varghese, played by Thomas, who gains superpowers after being struck by lightning. According to a press release, the graphic novel promises to delve deep into "the superhero's origins and adventures with a new story which takes the film's plot further".

Daggubati described the launch of the graphic novel a "significant milestone" for the Indian superheroes in the world of comics. "The debut of Tinkle's graphic novel 'Minnal Murali' at Mumbai Comic-Con marks a significant milestone for reaffirming the love for Indian superheroes and comics, furthermore, resonating with the unmet need of Indian comic lovers in the digital age. "It is a moment of great pride and excitement to continue the universe of one of this much loved contemporary Indian superheroes and bring him to life from the screen to a comic," Daggubati said in a statement.

Produced by Sophia Paul via Weekend Blockbusters, the film also starred Guru Somasundaram.

"Seeing our beloved characters and captivating storylines come to life on the vibrant pages is a testament to the enduring impact of our film, inspiring fans to embark on new adventures within this rich and dynamic universe," said Paul.

Books are often converted to films, but this project is a great example of how a popular film franchise has been taken into the pages of a book, with a brand-new story based on the characters of a successful movie in a graphic novel format, added president and CEO of Amar Chitra Katha and Tinkle, Preeti Vyas.

Gayathri Chandrasekaran, editor-in-chief of Tinkle Comics, said "We're thrilled to unveil Tinkle's first graphic novel at the Mumbai Comic-Con". (PTI)

Trolled for his son's name 'Jehangir', Chinmay Mandlekar says he won't play Shivaji Maharaj's role



PUNE, April 22: Trolled over his son's name, "Jehangir", noted Marathi actor Chinmay Mandlekar has announced he would not play the character of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as his family is being mentally harassed on social media.

Mandlekar said his son is 11-year-old but trolling over his name started only recently.

The actor and his wife Neha claimed they have been subjected to mental harassment over their son's name.

"My wife Neha had talked about the trolling of our family over our son's name yesterday through a social media post. After clarifying the views over the name, the trolling and comments did not decrease. In fact, the bad comments have increased and the trolls are now raising doubts over them and as a person, this is annoying me (sic)," Mandlekar stated on social media.

The actor said he was open to criticism about his work as an actor but trolls have no right to comment on his personal life.

Mandlekar also said he had clarified why he named his son "Jehangir" multiple times on social media.

Jehangir was the fourth Mughal emperor, who ruled from 1605 till his death in 1627.

"The tone of the trolling is that I have played the character of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in multiple movies and still the name of my son is Jehangir. My son was born in 2013 and today he is 11 years old. I did not face the trolling then. It is happening now," the actor said.

Mandlekar has written, directed or acted in successful plays such as "Bechaki" and "Sukhanshi Bhandto Aamhi". He had essayed the character of Chhatrapati Shivaji in Marathi movies "Farzand", "Pawankhind", "Subhedar" and "Sher Shivraj".

He had also starred in Marathi movies - "Zenda", "Morya or Gajaar: Journey of the Soul", and also played supporting roles in Hindi films including "Tere Bin Laden" and "Shanghai".

Mandlekar said he was appreciated a lot for playing the role of the Maratha king.

"But because of that role, if my family is being harassed, I announce here with great humility that I will not play that character. This decision has saddened me. The role was an expression of my devotion and love for Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj," he stated.

Hitting back at trolls, the actor wondered whether they will change the name of the iconic Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai.

"The Government of India conferred Bharat Ratna on Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoji Tata. Do we think about his name when we use the products and services by his company Tata," he said. (PTI)



Kit Harington says he's 'not so interested' in playing heroic roles after 'Game of Thrones'

LOS ANGELES, April 22: British star Kit Harington says it's tough to play a hero on screen today and that's why he has consciously sought to play "anti-hero-ish" roles post-"Game of Thrones".

The actor rose to international prominence with his portrayal of the upright warrior Jon Snow, one of the pivotal characters in "Game of Thrones", the HBO epic fantasy show that concluded in 2019 after eight seasons.

Ever since he wrapped "Game of Thrones", Harington said he seems to have lost interest in playing the classic hero.

That is seemingly what I've been hunting a bit. If I look at the roles I've taken since playing an out-and-out hero in "Game of Thrones," I have to admit there seems to be some sort of pushback about playing a hero. I'm not so interested in heroic roles, and if I am, they have to be pretty anti-hero-ish... he told Entertainment Weekly.

The actor got his wish in Rod Blackhurst's "Blood for Dust", a neo-Western crime thriller set

in snowy Montana. In his latest film, Harington plays Ricky, a sociopathic drug-slinging arms dealer sporting a handlebar mustache and gold chain.

"He's sort of a devil-on-the-shoulder character, the antagonist who's with you all the way through. He's like a good-time guy in a bad world. He doesn't want to have to face reality," he said of the role.

People who successfully play classically heroic roles are "very talented actors", added Harington. My heart goes out to people playing heroes. They're f***** hard to play and to make interesting. It is more fascinating as an actor, I think, to empathise with someone deeply faulted and wrong, to try and find your way into why they are doing these things.

(Playing) a guy who is doing all the right things and is driven by being good, it's harder to do that... But at the moment, I just find it more interesting looking for the f*****-up people, he said. (PTI)



I'm mindful of treating characters as people, says 'Dil Dosti Dilemma' director Debbie Rao

MUMBAI, April 22: It's important to be true to the story and treat characters like human beings, says director Debbie Rao, whose upcoming project is the young adult series "Dil Dosti Dilemma".

An adaptation of author Andaleeb Wajid's 2016 book "Asmara's Summer", the Bengaluru-set show follows Asmara, a popular, witty, and charming young girl, whose summer takes an unexpected turn when she is sent to her grandparents' neighbourhood as punishment.

Rao, best known for directing "Pushpavalli" starring Sumukhi Suresh and the Indian adaptation of the popular UK mockumentary "The Office", described Wajid's novel as a simple story with a lot of complexities.

"In the book-to-screen adaptation process, what we looked at mostly was not making it a unidimensional story... So, everyone has their own interesting arcs, relatable, authen-

tic problems. I wanted to make a show that people can get immersed in the characters and not start questioning life and humanity... It's a clean, beautiful show that is wholesome and that I hope every family enjoys watching.

"Sometimes your message, story and the earnestness with which you are trying to tell the story gets lost because of some tiny little deviation that someone has caught on to... It's important to be true to the characters and story... Every character is a human being, and the choices they are making are as human beings. (I was) Very mindful of the fact that I treat the characters as people," the director told PTI in an interview here.

Actress Anushka Sen plays the lead role of Asmara in "Dil Dosti Dilemma", which also stars Kush Jotwani, Tanvi Azmi, Shishir Sharma, Suhasini Mulay, and Revathi Pillai.

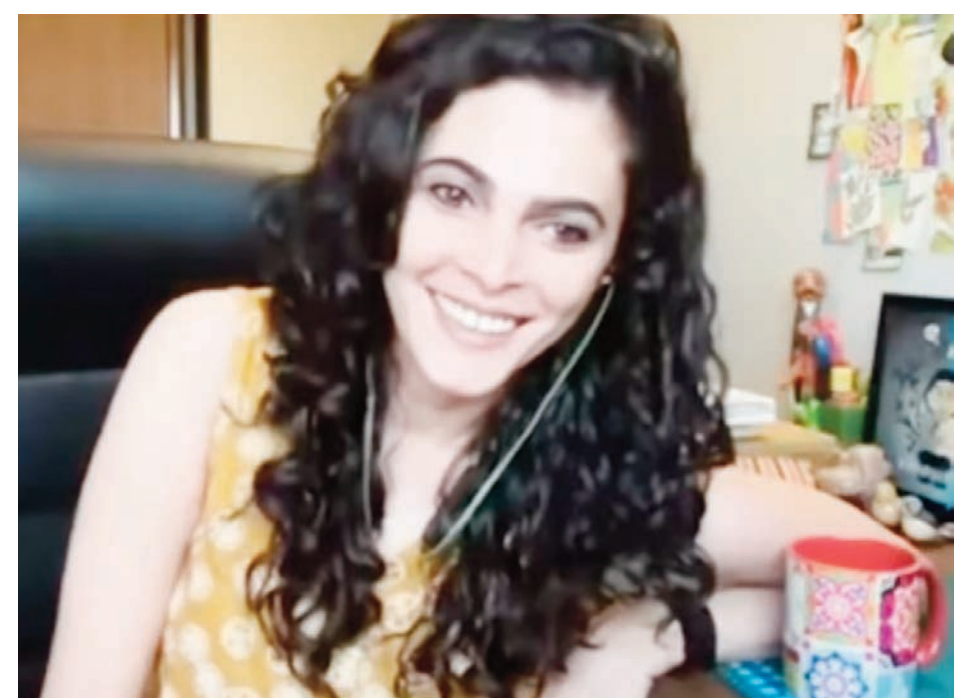
Rao said she is glad there was no social

media when she was a teenager.

"I make so many of the same mistakes that the youth make. Youth make the same mistakes that I made. I sometimes thank my stars (that) I'm not a teenager right now, because I think the pressure of social media, your peers, image perception, all of that is so much more now. I can't imagine being in school with a cell phone or like being on social media. It breaks my brain to think about it..." she added.

"Dil Dosti Dilemma" also features Elisha Mayor and Vishakha Pandey in pivotal roles.

It is produced by Ten Years Younger Productions and written by Anuradha Tiwari, Bugs Bhargava Krishna, Raghav Dutt and Manjari Pupala. Seema Mohapatra and Jahanara Bhargava serve as creative producers. The series will premiere on April 25 on Prime Video, with dubs available in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada. (PTI)



CRICKET ICON SACHIN TENDULKAR ALSO CONGRATULATED GUKESH FOR HIS STUPENDOUS FEAT

The future is here: Accolades pour in for Gukesh after historic win

NEW DELHI, April 22: People from all walks of life, including the chess community, went into a frenzy as they hailed India's D Gukesh as a potential "future world champion" after he etched his name in the history books by winning the prestigious Candidates tournament in Toronto.

Gukesh drew with American Hikaru Nakamura in the final round to not only win the prestigious tournament but also become the youngest ever challenger to the world title at 17.

Five-time world champion and the only other Indian to win the Candidates, the legendary Viswanathan Anand was one of the first people to congratulate the teenager.

"Congratulations to @DGukesh for becoming the youngest challenger. The @WacaChess family is so proud of what you have done. I'm personally very proud of how you played and handled tough situations. Enjoy the moment," Anand wrote on 'X'.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also hailed Gukesh's inspirational win.

"India is exceptionally proud of @DGukesh on becoming the youngest-ever player to win the #FIDECandidates! Gukesh's remarkable achievement at the Candidates in Toronto showcases his



extraordinary talent and dedication. His outstanding performance and journey to the top inspires millions," Modi wrote.

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar also congratulated Gukesh for his stupendous feat.

"What a triumph, @DGukesh! The youngest ever to win the FIDE Candidates—at only 17! Your journey from here leads to the World

Championship, and we'll be with you at every move. Go make history! #FIDECandidates," Tendulkar tweeted.

Gukesh had become the third youngest player in history to earn the Grandmaster title at the age of 12 and English grandmaster David Howell said he knew the prodigiously talented player would go on to do great things from the moment

he played his first match against the Indian.

"Congrats to Gukesh on winning the Candidates!! What a tournament I knew he was special ever since our first game. He was just 12 years old (but already a GM!) While analysing, both his mature attitude and his calculation skills impressed me hugely. Future world champ?" Howell wrote.

Former world champion and Grandmaster Vladimir Kramnik of Russia congratulated Gukesh for his astounding performance.

"What an evening Congratulations to Gukesh and special award for both Fabi, Ian for their incredible performance today. One of the most interesting games I ever saw. Bravo, REAL FIGHTERS, for giving it all. Most important, more than anything in chess in fact Full respect," Kramnik wrote.

With the win, Gukesh bettered the legendary Garry Kasparov's 40-year-old record. The Russian great was 22 when he qualified in 1984 to clash with compatriot Anatoly Karpov. The Chennai-based teen will take on reigning world champion, China's Ding Liren, for the crown later this year.

Indian grandmaster Koneru Humpy, who finished second in the women's section, said "Congratulations to @DGukesh for becoming the youngest challenger!!"

Another Indian Grandmaster Tania Sachdev said Gukesh's win shows that "future is here."

"GUKESH WINS THE CANDIDATES!! The future is here. It's today, 22.04.2024 a date to remember It's going to be Ding Liren vs Gukesh, World Chess Championship 2024" Sachdev tweeted.

Dronacharya award-winning coach Ramachandran Ramesh lauded the Indian's inspiring run at the tournament.

"Hearty Congratulations to young @Gukesh for convincingly winning the Candidates. Inspiring performance! Whole India is proud of you!" Ramesh tweeted.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijani chess grandmaster Teimour Radjabov was left spellbound by the teenager's achievement.

"@DGukesh congratulations, stunning! At any age, but at 17 years old... it is just WOW!" he wrote. Industrialist Anand Mahindra predicted a long and shining future for Gukesh.

"The ICEMAN prevails!! He comes from a swelteringly hot state, but he's shown he can keep his cool even when competitive heat is at its peak. Just 17 years old,

@DGukesh has a long and shining future ahead of him. And so does Indian Chess. An entire nation stands and Cheers this Chaturanga Champ," Mahindra wrote. (PTI)

Revenge on CSK's mind as LSG eye a heist in Dhoni's bastion



CHENNAI, April 22: Revenge will be on defending champions Chennai Super Kings' minds when they host an unpredictable Lucknow Super Giants here in their reverse IPL fixture on Tuesday with both the teams desperate to break out of the mid-table log-jam.

The last time the two teams faced off in Lucknow last week, KL Rahul and Quinton de Kock put up a record opening partnership which proved to be the difference as LSG joined CSK at eight points in the IPL standing.

The Super Kings have been a force to be reckoned with at home and they will look to set the record straight this time. Following the away loss, CSK will be eager to redeem themselves in the three consecutive home ties to march towards the playoffs.

For CSK, skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad and Shivam Dube have done bulk of the scoring and their failure against LSG meant they didn't get a flying start and also struggled in the middle overs.

While opener Rachin Ravindra's form is a concern, CSK also promoted Ajinkya Rahane as the opener and as a result, Gaikwad pushed himself a spot down to three.

Having scored three 50-plus scores as an opener so far, it would once again be a tricky call for Gaikwad to whether stick to the latest shuffle or promote himself back to the top.

While Ravindra Jadeja stepped up with a composed fifty, which allowed Moeen Ali and MS Dhoni to produce the late fireworks and give the team a fighting total, CSK would hope their top-order gets their act together before they face LSG again.

CSK's bowling unit was at their wits end against the rampaging duo of Rahul and Quinton the other day.

Young Matheesha Pathirana was their best bowler but the onus will be on pacers Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande and Mustafizur Rahman to produce a better show when they face the same opposition again.

Left-arm spinner Jadeja too struggled and will need to step up on their home turf, having done so in the past.

For LSG, batting has been an issue but they have shown how

devastating they can be if their top-order fires. Rahul and Quinton were on a roll and they will once again have to do the heavy lifting at Chepauk. Also Nicholas Pooran has hit top gear when needed and LSG will bank on him a lot.

In bowling, LSG will hope for the return of young pace sensation Mayank Yadav, who had to sit out of two games after suffering lower abdominal strain.

Pacer Mohsin Khan and Yash Thakur did well to restrict CSK initially but found themselves in the firing line of Dhoni in the final overs, something they need to work on before they walk into his den. Matt Henry had a wicketless debut for LSG and he too will be eager to prove himself.

In the spin department, Krunal Pandya's two wickets made a lot of difference in the middle-overs and he will have to take the lead again against CSK, while young Ravi Bishnoi will have to get over the thrashing that he received from Ali to find his mojo back.

The visitors would be fancying their chances but LSG would need consistency to pull off another win at CSK's fortress.

Squads:

Chennai Super Kings: Rachin Ravindra, Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), Ajinkya Rahane, Daryl Mitchell, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Sameer Rizvi, MS Dhoni (wk), Shardul Thakur, Tushar Deshpande, Mustafizur Rahman, Matheesha Pathirana, Nishant Sinde, Moeen Ali, Mitchell Santner, Shaik Rashied, Aravelly Avanih, Maheesh Theekshana, RS Hangargekar, Sameer Singh, Mukesh Choudhary, Prashant Solanki, Ajay Jadav Mandal, Richard Gleeson and Deepak Chahar.

Lucknow Super Giants: Quinton de Kock, KL Rahul (c & wk), Deepak Hooda, Ayush Badoni, Marcus Stoinis, Nicholas Pooran, Krunal Pandya, Ravi Bishnoi, Mohsin Khan, Shamir Joseph, Yash Thakur, Manimaran Siddharth, Prerak Mankad, Arshad Khan, Krishnappa Gowtham, Amit Mishra, Kyle Mayers, Ashton Turner, Matt Henry, Naveen-Haq, Devdutt Padikkal, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Mayank Yadav and Arshin Kulkarni.

Match start time: 7.30 PM (IST). (PTI)

Seventh-round loss gave me energy, motivation to aim for title: Gukesh

NEW DELHI, April 22: For most athletes victory is usually the biggest motivator but not for history-making teen Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh, who said he got the "energy" to become the youngest Candidates chess champion thanks to his seventh-round loss to Iran's Firouzja Alireza.

The 17-year-old from Chennai, whose father is an ENT surgeon and mother a microbiologist, drew his 14th and final round game against American Hikaru Nakamura to win the prestigious tournament and become the youngest challenger for the world championship title.

He will take on China's Ding Liren in that match later this year.

"I was feeling really good from the start but after my seventh round loss against Alireza, I was really upset. It was a painful loss. But the next day I had a rest day and was feeling my absolute best," Gukesh told PTI videos in a zoom interview from Toronto.

"The loss kind of provided me with the energy and motivation. After the loss I really felt that if I continue doing the right thing, and I am in the right mental state then I can really go for the wins," he added.

Gukesh became only the second Indian after five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand to win the Candidates. In the process, he bettered a 40-year-old record by the great Garry Kasparov, who became the youngest to challenge for the world title in 1984 at the age of 22.

Reflecting on how the tournament went for him, the world's third youngest Grandmaster said, "The focus from the beginning of the tournament was to trust the process, to be in the right mindset and play the right chess.

"I think throughout the tournament, I managed to do that well and consider myself fortunate enough to have the results go my way."

On how he felt after winning the title and becoming the youngest challenger for World Championship title, Gukesh said "It was a beautiful moment, I was so happy and relieved to have officially made it. I was just super happy."

The Indian needed the last game between Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia and top-seeded American Fabiano Caruana to end in a draw and this is exactly how things panned out.

Had any of these two players won, the tournament would have needed a tie-break as Gukesh and the winner would have ended up in joint lead.

"I was trying to prepare for the tie-break, Me and my trainer were discussing for the tie-break beforehand but soon after we started discussing we got to know that there will be no need for it," Gukesh said.

On what will be his plan for the world title match, the dates and venue for which are yet to be decided, he said: "I did not have much time to think about the World Championship final after winning the (Candidates) tournament. (PTI)

Chennai's chess nursery: The learning ground for Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa

CHENNAI, April 22: Even a casual stroll around the city will help visitors collect crumbs of Chennai's flourishing romance with chess - Napier Bridge decked up as a chess board, murals on the walls of many buildings or advertisements of coaching centres.

But Velammal Institutions is the catalysing force behind this chess revolution in the city.

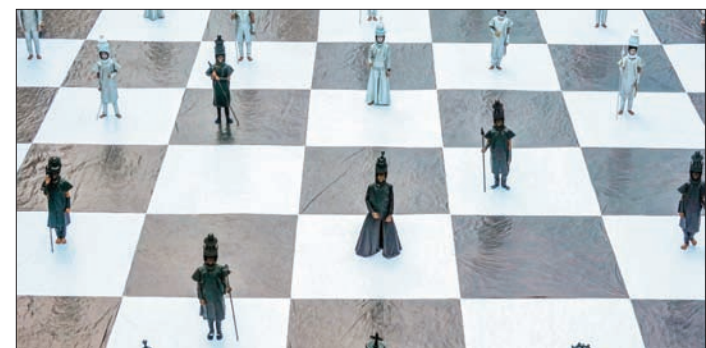
It is the nursery where GMs D Gukesh, who on Monday won the Candidates to become the youngest-ever challenger for world title, and R Praggnanandhaa learned the intricacies of the sport.

"Chess has always been a part of the city's culture and the decision to make chess a part of the curriculum has really helped it to boom. Of course, they also have a champion like Anand to look up to, S Velavan, the chess co-coordinator at the Velammal, said.

"Since most of the children coming here have a genuine interest in chess, we don't have to push them. They combine studies and chess well, and, in fact, the students who play chess have done even better in their studies too," Velavan added.

What he refers to here is the '7 to 17 programme' introduced in schools by former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalitha in 2013, coinciding with that year's World Chess Championship between Viswanathan Anand and Magnus Carlsen held in the city.

Their dedicated approach has produced matching results too as Velammal Institutions won the World School Chess championship for five successive years and both Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa too were part of their squad in 2021.



It's not surprising then to see that several Grand Masters have come out of this school since 2005 -- SP Sethuraman, Leon Mendonca, K Priyadarshan, B Adhiban, Vishnu Prasanna, Visakh NR, Vignesh NR, M Karthikeyan, C Aravindh, Karthik Venkataraman, V Pranav, S Bharath, Arjun Kalyan, P Karthikeyan, N Srinath while women GMs are Varshini S, daughter of Velavan, Vaishali R, sister of Praggnanandhaa, R Rakshit, B Savitha Shri.

"What we do here is to ensure that the children play regularly in tournaments so that they don't break away from the sport for a longer duration. It will not be good for their growth (as players) and they need to play at all junior levels like under-11, under-15 or under-17," Velavan said.

"It keeps them mentally prepared for tougher competitions in their way and they will not be in awe of their opponents or a competitive atmosphere," he notes.

But the challenge for them is just beginning as more children are trying to enroll into the school to make a career out of chess.

Velavan said the Velammal Institutions are trying to bring in more

coaches from outside to cater to the needs of a larger pool of players, and arrange more modern facilities and chess literature available for the aspirants.

Chennai's surge as the chess capital of the country has not one bit amazed the fraternity, and AICF vice-president DP Anantha traces the journey back to the 1970s.

"Along with Bengaluru, Chennai (then Madras) had the most privately owned chess institutions in the country. I still remember how the Tal Chess Club in Chennai used to conduct annual events and some big names like Manuel Aaron used to play in them.

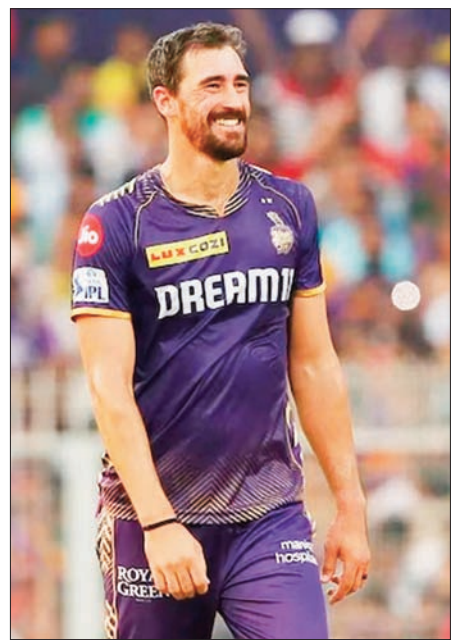
"It was prestigious to win the event because even some local players used to upset fancied players. They have kept that tradition very diligently," says Anantha.

The Tal club, which was started with the backing of the erstwhile Soviet Union, now no longer operates but institutions such as Velammal have ensured that the city will not go through a chess degrowth.

Currently, more than 60 recognised chess academies run in Chennai, including the Chess Gukesh by GM RB Ramesh, who mentors Praggnanandhaa. (PTI)

Starc is a superstar, don't think of him from investment standpoint: KKR CEO Mysore

KKR had bought Starc for a record ₹ 24.75 crore



KOLKATA, April 22: Under scrutiny for his poor show in the ongoing season, IPL's costliest buy Mitchell Starc on Monday received the backing of Kolkata Knight Riders' managing director and CEO Venky Mysore, who said they don't think of him from an "investment standpoint."

KKR had bought Starc for a record ₹ 24.75 crore but it always came with a caveat as the Aussie left-arm quick had limited experience in the shortest format and was making a comeback to IPL after nine years.

"He's a superstar and he's a quality player," Mysore said on the sidelines of Knight Golf event at RCGC here.

"We don't think of it from an investment standpoint, because you go to the auction and things happen in the auction, which is

not in the hands of the player, nor is it in the hands of anybody else.

"We just felt that an addition to the team like Mitchell Starc would add a lot of value, which it has. I mean, his presence itself in the lineup adds a different dynamic to the team, and there were specific skills that the support staff were looking for. So, we think we had that."

Starc's rustiness in the T20 format came to fore as he conceded 100 runs without taking any wicket from his eight overs in the first two matches.

It turned from bad to worse on Sunday when he leaked 54 runs from 16 balls at Eden Gardens, and in the final over, RCB No 9 Karn Sharma with little batting pedigree smashed him for three sixes in four balls.

Starc, however, managed to

salvage some pride taking a low return catch to dismiss Karn that eventually sealed a dramatic one-run victory.

"There are times when games are up and down. Everybody gets taken to the cleaners at times, and there are other times they come and just do their thing and win games for the team. So we're super happy having him in the setup," Mysore said.

With five wins from seven matches at the halfway mark, the second placed KKR look a transformed side under mentor and two-time title winning former captain Gautam Gambhir.

Gambhir, who last represented the side in 2017, returned to his former franchise as a team mentor, relinquishing the same position at Lucknow Super Giants this season.

Mysore said Gambhir has

added a lot of "weight" to the side.

"I think the consistency that is shown, I think we look like a more balanced and settled side this year. Needless to say, Gautam (Gambhir) coming in adds a lot of weight purely from the intensity that he brings, the experience that he brings.

"The winning attitude, I mean, he and Chandu (head coach Chandrakant Pandit) are both very, very determined and very desperate to win.

"They have a great support staff around them. So, I think sometimes these things all have to come together. It's very difficult to pinpoint to one thing and say, this is what made the difference. But very happy with where we are right now, so fingers crossed," Mysore said. (PTI)

Bhavesh, Simranpreet win second 25m Pistol Olympic Selection Trials

NEW DELHI, April 22: Bhavesh Shekhawat and Simranpreet Kaur Brar emerged winners in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) and women's 25m pistol OST T2 trials respectively at the first-ever Olympic Selection Trials (OST) for Rifle and Pistol at the Dr.Karni Singh Shooting ranges here on Monday. Bhavesh shot 34 in the RFP final, comfortably holding off OST T1 winner Anish Bhanwala (29), to extend his good form in the trials. Vijayveer Sidhu was third with 22-hits.

Adarsh Singh (17) and Ankur Goel (13) finished fourth and fifth. In the women's pistol, Simranpreet continued her good run in the trials, firing 37-hits in the 10 series of five-shots each, to emerge triumphant. She too held off OST T1 winner and Olympian Manu Bhaker who signed-off with 35-hits on the day. Esha Singh with 30-hits took third and the final podium points available. Rhythm Sangwan (24), the second quota holder in the event, finished fourth while Abhinaya Patil (16) was fifth. (PTI)

Behind Gukesh's Candidates success lies tale of his parents' sacrifices

CHENNAI, April 22: Young Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh may be grabbing headlines after his historic win at the Candidates but away from the spotlight lies the stories of sacrifice by his parents, who had to put careers on hold, dig into their savings and also turn to crowd-funding to fuel his dream.

The 17-year-old won the Candidates Chess Tournament in Toronto on Monday to become the youngest ever challenger to the world title, bettering a record created by the legendary Garry Kasparov 40 years ago.

But the journey to the top was a tough one and involved sacri-

fices not only from him but his parents -- ENT surgeon Dr Rajinikanth and Padma, a microbiologist.

Rajinikanth had to stop practice in 2017-18 as the father-son duo travelled across the world on a shoe-string budget when Gukesh chased the final GM norm, while his mother turned the primary breadwinner, taking care of the household expenses.

"His parents have sacrificed a lot," Gukesh's childhood coach Vishnu Prasanna told PTI.

"While his father has almost surrendered his career. His mother has been supporting the family while his father has been

travelling, and they hardly get to see each other."

Gukesh became India's youngest Grandmaster at 12 years, seven months and 17 days in January 2019.

Despite coming from a family of doctors, Gukesh's passion lay in the 64-square of chess board and looking at his dedication, his parents decided to stop him from attending school full-time after Class IV.

"He has not appeared for any exams in a while. So, I don't think he is trying to pursue anything academically at this stage, and I don't know if he will be going back to it. But, his mother

is a bit worried about it," Prasanna adds.

Gukesh also was without a sponsor and had to manage his finances through prize money and crowd-funding but despite all that he went on to overtake idol Viswanathan Anand as India's no.1 last year.

Prasanna was impressed at how quickly Gukesh scaled the heights of success, attributing his achievements to his obsession with the sport and insatiable desire to learn and improve.

"It's an incredible performance from him. To get to this level, you need a lot of things to work right, and it's a huge achieve-

ment. He already has a small place in history," Prasanna said.

"His focus and complete obsession with the game, besides also trying to get better. He is always thinking much more than anybody about how to get even better -- his biggest defining quality."

After learning to play the sport at the age of seven, Gukesh came under Prasanna's tutelage in 2017. "We met in 2017, and as soon as we started to work together, he began scoring the IM norms and so on. And then, things started to happen so fast and quickly that within two years or so, he became a Grandmas-

ter," he recalled.

"We continued to train intensely before COVID hit. During that period, we used to train at Vishwanathan Anand's academy and utilise the ample time that we had. He went up to 2,640 in rating before coming down to 2,610. Even last year, he went up to 2,750 and came down to 2,730.

"His previous big breakthrough was getting that Olympiad gold, and now, he has bettered it by not just qualifying for the Candidates, but even winning it. Marvellous achievement."

Currently having a rating of

2,743, his peak rating till date is 2,758, which he achieved last September. He is presently ranked 16th in the world by the International Chess Federation (FIDE), while his best ranking has been eighth.

Among the players he beat in Candidates was the young R Praggnanandhaa. Both youngsters have idolised the legendary Viswanathan Anand.

"Vishy has been his most important ambassador. Together, we used to discuss about him (Gukesh) and his future a lot, and we both would probably say the same thing to him," said Prasanna. (PTI)

17 YEAR OLD BECOMES YOUNGEST EVER CHALLENGER FOR WORLD TITLE

Grandmaster Gukesh wins Candidates Chess Tournament



TORONTO, April 22: India's 17-year-old Grandmaster D Gukesh scripted history by winning the Candidates Chess Tournament here to become the youngest ever challenger to the world title, bettering a record created by the legendary Garry Kasparov 40 years ago.

Gukesh played out an easy draw with American Hikaru Nakamura in the 14th and final round to finish with nine out of a possible 14 points in the tournament that is held to decide the challenger to the world champion.

The triumph entitles Gukesh a clash against reigning world champion Ding Liren of China in the last quarter of the year.

The Chennai-based teen bettered Kasparov's record by quite a distance as the Russian great was 22 when he qualified in 1984 to clash with compatriot Anatoly Karpov.

"So relieved and so happy. I was following this crazy game (between Fabio Caruana and Ian Nepomniachtchi), and then I went for a walk with my second (Gregor Gajevsky). I think that helped." Gukesh said after winning. Gukesh also won a cash award of 88,500 Euros (approx Rs 78.5 lakh). The total prize fund of

the Candidates was 5,00,000 Euros. He became only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to win the prestigious tournament. Five-time world champion Anand's triumph came in 2014.

"Congratulations to @DGukesh for becoming the youngest challenger. The @WacaChess family is so proud of what you have done. I'm personally very proud of how you played and handled tough situations. Enjoy the moment," Anand posted on 'X' to congratulate the youngster, who like him, also hails from Chennai.

Needing at least a draw, Gukesh gave nothing away to Nakamura, a clear signal that the teenager is ready for the big stage and is going to be the next biggest star in the chess world.

The black pieces did not matter much as Nakamura was at sea in the Queen's Gambit Accepted and did not find any ways to pursue playing for an advantage.

Gukesh won a pawn and Nakamura had to find the path to equality in the ensuing rook and opposite coloured Bishop's endgame. The game lasted till move 71 but the result was never in doubt.

With Gukesh ending on 9 points, all eyes were on the match between American Caruana and Russia's Nepomniachtchi.

"...those 15 minutes were probably the most stressful of this entire tournament, I was watching the commentary for sometime and then me and Gajevsky (his trainer) went for a walk and then my father came running," Gukesh revealed.

"Obviously the support system is huge, coming to my team I would not like to take their names but they know how grateful I am to them," he said.

The American outplayed Nepomniachtchi right from the opening and enjoyed a nearly winning position for several moves.

However, the clock did the talking here as Caruana blundered on the 39th move to allow a playable position.

Things were far from over though, Caruana built his position all over again and was close to winning a second time when again his clock deceived him and he failed to find the correct continuation. The resulting position was a drawn queen and pawns endgame where Caruana kept pressing to no avail.

Had any of these two players won, the tournament would have needed a tie-break as Gukesh and the winner would have ended up in joint lead.

Caruana, Nepomniachtchi and Nakamura all ended on an identical 8.5 points for the shared second place while Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa ended fifth on seven points defeating Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan.

Vidit Gujrathi played out a quick draw with Firouzja Alireza of France in the final round to end on the sixth spot with six points in all.

Alireza finished seventh on five points while Abasov ended last on 3.5 points in all.

Gukesh has been making waves for a while now after becoming the third youngest in chess history to earn the Grandmaster title at the age of 12. He later became the youngest to achieve an ELO rating of 2750. The youngster's father Rajinikanth, who is an ENT surgeon but has stopped his practice to nurture Gukesh's chess dreams, accompanied him to the tournament. His mother Padma is a microbiologist. Last year, Gukesh won a silver medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games. (PTI)

Ramit Tandon bows out in third round of El Gouna squash tournament



NEW DELHI, April 22: India's Ramit Tandon's impressive run at the El Gouna International Open squash tournament came to an end as he went down in straight games to Peruvian world No 3 Diego Elias in the third round of El Gouna International Open in Egypt. The Indian was no match for former world number 1 Elias, who dispatched Ramit 11-2, 11-4, 11-2 in 35 minutes in the USD 198,000 PSA Platinum event on Sunday. The Indian world No 40, who is preparing for next month's World Championships in Egypt, had upset French world No 11 Victor Crouin in the second round after brushing aside Egyptian world No 62 Aly Hussein in his opener. (PTI)

PCB constitutes panel to probe alleged mismanagement of Ehsanullah's injury

LAHORE, April 22: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has formed a medical probe panel to look into allegations that young fast bowler Ehsanullah's elbow injury was mismanaged by its medical panel.

Ehsanullah has struggled to recover from an elbow injury that he sustained last year after making his white ball debuts for the national team.

The independent medical board constitutes notable names such as Prof. Dr Javed Akram, Prof. Dr Rana Dilawazi and Prof. Dr Mumraiz Naqshbani.

"The medical board will submit its findings to us within a week's time and tell us whether Ehsanullah's treatment was handled properly or mis-managed," PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi told media. Ehsanullah had emerged as a promising prospect in last year's Pakistan Super League (PSL) but due to his elbow injury he has not played any cricket since after mid-2023.

A PCB insider said that Naqvi had formed the medical board after he was told that a specialist in London, who checked Ehsanullah last week, confirmed he might require another surgery as his first surgery in a Lahore hospital had been botched up.

The PCB's medical panel headed by Dr Sohail Saleem has handled his diagnosis and treatment since last year.

Naqvi said Ehsanullah was still in London for his treatment on PCB expenses and if need arose he would be sent to the United States for his treatment.

"The PCB values all its players and there is no way we will not ensure he is back to playing cricket again," he added.

He said once the probe is complete the picture will be clear but he personally would not tolerate any unprofessional work from board employees.

The board will recommend future course of action for proper treatment. (PTI)

Mayank Yadav recovering well, may return against Rajasthan on April 27: Morne Morkel

CHENNAI, April 22: Lucknow Super Giants are planning to bring back pace sensation Mayank Yadav in their next IPL fixture at home against Rajasthan Royals on April 27, bowling coach Morne Morkel revealed here on Monday.

Following a spectacular start to IPL with three-fors against each of Punjab Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Mayank was sidelined by "soreness in lower abdominal area" since April 7. On the eve of their return leg clash against Chennai Super Kings on Tuesday, Morkel said Mayank had stayed back in Lucknow and is set to return against Rajasthan Royals.

"He stayed behind in Lucknow just to give him that extra two-three days without travelling," Morkel told reporters here. "He is with (assistant coach) Lance Klusener and the rest of the guys in Lucknow, training and getting ready. So I think, anything from the next

game onwards, we'll look to bring him back in," he added.

Morkel said Mayank's recent start in bowling shows promising progress, with efforts now directed towards hitting the 150 kmph mark consistently.

"He's coming along very nicely. We're very happy with his progression. He started



bowling three-four days ago, so for him it's just a matter now, of course of him, the expectation is greater, (given) that he bowls every ball at 150 kmph.

"It's just to really get his body and his mind in that sort of state where he's confident, running and bowling all four overs at a

tight pace."

The defending champions Chennai Super Kings suffered an eight-wicket defeat at Lucknow in their previous outing.

Morkel is aware that the IPL heavyweights will hope to get their record straight after returning home. "They plan well, and they've got a coach and they've got the experience of MS (Dhoni) and all the international players. "It is definitely a team that you need to be on the money from ball one. You can't afford to give them that momentum, because once you give that momentum away from them, or once they have momentum, it's very hard to pull the game back. "We'll have to be confident, especially after beating them with eight wickets in the last game. It's a team that you can't afford to be in a back foot, so from a mental point of view, we'll have to stand up in all the battles, in all departments, with bat, ball and field," Morkel added. (PTI)

Humpy finishes second in Women's candidate



TORONTO, April 22: Indian grandmaster Koneru Humpy delivered the goods when it mattered, defeating erstwhile joint leader Tingjie Lei of China to finish second on a superior tiebreak in the women candidates tournament here.

Zhongyi Tan of China expectedly topped the tables after settling for a draw with Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine.

The real story of the day was R Vaishali who scored her fifth victory on the trot at the expense of Kateryna Lagno of Russia to tie for the second spot before finishing fourth on tiebreak. Tan finished with 9 points in all, 1.5 points clear of the nearest rivals Humpy, Lei and Vaishali who all finished second to fourth respectively.

Aleksandra Goryachkina finished fifth on seven points, a full point ahead of Lagno, while Nurgul Salimova of Bulgaria and Muzychuk ended in the last two spots in the eight-player double round-robin contest.

At the half-way stage, Humpy was languishing at 2.5 points out of seven games but came up with a splendid effort to score five points from the last seven games -- a score matched by Vaishali who was even worse at 2.5 out of nine.

Playing black against Lei, Humpy got a complicated middle game out of a Nimzo Indian

defense and Lei came up with a spectacular queen sacrifice that needed perfect follow up.

Humpy cashed in when the Chinese erred in her calculation and reached a winning endgame with her two rooks against white's rook and Bishop.

The complexities were far from over but on this day Humpy could do no wrong and squeezed out a victory after 62 hard-fought moves.

Vaishali faced the Ruy Lopez as black against Lagno who sacrificed a piece early in the middle game to initiate an attack against the black king. The Indian was however up to the task in defense and returned the extra material back to maintain the dynamics.

Lagno blundered on her 31st turn, handing the initiative to Vaishali who did not look back thereafter and coasted home after 45 moves.

Results final round (Indians unless stated): Tingjie Lei (Chn, 7.5) lost to Koneru Humpy (7.5); Kateryna Lagno (Fid, 6) lost to R Vaishali (7.5); Aleksandra Goryachkina (Fid, 7) drew with Nurgul Salimova (5.5); Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 5.5) drew with Zhongyi Tan (Chn, 9).

Final standings: 1. Tan; 2-4: Humpy, Lei, Vaishali; 5. Goryachkina; 6. Lagno; 7-8: Salimova, Muzychuk. (PTI)

Salt and Sunil Narine, the two KKR openers, have scored the bulk of runs

We may have got away with Kohli wicket: Phil Salt

KOLKATA, April 22: It was a rub of the green call that Virat Kohli was dismissed off a high full toss and Kolkata Knight Riders managed to eke out a narrow one-run win in their high-scoring IPL match against RCB on Sunday, says stumper-batter Phil Salt.

The new Hawk-Eye technology to determine no-balls for height was used when TV umpire Michael Gough deemed a waist-high delivery from KKR's Harshit Rana fair. Kohli was in full flow, scoring a brisk 18 runs off just seven balls, before Rana took a return catch to dismiss the star batter, as it became a pivotal

moment in RCB's narrow one-run loss while chasing a challenging target of 223 at Eden Gardens.

"It's split opinion, we know that. From our point of view, we feel like we may have got away with one there. It's the rub of the greens, one of those calls," said the world No 2 T20I batter at the Knight Golf event here.

The Englishman further said leveraging technology in this manner is ultimately beneficial for the game as he hinted at the possibility of a future review to assess the effectiveness of these technological advancements.

"They brought that data in, the

no-ball data, for exactly that purpose. I feel like in 12 months' time maybe there'll be some sort of review. Is it working? Is it not working? Is it a new thing to the game? "But personally, from a player's point of view, any time you're using data and technology to be more precise and get the right decisions, that's a good thing for the game," Salt added.

Salt and Sunil Narine, the two KKR openers, have scored the bulk of runs (535 runs from seven innings) for the team who have won five from their seven matches to be in the forefront of a playoff spot.

"It's great batting with Sunil, he is a very, very low-key chill guy. He's got a very different sort of skill set when he's opening the batting, as opposed to, up and down the order. "I suppose one of the good things for me is he takes the pressure off, and I don't have to strike at a rate of 200 in my first 10 balls. Some games I might, but I don't have to. "Normally, one of us gets going, and the other one feeds the strike. So, if we get a good start, we get a couple of boundaries away. You know, we can produce really big power plays, which is something that we've done." They have went

about their ways with a meticulous approach, picking the right bowler to attack and relied on match-ups, Salt said. "Our conversations are mainly, who's going to take what ball, you know, who likes to match up, left arm spin, right arm pace, all that sort of a things.

"Normally one of us who wants to put their hand up and take that arm. We keep it very, very simple." Narine has been a revelation with the bat at the top of the order as the KKR spinner who was known as a pinch-hitter, has batted this time with poise and patience. (PTI)