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Red boost for Gaurav, Lurinjyoti

Support extended to ensure defeat of BJP-led alliance: CPI (M)

GUWAHATI, April 2: The CPI(M) on Tuesday said it has extended unconditional support to Congress nominee Gaurav Gogoi and Assam Jatiya Parishad candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi in the Lok Sabha elections despite absence of a seat-sharing pact among the parties.

Though the Congress, CPI(M) and the BJP are part of the 16-party United Opposition Forum Assam (UOFA) in the state, they have put up candidates individually barring one seat.

In a series of posts on X, CPI(M)'s Assam unit said they are extending unconditional support to the opposition candidates, who are contesting in the first phase, in order to defeat the BJP-led alliance.

"CPI(M) Assam has decided to extend its unconditional support to @lurinjyotigogoi and @GauravGogoi in Dibrugarh and Jorhat LSC respectively," it added.

In Lakhimpur Lok Sabha constituency, CPI(M) shall jointly campaign with CPI for their candidate.

"While there is no seat sharing



with @INCIndia till date, we shall nevertheless campaign for @GauravGogoi in Jorhat. We however urge @INCIndia to rethink their decision regarding Barpeta LSC," CPI(M) Assam said.

The Congress nominated its state Seva Dal chief Deep Bayan

from Barpeta, while the CPI(M) has named its lone MLA in the state Assembly Manoranjan Talukdar for the seat.

Another UOFA ally, Trinamool Congress also decided to contest from Barpeta and gave ticket to Abul Kalam Azad.

From the ruling front, BJP's alliance partner Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) has nominated senior leader, and sitting Bongaigaon MLA Phani Bhusan Choudhury to contest from Barpeta for the general elections.

"It is clear from the ground that the fight is going to be between AGP-BJP Candidate and @Mano-Talukdar. Hence, @INCIndia should withdraw their candidate so that it is easier for the @INDIAAlliance to win #Barpeta LSC," CPI(M) said.

In other constituencies in the first phase, the Left party will campaign against the ruling alliance and try to make the strongest anti-BJP candidate win, it added.

Out of the 14 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress announced candidates for 13 seats. It has offered Dibrugarh seat to alliance partner Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP).

From the ruling NDA, the BJP has named 11 candidates, AGP nominated two and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) declared one candidate. (PTI)

Himanta backs BJP's Amarsing Tisso for Diphu Parliamentary seat



HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 2: Amidst fervent cheers and enthusiastic crowds, BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso from the 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency, on Tuesday filed his nomination papers, signalling the start of what promises to be a fiercely contested election.

The nomination event was preceded by a public meeting at the Diphu Government Boys Higher Secondary School playground, where Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, rallied support for Tisso's candidacy.

Addressing the gathered crowd, Sarma highlighted the multifaceted benefits of the government's initiatives, particularly emphasising the linkage of ration

cards with various welfare schemes.

"The Ration Card is linked with five schemes," he announced. "You will get free health benefits, Arundhoi, free gas cylinder under Ujjwala, and now a free insurance scheme for the head of the family. So you are getting five benefits in one ration card."

Sarma didn't shy away from taking shots at political opponents, particularly targeting the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) and its candidate JI Kathar.

"APHLC has no government at the centre or state. APHLC winning means even cows will stop producing milk," he asserted. Expressing confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

It should be tit-for-tat: CM on China renaming Arunachal areas

DIPHU, April 2: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday urged the Indian government to adopt a "tit-for-tat" approach in response to China's efforts to rename places in Arunachal Pradesh.

Sarma suggested that India should counter by assigning its own names for 60 "Tibetan areas of China."

"My request to government of India is that we should give 60 geographical names to Tibetan areas of China," Sarma told reporters here.

While maintaining that "it should be always tit-for-tat", the CM added, "But I don't want to comment as it is a policy decision of the government of India. But if they have named 30, we should name 60."

China had released a fourth list of 30 new names of various places in Arunachal Pradesh amid Beijing's stepped-up assertions in recent weeks to re-emphasise its claim over the Indian state.

The Ministry of External Affairs has firmly rejected the attempts by China to rename places in Arunachal Pradesh and asserted that assigning "invented names" will not alter the reality that the state "is, has been, and will always be" an integral and inalienable part of India. (PTI)

Prohibitory orders imposed in Assam's Cachar ahead of IS polls

SILCHAR, April 2: Prohibitory orders were clamped in Assam's Cachar district by the administration on Tuesday citing concerns over possible communal violence and breach of peace ahead of the general elections.

The order by district magistrate Rohan Kumar Jha will remain in effect until further orders, an official statement said. Prohibitory orders under CrPC section 144 has been imposed throughout the district in apprehension of breach of peace, public tranquillity and safety of the public during the election period, the statement added. Polling in Cachar district, which comes under Silchar Lok Sabha constituency, is scheduled in the second phase on April 26.

According to the order, no person or group will be allowed to carry weapons like lathi, lance, spears, 'dao' or any other articles which can be used as a weapon of offence. Additionally, the prohibition extends to carrying guns, toy pistols, revolvers, as well as using or carrying any explosives, fireworks, or materials capable of producing sound or chemical effects.

Earlier on March 27, the Cachar district administration had imposed prohibitory orders ahead of nomination filing of candidates. These orders included restrictions on the number of people and vehicles permitted within a 100-metre radius of the offices of the returning officer or assistant returning officer. (PTI)

SC slams Ramdev and Balkrishna, calls apology lip service

NEW DELHI, April 2: The Supreme Court on Tuesday tore into Patanjali Ayurved's defence for putting out misleading advertisements, rejecting the apology from yoga guru Ramdev and the firm's managing director Acharya Balkrishna as "lip service" and warning them against perjury. The bench, headed by Justice Hima Kohli, also questioned the Centre's alleged inaction over Patanjali's tall claims about the efficacy of its products and denigrating allopathy during the Covid peak and asked why the government chose to keep its "eyes shut".

Both Ramdev and Balkrishna were present in court in connection with show cause notices on why contempt proceedings should not be initiated against them.

The bench, also comprising Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah, posted the matter for hearing on April 10 and said (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Three govt officials arrested on bribery charges

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: In a significant crackdown on corruption, the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC), Assam, has apprehended three government officials involved in bribery schemes, according to an official statement. The accused officials were identified as Rani Borah, Dapendra Nath Brahma and Naba Krishna Roy. Borah served as the accountant at the office of the district agricultural officer in Assam's Jorhat district, while Roy held the position of block elementary education officer in Dhubri's Golakganj and had demanded ₹ 3000 as a bribe.

"A complaint was received at the Directorate of Vigilance & Anti-Corruption, Assam, alleging that Rani Borah, the accountant at the

office of the district agricultural officer, Jorhat, had demanded 10 per cent of ₹ 37,000 as a bribe from the complainant for processing of travelling allowance," the statement read. It further claimed that upon refusal to pay the bribe, the complainant approached the Directorate to take necessary legal action against the above-mentioned public servant.

"Accordingly, a trap was laid today, on 02/04/2024 by a team from the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, Assam, in the office of the district agricultural officer, Jorhat. Borah was caught red-handed in the office immediately after accepting ₹ 6,000 as part of the demanded bribe from the complainant," it added.

Meanwhile, Roy was accused of

conspiring with Dapendra Nath Brahma, senior assistant of the same office, who had demanded ₹ 3000 as a bribe from the complainant for updating his service book. Later, the bribe amount was reduced to ₹ 2,500 by the accused persons.

"Unwilling to pay the bribe, the complainant approached the Directorate for taking necessary legal action against the above-mentioned public servants. Accordingly, a trap was laid on Tuesday by a team from the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, Assam, in the office of the block elementary education officer, in Dhubri's Golakganj. Dapendra Nath Brahma, senior assistant was caught red-handed in the office immediately after accepting ₹ 2,000 as (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GUWAHATI, April 2: Four candidates, including Congress nominees Gaurav Gogoi and Premal Gogoi, in the fray for the first phase of Assam Lok Sabha polls on April 19 have criminal cases pending against them though none have been convicted, according to affidavits submitted by them at the time of filing of nomination papers.

Besides Gogoi and Ganju, Sonitpur's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) contestant Rishiraj Kaundinya and Kaziranga's Bharatiya Gana Parishad candidate Sailen Chandra Malakar also have criminal cases, related to corruption and cheating respectively, pending against them.

There are 35 candidates in the fray for the April 19 first phase polls to five Lok Sabha constituencies of Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Kaziranga and Sonitpur.

Gogoi, the Congress deputy leader in the outgoing Lok Sabha and party candidate from Jorhat seat has a case filed against him

at the Basistha police station in Kamrup (Metro) district under various sections of Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984 during the party's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Guwahati on January 23, 2024. Gogoi has been accused of disobedience to a legal order of public servant, violation of permission and obstruction to government servants while discharging their legal duties and assault on government servants during the yatra.

He is yet to receive any summons from any court or any charges have been framed against him, his affidavit stated.

Ganju, the Congress candidate from Sonitpur, has a case registered against him in the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in Biswanath under the Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881 for dishonouring a cheque in 2017. He has been accused of issuing a cheque of ₹ 9,50,000 to a firm and the said cheque was dishonoured (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tipra Motha-BJP tacit understanding caused worst damage to democracy in Tripura: CPI(M)

AGARTALA, April 2: The CPI(M) on Tuesday claimed that tribal-based party Tipra Motha has caused the "worst-ever damage" to the democratic movement in Tripura by fielding candidates in general seats, which helped the BJP in the 2023 assembly elections.

The Tipra Motha, which was not in the government then, did this in a "secret understanding" with BJP so that opposition votes get divided, CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Chowdhury claimed. The Tipra Motha bagged 13 seats in the 60-member assembly in last year's election and became the main opposition party in the northeastern state. It, however, joined the Manik Saha government last month and two of its MLAs became ministers.

"We had a suspicion that Tipra Motha chief had a secret understanding with the BJP be-

fore last year's assembly elections. That's why he fielded candidates in 22 (unreserved) assembly seats to give an advantage to the BJP," Chowdhury said in a rally at

Ambassa in Dhalai district. After Tipra Motha founder Pradyot Kishore Debbarma decided to join the government, it has become clear that he had an arrangement with the BJP, Chowdhury claimed in the rally organised to mark submission of nomination by INDIA bloc nominee Rajendra Reang, a CPI(M) leader. "Pradyot Kishore Debbarma has caused worst damage to the democratic movement in Tripura by fielding candidates in 22 unreserved seats in which it has no hope for victory. He had played with the sentiment of the people in the name of Greater Tripaland," Chowdhury said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



BIHU PREPARATIONS



Girl weaving Assamese traditional Gamosa ahead of Rongali Bihu at Dhakuakhana on Tuesday. UB photos

'Immortality, once a faint hope, has never been more within our grasp'

Nobel laureate Venki Ramakrishnan discusses ageing, death in new book

NEW DELHI, April 2: Nobel Prize-winning molecular biologist Venki Ramakrishnan's upcoming book, "Why We Die: The New Science of Ageing and the Quest for Immortality", transforms understanding of why humans age and die, and whether there's anything that they can do about it.

Scheduled to release this week, the book, published by Hachette India, explains how we are living through a revolution in biology and giant strides are being made to extend human life.

"Immortality, once a faint hope, has never been more within our grasp. Examining recent scientific breakthroughs, Ramakrishnan shows how cutting-edge efforts to extend lifespan by altering our natural biology raise profound questions," read the description of the book. In the last decade, more than 3,00,000 scientific articles have been published and 700 start-up companies have invested tens of billions of dol-



lars into anti-ageing research. Many of the celebrity tech billionaires -- including Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, Larry Page, Sergey Brin, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg -- have all expressed an interest in this area.

Does death serve a necessary biological purpose? How can we increase our chances of liv-

ing long, healthy and fulfilled lives? are some of the questions that the book seeks to answer.

According to the book, ageing is the accumulation of chemical damage to our molecules and cells over time. "It starts gradually with small defects; these lead to medium-sized ones that manifest as the morbidities of old age, leading eventually to the system-wide failure that is death," it explained. The book has been endorsed by the likes of physician-author Siddhartha Mukherjee and English actor-broadcaster Stephen Fry.

While Pulitzer Prize-winning Mukherjee called Ramakrishnan's writing "honest, lucid and engaging", Fry described the book as "riveting and revealing" that takes readers on a thrilling ride through the science of ageing and death. "Venki Ramakrishnan, a Nobel laureate at the very cutting edge of molecular biology has an extraordinary (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

EAM Jaishankar optimistic about permanent UNSC seat for India

RAJKOT, April 2: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday expressed optimism about India's eventual permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), saying it is inevitable but emphasised the need for heightened efforts in this regard.

Addressing intellectuals in Gujarat's Rajkot city, the external affairs minister stressed that diligent work is essential to secure this coveted position.

Acknowledging the current dominance of five nations - China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US - as the UN's original permanent members, the minister, however, said the international momentum was now favouring India's bid for a

permanent seat. The United Nations was formed around 80 years ago, and these five nations decided among themselves to become permanent members of its security council, Jaishankar said.

He highlighted the historical context of the UNSC's formation, where five nations secured permanent membership, underscoring the evolving global landscape with around 193 countries today.

"But these five nations have kept their control, and it is strange that you have to ask them to give us their consent for a change. A few agree, a few others put forward their position with honesty, while others do something from behind," he said. Jaishankar spoke about (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



India's mfg sector growth hits 16-yr high in Mar as new orders jump amid buoyant demand

NEW DELHI, April 2: India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a 16-year high in March on the back of the strongest increase in output and new orders since October 2020, amid reports of buoyant demand conditions, a monthly survey said on Tuesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) surged to a 16-year high of 59.1 in March, from 56.9 in February, reflecting stronger growth of new orders, output and input stocks as well as renewed job creation.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India's March manufacturing PMI rose to its highest level since 2008. Manufacturing companies expanded hiring in response to strong production and new orders. On the back of strong demand and a slight tightening in capacity, input cost inflation picked up in



March," Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC, said. Manufacturing output rose for the 33rd month running in March, and to the greatest extent since October 2020. Growth quickened across the consumer, intermediate and investment goods sectors.

Inflows of new work strengthened from both domestic and export markets. New export orders increased at the fastest pace since May 2022, the survey said.

Quantities of purchase increased at the quickest rate since mid-2023, and one that was among the strongest in nearly 13 years, as companies sought to build up stocks in advance of expected improvements in sales.

On the job front, after leaving payroll numbers broadly unchanged in the previous two months, manufacturers in India took on additional workers in

March. The pace of job creation was mild, but the best since September 2023, the survey said. On the price front, despite remaining modest by historical standards, cost pressures were at their highest in five months. Companies reported having paid more for cotton, iron, machinery tools, plastics and steel.

However, customer retention remained a priority for goods producers who raised their charges to the least extent in over a year.

On the outlook for the Indian manufacturing sector, companies remained confident on an average, with 28 per cent forecasting output growth in the year ahead and 1 per cent expecting a contraction.

The overall level of sentiment remained elevated, but slipped to a four-month low as inflation concerns weighed on confidence. The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to purchasing managers in a panel of around 400 manufacturers. (PTI)

Rupee falls 4 paise to close at 83.43 against US dollar

MUMBAI, April 2: The rupee on Tuesday consolidated in a narrow range and settled 4 paise lower at 83.43 against the US dollar, weighed down by a strong dollar and elevated crude oil prices.

Forex traders said a weak trend in domestic equities also dented investor sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.37, then touched an intraday high of 83.34 and a low of 83.44 against the greenback. The rupee finally settled at 83.43, a fall of 4 paise over its previous close. On Thursday last week, the rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.39 against the US dollar. Forex market was closed on Friday and Monday on account of 'Good Friday' and the annual account closing of banks, respectively.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on strong US dollar and weak tone in domestic markets. Rising crude oil prices may also weigh on the domestic currency," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Traders may take cues from Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) and speeches by various US Federal Reserve officials. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in the range of ₹ 83.20 to ₹ 83.60, Choudhary added. (PTI)

HCLJigsaw's fifth edition promises free registration and ₹ 12 Lakh prize purse

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: HCL, a global conglomerate with a revenue of US \$13.1 billion, has announced the commencement of registrations for the fifth edition of HCL Jigsaw - India's Biggest Problem-Solving Assessment Platform.

Designed to nurture a community of India's Top Young Problem Solvers, HCL Jigsaw invites school students from Grades 6 to 9 to participate in the competition free of charge. Interested students and schools can secure their spot by registering at www.hcljigsaw.com before July 31, 2024. With a total prize purse of Rs. 12 Lakh, this year's edition aims to recognize and reward critical thinking abilities through a rigorous evaluation process.

Rajat Chandolia, Associate Vice President and Head of Brand at HCL, emphasized the initiative's significance, stating, "At HCL, we aim to multiply the potential of young minds by fostering essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. Through HCL Jigsaw, we provide a platform for evaluating and honing these skills among school students."

Nes Jorabat Platinum retail outlet claims top spot nationwide in BPCL sales

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: In a remarkable achievement, Nes Jorabat, located at 10th Mile, G S Road, Jorabat, Meghalaya, and a distinguished Platinum retail outlet dealership of BPCL, has clinched the coveted title of the highest-selling outlet within BPCL India for the month of March. Celebrating its 18th Anniversary, the dealership, recently revitalized with a grand relaunch, has swiftly risen to prominence, surpassing all expectations by clinching this prestigious accolade within its inaugural month of revamped operations. Spanning across an expansive 2-acre area meticulously developed by BPCL, Nes Jorabat stands as a beacon of excellence, offering world-class facilities and services tailored to cater to the diverse needs of its esteemed patrons. Mr. Pankaj, BPCL's North East State Head, attributes the dealership's resounding success to a blend of exceptional customer service, innovative loyalty schemes, and the unwavering dedication of its proficient team. Expressing gratitude to the loyal clientele whose steadfast support propelled the outlet to its No. 1 position, Mr. Indranil Bannerjee, BPCL's Territory Manager Shillong, lauds the relentless efforts of the Jain family and their dedicated team in achieving this significant milestone.

The celebratory event witnessed the presence of esteemed BPCL officials, including Debashish



Das, Sr Manager, Faiyaz Alam, State Construction Engineer, Janmajet Das, Territory Coordinator, Pankaj Doley, Engineering Officer, and Asmita Khan, Sales Officer, alongside dealer Mr. Jain, his family, valued customers, and committed staff members.

Jain, the dealer of M/s NES Jorabat, attributes the dealership's triumph to its steadfast commitment to ensuring quality and quantity assurance, delivering world-class services, and pioneering customer-centric offerings. From expansive parking facilities to complimentary car wash services and a dedicated coffee shop cum departmental store, Nes Jorabat sets the standard for premium customer experiences. With a steadfast pledge to uphold these elevated standards in the future, Nes Jorabat reaffirms its dedication to excellence and unwavering customer satisfaction.

Seagram's Royal Stag BoomBox ends season with spectacular finale in Bhubaneswar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: Seagram's Royal Stag recently wrapped up the second edition of its electrifying musical festival, Royal Stag BoomBox, with a sensational finale in Bhubaneswar, Odisha on March 30th, 2024. Embracing the theme of 'Living it Large', the event merged the beloved tunes of Bollywood with the vibrant beats of hip-hop, captivating a crowd of nearly 10,000 enthusiastic attendees.

Transforming the Baramunda Ground Field into a kaleidoscope of colors and melodies, Royal Stag BoomBox offered a plethora of cultural experiences, food stalls, merchandise outlets, and interactive engagements, encapsulating the youthful essence of Bhubaneswar. Local talents, including bands, dancers, rappers, and beatboxers, set the stage on fire before headlining acts took over.

Reflecting on the event, Badshah expressed his delight, stating, "It's been a stellar association with Royal Stag BoomBox once again. The audience in Bhubaneswar truly knows how to have fun!" Ikka shared his enthusiasm, saying, "Royal Stag BoomBox is the perfect platform for exploring new genres of music. The show in Bhubaneswar was truly epic."

Neeti Mohan echoed the sentiment, remarking, "After the magical time we had in Jaipur, I had really been looking forward to performing in Bhubaneswar and the audience really wowed us!"

Artist Ali Merchant lauded the energy of Bhubaneswar, stating, "Royal Stag BoomBox is back with a bang with new Hip-Hop X Bollywood collabs! Bhubaneswar truly showed us amazing energy worthy of a finale!"

Stock markets end 3-day winning run as IT, private bank shares drop on profit-taking

MUMBAI, April 2: Stock markets snapped the three-day winning run on Tuesday with benchmark Sensex falling by 110 points due to profit-taking in select IT, private bank and auto shares amid weak trends from the US markets and foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 110.64 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 73,903.91 with 16 of its components ending lower and 14 settling higher. During the day, the index dropped by 270.78 points or 0.36 per cent to a low of 73,743.77 points.

The broader NSE Nifty closed lower by 8.70 points or 0.04 per cent at 22,453.30 despite recovery at the day-end. Both Sensex and Nifty scaled lifetime high levels in intra-day trade on Monday before settling around 0.5% higher.

"The domestic market took a breather today after achieving a fresh record high yesterday. Factors such as a rising dollar, increasing US bond yields, and a notable uptick in crude oil prices collectively dampened investor sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Better-than-expected US manufacturing data raised worries about a potential delay in interest rate cuts by the US Fed, Nair added.

"Nifty snapped its three-day



rally despite a sharp recovery in the last half an hour. Global stocks were mixed on Tuesday after Wall Street fell as surprisingly strong US manufacturing data created doubts over how soon the US Federal Reserve might cut interest rates," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

From the Sensex basket, Kotak Mahindra Bank fell the most by 1.84 per cent. ICICI Bank dropped 1.63 per cent, HCL Technologies by 1.82 per cent, and Infosys by 0.84 per cent. Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro, Tech Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Nestle, Tata Motors and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.28 per cent and the midcap index climbed 1.14 per cent.

Analysts said mid and small-cap stocks continued their recovery rally, although concerns about high valuations lingered. Moreover, investors are eagerly anticipating guidance from the upcoming RBI monetary policy announcement for insight into near-term market direction. Among the sectoral indices, tech fell by 0.71 per cent, IT declined 0.54 per cent, telecommunication (0.38 per cent) and banknexus (0.19 per cent).

Consumer Durables climbed 1.82 per cent, services jumped 1.56 per cent, metal (1.21 per cent), utilities (1.21 per cent) and commodities (1.17 per cent).

In Asian markets, Shanghai set-

tled lower while Tokyo, Seoul and Hong Kong ended in the positive territory. European markets were trading mostly in the green. Wall Street ended mostly lower on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 522.30 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.61 per cent to USD 88.83 a barrel.

India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a 16-year high in March on the back of the strongest increase in output and new orders since October 2020, amid reports of buoyant demand conditions, a monthly survey said on Tuesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) surged to a 16-year high of 59.1 in March, from 56.9 in February, reflecting stronger growth of new orders, output and input stocks as well as renewed job creation.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction. In its third straight day of gains, Sensex jumped 363.20 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 74,014.55 while Nifty climbed 135.10 points or 0.61 per cent to close at 22,462. (PTI)

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Himanta backs BJP's Amarsing

leadership, Sarma predicted a third consecutive term for Modi and urged the electorate to support Tisso's candidacy wholeheartedly. Drawing parallels with the previous election, where BJP candidate Horensing Bey secured a massive victory, Sarma set high expectations for Tisso's performance.

"Like wise Amarsing Tisso should win with more than 3 lakhs," he declared. Promising continued development in both Karbi Anglong and NC Hills districts, Sarma announced substantial funds allocated for infrastructural development across the hill districts. "The government has sanctioned 20,000 crore for infrastructural development for the three hill districts Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao," he disclosed.

In a bid to empower girl students, Sarma also unveiled incentives, stating that girls passing matric exams would receive ₹ 10,000, those admitted to higher secondary would get ₹ 12,500, and university entrants would be awarded ₹ 25,000. Echoing Sarma's sentiments, chief executive member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, urged voters to support the BJP for peace and development.

The nomination process concluded with a vibrant roadshow led by Amarsing Tisso, who submitted his nomination papers to the returning officer and district commissioner, Madhumita Bhagwati.

Tisso was accompanied by a cadre of prominent leaders including CEM of KAAC, Ronghang; CEM of NC Hills Autonomous Council, Deboli Garlosa; CEM of BTC, Promod Boro; deputy speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly, Dr Numal Momin; minister Nandita Garlosa, and MP Horensing Bey.

Three govt officials

part of the demanded bribe from the complainant in conspiracy with Roy," the statement claimed. In connection with this, a case has been registered at the ACB police station against the trio, and necessary legal follow-up action is underway.

Criminal cases against 4

on account of 'payment stop'. Charges were framed against Ganju in 2018 but he has not been convicted, his affidavit said. Sonitpur's AAP candidate, Kaundinya has seven cases pending against him on allegations of irregularities and corrupt practices in supply orders in different government offices.

Five cases have been filed against him in Dispur police station and one in Chandmari police station in Kamrup (Metro) districts while one has been lodged in Tezpur police station in Sonitpur district. Kaundinya has been accused of irregularities and corruption in three cases related to the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council, two in Mishing Autonomous Council and one each in AMRI Karbi Development Council and Tezpur Revenue Circle office.

No charges have been filed against him in any of the cases. Bhariya Gana Parishad candidate Sailen Chandra Malakar, contesting from the Kaziranga Lok Sabha seat, has a case pending against him in Hojai police station for alleged criminal trespass. Charges have been framed against Malakar but he has not been convicted. (PTI)

Tipra Motha-BJP tacit

The concept of 'Greater Tripaland' state, which used to be a key demand of the Tipra Motha, has not been specified, though it is supposed to include parts of several other northeastern states and Bangladesh, besides Tripura.

Chowdhury claimed the BJP would not have secured majority in the assembly had Tipra Motha not fielded candidates in unreserved seats. In the February 2023 assembly elections, the BJP won 32 seats while its ally, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), bagged one. The Tipra Motha secured 13 constituencies. The CPI(M) and Congress had fought the election jointly and won 11 and 3 seats respectively.

"The man (Debbarma), who used to brand the former chief minister Bibab Kumar Deb as a Bangladeshi during the anti-CAA movement, has now described him as his dearest friend," the CPI(M) leader said. He appealed to the electors to vote for INDIA bloc candidates in the election of two Lok Sabha seats - Tripura West and Tripura East - and by-election to Ramnagar assembly constituency to save the democracy.

While Rajendra Reang is contesting from East Tripura Lok Sabha seat as INDIA Bloc, state Congress president Ashish Kumar Saha has been fielded in Tripura West Lok Sabha seat as INDIA Bloc nominee. Former CPI(M) MLA Ratan Das is the INDIA bloc candidate in the by-election to the Ramnagar Assembly seat. (PTI)

Nobel laureate Venki

gift for explaining the science behind ageing and death with clarity, wit and enviably entertaining narrative flair. A must-read," said Fry in his praise for the book. Ramakrishnan, 72, who received the 2009 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for uncovering the structure of the ribosome, runs the Ramakrishnan Lab at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, UK. He is also the author of the scientific memoir "Gene Machine". "Why We Die", priced at ₹ 699, is currently available for pre-order online. (PTI)

EAM Jaishankar optimistic

the collaborative proposals involving India, Japan, Germany, and Egypt which have been submitted to the UN, signalling progress.

"But now, there is a feeling across the world that this should change, and India should get a permanent seat. I see this feeling increasing every year," he said, adding "we will definitely get it. But nothing big is ever achieved without hard work...we will have to work hard, and this time we will have to work even harder".

He stressed the importance of mounting pressure, citing recent stalemates over conflicts like the Ukraine war and Gaza. Jaishankar linked the UN's perceived weakening to increased opportunities for India's bid for permanent membership saying, "...there is a feeling in the world that the UN has weakened."

"There was a deadlock in the UN on the Ukraine war and no consensus was reached in the UN regarding Gaza. I think as this feeling increases, our chances of getting a permanent seat will increase," he added. Earlier in his address, the minister highlighted India's democratic achievements and economic resilience amidst the pandemic. He underscored India's potential as a global growth engine. Jaishankar said India has proved in the last 10 years that democracy can deliver. The world is amazed at India moving towards 7 per cent growth despite the COVID-19 pandemic hampering growth, he said.

Recognising India's progress in various sectors, he emphasised the nation's role as a talented and capable contributor to global problem-solving efforts. "The world believes that India as the fastest growing large economy can become the engine of global growth," he said, adding technological talent of the country has been recognised globally. World agencies such as the UN understand India's achievements in social sectors like access to water, electricity, roads, health, schooling, etc, the external affairs minister further said.

As India continues its journey towards further economic growth and social development, Jaishankar reiterated the importance of recognising the country's potential and the world's expectations of its significant contributions on the global stage.

"We should understand that being the fifth largest economy, on the way to becoming the third largest and with the biggest population, the world believes us to be talented people and expects us to contribute to resolve challenges," he added. Responding to a sensitive case of baby girl Ariha Shah, whose custody situation in Germany has garnered attention, the minister said "at my level I have raised the issue with my counterpart. Our effort is to find some solutions".

Assuring ongoing efforts to address the matter, he expressed dissatisfaction with the current arrangements and affirmed India's commitment to ensuring the child's welfare and cultural upbringing. (PTI)

SC slams Ramdev and Balkrishna,

Ramdev and Balkrishna have to appear again.

Giving them a last one week opportunity to file affidavits, it took strong note of their "absolute defiance" in not adhering to the undertaking given before it in the case filed by the Indian Medical Association (IMA).

"You have to abide by undertaking given to court and you have broken every barrier," the bench said. Sternly reprimanding Ramdev and his number two Balkrishna, Justice Kohli said the court was taking their apology with a "sack full of salt". The bench also warned Patanjali, Ramdev and Balkrishna that it would take note of "perjury" as certain documents, which were said to be attached with other papers, were created later on.

"This is a clear case of perjury. We are not closing the doors on you but we are telling all that we have noted," the bench said. Patanjali Ayurved Ltd assured the top court on November 21 last year that it will not violate any law, especially those relating to advertising or branding of products manufactured and marketed by it. It also assured the bench that "no casual statements claiming medicinal efficacy or against any system of medicine will be released to the media in any form".

The top court had said Patanjali Ayurved Ltd is "bound down to such assurance". The non-observance of the specific undertaking and subsequent media statements irked the bench, which later issued the show cause notices.

On Tuesday, the court strongly disapproved of Balkrishna's statement that the Drugs and Cosmetics (Magic Remedies) Act is "archaic" and said Patanjali Ayurved's advertisements were in the "teeth of the Act" and violated with impunity the undertaking given to the court.

The bench warned Ramdev and Balkrishna to be ready to face the consequences.

"Your apology is not persuading this court really to accept it. We think it is more of a lip service," Justice Kohli told the counsel representing the Patanjali Ayurved MD.

Observing that some matters have to be taken to their logical conclusion, the bench said there cannot be "so much magnanimity".

"The purpose of contempt is to make a person realise that the majesty of the law is above all," Justice Kohli said. Senior advocate Vipin Sanghi, the counsel representing Patanjali, said the firm's media department was not aware of the fact that the top court had restrained it from continuing with advertisements or branding of products manufactured and marketed by it which are meant to cure diseases, disorders or conditions specified in the Act.

"Mr Sanghi, once it is a court proceeding and there are specific undertaking given by you to the court, whose duty is to convey it to entire chain down the line?" Justice Kohli asked.

The bench said the undertaking has to be abided by in letter and spirit.

"That did not happen. Just to say that now you are sorry, we can also say we are sorry and we are not willing to accept such an explanation... your media department is not a standalone island in your office..." Justice Kohli said.

Senior advocate Balbir Singh, appearing for Ramdev, said the yoga guru was tendering an unconditional apology and they will file a better affidavit. Keeping in mind the stature and the social respect of Ramdev and Balkrishna, there was an onerous responsibility on them to behave responsibly and they owe a better explanation not just to the public but to the court, Justice Kohli said.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, offered his assistance in the contempt proceedings and said he was willing to sit down with the counsel for the parties to resolve the issue.

"What has happened, should not have happened," he said.

Justice Kohli said 2020 and 2021 was a critical period for the whole world with Covid at its peak and there was a recommendation by the Centre's committee that Ayurvedic products were supplementary to main medicines.

"The contemnors were going to town saying that this is the answer and the cure and there is nothing available in the modern science which can address it. They were aware of the fact that they have been cautioned not to do that... You choose to keep your eyes shut," she said.

Mehta said they will place the relevant material before the court.

On March 19, the apex court directed Ramdev and Balkrishna to appear before it after taking exception to the company's failure to respond to the notice issued in the case relating to advertisements of the firm's products and their medicinal efficacy. The top court had said it deemed it appropriate to issue Ramdev a show cause notice as advertisements issued by Patanjali, which were in the teeth of the undertaking given to the court on November 21, 2023, reflect an endorsement by him. (PTI)

Kamrup (M) Postal Ballot voting process finalised

Voters unable to visit polling booths can opt postal ballot facilities

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: Authorities have officially announced the schedule for the Postal Ballot voting process for the upcoming Lok Sabha Election 2024 in Kamrup Metropolitan Election District. The process entails several crucial dates and procedures, ensuring the smooth facilitation of postal voting for eligible voters.

Date of Issuance of Form 12D: The issuance of Form 12D from Kamrup Metropolitan Election District is set to take place on or before April 8, 2024. This form is essential for voters opting for postal ballot voting.

Last Date of Submission of Form 12D: Eligible voters are required to submit their Form 12D to the designated Postal Voting Centre



(PVC) located at the DC Office, Kamrup Metro. The deadline for submission is April 17, 2024, up to 5:00 PM.

Date of Casting Vote: The actual casting of votes will occur at the Postal Voting Centre (PVC), DC Of-

fice, Kamrup Metropolitan Election District, from May 1 to 3, 2024. Voters can cast their votes between 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM on each of these days. This comprehensive schedule ensures that voters who are unable to physically visit polling stations on

Election Day can exercise their voting rights through the postal ballot system. The specified timelines and procedures aim to streamline the process and ensure maximum participation in the democratic process.

The Electoral authorities urge eligible voters to adhere to the prescribed timelines and procedures to facilitate a smooth and efficient postal ballot voting process for the upcoming Lok Sabha Election 2024 in Kamrup Metropolitan Election District.

Elections for Guwahati seat for upcoming LS polls will be held in the third phase on May 7. In 2019, Guwahati had 21,81,319 voters, including 11,03,376 male voters, 10,77,865 female voters, and 78 third-gender voters. In 2014, there were 19,22,270 voters.



Artisan making Bihu Dhol ahead of Rongali Bihu at Rajgarh road in Guwahati on Tuesday. HT photo

Science and Maths Olympiad held



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: In a bid to foster scientific curiosity and mathematical proficiency among students in the state, the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, in collaboration with Samagra Shiksha Assam, recently organized one of the largest Science and Maths Olympiads in the country.

Drawing participation from over 1.14 lakh students representing 3,828 schools across Assam, the mega event aimed to nurture talent, promote critical thinking, and enhance problem-solving abilities among students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects.

Through a series of rigorous competitions and engaging activities, participants were encouraged to delve into the fascinating realms of STEM subjects, expanding their knowledge, creativity, and understanding.

Speaking about the successful hosting of the event, Prof. Parameswar K Iyer, Dean PRBR, IIT Guwahati, emphasized the institute's close collaboration with the

education department of Assam in enhancing STEM activities and promoting lively engagements like Olympiads.

Congratulating the winners, Prof. Rajeev Ahuja, Officiating Director, IIT Guwahati, expressed the institute's commitment to enhancing the quality of STEM education in Assam and the northeast region.

The objectives of the Olympiad were multifaceted, aiming to cultivate a culture of scientific inquiry and mathematical reasoning, identify and nurture talented individuals, provide a competitive platform for students, raise awareness about STEM education, and foster innovation and critical thinking skills.

The Olympiad comprised two phases, including a district-level test followed by a state-level round. The top performers from each district were selected to participate in the final round held at IIT Guwahati.

On March 30 2024, the final round witnessed 62 finalists from classes 9th and 10th competing, with three state winners emerging from the competition. Chandan Kaushik Saikia from Namdeuri HS, Jorhat, secured the 1st prize, followed by Jnanarun Hazarika from Dhalasatra HS, Jorhat, and Arjun Karki from Hawaipur HS, West Karbianglong, securing the 2nd and 3rd prizes, respectively.

Highlighting its holistic development approach, IIT Guwahati collaborates closely with the Government of Assam on various projects, including initiatives like the Science and Maths Olympiad. Other activities include mentoring schools, establishing clubs, setting up live labs, providing teacher training, curriculum enhancement, school outreach activities, and more.

The Science and Maths Olympiad provided students with a valuable platform to showcase their creativity and ingenuity, furthering their interest and proficiency in STEM subjects, a PR stated.

IIT-Guwahati Techniche's annual Guwahati Half Marathon on April 7

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: IIT Guwahati's annual techno-management fest, Techniche, is back with its 14th edition. Like every year, IIT Guwahati, Techniche is organising the Guwahati Half Marathon on April 7 as a prelude to the annual fest.

Announcing this year's Guwahati Half Marathon at a press conference at the Guwahati Press Club on April 2, the Techniche 2024 team highlighted the theme for the half marathon. This year, the theme of the Guwahati Half Marathon will be "Run for a Cleaner Tomorrow".

The half marathon will start at 5:15 am from the Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Stadium, Sarasajai, Guwahati. This year, the Guwahati Half Marathon with the theme "Run for a Cleaner Tomorrow", which in essence, seeks to highlight the urgent need to address the issue of cleanliness and sanitation in Guwahati. The event will also provide a platform for participants to support the cause and make a positive impact in their communities.

Packed with numerous events, competitions, workshops, and initiatives, IIT Guwahati Techniche is an initiative by the student-led team.

"Techniche has always been a platform for creating a positive impact in the lives of everyone associated with the fest in every way. The Guwahati Half Marathon is no exception. This event is a celebration of fitness, perseverance, and human potential, and is a testament to the spirit of Techniche. By incorporating the theme of "Run for a Cleaner Tomorrow", the event takes on a social dimension, encouraging par-



ticipants to not only push their physical limits but also raise awareness about the issue of cleanliness in our society. Techniche being a brainchild of the northeast region, which is home to sporting legends such as Mary Kom and Mirabai Chanu, it is not only a social responsibility but also an honour for us to serve the community of Guwahati and initiate positive change in the region. This time, we push forth the bounds of social development and Run for a Cleaner Tomorrow. We anticipate generating excitement as we welcome participants from across India to Guwahati for Techniche and The Guwahati Half Marathon." said Samyak Sharma, Convener, Techniche 2024.

The Guwahati Half Marathon on April 7 is an attempt by Techniche to get people together to fight for a cause relevant to millions worldwide. With the backing of the participants, sponsors, and volunteers, Team Techniche is committed to making a significant difference in the campaign for a more pristine Guwahati. Team Techniche encourages everyone to unite with them this year as they work towards a healthier, more vibrant community, a PR stated.

ASSOCHAM Walkathon on Food and Drug Safety awareness

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) organised a Walkathon to create awareness on the issues of food and drug safety and its challenges among the civil society and government functionaries.

The event was organised in association with Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The event supported by Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. in association with Amway India, Jubilant Foodworks Ltd and Repose Foods was organised recently at Dighalipukhuri Park, Guwahati. More than 300 enthusiastic participants joined the



walkathon organised by ASSOCHAM on the day. The event saw participation of people from different walks of life and age which also included officials from Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), Govt of Assam and ASSOCHAM regional council members. The event was inaugurated by Paul Barua, secretary, food, public distribution & consumer affairs department, govt of Assam. In his inaugural speech, he advised that the best way to help people make healthy is through public health efforts and policy changes, diet and lifestyle changes. Barua being a fitness enthusiast himself reasoned to practice physical exercise and eat right in order to lead a happy and healthy life.

The event was also graced by Tridib Konwar, addl district commissioner, Kamrup Metro, Anupam Gogoi, food analyst, deptt of health and family welfare, govt of Assam and Jestu George, deputy director, FSSAI Branch Office, Guwahati Ashish Vaidya, regional corporate affairs manager - West & East AMWAY India, Tarali Samrah, dept head-public relations-North-East, corporate affairs, Jubilant Foodworks Ltd. Sandeep Khaitan, Co-Chair, ASSOCHAM North-East Regional Council, felicitated the dignitaries present at the event.

Acting school announces admission dates

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: Surojit Academy has announced admission to acting and cultural courses. It stated that classes for the courses will start from May 4. The Academy is making special contribution to the cultural and educational aspects of Assam. Over the last 27 years it has been providing training to children, youth by engaging courses in cultural and educational aspects on various subjects. The courses include Two Year Diploma in Acting (Film, Stage) and Puppetry, Sattriya Dance, Classical Music, Painting (Fine Arts), Kathak Dance, Bharatnatyam, Modern Dance, Bihu Dance, Folk Music, Puppet Dance, Spoken English, French Language etc. By taking training in this course, students' established in the cultural world of Assam. Many students' have won National Awards for being film directors as well as playing lead roles in films. Students have also received National scholarships, fellowships, Tagore Research Fellowship from the Ministry of culture, Government of India and the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar from the Sangeet Natak Akademi. Students have brought glory to Assam in various cultural programs under the Government of India.

These courses are offered by renowned artists from the cultural world of Assam as well as India, graduates of National School of Drama, Delhi, postgraduates in performing arts and folk arts in universities designated by the University Grants Commission. Classes for the courses will begin from May 4. Admission to the courses is going on. For detailed information, contact Surojit Academy, Assam Engineering College Campus, Amar Path, Jalukbari, Guwahati-13, mobile-9435042348, website: surojitacademy.com, Binita Devi, Principal of Surojit Academy, informed the press.

Women drug peddlers in STF net at Fancy Bazar



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: The Special Task Force (STF) of Assam conducted a raid at Railway Gate No. 3, Fancy Bazar, under the jurisdiction of Panbazar Police Station this afternoon, April 2, 2024. The operation resulted in the apprehension of two habitual women drug peddlers and the seizure of various incriminating items.

During the raid, the STF recovered 70 vials suspected to contain heroin, with a total weight of 94 grams, along with two mobile phones, five empty vials, and a sum of ₹ 830 in cash. The apprehended individuals have been identified as Musstt. Alimon Begum (26 years old) and Musstt. Sukurjan Begum (23 years old).

Alimon Begum, residing in Kamarpara Kuwari Pukhuri under Kalaigaon Police Station in Darrang district, and Sukurjan Begum, hailing from Simalguri road under Rowta Police Station in Udalguri district, were both found present at the location of the raid, SRCB Road, Railway Gate No. 3, Fancy Bazar under Panbazar Police Station. The STF, in collaboration with local authorities, is currently undertaking necessary formalities following the apprehension of the suspects and the recovery of contraband items. This operation underscores the continued efforts of law enforcement agencies to curb the menace of drug trafficking in the region, ensuring the safety and well-being of the community.



GMC garbage carrying truck seen openly carrying waste at Silpukhuri in Guwahati on Tuesday. HT photo

Menswear brand Turtle collaborates with Zubeen Garg

Heartthrob to perform in city on April 5 marking Bihu celebrations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 2: Menswear brand Turtle has announced collaboration with singer Zubeen Garg on Tuesday.

Turtle, will be celebrating its 20 years of presence in Assam. It gears up to mark this significant milestone, proudly announcing the association with acclaimed singer Zubeen Garg with its upcoming Bihu Celebration in Guwahati, a PR stated.

The music maestro Zubeen Garg will grace the Turtle's Bihu Celebration on April 5 at Central Mall, Guwahati, promising an evening filled with fervor, festivity, and the rich cultural tapestry of Assam. Zubeen Garg, a beloved figure in Assam's music industry and beyond, will lend his captivating voice and electrifying presence to make this celebration truly unforgettable. Along with Central Mall Zubeen will also be visiting - City Centre Mall, GS Road, Fancy Bazaar stores. Turtle, synonymous with quality and tradition, has been an integral part of Assam's Style Statement for the past two decades. Its commitment to excellence and dedication to promoting Assam's culture and heritage resonate deeply with the people of the region. The Bihu Celebration serves as a testament to Turtle's unwavering bond with local talent and its enduring bond with the community.

Speaking about the event, Ritankar Sarkar, Head Of Marketing, Turtle Ltd, said,

"We are thrilled to have Zubeen Garg grace our Bihu Celebration as we commemorate 20 years of Turtle's journey in Assam. Zubeen's music transcends boundaries and resonates with audiences of all ages, adding a touch of star power to our celebration. In Assam, as a leading menswear brand, Turtle is known for its commitment to quality craftsmanship and traditional values, promoting Assam's culture and heritage through its diverse range of products and initiatives."

Zubeen Garg's performance promises to be the highlight of the evening, showcasing the vibrant spirit and cultural richness of Assam's Bihu festival. The special attraction of the festivities will be a captivating chit-chat show which will be held in the bustling Central Mall, Guwahati, where press members, dealers, and esteemed guests will converge to engage in lively discussions encompassing fashion, music, film, and technology. The atmosphere will be brimming with excitement as participants delve into the intersection of these dynamic industries, exploring the latest trends and innovations shaping our cultural landscape. Attendees will have the opportunity to interact with Zubeen Garg and gain valuable insights into his multifaceted career, while also capturing memorable moments through photography sessions. Attendees can look forward to an enchanting fusion of traditional melodies and contemporary tunes, creating



an immersive musical experience for all.

In addition to the enthralling chit-chat show, Turtle is also proud to welcome eight esteemed local influencers - Abhijit Das, Nihal Kalita, Siddhartha Boro, Gunajit Deka, Abhigyan Kalita, Phanindra, Mintu and Arpan - who will grace the occasion with their presence at select Turtle stores, adding their unique charm and style to the festivities.

Turtle Limited is a leading menswear brand renowned for its unparalleled quality, timeless designs, and commitment to excellence. With a legacy spanning three decades, Turtle has been at the forefront of redefining

men's fashion in India, offering a diverse range of clothing that blends tradition with contemporary style.

Turtle's rapid expansion is a testament to its popularity and commitment to providing premium quality menswear across India. The brand has established a strong presence in more than 500 cities, including West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. Turtle has four big stores in Guwahati - City Centre Mall, GS Road, Beltola, and Central Mall among many others, a PR stated.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

*In heaven, all the interesting people are missing.
- Friedrich Nietzsche*

NCT faces governance crisis

The recent incarceration of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has plunged the National Capital Territory (NCT) into a governance crisis, exacerbating the suffering of its residents. With administrative processes grinding to a halt and bureaucratic inertia impeding the directives of AAP ministers, the city finds itself at a standstill. This stalemate, fueled by political rivalry between the AAP and BJP, underscores a deeper issue of governance and democratic principles. The root of this crisis lies in the power struggle between the elected government and the central authorities, particularly highlighted by the Government of NCT Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021. Under this act, bureaucratic control shifted decisively towards the Lieutenant Governor, undermining the autonomy of the elected administration. Despite repeated interventions by the Supreme Court urging cooperation and condemning bureaucratic obstructionism, the situation persists. A recent instance of this bureaucratic impasse emerged in the withholding of crucial funds earmarked for the Delhi Jal Board, impacting essential services like water supply. This brazen disregard for administrative necessities directly affects the lives of Delhi's residents and underscores the urgency of resolving the governance deadlock.

The incarceration of chief minister Kejriwal, ostensibly on charges perceived by many as politically motivated, has further compounded the crisis. Despite legal clarity affirming his eligibility to govern from jail, questions loom over the efficacy of such a setup in ensuring smooth governance. The AAP government must navigate this challenging terrain while upholding its commitment to serve the people of Delhi. The political ramifications of this crisis extend beyond mere governance. With the looming specter of impending elections, the BJP's aggressive stance against the AAP-Congress alliance underscores the high stakes involved. The arrest of prominent AAP leaders, including the Chief Minister, underscores the lengths to which political adversaries are willing to go in pursuit of power. In the face of such adversity, the AAP must chart a new course to safeguard democracy and ensure effective governance. Relying on a succession plan within the party's leadership ranks becomes imperative to maintain continuity and resilience in the face of mounting challenges. The AAP's unwavering commitment to its principles must guide its actions as it confronts this existential threat to democratic norms.

As the political landscape of Delhi continues to evolve, it is crucial to remain vigilant against any attempts to undermine democratic institutions. The AAP's struggle for autonomy and effective governance resonates far beyond the confines of the National Capital Territory, serving as a litmus test for the resilience of democratic principles in the face of authoritarian tendencies. The ongoing governance crisis in Delhi underscores the urgent need for a concerted effort to uphold democratic values and ensure effective governance. The AAP's resolve in the face of adversity serves as a beacon of hope for those committed to preserving the integrity of democratic institutions. As the nation watches, the fate of Delhi's governance hangs in the balance, with far-reaching implications for the future of Indian democracy. As the political turmoil in Delhi intensifies, the AAP finds itself at a critical juncture, grappling with unprecedented challenges to its authority and legitimacy. With the BJP's aggressive posturing and the looming specter of further arrests, the party must rally its ranks and forge a path forward that prioritizes the welfare of Delhi's residents above all else.

Rahul Gandhi's Yatra made big impact in tribal districts of Maha

By: Harihar Swarup

On the day Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra entered the tribal district of Nandurbar on March 12, it was greeted with much fanfare. The mood of Congress leaders was upbeat, as Rahul Gandhi addressed huge rallies in Nandurbar and Dondaichain Maharastra. The jolt, however, came the next day—former minister Padmakar Valvi quit the party and joined the BJP.

Though hardly a heavy weight, Valvi certainly has some influence in the tribal belt of Nandurbar and DhuleLok Sabha constituencies. The three-time legislator can damage the Congress's chances in the Nandurbar constituencies for sure.

Once a Congress bastion, Nandurbar constituency and its tribal had a special place in Indira Gandhi's heart. Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi carried forward the special bond. The UPA government chose Nadurbar district for the launch of its prestigious Aadhaar card scheme during its tenure.

The constituency, however, slipped away from the hands of the Congress in the Modi wave in 2014. Heena Gavit, a young BJP leader, has been representing the constituency since then. The Congress is keen on wresting it back.

The party has to play its cards deftly, though. It has to make sure that Prakash Ambekar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) does not spoil the game. The efforts for an understanding with the VBA have not yielded any result as it refused to accept the two seats offered by the Maha Vikas Aghadi during the seat sharing talks.

A tacit understanding with powerful local leaders like Chandra Kant Raghuvanshi would work well for the Congress. Originally a congressman, Raghuvanshi shifted his loyalty to the Shiv Sena after the saffron alliance came to power in Maharashtra in 2014.

After Shinde rebelled to form his own government and took

control of Shiv Sena, Raghuvanshi shifted camp. He is, however, not happy there.

The BJP has been winning Dhule, Nandurbar's neighbouring constituency, since 2009, and the margins have been getting bigger. In 2019, the BJP's Subhash Bhamre trounced the Congress's Kunal Patil by 2.29 lakh votes. While Bhamre will contest again in 2024, the Congress has not yet decided its candidate.

Rahul's first stop in Dhule was the residence of Rohidas 'Dajisabib' Patil. A Congress veteran, he was minister many times. The popular leader has passed on the mantle to his son Kunal, who many in Dhule say, is not as popular as his father. Rahul met the senior Patil and made a phone call to Sonia Gandhi so that she could speak to him.

Rahul addressed two meetings in Dhule—one in the city and other on the outskirts. Both were well attended. Like he did in Nandurbar, he announced five guarantees for women if the Congress came to power. Each of his announcements was greeted with thunderous applause from women.

"The response to Rahul's yatra has phenomenal", said Sachin Sawant, general secretary, Maharashtra Congress. "People are coming on their own to listen to him on. People are tired of this politics of money and hatred. Now even the surveys for Maharashtra are saying that this election is not a cake walk for the BJP."

Sharad Power joined Rahul's yatra when it entered Nashik district at Malegoan. His NCP will contest Dindori and Nashik, the two Lok Sabha constituencies in the district.

Huge crowds received the Yatra in Malegoan, a Muslim majority town of handloom and powerloom owners.

The Congress had long been the first choice of Muslims in the region. In the last election, however, Malegoan Assembly seat was won by Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM. (IPA Service)

Aid is at the core of Israel, Palestine struggle to control post-war Gaza

Israel's refusal to lift restrictions on the unfettered entry into Gaza of food, medical supplies, and other desperately needed humanitarian goods, has less to do with a stand-alone starvation policy and more with who controls distribution in the Strip. Both Israel and Hamas see control of aid distribution as a building block of who comes out on top once the guns fall silent.

The struggle for control explains the latest Israeli assault on Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City and highlights the willingness of Israel and Hamas to sacrifice innocent Palestinian lives in the pursuit of their political goals. The struggle also frames the battle over the future of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the foremost humanitarian organisation in Gaza, with the United States seemingly backing Israeli efforts to shut it down and Gulf states walking a tightrope.

Hamas makes no bones about Al-Shifa having served as base for a commander of Gaza's internal security force, Brigadier General, Faiq al-Mabhouh, in the full knowledge that his presence risked an Israeli assault. Al-Mabhouh was killed during the attack on the hospital. The Israeli military asserted that Al-Mabhouh had been "hiding in a compound at the Al-Shifa hospital from which he operated and advanced terrorist activity," while Hamas claimed he had been in charge of coordinating aid deliveries to northern Gaza with local clans, UNRWA and other international organisations.

Israel said Al-Mabhouh was among 170 "terrorists" it killed in hospital and its immediate surroundings. Israel said it had captured a further 358 Palestinian fighters. Al Jazeera journalist Ismail al-Ghoul was among the captives. He was later released by Israeli forces. Israel has targeted other senior police officials since Al-Mabhouh's killing. Earlier this week, Israeli forces struck the home of the police's northern Gaza investigations director, Major Raed al-Banna, killing him, his wife and children. Al-Banna, like Al-Mabhouh, focused on facilitating the entry into Gaza and distribution of aid. In contrast to Hamas military and political officials, who function from the group's underground tunnels, Al-Mabhouh operated openly in uniform and spoke publicly about maintaining law and order in northern Gaza. Israel killed Al-Mabhouh and Al-Banna despite a US request that it stop targeting the police force that escorts aid trucks on the Gaza side of the border. US officials warned that a "total breakdown of law and order" was exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the enclave.

At the heart of the diverging US and Israeli perceptions of the police force are lessons learnt from the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. The United States came to regret its decision to ban Saddam Hussein's Baath Party and remove all senior Baathists from the government and security forces. As a result, David Satterfield, the Biden administration's envoy for humanitarian affairs, conceded that the Gaza police "certainly include(s) Hamas elements" but they "also include individuals who don't have a direct affiliation with Hamas who are there as part of the Palestinian Author-

ity's remnant presence and security."

It's a distinction Israel refuses to make, driven by its determination to create a compliant post-war Palestinian administration. Israel sees the Strip's clan and tribe-based gangs as the skeleton of a future subservient Gaza administration that could replace Hamas and create an alternative to Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas' internationally-backed Palestine Authority.

In February, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu unveiled a post-war plan, entitled 'Plan for the day after Hamas,' that envisioned Israeli security control and a Palestinian administration that "will be based on professionals with managerial experience."

These local officials must not be identified with states or organizations that support terror and must not receive salaries from them." Israel's targeting of the police has forced officers to venture out in plainclothes and unarmed, creating an opportunity for unidentified gunmen, believed to be clansmen, to take control of aid trucks.

The struggle between Israel, Hamas, and the clans burst into the open earlier this month with reports of the death of Haj Saleh Ashur, a leader of the powerful Doghmush clan in northern Gaza suspected of looting aid convoys, and two of his associates. Israeli sources suggested that Hamas killed the three men, noting that the clan had clashed with the Islamist group in the past. The clan said Ashur died in an Israeli strike last November.

In a statement after the leaking

of Ashur's death, several clans said they would only cooperate with institutions authorized by the Palestine Authority's backbone, the Palestine Liberation Organisation or PLO, which they described as "the only representative of the Palestinian people." The clans demanded that "Hamas stops accusing us of treason and apostasy. Our nation can no longer bear the foreign concepts Hamas is trying to disseminate through its toxic media."

Israel has recently sought to reinforce its preference for the clans by saying it would boycott UNRWA and bar its aid supplies from entering northern Gaza, the hardest hit part of the Strip. In January, Israel, on the warpath against UNRWA long before the organisation's 13,000 Gaza employees had participated in Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel. Israel has yet to substantiate the claim, according to UN officials and officials of donor countries that initially suspended funding in response to the Israeli allegations.

Gulf states, reluctant to be sucked into Gaza unless there is a credible pathway to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, walk a tightrope. Rather than rushing to UNRWA's aid, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, together with the United States, the chief Israel-Hamas ceasefire mediators, have offered minimal assistance.

Earlier this month, Saudi Arabia pledged US\$40 million. The UAE disbursed US\$20 million it had promised UNRWA last year but hadn't delivered, while Qatar said it would donate US\$25 million for 2024.

At the core of Israel's cam-

paign against UNRWA is the assertion that the organisation perpetuates the status as refugees of millions of Palestinians, most of whom were born after the 1948 expulsion of Palestinians and many after Israel's conquest of Gaza and the West Bank in the 1967 Middle East war. In effect, Israel opposes UNRWA because it contributes to Palestinians' national identity.

A recent report on UNRWA schools in the northern Gaza city of Beit Hanoun by IMPACT-se, a Ramat Gan and London-based textbook watchdog, sought to demonstrate Israeli assertions that UNRWA promotes hatred and violence. The report found that the schools' books contain anti-Israel incitement, the systematic erasure of Israel's existence, and the glorification of jihad and martyrdom.

The report cited a geography book that features Palestine instead of Israel on maps. Other textbooks glorified explosive belts worn by Palestinian fighters battling the Israeli military, and praised the "image of a burnt Zionist soldier."

The IMPACT-se report contrasts starkly with a 2018 State Department-funded report on UNRWA that found based on a UNRWA review, an anti-Israeli bias in only 3.1 per cent of Palestinian textbooks. The US report noted that UNRWA developed alternate materials that were rejected by Palestinian teachers. An earlier 2022 Impact-se review of Israeli textbooks reported that they taught peace and tolerance, the "Palestinian experience and perspective," challenges Israeli Palestinians face in integrating into Israeli society, and that they included maps of Palestinian territories. (IPA Service)

After Delhi Chief Minister, Taliban regime goes back to archaic practices affecting women's lives

By: Arun Kumar Shrivastava

By: P. Sreekumaran

The Enforcement Directorate, flush from what it perceives to be a 'successful' campaign against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, has set its sights now on Kerala. But the central investigating agency must know that Kerala is a different cup of tea. The tactics it has successfully used in North India state won't do in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

The latest step the agency has taken in its campaign against Kerala is to register an Enforcement Case Investigation Report (ECIR) in connection with an alleged monthly pay-off controversy involving the company of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter T. Veena. The ECIR has been filed by the Kochi unit of the agency under the Prevention of money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

The action follows a report by the Income Tax Interim Settlement Board (ITSIB) in August 2003 on the ground that her company, Exalogic Solutions Private Ltd. had received Rs 1.72 crore as monthly payments from the Kochi-based Cochin Minerals and Rutile Ltd. (CMRL) although there was no evidence of any services given in return. The investigation by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SIFO) under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs into the monthly pay-off case is underway.

Besides Veena, the role of CMRL and the Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation (KSIDC) which holds 13.4 per cent shares in CMRL, is also being investigated. It may be mentioned that the High Court in Karnataka had, in February, rejected a petition filed by Exalogic challenging the action of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) in ordering a probe by the SFO into the affairs of the company.

The latest ED move has come against the backdrop of the dismal failure of its previous attempts, at the behest of the Union Government, to destabilize the LDF Government. Not only did such misadventures come a cropper, the people gave a befitting reply to the BJP and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF)'s campaign

against the LDF Government, by returning the CPI(M)-led LDF back to power with a bigger majority in 2021 state assembly elections. The campaign of calumny had obviously failed to have any impact at all on the voting pattern.

The timing of the latest ED move against the Chief Minister's daughter and CPI(M) central committee member Thomas Isaac is significant coming as it does just before the Lok Sabha elections. It is nothing but a desperate move by a panicky Modi Government, which is reeling under the adverse impact the revelations in the electoral bonds case have made.

It is to divert the people's attention from the issue that the arrests of Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal have been made. The saffron camp obviously thinks that such moves will fetch it rich electoral dividends. But it will be lulling itself into a false sense of complacency if it thinks so. If anything, the misadventure is set to boomerang badly on the Sangh Parivar and the Modi Government. The signs are already there.

Why is the BJP-RSS combine so scared? The reasons are obvious. The campaign undertaken by the Left parties against Citizens Amendment Act(CAA) and the electoral bonds issue are creating a big impact in the minds of the people. The left parties are undoubtedly in an advantageous position as they are the only ones who have not bought the electoral bonds. And it was the CPI(M) which moved the apex court against the electoral bonds and won a favourable verdict, which has dealt a devastating blow to the credibility of the Modi Government.

That explains the aggressive campaign against the left parties in particular. And Veena has been targeted as she is the daughter of Pinarayi Vijayan who is spearheading the campaign against the Union Government and the BJP-RSS duo. The Kerala CM is using the CAA issue and the electoral bonds case with telling effect in his election rallies which are attracting massive crowds to the dismay of the saffron camp.

Thomas Isaac is being tar-

geted because he has been successfully resisting the ED's attempts to 'fix' him in connection with an investigation into the issue of masala bonds by the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Board (KIIFB) Fund. The ED is busy issuing summons after summons to Isaac and the latter has shrugged them off repeatedly. The former finance minister of Kerala had opposed the ED move by terming the summons as illegal and arbitrary.

On his part, the Kerala Chief Minister has come down heavily on the Union Government accusing it of misusing central agencies to intimidate opposition parties. He also referred to the arrest of his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal saying that it could not be considered as either the first or the last. Democracy is in danger and the need of the hour was to defend it with all our might. CPI(M) leaders have extended solid support to the Kerala CM.

In his strong reaction, CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan said the ED move was to help the leader of the opposition in Kerala VD Satheesan, who has been seeking action against Pinarayi. The ED, Govindan said, is filing cases against opposition leaders to further the BJP's political agenda. The Union Government had used ED and other investigating agencies in the last assembly elections, too. Govindan blasted the Congress's position on ED raids against non-BJP leaders. He said the party reacts only when ED goes after Congress leaders, he pointed out.

One thing can be predicted with certainty. Any misadventure on the part of ED against the LDF Government is bound to boomerang badly against the saffron camp and the Union Government. The growing support for the LDF in Kerala has clearly unnerved the BJP-RSS combine.

Hence its attempts to destabilize the Pinarayi government by hook or crook. But the enlightened people of Kerala are solidly behind the LDF Government and the Chief Minister as they have realised that he is leading from the front the battle to save democracy and see that the idea of a democratic, secular and socialist India remains intact. (IPA Service)

Despite assurances of a more lenient rule following their ascent to power, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is also known as Taliban (Pashto for "students") have intensified restrictions on various aspects of women's lives. Women in Afghanistan face a multitude of constraints, including exclusion from leadership roles, limitations on education and employment opportunities, and restrictions on travel and access to public spaces, such as bathhouses, gyms, and parks, without male accompaniment. They have been barred from accessing restaurants with garden spaces in Herat province.

In the latest, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, the leader of the Taliban, has reportedly announced his intentions to impose public floggings and stoning to death as punishments for adultery in Afghanistan. Akhundzada's statement, conveyed through a voice message broadcast on state television, has reignited fears of a regression in women's rights, reminding the Taliban's previous rule from 1996 to 2001.

In his message, Akhundzada was quoted by The Guardian as stating, "We will flog the women... we will stone them to death in public... you may call it a violation of women's rights when we publicly stone or flog them for committing adultery because they conflict with your democratic principles... (But) I represent Allah, and you represent Satan."

The Taliban leader justified these draconian measures as a continuation of the group's resistance against Western influences. "The Taliban's work did not end with the takeover of Kabul, it has only just begun," he emphasized, as reported by The Guardian.

During Taliban's rule, Afghanistan has emerged as the sole nation globally where girls are prohibited from attending school beyond the age of 11. Additionally, the group has instituted a policy characterized as "gender apartheid," effectively excluding women from the majority of employment opportunities and public spheres. In a recent report on Afghanistan's healthcare crisis, UN Human Rights Watch reveals how women are particularly more affected by the country's collapsing healthcare system. "Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the healthcare crisis, particularly because of Taliban abuses. The Taliban's restrictions on women's freedom of movement and employment with humanitarian and other organizations have gravely impeded women and girls' access to health services, while bans on education for women and girls have blocked almost all training of future female healthcare workers in the country," HRW's report A Disaster for the Foreseeable Future says.

Another report by International Rescue Committee (IRC) on the prevailing poverty in Pakistan says the dire situation in Afghanistan is disproportionately impacting women and children, who constitute nearly 80% of those in need. This crisis stems primarily from economic instability compounded by severe limitations imposed on women within society. With women-headed households bearing the brunt of increasing food insecurity, mothers are compelled to send their children to work in order to afford basic necessities, leading to a concerning rise in child labour rates. Moreover, the stringent restrictions on women's employment opportunities are exacerbating the economic downturn, resulting in an estimated economic loss of up to \$1 billion, equivalent to approximately 5% of Afghanistan's GDP. To address these challenges and revitalize the economy, it is imperative that women are empowered to participate in the workforce and afforded equal opportunities to contribute to their local economies, thereby safeguarding the future of their nation.

In January 2022, Afghanistan's Taliban authorities declared a ban on women accessing hammams, communal bathhouses, in the northern regions of the country. According to Sardar Mohammad Heydari, an official from a local branch of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, women in Balkh and Herat provinces will be prohibited from using these facilities, as reported by The Guardian.

Afghans rely on hammams, especially during the winter months, for access to warm water for bathing. Additionally, many Afghan women use these communal bathhouses for ritual ablutions mandated by Islamic law.

More recently, the Taliban implemented a ban prohibiting women from visiting Band-e-Amir National Park, one of Afghanistan's notable tourist destinations. Mohammad Khaled Hanafi, Afghanistan's acting minister of virtue and vice, cited women's alleged failure to adhere to proper hijab standards during park visits as justification for the ban, stating, "Going sightseeing is not a must for women." Hanafi urged security forces and religious leaders to enforce the ban until a resolution was reached.

The decision has sparked reactions from various quarters, with Sayed Nasrullah Waezi, head of the Bamiyan Shia Ulama Council, expressing concerns about visitors' attire, particularly hijab compliance. Established in April 2009, Band-e-Amir National Park holds significance as Afghanistan's inaugural national park and is recognized by UNESCO for its unique geological formations and natural beauty.

Heather Barr, associate director of women's rights at Human Rights Watch, criticized the Taliban's increasingly restrictive measures, noting, "Not content with depriving girls and women of education, employment, and free movement, the Taliban also want to take from them parks and sport and now even nature, as we see from this latest ban on women visiting Band-e-Amir." She underscored the narrowing space for women's autonomy within Afghan society. (IPA Service)

12-year-old student opens fire at a school in Finland, killing one and wounding 2 others

HELSINKI, April 2: A 12-year-old student opened fire at a secondary school in southern Finland on Tuesday morning, killing one and seriously wounding two other students, police said. The suspect was later arrested.

Heavily armed police cordoned off the lower secondary school, with some 800 students, in the city of Vantaa, just outside the capital, Helsinki, after receiving a call about a shooting incident at 09:08 a.m. Police said both the suspect and the victims were 12 years old. The suspect was arrested in the Helsinki area later Tuesday with a handgun in his possession, police said.

Police told a news conference that one of the wounded students had died. The other two were seriously wounded, said Chief of Police Ilka Koskimäki from the Eastern Uusima Police Department.

Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo posted on X that he was “deeply shocked” over the shooting. In the past decades, Finland has witnessed two major deadly school shootings.

In November 2007, a 18-year-old student armed with a semi-automatic pistol opened fire at the premises of the Jokela high school in Tuusula, southern Finland, killing nine people. He was found dead with self-inflicted wounds.

Less than a year later, in September 2008, a 22-year-old student shot and killed 10 people with a semi-automatic pistol at a vocational college in Kauhajoki, southwestern Finland, before fatally shooting himself.

In the Nordic nation of 5.6 million, there are more than 1.5 million licensed firearms and about 430,000 license holders, according to the Finnish Interior Ministry. Hunting and gun-ownership have long traditions in the sparsely-populated northern European country.

Responsibility for granting permits for ordinary firearms rests with local police departments.

Following the school shootings in 2007 and 2008, Finland tightened its gun laws by raising the minimum age for firearms ownership and giving police greater powers to make background checks on individuals applying for a gun license. (AP)

NKorea fires an intermediate-range missile into its eastern waters: S Korea

SEOUL, April 2: North Korea test-fired a suspected intermediate-range ballistic missile toward waters off its eastern coast on Tuesday, South Korea’s military said, as it pushes to advance its weapons aimed at remote U.S. targets in the Pacific.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile was launched from an area near the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, and flew about 600 kilometers (372 miles) before landing in the sea between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the launch likely followed up on a North Korean test in March of a solid-fuel engine built for a new intermediate-range hypersonic missile it has been developing. If perfected, such weapons could reach the U.S. Pacific military hub of Guam and beyond, experts say.

Lee didn’t specify why the South Koreans were assessing the missile as an IRBM or whether it was flown at less than its capacity, but said the North Koreans were likely experimenting with new warhead technologies.

Japan’s Defense Ministry gave more details in its assessment, saying the missile flew about 650 kilometers (403 miles) while reaching a maximum altitude of 100 kilometers (62 miles) before landing in waters outside of Japan’s exclusive economic zone. The Japanese military didn’t immediately say whether it assessed the missile as intermediate range or something else.

Hours after the launch, Seoul’s Defense Ministry announced that South Korea, the United States and Japan conducted a combined aerial exercise above waters near Jeju island that involved at least one nuclear-capable U.S. B-52 bomber.

The United States in recent months has been increasing its deployment of strategic assets to the region, also including aircraft carriers and missile-firing submarines, in a show of force against

North Korea. The South Korean ministry said Tuesday’s training, which also involved the three countries’ fighter jets, was aimed at enhancing their response capabilities against North Korean nuclear and missile threats.

It was the North’s first known launch event since March 18, when North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a live-fire drill of artillery systems designed to target South Korea’s capital.

Japan’s coast guard shared an assessment of the country’s Defense Ministry that the missile has already landed but still urged caution for vessels passing the area.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters that no damage related to the missile has been reported. He said North Korea’s frequent missile launches “threaten the peace and safety of not only Japan but also the region and the international security.”

Tensions in the region have risen since 2022 as Kim used Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a distraction to accelerate his testing of missiles and other weapons. The United States and South Korea have responded by expanding their combined training and trilateral drills involving Japan and sharpening their deterrence strategies built around strategic U.S. assets.

There are concerns that North Korea could further dial up pressure in an election year in the United States and South Korea.

Following the March 19 test of the solid-fuel IRBM engine, Kim said the strategic value of such weapons would be just as important as his intercontinental ballistic missiles targeting the U.S. mainland.

In recent years, North Korea has been focusing on developing more weapons with built-in solid propellants. Those weapons are easier to move and hide and can be made to launch quicker than liquid-propellant missiles, which need to be fueled before launch and cannot stay fueled for long periods of time. (AP)

Those killed in the incident in central Gaza’s Deir Al-Balah included Palestinians and a dual citizen of the United States and Canada

World Central Kitchen charity halts Gaza operations after apparent Israeli strike kills 7 workers

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), April 2: An apparent Israeli airstrike killed six international aid workers with the World Central Kitchen and their Palestinian driver, the charity said on Tuesday, in a potentially major setback to efforts to deliver aid by sea to Gaza, where Israel’s offensive against Hamas has pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation.

The food charity, founded by celebrity chef Jose Andres, said it was immediately suspending operations in the region. The source of fire late Monday could not be independently confirmed. The Israeli military expressed “sincere sorrow” over the deaths while stopping short of accepting responsibility.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top military spokesman, said that officials are reviewing the incident at the highest levels. He says an independent investigation will be launched that “will help us reduce the risk of such an event from occurring again.” Footage showed the bodies, several wearing protective gear with the charity’s logo, at a hospital in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. Those killed include three British nationals, an Australian, a Polish national and an American-Canadian dual citizen, according to hospital records.

The charity said the team was travelling in a three-car convoy that included two armoured vehicles.

“Despite coordinating movements with the (Israeli army), the convoy was hit as it was leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tons of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route.”

Erin Gore, the CEO of the charity, said “this is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organizations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war. This is unforgivable.”

Three aid ships from the Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus arrived earlier Monday carrying some 400 tons of food and supplies organized by the charity and the United Arab Emirates, the group’s second shipment



after a pilot run last month. The Israeli military was involved in coordinating both deliveries.

The U.S., which has provided key military and diplomatic support for Israel’s offensive, has touted the sea route as a new way to deliver desperately needed aid to northern Gaza and plans to build its own floating dock, with construction expected to take several weeks.

The U.N. has said much of the population is on the brink of starvation, largely cut off from the rest of the territory by Israeli forces. Israel has barred UNRWA, the main U.N. agency in Gaza, from making deliveries to the north, and other aid groups say sending truck convoys north has been too dangerous because of the military’s failure to ensure safe passage.

The UNRWA said in its latest report that 173 of its workers have

been killed in Gaza. The figure does not include workers for other aid organizations.

The bodies of the aid workers have been taken to a hospital in the southern city of Rafah on the Egyptian border, according to an Associated Press reporter at the hospital.

The foreigners’ bodies will be evacuated out of Gaza and the Palestinian driver’s body will be handed to his family in Rafah for burial.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese confirmed that Zomi Frankcom, 44, of Melbourne, was among those killed and said his government has requested an explanation from Israel.

“This is someone who was volunteering overseas to provide aid through this charity for people who are suffering tremendous deprivation in Gaza. And this is just completely unacceptable,” Albanese told reporters.

“We want full accountability for this because this is a tragedy that should never have occurred.” Poland’s Foreign Ministry posted “sincerest words of sympathy” to the family of a volunteer who had offered assistance to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, without saying how he was killed. The Foreign Ministry said it is requesting an explanation from Israel.

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Britain’s Foreign Office said it was aware of reports of the death of a British national in Gaza and was “urgently seeking further information.”

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people and abducting around 250 hostages. Israel responded with one of the deadliest and most destructive offensives in recent history.

At least 32,845 Palestinians have been killed, around two-thirds of them women and children, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count. Israel blames the civilian toll on Palestinian militants because they fight in dense residential areas.

Aid groups have repeatedly called for a humanitarian ceasefire, saying it’s the only way to reach people in need. The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent months trying to broker another cease-fire and hostage release but the indirect talks between Israel and Hamas remain bogged down.

Hamas is believed to be holding some 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others after freeing most of the rest during a cease-fire in November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. (AP)

Ukraine uses drones in what appears to be its deepest strike yet inside Russia

MOSCOW, April 2: Ukrainian drones attacked industrial facilities in the province of Tatarstan, Russian authorities said on Tuesday, in what would be Kyiv’s deepest strike inside Russian territory since the war began more than two years ago.

Seven people were injured in the attack on facilities near the cities of Yelabuga and Nizhnekamsk, located some 1,200 kilometers (745 miles) east of Ukraine, Russian regional authorities said.

The strike damaged a hostel for students and workers in a free economic zone where a factory manufacturing Iranian-designed drones is reportedly located, other media reports said. Tatarstan is known for its high level of industrialization.

Tatarstan officials said the attack didn’t disrupt industrial production, while Nizhnekamsk’s mayor said the attempt to strike a refinery was thwarted by air defenses. Kyiv officials normally neither claim nor deny responsibility for attacks on Russian soil, though they sometimes refer obliquely to them. The Associated Press could not independently verify the reports.

Ukrainian drone developers have for months been extending the weapons’ range, part of Kyiv’s effort to compensate for its battlefield disadvantage in weapons and troops. The unmanned aerial vehicles are also an affordable option while Ukraine awaits more U.S. military aid.

Neither side is currently able to make much of a dent on the around 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line.

Ukraine previously has launched drone attacks in and around St. Petersburg, which lies about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) north of the border. But the facilities in Tatarstan, a province on the Volga River, appears to be the most distant target Ukraine has tried to hit.

In recent weeks, Russian refineries and oil terminals have been targets of Ukrainian drone attacks, part of stepped-up assaults on Russian territory, including long-range drone attacks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last year his country had developed a weapon that hit a target 700 kilometers (400 miles) away, in an apparent reference to a drone attack on Russian soil.

Late last year, Ukraine’s minister for digital transformation, Mykhailo Fedorov, said the government was bent on building a state-of-the-art “army of drones” and that its value to the war effort will be evident by the end of this year. Ukraine trained more than 10,000 new drone pilots last year, he said.

Ukraine has also developed deadly sea drones that have struck Russian navy ships in the Black Sea.

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s air force said on Tuesday it intercepted nine out of 10 Shahed drones launched overnight by Russia in the latest attack on the country’s power grid. (PTI)

Iran vows revenge after Israeli strike demolishes consulate in Syria

TEHRAN, April 2: Iran and one of its key proxies vowed on Tuesday to respond to a strike widely attributed to Israel that demolished Iran’s consulate in the Syrian capital of Damascus and killed seven, including two Iranian generals.

Iran’s state TV reported on Tuesday that the country’s Supreme National Security Council, a key decision-making body, met late Monday and decided on a “required” response to the strike. The report said the meeting was chaired by President Ebrahim Raisi, but provided no further details.

Israel has repeatedly targeted military officials from Iran, which supports militant groups fighting Israel in Gaza, and along its border with Lebanon. Monday’s strike in Damascus signaled an escalation because it struck an Iranian diplomatic mission.

It was not clear if Iran would respond itself, risking a dangerous confrontation with Israel and its ally the United States, or if it would continue to rely on proxies, including Lebanon’s Hezbollah militia and Yemen’s Houthi rebels.

The airstrike in Syria killed Gen Mohammad Reza Zahedi, who led the elite



Quds Force in Lebanon and Syria until 2016, according to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard. It also killed Zahedi’s deputy, Gen. Mohammad Hadi Hajriahmi, and five other officers.

Hezbollah said Tuesday that Zahedi played a crucial role in helping “develop and advance the work” of the group in Lebanon. “This crime will certainly not pass without the enemy receiving punishment and revenge,” Hezbollah said in a statement. Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza nearly six months ago, those proxies have stepped up attacks, leading to near daily cross-border exchanges between Hezbollah and Israel, and frequent Houthi attacks

on Red Sea shipping. Hamas, which rules Gaza and attacked Israel on October 7, is also backed by Iran.

Israel, which rarely acknowledges strikes against Iranian targets, said it had no comment on the latest attack in Syria, although a military spokesman blamed Iran for a drone attack early Monday against a naval base in southern Israel.

Israel has grown increasingly impatient with the daily exchanges of fire with Hezbollah, which have escalated in recent days, and warned of the possibility of a full-fledged war. Houthi rebels have also been launching long-range missiles toward Israel, including on Monday.

Iran’s official news agency IRNA said Tuesday that Iran relayed an important message to the United States late Monday and that it called for a meeting of the UN Security Council. The message to Washington was delivered through a Swiss envoy in Tehran; Switzerland looks after US interests in Iran.

IRNA said Iran holds the United States, Israel’s closest ally, responsible for the strike. (AP)

Sri Lankan Cabinet did not discuss Katchatheevu issue: Cabinet spokesman

COLOMBO, April 2: Sri Lanka’s Cabinet has not discussed the Katchatheevu issue so far as it was never raised, a government spokesman said here on Tuesday, after India’s ruling BJP blamed the Congress Party for ceding the tiny island to Colombo in 1974.

“The Cabinet did not discuss it as it was never raised,” Bandula Gunawardena, the Cabinet spokesman and minister of information told reporters here today.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday cited a media report to assert that new facts reveal that the

Congress Party “callously” gave away Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also slammed the Congress Party and ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) over the Katchatheevu island issue. On Monday, Jaishankar claimed that prime ministers from the Congress displayed indifference about Katchatheevu island as if they did not care and gave away Indian fishermen’s rights despite legal views to the contrary.

Citing details of the agreements between India and Sri Lanka first in 1974

and then in 1976, he said a recurring theme is the indifference shown by the central government and prime ministers of the day about the territory of India.

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader P Chidambaram has said that Katchatheevu was ceded to Sri Lanka to maintain good relations and to save the lives of lakhs of Tamils.

Chidambaram, a former Union Home Minister, wondered why the Prime Minister was raking up an issue that was settled in 1974.

That year, the Indira Gandhi government, to maintain good relations with

Sri Lanka and to help lakhs and lakhs of Tamils there, negotiated with the island nation’s government.

Following negotiations, a settlement was made on Katchatheevu, a very small island of about 1.9 sq km, and India acknowledged Katchatheevu as belonging to Sri Lanka, he said.

In return, six lakh Tamils were allowed to come to India. “They have come here, their families are here, they have got full freedom, they are breathing free air. Their children and grandchildren are here. The issue was closed 50 years ago,” Chidambaram said. (PTI)

Senegal prepares to swear in former opposition figure, recently freed from prison, as new president

DAKAR, April 2: Senegal prepared to inaugurate Bassirou Diomaye Faye as its new president on Tuesday, completing the previously little-known opposition figure’s dramatic ascent from prison to the palace in recent weeks.

Faye was released from prison less than two weeks before the March 24 election, along with popular opposition figure Ousmane Sonko, who backed him, following a political amnesty announced by the outgoing president. It will be the former tax inspector’s first time in elected office.

Presidents from across West Africa and representatives from the U.S. and Europe are attending Tuesday’s ceremony.

Faye, 44, campaigned on promises to clean up corruption and better manage the country’s natural resources. His victory was seen as reflecting the will of young people frustrated with widespread unemployment and former colonial ruler France, seen by critics to be using its relationship with Senegal to enrich itself. In his first speech as president-elect, Faye promised to fight corruption and reform the economy. Sonko, who is expected to have a



prominent role in the new administration, named Faye to run in his place after being barred from the election for a prior conviction. “I think the first challenge is the formation of his government,” said Alioune Tine, founder of the Senegalese think tank Afrikajom Center. “This will be the first concrete message he sends to the Senegalese people. The size, diversity and profiles will be analyzed with a fine-tooth comb, to see if they meet the demand for a break with the past.”

The election tested Senegal’s reputation as a stable democracy in a region that has experienced coups and attempted coups.

It followed months of unrest ignited by the arrests last year of Sonko and Faye, and concerns that the president would seek a third term in office despite constitutional term limits. Rights groups said dozens were killed in the protests and about 1,000 people were jailed.

Faye was arrested for alleged defamation last year, while Sonko faced a number of charges, including a prolonged legal battle that started when he was accused of rape in 2021. He was acquitted of the rape charges but was convicted of corrupting youth and sentenced to two years in prison last summer. He was later disqualified from the ballot over a six-month suspended sentence following a different conviction on defamation charges.

Sonko’s supporters say his legal troubles were part of a government effort to derail his candidacy. While Sall eventually ruled out running for a third term, he then abruptly postponed the election in February with only weeks to go, triggering another wave of protests. That move was blocked by the country’s constitutional court and the election was eventually held weeks later in March. (AP)

Polling underway for 30 vacant Senate seats in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, April 2: Polling was underway on Tuesday in Pakistan to elect 30 senators after their seats in the upper house of Parliament became vacant last month.

At least 52 members of the Senate fell vacant in March after the incumbents retired after a six-year term. The Senate comprises 96 members, including 23 each from four provinces and four from the federal capital region of Islamabad. Those from provinces are elected by the respective provincial assemblies while the National Assembly elects one Senator from the Islamabad region.

The Senate is a continuous body as half of its members retire after three years and new ones are elected.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had announced plans to hold polls on 48 seats as four seats of senators who were elected from tribal regions were abolished after the region was merged with the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of the country.

Before the merger, eight senators were elected from the federally administered tribal areas called Fata.

Already 18 senators were elected unopposed, including all 11 senators from the Balochistan province and the rest from Punjab and Sindh.

Polling began at 9 am and will continue till 4 pm without any break.

Polling was being held at the National Assembly hall for the election of two senators.

Ishaq Dar of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), part of the ruling coalition, and Raja Ansar Kayani of Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), a major opposition party, are vying for the technocrat seat while for the general seat, the competition is between Rana Mahmood ul Hassan of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), supporting the ruling coalition, and Farzand Hussain Shah of Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC).

In Punjab, voting was being held on two women and technocrats seats each and one minority seats of women in the province.

In Sindh, polling was going on for 12 seats including seven general seats, two women, two technocrats/Ulema and one non-Muslim seat in the province.

Meanwhile, in KP province polling for elections on 11 senate seats could not be started due to controversy over the oath-taking of members elected on reserved seats.

Stakes are high as the ruling alliance of PML-N and PPP is expected to gain two-thirds majority in the upper house, which will play a crucial role in case of any amendment in the constitution as a two-thirds majority is needed in both houses for the same. (PTI)

SDF banking on Bhaichung Bhutia's popularity, young candidates to win Sikkim assembly polls

SDF garners votes highlighting anti-incumbency factor, apprehension on dilution of Sikkim's special status under Article 371 (F) of Constitution

GANGTOK, April 2: The opposition Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) led by five-time former chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling is banking on former Indian footballer Bhaichung Bhutia's popularity and young candidates in most assembly constituencies to return to power in the Himalayan state.

The SDF also wants to utilise the anti-incumbency factor against the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) and fear among local people that the special status of Sikkim under Article 371 (F) of the Constitution and its old laws will be diluted if either the SKM or BJP come to power in the northeastern state, to win votes.

Elections to the 32-member Sikkim assembly and the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state will be held on April 19.

The SDF, which ruled the Himalayan state for 25 years from 1994 to 2019, lost to Prem Singh Tamang-led SKM in the last assembly elections. To give the SKM a tough fight in the assembly polls, Chamling roped in former India football captain Bhaichung Bhutia, a popular person in the Himalayan state to chart a new course in state politics.

45-year-old Bhutia buried all his differences with the SDF supremo and merged his



party, Hamro Sikkim with the SDF.

A grateful Chamling immediately rewarded the former footballer with the post of the SDF vice-president and party ticket to contest the assembly elections.

Bhutia has started canvassing for the SDF supremo and requesting the people of the state to give Chamling one more term as

chief minister. "Chamling has leadership skills and vision to take Sikkim on the path of development and prosperity," Bhutia said.

"With Sikkim being a strategically important state, it needs to maintain peace and tranquility and for that it must have a leader who can maintain the fragile social order and protect the rights and socio-economic

and cultural ethos of the indigenous people comprising Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepalis," the former India footballer said.

Both Chamling and Bhutia have been stoking the fear among the local people that the special status of Sikkim and its old laws will be diluted if either the SKM or BJP come to power alone or through a post-alliance. Under Article 371F, Sikkim has been granted several benefits such as Sikkimese people have the right to own land and get state government jobs. They are also exempted from paying income tax.

Exuding confidence that the electorate of Sikkim with repose faith in it at the hustings, the SDF is contesting all 32 assembly seats as well as the lone Lok Sabha seat in Sikkim in a bid for a sixth term in power.

Chamling is contesting from two assembly constituencies, Poklok-Kamrang in native Namchi district and Namcheybung in Pakyong district, while Bhutia has been given ticket to contest from Barfung (BL-Reserved) assembly constituency.

The SDF has put up young candidates in most of the assembly constituencies. It has given ticket for the lone Lok Sabha seat to the two-term MP P D Rai, a close aide of Chamling. (PTI)

TSR personnel engaged outside Tripura granted service voters' status

AGARTALA, April 2: Tripura State Rifles (TSR) personnel, who have been deployed in Delhi and Chhattisgarh, are eligible to exercise their franchise as 'service voters' for the first time in the elections to two Lok Sabha constituencies and a by-poll to an assembly segment in the northeastern state, a poll official said on Tuesday.

Around 1,500 TSR personnel, including officers will be treated as service voters and this tag will enable them to cast their votes in the upcoming polls, he said.

TSR personnel, who were deployed outside the state, could not exercise their franchise in last year's assembly elections as they were not treated as service voters then, the official said.

Additional chief electoral officer, S Bhandopadhyay said the Election Commission of India (ECI) has approved the enrolment of TSR personnel, engaged in duties in Delhi and Chhattisgarh, as 'service voters' and advised the office of the CEO of Tripura to take initiatives to make a list of these security persons.

CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Chaudhury has recently written to the EC, requesting the poll panel to consider Tripura State Rifles jawans working outside the state as service voters.

"All TSR personnel, now engaged in Delhi and Chhattisgarh, are being facilitated to be enrolled as service voters. A report indicating the action taken in this regard was received from the police authority," the additional CEO told PTI.

Members of the armed and paramilitary forces of the Centre are normally granted service voters status so that they can cast their votes. They exercise their franchise through electronically transmitted postal ballots.

Polls to the Tripura West Lok Sabha constituency and by-election to the Ramnagar assembly will be held on April 19 while the Tripura East parliamentary seat will go to poll on April 26.

The CPI(M) state secretary has thanked the EC and the state election authority for their prompt action to ensure the democratic rights of those TSR personnel. (PTI)

Arunachal Cong releases manifesto with focus on healthcare, education, jobs

ITANAGAR, April 2: Opposition Congress in Arunachal Pradesh on Tuesday released its manifesto ahead of the simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly polls in the state, focusing on the health and education sectors, besides promising jobs for youths.

Releasing the manifesto, Pradesh Congress Committee president Nabam Tuki said it was drafted after due consideration of the views, opinions and grievances of the people.

The northeastern state will go to simultaneous polls for two Lok Sabha and 50 assembly constituencies in the first phase on April 19.

The ruling BJP has already won 10 seats in the 60-member assembly, unopposed. Though the Congress had fielded 34 candidates for the assembly polls this year, only 19 candidates remain in the fray after several nominees refrained from filing nominations and others withdrew their papers.

Tuki, who is contesting against Union earth sciences minister Kiren Rijiju from the Arunachal West Parliamentary seat, asserted that the Congress stands for "giving power to people".

"The Congress has played an important role in the political evolution of Arunachal Pradesh and has been sensitive to its tribal culture and ethos. The people of the state have always placed their confidence in the party," he said.

According to the manifesto, the party will upgrade all government primary and middle schools to

residential schools with hostel facility, and construct model schools in every district in line with the Jawahar Novodaya Vidyalaya and Kendriya Vidyalaya.

"We will provide compulsory stipend to APST students from preparatory to Class 12 level in all government and private schools in the state, besides enhancement in students' stipends, regulation of fees in private institutions and regularisation of SSA teachers," Tuki said.

In the health sector, the Congress said it would fill vacancies of staff and doctors in all government hospitals if the party returns to power in the state. The manifesto also talks about regularising contractual nursing staff within a year, establishment of super speciality hospitals in every district headquarters and enhancement in the chief minister's health insurance scheme.

Other promises include regularisation of contractual and contingency employees, job guarantee for youths after obtaining skill development training, a new law to curb paper leaks in competitive examinations, enhancement of minimum wages for labourers and cash incentives for registered farmers.

The grand old party also assured people about minimum support price for agriculture and allied products, and implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 in the "right earnest". (PTI)

Police rescue man kidnapped from Wage'Asi Village in Meghalaya

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 2: The North Garo Hills police rescued a 26-year-old man from Wage'Asi A'brong Village, who had been reportedly allegedly kidnapped by a gang of over 8 miscreants.

According to sources, the victim named Leeku G Momin was kidnapped on March 31 at around 12:30 am from a bachelor's dormitory at Wage'Asi A'brong village in the North Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. Upon receiving information, the superintendent of police, Bruno A Sangma launched an immediate rescue operation.

The police team comprising of

Wage'Asi/Dainadubi along with 120 Battalion of CRPF, Mendipathar led by deputy SP (HQ) recovered the victim from A'brong jungle at about 1 pm. The victim was found beaten black and blue and was kept tied behind his back by his captors.

The rescued person was then rushed to a nearby hospital for medical examination.

As per the statement given by the victim, the identity of the kidnappers could not be known as their faces were covered.

The police informed that a case has been registered at the Kharkutta Police Station for further investigation to nab the members of the gang.

Govt showing 'weak-kneed' approach towards China: Cong on Arunachal row

ITANAGAR, April 2: The Congress on Tuesday criticised the BJP government for its "weak" response to China "renaming" 30 places in Arunachal Pradesh, saying those espousing "misplaced muscularity" on the Katchatheevu issue are "scared" of even mentioning China over its aggression.

India on Tuesday outrightly rejected as "senseless" China's actions and asserted that assigning "invented" names does not alter the reality that Arunachal Pradesh "is, has been, and will always be" an integral part of India.

Union external affairs minister S Jaishankar had on Monday said nothing will be gained by changing the names. "If I change the name of your house, will it become mine? Arunachal Pradesh was an Indian state, is an Indian state and will remain so in the future," he had said.

Congress senior spokesperson Manish Tewari said the "strange" statement of Jaishankar only shows the weakness of the government. "It has been such a weak and inflexible response to China's cartographic aggression in Arunachal Pradesh, that it has changed the names of 30 places. Such a weak response does not suit the Government of India and especially does not suit the foreign minister of India," he said. Tewari asked how much land is in control



of China after May 2020. He also questioned why the government "did not get it vacated" and was instead resorting to "deflections and deceptions" on the issue.

He also asked the ruling party not to bring the issue of national security, including Katchatheevu, within the realm of its partisan politics. "Those who have been espousing muscularity about Katchatheevu, it is unfortunate and regrettable that they are scared of even uttering the word, China," he told reporters at a press conference.

The Congress leader condemned what he called the "disinformation campaign" launched by the government against former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on the issue of Katchatheevu island. "Nothing can be more ridiculous than even to think that a Prime Minister who divided

Pakistan into two parts and did not care about the threats from the United States and other Western powers would concede any territory to any other country," he said.

Tewari said the Government of India has consistently and continuously shown a "weak-kneed" approach towards China, pointing out that even after about four years of the intrusion in the Galwan Valley, the government is yet to come out with any response and clarification.

He said that the then SSP Leh had in January 2023 presented a research paper at the annual conference DGPs/IGPs and given in writing that India did not have access to 26 patrolling points out of 65 joint patrolling posts, which were under Chinese occupation.

"One and a half years have passed and the government has not reacted about what a senior officer of the government revealed," he claimed and said, "Why such silence when it comes to China". He said that despite the opposition parties raising the matter on several occasions in both houses of parliament, "neither the Prime Minister nor the foreign minister uttered a single word about Chinese intrusion".

"What bigger proof can be there that this government is not sensitive about India's unity and integrity?" he said. (PTI)

Women vendors declare non-participation in ensuing LS polls

IMPHAL, April 2: Women vendors of Khairamband Keithel, the iconic all-women-run markets, in Imphal on Tuesday declared non-participation in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections as voices of denouncement against holding of the elections without resolving the 11-month old crisis in Manipur get louder.

Local women organizations, particularly in the violence affected fringe areas of the valley districts, have been voicing against the holding of elections before resolving the crisis rocking the state since May 3 last year.

While condemning the holding of the elections, the women bodies declared to boycott any election related activities.

Women vendors of Khairamband Keithel under the aegis of Manipur Keithel Phambi Apunba Lup declared that they will stay away from participating in all the activities related to the ensuing Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing a press conference held at Khairamband women market on Tuesday, general secretary of the body Yumnam Ibeiyima decried the holding of the elections amid the ongoing crisis. She demanded that the prevailing 11-month old crisis that has been rocking the state should be resolved first before holding the elections. (NNN)

Cong to be extinct, communists will find place in museums: Tripura CM



AGARTALA, April 2: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Tuesday claimed that the communists will be found in museums in the days to come, while the Congress will become extinct.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front had governed the northeastern state between 1978 and 1988 and again from 1993 to 2018. In between, the Congress was in power for five years.

"Since the BJP came to power in Tripura (in 2018), the communists are losing their ground and grabbed the hand of the Congress, another party whose misrule

affected the people," Saha said.

The Congress will soon become extinct, the chief minister said at an election rally at Chakmaghat in Khowai district.

Attacking the Left party, he said, "We may not be there but it is for sure that they (CPIM) will find a place in museums and the people will have to visit museums to know about them".

Saha also slammed the INDIA bloc for criticising the Tipra Motha for joining the BJP-led alliance before the Lok Sabha elections.

"The CPI(M) and Congress had tried to rope in Tipra Motha before the elections but they could not succeed. I used to talk to Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Kishore Debbarma and exhorted him not to fall into the trap of the opposition and finally, he chose the right path," he said.

The tribal-based Tipra Motha bagged 13 seats in the 60-member assembly in last year's election and became the main opposition party. It, however, joined the Manik Saha government last month and two of its MLAs became ministers.

Laying emphasis on amity between tribals and non-tribals, Saha urged the BJP's two allies - Tipra Motha and IPFT - to continue with the electoral understanding with the saffron camp for the next 50 years to make Tripura a developed state. (PTI)

USTM signs MoU with MBSI

MBSI confers 'Life Time Devotion Award' on USTM vice-chancellor GD Sharma

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 2: The Microbiologists Society, India (MBSI) on Tuesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM).

The MoU was signed during the two-day national conference on 'Bio-resource and Sustainability: Current Trends and Future Prospects' that began at the university campus in Khanapara on Tuesday. The conference was organised by the department of applied biology of the university in association with MBSI.

The MBSI also conferred the 'Life Time Devotion Award' on GD Sharma, vice chancellor of the USTM during the national conference. A few topics of the plenary sessions of the national conference included 'Role of ICMR-Regional Medical Research Centre North East for NER Regions', 'Drug development in the Current Scenario and How to Apply for Investiga-



tional New Drug (IND) Applications" and "Understanding Emerging Contaminants in Soil and Water: Modern Strategies for Effective Cleanup, Targeted Delivery of Pharmaceutically Active Components through Ethosomal Formulations". Two books were also released during the inaugural session of the event.

Receiving the award, GD Sharma said, "This prestigious award is dedicated to the students of microbiology in Northeast India, who have immensely con-

tributed to the field. Learning is a continuous process; there is a lot of opportunity in the field of microbiology in India".

Addressing the gathering, president of MBSI, AM Deshmukh said, "Although Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are parts of the Northeast, in terms of bio-resources and bio-diversity the area is central to India as much of biodiversity is seen in this region." "The topic of the conference on 'sustainability' is very significant and we have to see

whether our development is sustainable and our tools are eco-friendly," he further said. Director of ICMR-Regional Medical Research Centre, NE, Dibrugarh, Kalimuthusamy Natarajaseenivasan said that the founder of USTM suffered a lot during his young age, which has prompted him to provide education to the poor communities.

Meanwhile, professor of the department of pharmacology of PGIMER, Chandigarh, Bikash Medhi said that India contributes less than four per cent of research publications of the world despite the considerable number of higher educational institutions. He said that collaboration and exchange of ideas need to happen extensively.

The welcome address was delivered by Deboja Sharma, associate professor and head of the department of applied biology of USTM. The vote of thanks was extended by Yugal Kishore Mahanta, assistant professor and convener of the conference.

Arunachal inalienable integral part of India, asserts CM Khandu

ITANAGAR, April 2: Chief minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday asserted that Arunachal Pradesh is an inalienable integral part of India and termed Beijing announcing Chinese names for 30 more places in the state as "another gimmick".

Khandu also said proud citizens and patriots of Arunachal Pradesh are rejecting such antics from China.

"Another gimmick from China. Being a proud citizen of Bharat and a native of Arunachal Pradesh, I strongly condemn this act of naming of places within Arunachal Pradesh, which has been an inalienable integral part of India," he said in a statement.

The Union government on Tuesday outrightly rejected as "senseless" China renaming some places in Arunachal Pradesh, and asserted that assigning "in-

vented" names does not alter the reality that the state "is, has been, and will always be" an integral part of India. India's reaction came in response to Beijing announcing Chinese names for 30 more places in Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as the southern part of Tibet.

The Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs released the fourth list of standardised geographical names for Zangnan, the Chinese name for Arunachal Pradesh, the state-run Global Times reported on Sunday.

In April last year, India reacted sharply after Beijing had released the third list of standardised names for 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh.

The first batch of standardised names for six places in Arunachal Pradesh was released in 2017 while the second batch of 15 places was issued in 2021. (PTI)

Congress will revitalise Railways as growth engine for India: Kharge

'Railways (is) ravaged under the Modi Government'



NEW DELHI, April 2: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday attacked the BJP government on the state of the Railways, alleging that it has "ravaged" the Railways by destroying its finance, safety, efficiency and affordability.

Kharge claimed that his party will revitalise the national carrier as a growth engine for India.

In a post on X, he said, "the Railways (is) ravaged under the Modi Government! Trains, getting 'trained' only for Self Promotion."

"Behind the 3D Selfie Points of Modi ji and the event-driven green flags for Vande Bharat, lies the story of absolute apathy, complete neglect and deliberate emaciation of the Railways by the BJP," he said.

Kharge claimed the Railways is still the lifeline for crores of Indians, but the Modi government "has destroyed its finances, safety, efficiency and affordability".

"No wonder, the number of mail and express trains that were punctual declined from 79 percent in 2012-13 to 69.23 percent in 2018-19 ! (CAG 2023). The Congress party will revitalise the Railways as a growth engine for India," the Congress chief said.

Posing seven questions, he asked why has the BJP government not filled more than three lakh vacancies in the Railways.

"Is the BJP against SC, ST, OBC, EWS people who may avail reservation in India's largest public sector employer," he asked.

"Why has the average price per passenger per kilometre doubled from 0.32 paise per passenger-km in 2013-14 (UPA) to 0.66 paise per passenger-km in 2023? Is it not true that more than 100,000 train-

related deaths were reported between 2017 and 2021? (NCRB). This does not include the deadly Balasore accident (2023) which took the precious lives of almost 300 people," Kharge said.

"Is it not true that the Kavach Railway Safety anti-collision technology only covers 2.13% of the network? Why did the Modi Government withdraw the concessions for senior citizens, women and children, in an apathetic manner during the Covid pandemic? Due to this revocation, the Modi Government looted ₹ 2242 crores in a single year," the Congress president asked.

According to the CAG, he claimed that only 0.7 percent funds out of ₹ 58,459 crore were spent on track renewal and asked why it was so.

This is the reason, Kharge claimed, why the much-hyped Vande Bharat high speed trains have an average speed of just 83 kmph instead of 180 kmph claimed by the Modi government.

"Is it not true that the move to merge the Railway Budget was a way to cut its funds through the back door? Is it not true that Modi Government has unveiled a grand plan of Privatisation of the Indian Railways and incremental privatisation has already begun," he also asked. According to the National Railway Plan (2021) of the Modi government, the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha claimed "all freight trains will be privatised by 2031, along with 30 percent of the 750 railway stations".

"All profit-making AC coaches will also be privatised. Only loss-making second class passenger trains will be left with the railways," he said. (PTI)

Modi accuses Cong of instigating people against electoral mandate, asks them to wipe out oppn party

'Corrupt threatening and abusing me; but they can't deter me; action against each one of the corrupt will continue'

RUDRAPUR (U'KHAND), April 2: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday launched a blistering attack on Rahul Gandhi for his remark suggesting that there will be a "conflagration" in the country if he gets a third term and asked the people to wipe out the Congress from everywhere.

Addressing his first election rally in Uttarakhand, Modi said he was being threatened and abused by the corrupt but there will be even bigger action against corruption after his re-election.

"The Congress and INDI Alliance have made their intentions clear. Congress's royal family 'shehzada' (prince) has threatened there will be fire if Modi gets another term in office.

"Staying out of power has made them so desperate that they are now talking about setting the country afire. Would you let them do it? Is this the kind of language used in a democracy? Wouldn't you punish them?" Modi said.

At an INDIA bloc rally in Delhi's Ramlila Maidan on Sunday, Rahul Gandhi had said that if the BJP wins the election through "match-fixing" and changes the Constitution, then the country would be on "fire" and would not survive.

"The Congress, with its Emergency-mindset, no longer has faith in democracy. Therefore, it is busy



instigating people against the electoral mandate," the prime minister alleged.

He accused the Congress of pushing the country towards instability and anarchy and asked the people to wipe it out from everywhere.

He said a big Congress leader in Karnataka recently spoke of separating south India from the country and dividing it.

But instead of punishing him, the party has given him a ticket to contest the polls, he said, apparently referring to Congress leader D K Suresh.

The prime minister also accused the Congress of insulting the country's first Chief of Defence Staff Bipin Rawat, who hailed from the hill state.

He alleged that the Congress which encouraged infiltrators was troubled the most when the BJP brought CAA to give citizenship to persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

"The Congress is sunk so deep in the morass of appeasement that it cannot think of national interest," he alleged.

He also talked about how the "weakness" of Congress governments had led to the "country's division" and the "ceding" of Kartarpur Sahib Gurudwara from Indian Sikhs.

Modi also raised the Katchatheevu island issue, holding the opposition party responsible for giving the island to Sri Lanka during its rule.

Enough, won't contest elections anymore, says CM Siddaramaiah, cites advancing age

MYSURU, April 2: Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said he has decided not to contest in elections anymore, as he won't have the health and enthusiasm needed to work after four years with advancing age.

During the 2023 assembly polls itself, he had declared that it will be his last election, but he will continue to remain in politics.

"People in Varuna want me to contest once again for Assembly polls from there, but I have decided not to contest in elections anymore. Now I'm 77 year old, still I have four years time (assembly tenure), I will be 81-82 year-old by then. I won't have health, and I will not be able to work happily. Can I work with enthusiasm? Enough," Siddaramaiah said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "By 2028 (when Assembly elections are due in Karnataka), I

will be 82-year-old, and I will complete 50 years in politics. In 1978, I became the taluk board member." When told he doesn't look old, he said, "I may not look old, but who can experience aging, you or me?"

Siddaramaiah during May assembly polls last year had emerged victorious in Varuna constituency, entering the Assembly for the ninth time.

Siddaramaiah, the then sitting chief minister, had lost in Chamundeshwari in 2018. He, however, won in Badami, the other constituency from where he had contested, and went on to serve as Leader of Opposition.

Making his debut in the Assembly in 1983, Siddaramaiah had got elected from Chamundeshwari on a Lok Dal Party ticket. He has won five times from this constituency and tasted defeat thrice.

After neighbouring Varuna be-

came a constituency in 2008 following delimitation, Siddaramaiah represented it till he vacated the seat for his son Dr Yatindra in the 2018 assembly polls and went back to his old constituency of Chamundeshwari. In 2023 Yatindra returned the favour to his father by vacating the seat.

Ahead of the May 2018 Assembly polls, Siddaramaiah had said it would "most likely" be his last election.

Earlier, during the 2013 Assembly polls too, he had said that it was his last election and went on to become Chief Minister after the polls.

Amid speculations about leadership change, Siddaramaiah on Monday asked the people of his Varuna assembly segment to give the Congress candidate a lead of at least 60,000 votes in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, to ensure that he remains in the post. (PTI)

Cong complains to EC against BJP's ad campaign

NEW DELHI, April 2: The Congress on Tuesday complained to the Election Commission against BJP's advertisement campaign, alleging it was maligning the opposition party through the use of cropped and distorted videos, and urged the poll body to take immediate action against the authors and issue instructions for recall.

The Congress also filed a complaint against what it called the BJP's "malicious attempts" to link the Congress campaign to billionaire financier George Soros.

AICC General Secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said, "The party lodged a complaint against the BJP's repeated and malicious use of cropped and distorted videos to malign the INC. The ECI was requested to take immediate action against the authors of this low-level campaign, as well as issue instructions for its recall."

A delegation of party leaders comprising Salman Khurshid, Pawan Khera and Gurdeep Sap-

pal on Tuesday met the Election Commission and handed over a memorandum of their complaints to them.

"The Congress Party lodged a complaint against the BJP's malicious attempts to link the Congress campaign to George Soros," Ramesh said.

"This complaint covers other examples of false propaganda that target the INC as well. Not only are these materials patently false, they are also mala fide and knowingly defamatory. The ECI was requested to take immediate action against the authors of this low-level campaign, as well as issue instructions for its recall," he said in a post on X.

The opposition party has also complained against the alleged violation of the model code of conduct for elections in Andhra Pradesh, where assembly and Lok Sabha polls are held together. It claimed posters and advertisements of state schemes were still bearing the photos of the state chief minister. (PTI)

He said 35 lakh people who did not have bank accounts have their accounts now, Rs 2200 crore have been credited directly into the accounts of small farmers.

"One could wonder how so much work is being done by the Modi government. Development happens when the intentions are right. Right intentions lead to good results," he said.

Asking people to further strengthen him, Modi said India will be the third biggest economy in the world in his third term which means an increase in people's income and better employment opportunities. (PTI)

BJP wants to replicate Russia, China-like rule, says Farooq Abdullah

JAMMU, April 2: The BJP wants to replicate Russia- and China-like rule in the country, National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah claimed on Tuesday and said the INDIA bloc has come forward to safeguard the Constitution, even at the cost of "our lives". He also targeted the Centre over the issue of the Katchatheevu island, handed over to Sri Lanka in the 1970s, and asked why the BJP-led Centre is silent on the "continuous incursion" by China in Ladakh and its claims over land in Arunachal Pradesh.

"The INDIA bloc has been formed to safeguard the Constitution because there is apprehension that the Constitution will be finished (by the BJP) ... The same thing will happen here (in India) as (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and China President (Xi Jinping) are sitting there. They (the BJP) are making attempts as they

want to rule the country for life (without any opposition)," Abdullah told reporters. "INDIA will not allow this to happen and protect the Constitution given by (BR) Ambedkar, even at the cost of our lives. We will not allow this Constitution to get buried," he said. The National Conference leader was in Jammu to accompany Raman Bhalla, the Congress candidate who filed his nomination from the Jammu Lok Sabha constituency. The constituency will go to the polls in the second phase on April 26.

Bhalla -- accompanied by Bharat Singh Solanki, the AICC's Jammu and Kashmir in-charge, and Pradesh Congress Committee chief Vikar Rasool Wani -- took part in a roadshow before filing the papers.

The Congress and the National Conference are both constituents of the opposition INDIA bloc.

Asked to comment on Prime Min-

ister Narendra Modi's criticism of the Congress over its decision to hand over the strategic Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka in the 1970s, Abdullah pointed to China's alleged incursions into Ladakh and its claims over land in Arunachal Pradesh.

"How much land is with China, why are they (central government) not talking about it? China has grabbed thousands of kilometres of our land and we raised the issue in the Parliament but they did not answer. Let them reply on this first," the Srinagar MP said.

There have been "18 or 19 rounds of talks" between India and China but "what is the outcome of these talks as they (China) are continuously moving forward and even started renaming various places, which they are claiming to be their part. Why are they (BJP) not raising their voice against this?", Abdullah said. (PTI)

BJP announces 112 candidates for Odisha Assembly elections, 5 turncoats get ticket

BHUBANESWAR, April 2: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday re-nominated 21 of its 22 sitting MLAs in Odisha while announcing the list of candidates for 112 of the 147 Assembly constituencies in the state.

The lone legislator who has been denied the BJP ticket was Lalitendu Bidyadhar Mohapatra from Brahmagiri in Puri district. Mohapatra's niece Upasana Mohapatra has got the ticket from the Brahmagiri Assembly seat.

There are eight women candidates in the list. They are Sundergarh MLA Kusum Tete, Sehati Nayak (Bonai), Babita Mallick (Binjharpur), Smrutirekha Pahi (Dharmasala), Kalpana Kumar Khara (Baliguda), Pravati Parida (Nimapara), Upasana Mohapatra (Brahmagiri) and Pratushya Rajeswari Singh (Nayagarh).

As per the list, BJP state president Manmohan Samal will contest from Chandbali assembly segment in Bhadrak district while senior party leader and sitting MP from Bargarh Suresh Pujari will contest from Brajarajnagar Assembly seat. Pujari was denied the party ticket for contesting the Lok Sabha polls this time.

The BJP has fielded Sisir Mishra against Chief Minister Naveen Pattnaik from Hinjili Assembly constituency while former BJD MP Pratyusha Rajeswari Singh will contest against former minister and sitting MLA Arun Kumar Sahoo in Nayagarh assembly seat.

Leader of Opposition in the Odisha Assembly Jaynarayan Mishra will contest from his traditional Sambalpur assembly seat. Similarly, former minister and ex-BJP state president KV Singhdeo will contest from Patnagarh assembly seat in Bolangir district. His wife Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo is BJP candidate for the Bolangir Lok Sabha seat.

Five turncoats from BJD, Arabinda Dhali, Akash Das Nayak, Siddhant Mohapatra, Purna Chandra Sethi and Priyadarshi Mishra were given BJP tickets. Arabinda Dhali will fight from the Jayadev assembly segment in Khurda district. While actor-turned-politician Akash Das Nayak has been given the ticket for Korei Assembly segment in Jajpur district, former BJD MLA Priyadarshi Mishra will fight the polls from Bhubaneswar North seat.

Former MLA Purna Chandra Sethi, who quit

BJD and joined the BJP on March 26, will contest from Khalikote assembly seat. He had won two consecutive elections from the constituency in 2009 and 2014 but was denied a ticket in 2019. While the saffron party's youth leader Tankadhar Tripathy will fight the Assembly polls from Jharuguda, MLA Kusum Tete will contest from Sundargarh Assembly seat and Biswaranjan Badajena from Jatni.

Jagannath Pradhan has been fielded from Bhubaneswar Central, Babu Singh from Bhubaneswar Ekamra and Prithiviraj Harichandan from Chilika Assembly seat.

The party also selected sitting MLA Suryabanshi Suraj -- son of BJP leader late Bishnu Sethi from Dhamnagar Assembly seat, Padmalochan Panda from Simulia, Rajendra Das from Soro, Gobinda Chandra Das from Remuna, Manas Kumar Dutta from Balasore, Braja Pradhan from Jaleswar, Irasis Acharya from Bhatli.

Senior BJP leader Mohan Majhi ridiculed the ruling BJD over its recent statement that the saffron party was unable to find candidates for all the 147 assembly seats. (PTI)

Bhaichung Bhutia joins Mothers Against Vaping cause to combat promotion of new-age tobacco devices

NEW DELHI, April 2: Mothers Against Vaping on Tuesday announced that former footballer Bhaichung Bhutia will support their cause of combatting the promotion of new-age tobacco devices among Indian children and youngsters.

Bhutia's endorsement adds substantial weight to the cause of Mothers Against Vaping, it said.

The group is a united front of concerned mothers that aims to combat the promotion of e-cigarettes, vapes, electronic nicotine delivery systems and heat-not-burn products among Indian youngsters.

The group said, "His (Bhutia) involvement is anticipated to amplify the impact of the cause, shedding more light on the escalating problem of new-age tobacco device usage among the country's youth."

This collaboration aims to raise



awareness, garner support and foster a collective effort to protect the wellbeing of the younger generation from the hazards of these devices, they said.

Bhutia said, "I have been working with children to nurture future football talents and it is a great feeling to see their spirit on the field. So, for me, it is very disheartening that children and

youngsters are falling prey to these harmful habits."

"At an age where our children should be immersed in an environment that nurtures their dreams and aspirations, it is sad to witness the havoc that these new-age tobacco devices are wreaking on their health and ultimately their lives," the former Indian football team captain said.

He also praised the efforts of Mothers Against Vaping in raising awareness, calling it "truly commendable".

"I wholeheartedly extend my support to them, so that the well-being and future of our younger generations are secured," Bhutia said.

According to Mothers Against Vaping, rising addiction among children to new-age tobacco devices is fuelled by the aggressive efforts of big tobacco companies to establish a new market and cultivate future consumers.

"These companies employ various tactics, including social media advertising, designing electronic devices with sleek technology and eye-catching aesthetics and introducing enticing flavours like strawberry or bubble gum, to appeal to children," the group said.

"This alarming trend poses a

significant risk of addiction as e-cigarettes and other such devices can serve as gateway devices, potentially leading users to more harmful substances such as cocaine and heroine," it added.

Despite the comprehensive ban imposed by the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarette Act, 2019, e-cigarettes and similar new-age devices continue to proliferate, according to Mothers Against Vaping.

The use of vaping and e-cigarette devices has been linked to various harmful effects, ranging from extensive lung damage to environmental harm through improper disposal, the group said.

In response to the urgent concern posed by the proliferation of new-age tobacco devices, the group is seeking support and action from influential figures, parents, educators, influencers and policymakers. (PTI)

'Big day for democracy, Satyameva Jayate', says AAP on Sanjay Singh's bail



NEW DELHI, April 2: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Tuesday welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to grant bail to the party's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh in a money-laundering case linked to the excise policy case, calling it "big day for democracy in the country and a moment of hope".

In a joint press conference, AAP leaders claimed that the court order "exposed" that the entire liquor scam case was based on statements "extorted" from witnesses and approvers.

Singh was brought to a hospital on Tuesday morning and he is likely to be discharged on Wednesday, an official source told PTI. Singh was arrested by the Enforcement

Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped excise policy on October 4.

"This is a big day for democracy in the country and a moment of happiness and hope," Delhi minister Saurabh Bhardwaj said in the press conference.

Atishi, also a cabinet minister in the Delhi government, said that for two years AAP leaders have been targeted in fake cases and arrested.

"In the court proceedings, two important things have come before the people -- ED had no response when the Supreme Court asked where is the money trail; and that the entire case of the ED is based on approvers' statements who were pressured to give statements against Kejriwal," she said.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was arrested by the ED in the excise policy case, was on Monday sent to judicial custody till April 15.

Atishi earlier shared the news of Singh's bail in a post on X and said in Hindi, "Satyameva Jayate." (PTI)

9 Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur; arms seized

RAIPUR, April 2: In a major anti-insurgency operation, nine Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, police said.

Bijapur district comes under the Bastar Lok Sabha constituency, which will go to polls in the first phase of general elections on April 19.

The gunfight took place at around 6 am in a forest near Lendra village under Gangaloor police station area, when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P told PTI.

After the exchange of fire stopped, bodies of four Naxalites were recovered from the spot along with a light machine gun, barrel grenade launchers and other arms and ammunitions, he said.

Later, five more bodies were found at the encounter site, the IG said, adding that search operation was still underway in the area.

Personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard, Special Task Force, Central Reserve Police Force and its elite unit Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) were involved in the operation, he said.

Notably, Naxalites carry out the Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign (TCOC) in the summer season between March and June every year and step up their activities. A large number of attacks on security forces have taken place in the Bastar region during this period.

On March 27, six Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Basaguda area of Bijapur, police earlier said.

With the latest incident, 42 Naxalites have been killed so far this year in separate encounters with security forces in Bastar region, comprising seven districts including Bijapur, according to police. (PTI)

Kin of former T'gana CM KCR held in case of attempt to grab land

HYDERABAD, April 2: A nephew of former Telangana chief minister and BRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao, was on Tuesday arrested for allegedly attempting to encroach land here, police said.

A case was earlier registered against Chandrasekhar Rao's nephew K Kanna Rao and others in the first week of March at Adibatla police station based on a complaint from a director of a real estate firm who accused them of trying to encroach upon two acres of the company's land after trying to threaten their employees.

He has been arrested in connection with that case and is being sent to judicial remand, a senior police official told PTI.

An FIR was registered on March 3 against Kanna Rao and others under relevant IPC sections including 307 (attempt to murder), 147 (rioting), 447 (criminal trespass). (PTI)

Disengagement, de-escalation way forward: Rajnath on eastern Ladakh

'Unconventional and asymmetric warfare, including hybrid war, will be part of the future conventional wars'

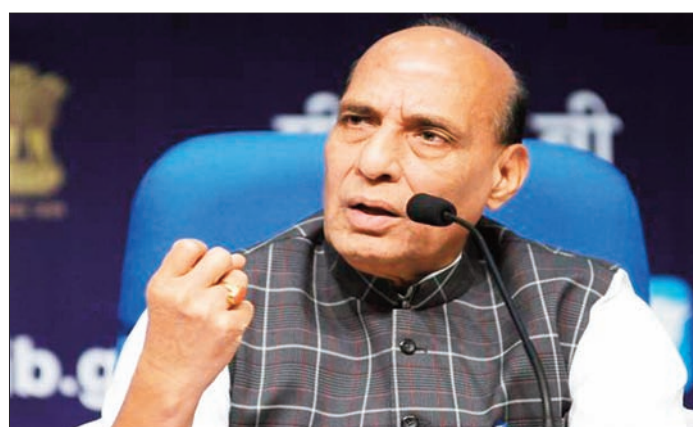
NEW DELHI, April 2: With the India-China military face-off continuing in eastern Ladakh, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said the Indian troops are standing "firm" and the ongoing talks between the two sides for a peaceful resolution of the matter will continue as disengagement and de-escalation is the way forward.

In an address to the top commanders of the Army, Singh reaffirmed the faith of the billion-plus citizens in the force as one of the "most-trusted and inspiring" organisations in the country.

The Army commanders deliberated extensively on national security challenges along the borders with China and Pakistan and ways to boost the force's overall combat capability. The defence minister, complimenting the Army leadership for successfully taking ahead the country's "defence and security" vision to new heights, said the role of the force is very important in nation building.

In his remarks, Singh also lauded the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), saying its efforts have led to the "quantum improvement" in road communication along the western and northern frontiers.

On the current situation along the northern borders, Singh expressed full confidence that while the troops are standing firm, the ongoing talks for peaceful resolution will continue and disengagement and de-escalation is the way forward, the



defence ministry said in a statement.

The Indian and Chinese troops are locked in a standoff in certain friction points in eastern Ladakh for nearly four years even as the two sides have completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks. Referring to the situation along the borders with Pakistan, Singh complimented the Army's response to cross-border terrorism, adding that the proxy war by the "adversary" continues.

The defence minister complimented the "excellent synergy" between the Central Armed Police Forces, local police and Army in tackling the menace of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The synergised operations in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir are contributing to in-

creased stability in the region and the same should continue," he said.

Singh lauded the forces for the high standard of operational preparedness and capabilities, which he said he has always experienced firsthand during his visits to forward areas.

Delving into the complex world situation, Singh said it affects everyone globally.

"Unconventional and asymmetric warfare, including hybrid war, will be part of the future conventional wars. Cyber, information, communication, trade and finance have all become an inseparable part of future conflicts," he added.

"This necessitates that the armed forces will have to keep all these facets in consideration while planning and formulating strategies," the defence minister said.

He highlighted the stellar role

played by the Army in guarding the country's borders and fighting terrorism, apart from providing assistance to the civil administration in every need of the hour.

"The Army is present in every domain, from security, HADR (humanitarian assistance and disaster relief), medical assistance to maintaining the stable internal situation in the country," he said.

"The role of the Indian Army is very important in nation building as also in the overall national development," he noted.

The defence minister complimented the leadership of the Army for successfully taking ahead the country's "defence and security" vision to new heights.

He also hailed the Army's approach on the infusion and absorption of cutting-edge technology.

Singh paid tributes to all the bravehearts for making the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of the motherland. The Army Commanders' Conference is an apex-level biannual event that is held in April and October every year. The conference is an institutional platform for conceptual-level deliberations, culminating in making important policy decisions for the Army.

The commanders comprehensively deliberated upon all aspects of the existing security scenarios, the situation along the borders and the hinterland and the challenges for the present security apparatus. (PTI)

Farm unions to protest against decision to use corporate silos as procurement centres on April 7

CHANDIGARH, April 2: Two farmer bodies on Tuesday said they will hold demonstrations on Sunday against the decision to declare private silos as wheat procurement centres in Punjab.

The move will make grain markets redundant, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha said, adding that they will burn effigies of both the central and Punjab government over the issue on April 7.

Apart from SKM (Non Political) and KMM, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), which spearheaded the 2020-21 farmers' agitation against the now-repealed farm laws, earlier announced that it will hold protests over the issue on April 9.

The state government, in its order on March 15, had declared 11 silos, being managed by private companies, as purchase centres in view of the Rabi marketing season that started on April 1.

A steel silo is a scientific way of storage of foodgrains and ensures better preservation in comparison to conventional storage warehouses. A silo also can also act as a purchase centre where farmers can bring their crops for sale.

SKM (Non Political) and KMM are spearheading the 'Delhi Chalo' march by farmers to press the government to accept their demands which includes a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops.

The protesting farmers who have been staying put at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between

Punjab and Haryana after their march was stopped by security forces on February 13, have also demanded the release of five arrested farmers by the Haryana police.

Addressing mediapersons here on Tuesday, SKM (Non Political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal condemned the decision to declare corporate silos in nine districts as procurement centres for wheat storage in Punjab.

He said the Punjab government has "acted at the behest of the Centre", claiming this was an attempt to make the 'mandis' (grain markets) redundant.

KMM leader Sarwan Singh Pandher accused the AAP government of trying to please corporations by allowing the sale, purchase and storage of wheat at private silos.

Pandher said he had "no doubt" that it was a central government policy but added that the state government could have stopped its implementation.

He urged farmers to not bring their crops to these silos for sale.

Both the leaders also demanded the release of five farmers including Ravinder Singh Ravi, Amarjit Singh, both from Punjab, who were arrested during the ongoing protest.

Pandher said they will burn effigies of the Modi government and the Bhagwant Mann government on April 7 over the issue.

If their demands to roll back the decision on corporate silos and the release of the five farmers were not accepted by April 7, then they will hold a 'rail roko' agitation on April 9, Pandher said. (PTI)

All pleas challenging Centre's ban on 23 dog breeds to be heard together: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, April 2: Delhi High Court on Tuesday transferred to itself several petitions challenging the Centre's ban on the sale and breeding of 23 breeds of ferocious dogs.

A division bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora observed that these are "very ferocious dogs" and they are "hounding upon children".

The court said once the division bench is seized of the matter, all other similar petitions pending before single judges shall also come to it and heard together.

"Once the division bench is seized of the matter, all such cases should come here. In fact, all single judges must send their related matters here. We will summon the case files here. You file an impleadment application in the other pending PIL and we will hear you. We can't have so many PILs on this," the bench said and added that "multiple petitions on the

same issue would only create complications and delay the disposal of the matter".

The Pet Lovers' Association challenged the Centre's March 12 notification on the ground that the ban has been imposed on 23 dog breeds without consulting or inviting objections and suggestions from stakeholders.

To this, the bench said, "Every dog lover or dog owner or association cannot be made a party and heard, that is impossible."

"This has happened on our directions. It can't be that we direct the central government to examine and then we say the central government can't pass such an order. We will see and examine it," it further said.

The division bench said it has already issued notice on a similar PIL and disposed of the current petition, granting liberty to the petitioner organisation to file an impleadment or

intervention application in that matter.

The bench also transferred to itself the petitions pending before single judges on the same issue and listed the matter for hearing on April 9.

On March 12, the Centre directed states to ban the sale and breeding of 23 breeds of ferocious dogs, including Pitbull Terriers, American Bulldog, Rottweilers and Mastiffs, amid rising instances of pet dog attacks.

The directive issued to states and Union Territories bars people from keeping these 23 breeds of dogs as pets.

In a letter to chief secretaries of all states and Union Territories dated March 12, the Union government's Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying also said these breeds of dogs already been kept as pets should be sterilised to prevent further breeding. (PTI)

Five IAF helicopters conduct trial landing, take-off on emergency landing strip in J&K

SRINAGAR, April 2: Five IAF helicopters, including the recently inducted US-manufactured Chinook, landed on a stretch of the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway as part of an Emergency Landing Facility drill, the first such exercise in Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Tuesday.

With this, Jammu and Kashmir became the first Union territory to operationalise an Emergency Landing Facility (ELF). Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan are the three states where these emergency landing strips are currently operational. According to the officials, two US-manufactured Chinook, one Russian-made Mi-17 and two Advance Light helicopters (ALH) of the Indian Air Force (IAF) landed on the Wanpoh-Sangam stretch of the national highway linking Kashmir with the rest

of the country in the early hours of Tuesday.

The entire drill ended by 2.50 am, during which the helicopters landed at the stretch and carried an exercise of picking up troops lying on the ground, the officials said, adding the exercise was held without any problems, they said.

Work on the 3.5-km emergency landing strip was started in 2020 and completed late last year as part of a programme initiated by the IAF along with the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways for the creation of ELFs at different locations across the country. Chinook helicopters, which have a top speed of 310 kmph and a travel range of 741 km, are used for heavy lifting and the main cabin can hold over 33 fully-equipped troops. It can also be used for medical evacuation and has space for 24 stretchers. (PTI)

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Karnataka to experience dry weather and heat wave conditions till April 5



BENGALURU, April 2: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted heat wave conditions in the northern districts of Karnataka till April 5, and likely dry weather across the state in the coming days.

According to the IMD, due to certain wind and weather conditions from south Tamil Nadu to east Vidarbha, isolated light rainfall is likely over Madhya Maharashtra from April 5 to 8, and over Konkan and Goa, Marathwada, Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam, Telangana, and Karnataka from April 6 to 8.

North Interior Karnataka experienced heat wave conditions in isolated pockets on Tuesday while the Kodagu district received some respite with a fresh spell of rainfall.

According to the IMD,

Bagalkote, Kalaburgi, Vijayapura, Yadgir, Raichur, Bellari, Belgaum, Koppal and Gadag districts of the state are likely to face heat wave conditions.

For April 6, the IMD has forecast light rainfall in isolated places over Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Bidar, Kalaburgi, Kodagu, Mandya, Mysuru districts of Karnataka, whereas the remaining districts of the state are likely to experience dry weather.

On April 7, light rainfall is likely at isolated places over Dakshina Kannada, Bidar, Kalaburgi, Chikkamagaluru, Kodagu, Mandya and Mysuru districts and the possibility of dry weather in the remaining districts.

On April 8, the IMD has predicted the possibility of light

rainfall in isolated places over Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Bidar, Kalaburgi, Vijayapura, Yadgir, Bagalkote, Belagavi, Gadag, Dharwad, Koppal, Raichur, Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Shivamogga, Chitradurga and Mysuru districts while dry weather very likely in the remaining districts.

"Hot and Humid conditions very likely to prevail over Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Bengaluru Rural and Bengaluru Urban, Chitradurga, Davanagere, Kolar, Mandya, Mysuru and Tumakuru districts during next three days," it said.

The maximum temperature is very likely to gradually rise by two-four degrees Celsius over Bagalkote, Bidar, Belagavi, Dharwad, Kalaburgi, Haveri and Koppal districts of North Interior Karnataka and Bengaluru Rural, Bengaluru Urban, Chitradurga, Davanagere, Kolar, Mandya, Chikkamagaluru, Shivamogga, Tumakuru and Mysuru districts of South Interior Karnataka during the next five days.

For Bengaluru city, the IMD has forecast partly cloudy sky in the morning and mainly clear sky by afternoon/evening over the next 48 hours while the maximum and minimum temperatures are very likely to be around 36 degrees Celsius and 24 degrees Celsius respectively. (PTI)

Indian Coast Guard ship makes port call in Vietnam on overseas deployment to ASEAN countries



NEW DELHI, April 2: Indian Coast Guard ship Samudra Paharedar, a specialised Pollution Control Vessel, on Tuesday made a port call at Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam as part of its ongoing overseas deployment to the ASEAN countries, officials said.

This deployment is a testimony to the ICG's commitment to "bolster bilateral relationships" and "enhance international cooperation" with friendly countries, the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

"The deployment of Samudra Paharedar to the ASEAN region reflects India's shared concern and resolve towards marine pollution, promoting safety and security through maritime cooperation.

Prior to Ho Chi Minh, the vessel had visited Manila, Philippines, to demonstrate a seamless continuation of diplomatic maritime engagements in the ASEAN region," it said.

The ship is equipped with specialised marine pollution control equipment and a Chetak Helicopter in pollution response configuration, designed to contain and recover spilled oil and augment the operation.

The ICG ship is on an overseas deployment to the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries -- the Philippines, Vietnam and Brunei -- from March 25 to April 12.

Samudra Paharedar, with an integral helicopter, made a port call

at Ho Chi Minh as part of its ongoing overseas deployment to the ASEAN countries, the ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

"During the three-day visit, the crew will engage in professional interactions focusing on marine pollution response, maritime search and rescue, and maritime law enforcement. The activities will also include cross-deck training, subject matter expert exchanges, sports events and passage exercise with the Vietnam Coast Guard (VCG)," it said.

The visit not only aims to strengthen ties between the ICG and VCG, but also showcases India's indigenous shipbuilding capabilities.

In addition, 25 National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets aboard the vessel will participate in a walkathon and beach clean-up activities, officials said.

Since 2015, the ICG and VCG have an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which institutionalised the cooperative engagements between the two maritime agencies, it said.

The visit of the ICG specialised vessel to these countries is in pursuance with India ASEAN initiative for marine pollution announced during the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus in Cambodia in 2022. (PTI)

DGCA seeks daily report from Vistara on flights cancellations

NEW DELHI/ MUMBAI, April 2: Aviation watchdog DGCA has asked Vistara to submit a daily report on flight cancellations and delays, and the situation is also being monitored by the civil aviation ministry, amid non-availability of pilots causing flight disruptions for the airline.

A day after the carrier announced reducing operations due to non-availability of crew and other operational reasons, sources on Tuesday said some commanders as well as first officers of its A320 fleet are also reporting sick to protest pay revisions due to signing of new contracts.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Tuesday said in view of various flight disruptions of Vistara, it has asked the airline to submit daily information and details on the flights that are being cancelled and delayed.

The officials of the DGCA are also monitoring the situation to ensure compliance with requirements for providing facilities to passengers in case of flight cancellations and delays.

This is to minimise the inconvenience to passengers, the regulator said. On Tuesday, the civil aviation ministry said it is monitoring the situation of Vistara flight cancellations.



"However, flight operations are managed by Airlines themselves. Airlines have to comply with DGCA norms to ensure passenger facilitation in case of cancellation or delay of flights," the ministry said in a post on X.

Many passengers have taken to social media to complain about flight delays and cancellations.

In recent weeks, discontent has been simmering among pilots at Vistara, which is in the process of getting merged with Air India, following the new contracts wherein there are concerns that fixed pay component is getting reduced and there is more flying-linked incentive in the salary structure.

The new contracts that will bring parity between pilots of Vistara and Air India have been introduced as part of the ongoing merger process.

Vistara is a joint venture between Tata Group and Singapore Airlines.

Many first officers of Vistara's A320 fleet have been reporting sick in the past few weeks and on Monday alone, around 50 flights were cancelled and many were delayed as there were not enough pilots to operate flights.

The sources said that now some commanders of the A320 fleet are reporting sick.

Vistara has a fleet of 70 planes

comprising 63 aircraft from A320 family and 7 wide-body Boeing 787s. As per the summer schedule, which started from March 31, the airline is to operate little over 300 flights daily.

In a statement on Monday, Vistara said it had a significant number of flight cancellations and delays in the past few days due to various reasons, including crew unavailability.

"We have decided to temporarily reduce the number of flights we operate, to ensure adequate connectivity across our network," the airline had said and also apologised for the disruptions.

The airline has also decided to temporarily reduce the number of flights it operates, to ensure adequate connectivity across its network.

Further, the airline has deployed larger aircraft like B787-9 Dreamliner and A321neo on select domestic routes to combine flights or accommodate more customers, wherever possible.

In the ongoing summer schedule, Vistara will be operating 25.22 per cent more weekly flights at 2,324.

Sources had said, the number of flight cancellations are expected to go up and touch 70 on Tuesday. (PTI)

Contrasting visions and allegations take center stage in campaign trail

War of words intensifies between Topon and Gaurav



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, April 2: The war of words between NDA candidate Topon Kumar Gogoi and INDIA candidate Gaurav Gogoi for the prestigious 14 Jorhat parliamentary seat continues as the D-day of the poll battle is drawing close. BJP's sitting MP Topon Kr Gogoi, accompanied by Sonari MLA Dharmeswar Gogoi, addressed several meetings in Baruah Chali

TE, Haridev Kanu TE, Borguri Badulipar, Longpatia, Ahukhat Moran Habi, etc., places under Sonari LAC of the Charaideo district and reiterated his commitment to work silently but dedicatedly for the people of Jorhat Lok Sabha as desired by his party led by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in the state and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the centre for a developed India. Over 200 minori-

ties and others joined the BJP in the meeting held in Bhojo, Simaliguri Sivasagar and Charaideo district. Biswa Bhunia, convener, Media Cell BJP, while campaigning for Topon Kumar Gogoi on Monday said that the BJP has done in 10 years what the Congress could not do in 70 years. For example, he mentioned that the BJP has declared Sivasagar as an 'Iconic City', laid the foundation

stone for the Rs 140 crore Rangghar beautification project, Sivasagar Medical College, Charaideo Moidam World Heritage Project, strengthened Desang, Darika, Dikhow embankments, upgrading Sibsagar College into a university, etc. Meanwhile, addressing the media in Sivasagar Press Club on Monday, Gaurav Gogoi alleged that the BJP government has become overtly autocratic and those who oppose CAA are being put behind bars. He alleged that the BJP is running a syndicate in the tea gardens which is a bigger scam than the electoral bonds. He said that if the capitalists turn the gardens into different industries, the tea garden labourers will be jobless. Gaurav Gogoi visited several GPs in Sivasagar the same day and offered prayers in Amlakhi Deoxal, a religious pith of the Ahoms in Bokota. Regarding the Congress leaders that have deserted the party, Gaurav Gogoi said that the party is purged of the corrupt members now and he is very happy now.

Shikha Sharma & Abu Shama file nominations

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 2: Two Independent candidates filed nomination papers for the Nagaon parliamentary constituency on Tuesday here. Shikha Sharma, a female writer and litterateur, submitted one nomination paper for the parliamentary constituency, while another Independent candidate, Abu Shama, submitted two nomination papers for the Nagaon parliamentary constituency, an official press note asserted this on Tuesday afternoon here.



Children and young girls in traditional Assamese attire participated in the opening day of the 10-day-long Bihu dance and dhol (drum) badan workshop organised by East Guwahati Bihu Sammilan ahead of the Rongali Bihu festival at AEI Playground in Chandmari, Guwahati, on Tuesday. UB Photos

Section 144 CrPC imposed in Cachar

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 2: Apprehending communal violence and breach of peace and tranquility, the District Magistrate Rohan Kumar Jha has issued an order clamping Section 144 CrPC throughout the district in anticipation of breaches of peace, public tranquility, and safety during the election period. This order comes into immediate effect and states that no person or group is allowed to carry weapons such as lathi, lance, spears, dao, or any other articles that can be used as weapons of offense. No person is allowed to carry or use any bombs, crackers, or any other materials that can produce sound or any chemical effect. No person or group of persons is allowed to carry toy guns, toy pistols, and revolvers. Considering the urgency of the circumstances, this order is passed ex-parte. The order comes into force with immediate effect throughout the district of Cachar and shall remain valid until further notice.

Movement of e-vehicles restricted

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, April 2: As a security measure on the eve of the elections to the 18th Lok Sabha, Sivasagar district commissioner Aditya Vikram Yadav, through an order on Monday, banned e-vehicles' movement at night from 9 pm to 6 am in the district. Police administration in Sivasagar has stepped up security checks in all vehicles on NH 37 and at the entry points to the town, besides the Assam-Nagaland border areas.

Punjabi dhaba owner picked up for Khalistani poster

GUWAHATI, April 2: A roadside dhaba owner hailing from Punjab was picked up from Bongaigaon district on suspicion of being a Khalistani sympathiser, a police officer said on Monday.

According to Bongaigaon SP Mohan Lal Meena, the person kept a poster of Khalistani ideologue Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and others in his line hotel, located near Gerukabari outpost on National Highway-27.

"There is a photo of Bhindran-

wale. In another photo, a person is waving a flag similar to that of a Khalistani one. We are examining it," he told PTI.

The person, identified as Gurmukh Singh from Tarn Taran district of Punjab, also kept a photo of slain controversial rapper Sidhu Moose Wala, Meena said.

Police picked him up on Sunday and are interrogating him at present, he added.

"He claimed that some truck drivers gave him the pictures. He

might be a sympathiser, but we cannot say it at the moment," the SP said.

Singh used to drive trucks before Covid-19, but opened the dhaba after the pandemic, he added.

"We feel that he put up such kinds of posters in his dhaba to attract more truck drivers, a lot of whom are from Punjab. Otherwise, he would not have done such a foolish thing publicly in front of his dhaba," Meena said. (PTI)

Tea Board decision sparks outrage

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, April 2: Satra Mukti Sangram Samity Central Committee, Tinsukia District Committee, and Tirap Jagun Regional Committee jointly held a press conference at Hotel Patkai Inn, Jagun, on Tuesday against the Tea Board of India's unilateral decision to ensure that brought leaf tea manufacturing industries will not produce tea from April 1. This decision has created an undesirable atmosphere among the small tea growers of Margherita sub-division as well as in the state.

According to the Tea Board of India's decision, the recommendation states that 100 percent of the tea produced by brought leaf factories can be sold through public auction, and the tea unable to prepare due to the use of pesticides has directly troubled the small tea growers.

At the press conference, the student bodies criticised the management of the Tea Board of India, brought leaf factory owners, as well as the BJP-led government both at the union and state levels. Rahul Chetry, the general secretary of Satra Mukti Sangram Samity Central Committee, demanded that all brought leaf tea factories cancel their decision not to produce tea at the earliest, fix the right price for the tea leaves, and close all pesticides manufacturing companies as they have already been banned by the Tea Board of India.

Training on EVM commissioning & poll day protocols

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, April 2: In view of the smooth conduct of the upcoming general election to Lok Sabha 2024 for 11-Sonitpur HPC, a hands-on training session on EVM/VVPAT, Form 17A/17C, Form 14-A, and other relevant issues was organised on Tuesday at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's Office, Sonitpur.

The training included a focused presentation on commissioning of EVMs, EVM management, and

protocol on poll day, as well as live demonstrations of EVMs and hands-on training for all the officers present. It is noteworthy that EVM commissioning for Sonitpur election district will commence on April 9 at Darrang College, Tezpur. The training program was attended by the district development commissioner, chief executive officer of Zilla Parishad, additional district commissioners, election officer, circle officers, assistant commissioners, and other concerned officials of Sonitpur election district.

AYM protests deteriorating condition of road



HT Correspondent
DEMOW, April 2: The Asomiya Yuva Mancha (AYM) has expressed serious concerns about the condition of Hari Pora Road, which connects Demow and the front side of Nitai Road, as both roads have developed potholes. Jadab Gogoi, president of Asomiya Yuva Mancha (AYM),

Central Committee, along with other activists of AYM and local residents, protested on Tuesday on Hari Pora Road. During the protest, a fishing net was used and placed in the potholes filled with water. They shouted slogans against the PWD Department, stating that it is unclear whether the roads are for vehicles or

ponds. Moreover, pedestrians face serious problems while traveling on both roads, especially after heavy showers when the potholes fill with water. Hari Pora Road is home to schools, colleges, offices, and a police station. The protestors demanded that the potholes on both roads be repaired at the earliest.

Fire ravages weekly market



HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 2: A devastating fire broke out at Dekorai weekly market in Itakhola under Biswanath district, gutting down a total of six shops on Tuesday afternoon. According to reports, the fire erupted suddenly and quickly spread to the adjoining huts of the weekly market, damaging them extensively. Local residents promptly alerted the fire brigade, and a team of firefighters rushed to the scene. With the assistance of local people, they managed to prevent the fire from spreading further and successfully extinguished it. The Itakhola Police also arrived at the site promptly, and an investigation is currently underway.

Sub-standard meals served to election workers

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, April 2: The employees engaged in different cells for the smooth conduct of the Lok Sabha 2024 election, scheduled for April 26 in the district, are dissatisfied with the refreshment cells for serving them sub-standard meals during lunchtime. The employees, involved in various election-related tasks, have expressed serious concerns about being served only 'puri & sabji' instead of rice. It is alleged that the packets

of 'puri & sabji' have caused several employees to encounter issues related to freshness, taste, and overall cleanliness of the food. These observations cast serious doubts on the adherence to proper hygiene standards in the preparation and handling of the meals. The employees have urged the authorities to thoroughly investigate this matter and implement necessary measures to ensure that the meals provided meet the expected standards of quality and hygiene.

Bokajan CHC receives donations from CCI

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, April 2: Under the initiative of Cement Corporation of India Ltd. (CCI), Bokajan Community Health Centre (CHC) received donations including an Aqua Guard RO system, refrigerator, geyser, and ECG machines. These contributions were presented in the presence of SDMHO Dr Debojit Deori, Dr NC Dey, executive member of Asom Jatiyatibadi Yuva Chatra Parishad Jitu Phukon, and president of Karbi Students Association Bokajan District Committee Raju Engleng. It is noteworthy that CCI had also provided a year-long ration to 50 tuberculosis patients in Bokajan last year.

Police seize fake currency notes

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, April 2: The police in Karbi Anglong intercepted Indian Fake Currency Notes (IFCN) while conducting checks on NH 39 under the jurisdiction of Khakhati Police Station in Karbi Anglong. During their routine inspection, they encountered an LP truck bearing registration number AS 01 JC 3745 traveling from Manipur to Guwahati. Upon a thorough examination, counterfeit currency notes were discovered within the driver's cabin. Consequently, the driver of the truck, Mahamad Sajid Khan (27), hailing from Manipur, was detained in connection with the incident. Further investigation into the matter is underway.

Garbage accumulation raises concerns

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, April 2: The newly constructed flyover at the railway crossing on the Jagiroad-Morigaon road has largely alleviated the traffic problems in Jagiroad, but some pedestrians and businessmen have complained that the beautiful flyover has been given an ugly appearance by some unsocial elements. It is alleged that there is a lot of garbage on the sidewalks of the flyover, which is causing difficulties for pedestrians to travel on the two sidewalks. Concerned citizens feel that it is necessary to take measures to prevent the dropping of garbage and thereby prevent the spread of diseases. There are also complaints that the road is causing inconvenience to people due to the foundation plate erected amidst the footpath of the flyover. The residents hope that the departmental authorities will take necessary measures to address these issues soon.

Israeli scholar embraces teachings of Srimanta Sankardeva

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 2: Edgar Faingor, a 47-year-old Israeli national, intellectual, and professor at the International Buddhist College, Thailand, initiated the Vaishnavite 'Ek Naam Dharma' founded by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva centuries ago, at Balisatra in Kaliabor. Edgar's initiation to Vaishnavite 'Ek Naam Dharma' was ceremonially carried out by Hiru Prasad Mahanta, satradhikar of Baghargaoon Satra, after renaming Edgar Faingor as Krishna Charan Bhakat.

Edgar was born in Moscow, Russia, and has explored many countries across the globe. He studied almost all religions and later converted to Buddhism. During the initiation programme, Edgar Faingor promised to practice the Shankari arts and crafts in the next part of his life and also participated in the Nam-Sangha at Balisatra Satra. The Israeli national Edgar married from Nepal and also has a son.

Following vast studies of almost all religions and exploring various disciplines and countries for over twenty years across the globe, Edgar Faingor came into contact with professor, columnist, litterateur, and noted scholar of Vaishnavite Guru Srimanta Sankardeva - Dr Sanjib Borkakoti and studied Dr Borkakoti's all English ver-



sions on Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva.

Edgar Faingor recently expressed his willingness to take initiation to Vaishnavite Guru Srimanta Sankardeva's Ek Charan Naam Dharma to Dr Sanjib Kr Borkakoti, and Dr Borkakoti ensured his initiation



ceremony at Batadroba Than entertaining by Satradhikar Debananda Dev Goswami on Tuesday. But amidst the arrangements, Satradhikar Goswami suddenly died due to cardiac arrest, for which the programme of his initiation to 'Ek Charan Naam Dharma' finally shifted to Balisatra in Kaliabor.

Edgar was awarded a satra certificate during the ceremonial initiation, which was attended by author, researcher, and professor Dr Sanjib Kr Borkakoti, Deka Satriya Monimadhav Mahanta of Balisatra, and other satradhikars of several satras of greater Kaliabor areas.

FIDE Candidates: Praggnanandhaa enters as India's best bet

TORONTO, April 2: Teen sensation R Praggnanandhaa will enter as the favourite among the three Indian participants in the Candidates chess tournament that will get underway here from Wednesday to decide the challenger for the next world championship match.

After nearly 35 years as many as three Indians – Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh and Vidit Gujrathi – have qualified for the most prestigious event of the year that has just eight participants.

According to an expert, India is the new Russia of the chess world, as in the past such dominance was only shown by Russian players.

Praggnanandhaa, 18, starts as the rating favourite among Indians and also as the favourite of the chess buffs even though the top bracket of the world feels that all the three Indian youngsters still need time to settle among the world elite.

Fearless and psychologically sound, Praggnanandhaa will likely have the assistance of eight-time Russian champion Peter Svidler for the event. One cannot help but recall that during one of the world championships Indian grandmaster P Harikrishna had assisted Svidler in his quest to be the world champion.

While Svidler could be a game-changer, it will largely depend on Praggnanandhaa's form and how he adapts in this tough event, where the eight players will play each other twice.

At just 17 years, Gukesh is hailed as one of the finest talents



around. The Indian is also the youngest participant in the fray and second youngest ever after Robert James Fischer – aka Bobby Fischer – to qualify for the elite event. Fischer was 16-year-old when he qualified in 1959.

That Fischer's record lasted a whopping 65 years, goes to prove what it takes to be one of the candidates and if Gukesh wins it, he will be the youngest ever to compete for the World Championship title.

Vidit Gujrathi will have his task cut out and much will de-

pend on his form. In his last outing, probably training his sights for the candidates, the Nasik-based player did not do well at the Prague masters and slipped considerably on the rating list also. Praggnanandhaa was the first to qualify for the tournament by virtue of his silver medal performance in the last World Cup at Baku, Azerbaijan.

The Indian star went down to Magnus Carlsen in the final but since then has picked up a lot and has come around as a fierce.

Gujrathi made it thanks to a re-

markable performance in the Grand Swiss tournament at Isle of Man, UK, last year. The Indian had displayed top form in the final stages of the tournament.

For Gukesh it was touch and go but the teenager displayed steely nerves to win a spot through the rating process by winning a GM tournament in Chennai last December.

The field however is diverse with a great mix of youth and experience.

American Fabiano Caruana starts as the top seed ahead of his

compatriot Hikaru Nakamura. The 20-year-old Alireza Firouzja of France is ranked third while twice challenger Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia is the fourth seed.

Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh and Gujrathi follow these four in terms of FIDE ratings while Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan is the last seed in the event.

The first round will commence on Thursday, at midnight IST. There will be four rest days in all. The winner not only gets to play the world championship match but will also become richer by 48000 Euros (roughly Rs. 45 lakh).

Road to the Candidates: Ian Nepomniachtchi (2758) – qualified as the previous World Championship match runner-up.

R Praggnanandhaa (2747) – qualified as the 2023 World Cup runner-up.

Fabiano Caruana (USA, 2804) – qualified as the third-place finisher at the 2023 World Cup.

Nijat Abasov (AZE, 2632) – qualified as the fourth-place finisher at the 2023 World Cup after the winner, Magnus Carlsen, declined his right to participate.

Vidit Gujrathi (2747) – qualified as the 2023 Grand Swiss winner.

Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 2789) – qualified as the 2023 Grand Swiss runner-up.

Alireza Firouzja (FRA, 2760) – qualified as the best by rating on January 1, 2024.

D Gukesh (2747) – qualified as the 2023 FIDE Circuit winner. (PTI)

Indian junior girls' coach advocates for extended training camps with int'l boxers



ROHTAK, April 2: Month-long exposure camps with international pugilists will greatly benefit the development of boxing in India, especially at the age-group level, feels national junior girls' boxing coach Geeta Chanu.

Chanu noted that the reason countries like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are among the top boxing nations is the close cooperation between the respective boards of these Central Asian nations.

"Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have good endurance they are also high on strength but where they really score over others is there confidence," Chanu told PTI. "Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan conduct combined training and competitions across various age groups, at least three such combined training or competitions in a year. Hence from a very young age they get a lot of international exposure."

"Our players face international boxers only in multi-national tournaments," she added.

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) conducted a 15-day REC Combined Multinational Training Camp for junior boys and girls at the Sports Authority of India's National Boxing Academy here.

At the camp that ended on Tuesday, Indian boxers got to rub shoulders with pugilists from boxing powerhouses Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan besides Sri Lanka.

Chanu welcomed BFI's move to host a multinational camp for the age-group level Indian teams but insisted that the duration of such camps should be longer.

"We need even longer camps. A 30-day camp would yield more results. In 15 days not everything can be covered so we want that a longer camp should be there," she said.

Junior World Championship gold and silver medalists Payal and Amisha Kerketta echoed the same sentiment.

"This camp was very useful as our shortcomings were identified and a lot of work on rectifying them was done. It would have been great had it been a longer camp," Payal said.

"At the continental as well as World Championships we face a lot of Uzbek and Kazakh boxers so it was good to observe them close up and spar with them at this camp," Amisha added.

"We wish more such camps are conducted for longer durations like 45 days or a month so that we can learn much more."

The camp, which is a part of SAI's new Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KRITI) initiative, saw participation of over 150 boxers including 75 from India, 37 from Kazakhstan, 18 from Uzbekistan and 35 from Sri Lanka.

"The vision behind this is to identify athletes at a grassroots level and to build the bench strength of the country," said Deputy Director SAI Sachin. K. (PTI)

Nazi symbolism: Germany withdraws soccer jerseys with number 44

HERZOGENAURACH, GERMANY, April 2: The German soccer federation and Adidas have stopped the sale of Germany jerseys with the number 44 because of a resemblance to the logo of the Nazi Party's notorious SS paramilitary units.

Adidas on Monday stopped offering the personalisation of jerseys with names and numbers, and the federation halted the delivery of jerseys with the number 44 from its own online shop. The federation said it

was looking for an alternative design for the number 4 together with its partner, 11teamsports. "None of the parties involved saw any proximity to Nazi symbolism in the development process of the jersey design," the federation said on X, formerly Twitter.

The moves to withdraw jerseys with number 44 came after it was pointed out that the two fours together resembled the stylized SS used by the Nazi Party's Schutzstaffel group. Commonly known as

the SS, it included police units, combat forces and others who ran the concentration camps that carried out the mass killings of civilians during World War II. The stylised SS symbol is banned in Germany today.

Adidas spokesman Oliver Bruggen told news agency dpa that the federation and 11teamsports were responsible for the design of the names and numbers on the shirts. "People from around 100 countries work at Adidas. Our company stands for

the promotion of diversity and inclusion, and as a company, we actively campaign against xenophobia, antisemitism, violence and hatred in all forms," Bruggen said. "Any attempts to promote divisive or exclusionary views are not part of our values as a brand," he said.

Bruggen said Adidas strongly rejects any suggestions that this was our intention. Germany is hosting the European Championship from June 14 to July 14. (AP)

OLYMPIC BUILD-UP Indian men's hockey team heads to Australia for five-Test series



NEW DELHI, April 2: The Indian men's hockey team has left for Australia to compete in a five-match Test series beginning April 6, a crucial assignment ahead of the Paris Olympics in July-August.

The Harmanpreet Singh-led side left on Monday night.

The team has been in good form and recently won three out of its four matches during the FIH Pro League in Bhubaneswar.

After the opening game on April 6, the series features matches on April 7, 10, 12 and 13. It is essential for the Indian team to enhance their performance, build and check-through the improvement areas for the coming Paris Olympics, Hockey India stated in a press release.

"As we embark on this crucial tour to Australia, we are filled with determination and excitement. The series presents an excellent opportunity for us to assess our strengths and areas for improvement ahead of the Paris Olympics," Harmanpreet said before the side's departure.

"We are fully committed to

giving our best on the field and making every moment count." Vice-captain Hardik Singh stated that this tour holds immense significance for the team.

"We have been working hard as a team to refine our skills and strategies, and we are confident in our abilities. We are focused on putting up a strong performance and making our country proud," he said.

The Indian Team: GOAL-KEEPERS: Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh, Suraj Karkera DEFENDERS: Harmanpreet Singh (C), Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay, Sumit, Amir Ali MIDFIELDERS: Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh (VC), Vivek Sagar Prasad, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Vishnukant Singh.

FORWARDS: Akashdeep Singh, Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Gurjant Singh, Mohammed Rheel Mousen, Bobby Singh Dhami, Araiyeet Singh Hundal. (PTI)

Rohit wouldn't have lost MI captaincy if he'd been named India's T20 WC skipper earlier: Sidhu

NEW DELHI, April 2: Former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu believes that Rohit Sharma would not have been replaced by Hardik Pandya as Mumbai Indians captain had the BCCI named him skipper for the T20 World Cup last year itself.

Rohit was declared captain of India's yet-to-be-named T20 World Cup squad in February this year by BCCI secretary Jay Shah at an event in Ahmedabad, a good two months after he was replaced by Pandya as MI skipper.

"If the BCCI had named Rohit as captain for the T20

World Cup in October, the franchise wouldn't have chosen Hardik as captain. It's a matter of the franchise's respect. So, the actual issue here is timing," Sidhu said in 'Star Sports Press Room'.

Pandya has been facing hostility from fans in the ongoing IPL, booed in all three matches so far, including the one at MI's home turf of Wankhede, besides ending up on the losing side.

Sidhu said the fans' reaction is quite understandable as Rohit is a much-loved cricketer.

"Nobody can digest the fact that India's hero, India's captain, is not the captain of our fran-

chise. 'What wrong has he done?' is what fans of the franchise would be thinking. But what does he have to do?"

"There is nothing that succeeds like success. If he had won these two matches, there wouldn't have been any noise," he pointed out.

Talking about other teams in the IPL, Sidhu felt Royal Challengers Bengaluru have become predictable, especially in their spin bowling.

"The biggest thing needed in the winning of a team is that they are not dependent on just one individual to achieve victory. We do talk about Virat

Kohli and Faf du Plessis, but you got to saddle the right horse."

"The chain is as strong as the weakest link, and their weakness lies in the spin department. Their spinners are just not there, so therefore they will have to replenish that area. Like, RCB had (Wanindu) Hasaranga, who was pretty good and even before him, there was Yuzvendra Chahal," he observed.

"But they let them go and that has created a void in their bowling line-up. RCB haven't been able to fill that void, which makes them predictable. Now look at (MS) Dhoni – when he

comes, no one knows his plan," he said.

Sidhu reiterated that IPL performances will shape the T20 World Cup squads of all the teams.

"The entire world revolves around the IPL. Playing in the IPL just before the World Cup is like participating in a mini World Cup. Stellar performance here can make you an overnight sensation. Therefore, anyone who excels in the IPL becomes a strong contender," he said.

The T20 World Cup will begin on June 1 in the USA and the West Indies. (PTI)

India, Australia and England cricket boards in talks to revive Champions League T20

MUMBAI, April 2: About 10 years after its last edition was played, "active conversations" are taking place between cricket boards of India, Australia and England to revive the Champions League, a club-based international T20 competition.

The last edition of the CLT20 was held in India in 2014 with Chennai Super Kings winning the title after defeating Kolkata Knight Riders in the final at Bengaluru, with the edition involving three teams from India, two each from Australia and South Africa and one team from Pakistan, the West Indies and New Zealand.

As many as six editions of the CLT20 were played between 2009-10 to 2014-15, with four of these being organised in India and two in South Africa. The tournament was won twice each by Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians, while Australia's New South Wales and Sydney Sixers won it one time each.

While the cricket calendar remains jam-packed, the biggest challenge would be to find a win-

dow for reviving such an event, said Cricket Victoria CEO Nick Cummins, who is aware of the conversations taking place between the three biggest boards in international cricket.

"I think (the earlier edition of) Champions League was ahead of its time. The T20 landscape wasn't matured enough at that point. I think it is now," Cummins told the media during the announcement of its partnership with KheloMore to launch the Melbourne Cricket Academy in India.

"I know that there's active conversations between Cricket Australia (CA), ECB (England and Wales Cricket Board) and the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) about (reviving) the Champions League," he said.

"It's just trying to find a window as to when you actually play that, because you've also got all the ICC tournaments as well. It maybe (the case) that the first iteration of the Champions League will be of the women... (it may involve) cricketers playing in the) WPL, the Hundred and the



WBBL," he added.

Cummins said he has been in regular talks with CA's CEO Nick Hockley for the revival of CLT20 but added that BCCI secretary Jay Shah could also shed some light on it.

"I'm constantly talking to Nick Hockley, Cricket Australia CEO, for a Champions League, because

I think it's pretty important to bring that back," he said.

"There are talks about it. It's probably a question to ask Jay Shah (BCCI secretary). But certainly, from an Australia cricket perspective, we are very open to the idea of the Champions League. It's just about finding a window in the FTP, but I think

that's the next step in the evolution of cricket," he added.

Cummins drew comparison between the club-based international competition like Champions League in football, saying that cricket is in a similar phase of finding the balance between international and club-based competitions.

"We still haven't made out which league is the best. IPL, PSL or the Big Bash? The only way we can show that is by having the Melbourne Stars play Karachi Kings or the Mumbai Indians," Cummins said.

"Our great aspiration is to have the Indian players play in the Big Bash," he said.

"(The) Champions League is well overdue. Look at what Champions League does for football, the World Cup is fantastic and the Champions League is there (too) every time."

"The idea of the Mumbai Indians playing the Melbourne Stars at the MCG would be just as exciting as India playing Australia at the MCG," he added. (PTI)

Delhi Capitals ready for Kolkata Knight Riders challenge in IPL



VISAKHAPATNAM, April 2: Delhi Capitals would be keen to prove that their comfortable win against Chennai Super Kings was not a flash in the pan while Kolkata Knight Riders would be eyeing a hat-trick of victories when the two sides face off in the IPL here on Wednesday.

The Capitals would be buoyed by the 20-run victory here on Sunday, their first of the season, against defending champions CSK who were outsmarted by Rishabh Pant and Co. in all departments of the game.

And come Wednesday, the Capitals will have to put another such performance against KKR, whose batters pummelled Royal Challengers Bengaluru bowlers to notch their second win of the season on March 29.

For DC, the onus will be on Prithvi Shaw and veteran Australian David Warner to provide a solid start.

Meanwhile, Pant continues his inspirational journey. After two scratchy innings, the skipper gave a glimpse of his devastating best as he scored his maiden fifty (51 off 32 balls) of the season and seems to be slowly finding his groove.

The likes of South African Tristan Stubbs and Australian Mitchell Marsh, both capable of launching an assault on the opposition, need to be better towards the end as DC lack domestic power hitters.

While Stubbs showcased his prowess with the bat against Rajasthan Royals, a consistent show

from him will do a world of good for DC.

On the other hand, Marsh is yet to produce a glimpse of his brute power with the willow which could prove to be DC's lethal weapon.

South African Anrich Nortje is yet to find his rhythm as he returned to action after a long injury layoff. The Capitals' Indian pace unit will thus have to punch above its weight against a formidable KKR side.

Khaleel Ahmed's performance against CSK was commendable, yet his long-standing fielding troubles remain a concern. He struggles particularly with aerial catches, dropping more than he successfully takes. He dropped a catch of MS Dhoni against CSK.

Mukesh Kumar lacks pace while veteran Ishant Sharma is more than capable of asking pertinent questions.

KKR, on the other hand, have looked good this season, registering two wins from as many games. Opener Phil Salt, all-rounder Andre Russell and Venkatesh Iyer have been in good nick in the first two games and would look to pose a challenge for the Delhi pacers.

Skipper Shreyas Iyer also got some runs under his belt in the win against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Rookie pacer Harshit Rana has impressed so far, picking five wickets in two outings, but Mitchell Starc, their record buy, and Varun Chakravarthy have gone for runs aplenty.

The Teams (From):

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Prithvi Shaw, Yash Dhull, Abhishek Porel, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Mitchell Marsh, Pravin Dube, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Kuldeep Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Khaleel Ahmed, Ishant Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Tristan Stubbs, Ricky Bhui, Kumar Kushagra, Rasikh Dar, Jhye Richardson, Sumit Kumar, Swastik Chikara and Shai Hope.

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mubeen Ur Rahman.

Match starts at 7.30pm IST. (PTI)

KKR-RR, GT-DC matches rescheduled: BCCI



NEW DELHI, April 2: Kolkata Knight Riders' home IPL game against Rajasthan Royals was on Tuesday advanced by a day to April 16, while Gujarat Titans-Delhi Capitals fixture in Ahmedabad was also rescheduled by the BCCI which did not give any reason for the move.

The PTI had on Monday reported that the KKR-RR tie was set to be rescheduled due to Ram Navami, but the Board did not specify any reason for the rescheduling of matches on these two dates.

"The fixture between Kolkata Knight Riders & Rajasthan Royals, which was earlier scheduled to take place on April 17, 2024 at Eden Gardens, Kolkata will now be played a day prior on April 16, 2024.

Matter of time before Starc returns to his elements: Bharat Arun

VISAKHAPATNAM, April 2: Mitchell Starc has not lived up to his astronomical price tag so far in the IPL but Kolkata Knight Riders bowling coach Bharat Arun on Tuesday backed the Australia left-arm pacer, saying it's just a "matter of time" before he hits his stride.

Starc's combined figures from the first two games read an underwhelming 8-0-100-0.

"He is probably one of the most experienced bowlers in the world and also somebody who understands the conditions and adapts to it very well. I think you will see a different version of him in the future games," Arun said ahead of their match against Delhi Capitals here. Returning to the IPL after nine years, Starc was bought for a record sum of ₹ 24.75-crore at the auction.

Asked what conversations they are having with Starc, Arun cheekily replied: "Nothing about the price tag definitely.

"We have been talking about his strengths. I'm sure he understands what it is and what it takes to succeed. The kind of experience he brings with him having played in all the conditions, it is just a matter of time before you see Starc return in his elements," he said.

KKR have won both their matches (Sunrisers Hyderabad and Royal Challengers Bangalore) so far, relying on their spin bowling and their explosive batting. (PTI)

"The Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad was earlier scheduled to host the match between Gujarat Titans & Delhi Capitals on April 16, 2024. The fixture will now be played on April 17, 2024," the BCCI said in a statement.

It was learnt that Kolkata Police expressed its inability to provide adequate security cover for what will be KKR's third home game of the 17th IPL season, just three days after they host the Lucknow Super Giants.

"Since the match is coinciding with Ram Navami and a portion of security is already deployed for elections. Therefore it won't be possible for us to provide adequate security for the match on April 17," Kolkata Police had stated in a letter to Cricket Asso-

ciation of Bengal (CAB) president Snehasish Ganguly.

Bengal is also set to vote on April 19 in the first phase of the seven-phase general elections. The voting in Kolkata will take place on June 1.

"Yes, the CAB has informed us that local police has asked for rescheduling of the date and the matter is being looked into. We haven't yet decided on the new date," a senior BCCI official told PTI on Monday.

On part of CAB, a senior officer-bearer had informed: "We have suggested two dates, April 16 or 18. In any case, it is KKR's home match and will be played at the Eden Gardens."

The CAB had suggested that the match be advanced either by a day (16 April) or pushed back by 24 hours to 18 April.

KKR is currently in Visakhapatnam for a game against Delhi Capitals on Wednesday.

They had begun the season with a thrilling four-run victory over Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Eden Gardens, followed by a seven-wicket thumping of Royal Challengers Bengaluru at M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

The Shubman Gill-led Gujarat Titans are placed fourth in the standings with four points, following two wins and a loss from four outings. (PTI)

CAB announces IPL-style 'Bengal Pro T20'



KOLKATA, April 2: Bengal will finally have its own regional cricket league -- Bengal Pro T20 -- which will follow IPL model but will be restricted to just players from the state, the CAB announced on Tuesday.

The 21-day inaugural season will unfold in June with eight men's and women's teams.

The 'Bengal Pro T20' will follow the IPL model and its playing conditions but will not allow any "outstation cricketers, Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) president Snehasish Ganguly said adding that "even the coaches from outside the state will not be allowed."

The men's league will be held at Eden Gardens, while Jadavpur University Second Campus at Salt Lake will host the women's matches.

Double headers will feature on all days. The men's team will have 17 players each, while women's team will have 16 players each.

"All the eight teams will be franchises-owned, which will be a first

(in regional T20 leagues). We have still not finalised the franchises, which will be announced at a later date.

"The teams will be completely owned by franchises and all players will be paid as per the salary cap. CAB will not incur any expense for the league," the CAB president added. It is learnt that the CAB are in talks with Kolkata Knight Riders, the RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group (Lucknow Super Giants), Bandhan Bank, Shracchi Group and Rashmi Cement among others for the eight franchises.

The CAB had a regional T20 tournament back in 2020-21, but it failed to generate response and had to be stopped after one season.

Since then may states have launched their own T20 leagues to catch the attention of IPL spotters.

As of now, there have been more than a dozen regional T20 leagues in India, with the oldest being the KPL (Maharaja Trophy T20) of Karnataka, while Tamil Nadu's TNPL being the most popular. (PTI)

Kohli seems to have evolved again, never write off your champions: David Hussey



MUMBAI, April 2:Virat Kohli seems to have "evolved again" avowed former Australia cricketer David Hussey, who warned against writing off the champion player after a debate ensued on the Indian batter's strike rate.

Despite leading the run chart for Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the ongoing edition of IPL, Kohli faced some criticism for not batting aggressively enough against KKR in their last game.

Kohli is the joint-highest run getter so far with RR's Riyan Parag, scoring 181 runs in three matches with two fifties at a strike rate of 141.4.

With the T20 World Cup impending, Kohli's place in the team has also been a topic of discussion even though he played one of the most memorable innings for India in their clash against arch-rivals Pakistan in Melbourne.

"Virat Kohli is the leading run scorer, isn't he in the IPL currently?" Hussey replied when asked about what he made of the debate around Kohli's strike rate.

"He's a pretty good player. I don't think he's going to have too many issues. If you see the strike rate in this IPL, he seems to have taken his game to a new level, he's evolved again," Hussey told the media here on the sidelines of the announcement of the launch of Melbourne Cricket Academy, a partnership between Cricket Victoria and KheloMore.

"You never write off champions, like you never write off Steve Smith, (like) you never write off Ricky Ponting, Sachin Tendulkar, Rohit Sharma..."

"You never write them off and I'm certain that Virat Kohli is going to come out in the next World Cup and be the dominant force that he has been for the better part of a decade. Never write off your champions," Hussey reiterated.

Hussey, who played in the IPL for Chennai Super Kings, the then Kings XI Punjab and Kolkata Knight Riders, said the competition has evolved with

teams moving on from a conservative approach to an ultra-aggressive one.

"It's hit-hit, bang-bang from ball one now, whereas back in 2008, (it) was (about) take your time, get yourself in, try and have wickets in hand at the first 10-over mark and then try and get 180 or 190, (and) that was out of this world," he said.

"Now teams are getting 270 runs and other teams are almost chasing them down. If you face a couple of dot balls early and your strike rate is under 100, you're sort of ostracised, you don't fit to the T20 mould, so the planning that's evolved from 2008 till now is phenomenal -- every ball, every over is really important," he said.

Hussey, who was present at the Cricket Club of India along with Cricket Victoria CEO Nick Cummins and KheloMore CEO and selector Jatin Paranjape, said 10 years from now IPL would be entirely different.

"The game has evolved out of sight and like Nick (Cummins) said, I can't wait to see what the IPL and what T20 cricket looks like in a decade's time, because teams might get 300 runs and chase it down, which should be not good for fast bowlers or spinners but it's great for the game of cricket," he said.

A selection headache going into the World Cup, adding that players who are likely to feature in the T20 World Cup are getting an excellent opportunity to prepare for it in the IPL.

"There's competition for places, isn't there, in the Australian team? There's Travis Head who also opens up batting as well, who's playing particularly well," Hussey said.

"Anybody can beat anybody on their day, the pitch is a different, foreign conditions, but the players are very, very fortunate to have the IPL to play in and prepare very well in order to go to the World Cup and execute their skills," Hussey said. (PTI)

Ben Stokes pulls out of T20 World Cup

LONDON, April 2: England's star player Ben Stokes on Tuesday pulled out of the upcoming T20 World Cup, saying the "sacrifice" will help him focus on regaining his fitness to bowl full throttle and be the "all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future".

The country's Test captain has informed the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) about his decision, two months ahead of the showpiece that will be held in the USA and West Indies.

"I'm working hard and focusing on building my bowling fitness back up to fulfil a full role as an all-rounder in all formats of cricket.

"Opting out of the IPL and the World Cup will hopefully be a sacrifice that allows me to be the all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future," Stokes said in a statement issued by the ECB.

Stokes, 32, was in-charge of the team that suffered a 1-4 Test series loss to India earlier this year and said the tour made him realise that he isn't quite up for it when it comes to bowling.

"The recent Test tour of India highlighted how far behind I was from a bowling point of view after my knee surgery and nine months without bowling.

"I'm looking forward to playing for Durham in the County Championship before the start of our Test summer. I wish Jos (Buttler), Motty (Matthew Mott) and all the team the best of luck in defending our title."

England will be defending the title in the Caribbean having triumphed in the last edition of the tournament in Australia in 2022, with Stokes hitting the winning run in the final for a five-wicket victory over Pakistan at the MCG.

However, he has only played two T20 matches since, both at last year's IPL.

Having previously retired from ODI cricket in 2022, Stokes reversed his decision in order to play in the 50-over World Cup last year in India, following which he underwent a knee surgery that did not allow him to bowl in the Test series against India. (PTI)

Riyan Parag reminds me of young SKY at MI: Rajasthan Royals assistant coach Shane Bond

MUMBAI, April 2: Rajasthan Royals assistant coach Shane Bond has described in-form Riyan Parag as a player of "extreme talent" and likened him to a young Suryakumar Yadav who joined Mumbai Indians more than a decade ago and went on to become one of the most explosive T20 batters in the world.

The 22-year-old Parag has brought his rich form from domestic cricket into the IPL, striking two high quality fifties to help Rajasthan notch up wins in all three games so far.

Parag's latest effort came against Mumbai Indians in his side's six-wicket win on Monday. He dropped anchor to spearhead Royals' chase of 126, scoring 54 not out off 39 balls with the help of five fours and three sixes.

"He (Parag) sort of reminds me a little bit of Surya (Suryakumar Yadav), who came to Mumbai a few years ago. He looks like that - he has got extreme talent. He has just matured as a cricketer, even though he is only 22," Bond, who is also the RR bowling coach, said at the post-match press conference.

Bond played a crucial role in developing bowling talents at MI in his nine-year stint with the Mumbai-based franchise from 2015 onwards, before shifting base to Jaipur this year.

"He (Parag) has had an outstanding domestic season, obvi-



ously, batting up the order. The trade we made with Devdutt (Padikkal), bringing Avesh (Khan) in, that was to put Riyan up into a position which was probably better suited," the former New Zealand fast bowler added.

Suryakumar, the world's number one T20 batter, joined MI in 2011 and spent four years at Kolkata Knight Riders from 2014-17 before he was brought back to the Mumbai side in 2018. He is recovering from a recent surgery.

Bond said Parag has had to play the role of a finisher in the IPL at a young age whereas other teams have experienced international

players in that role.

"Riyan started so young, you forget that he was 17 or something, playing in one of the toughest spots in a batting line-up of No 6. You look at the characters who finish games around the IPL, they are generally pretty experienced guys," he said.

"(The) Tim Davids, (the) Dave Millers... these are high quality players who play international cricket. Riyan has been tasked with that for a number of years. He is still a very young man, but he has got this wealth of experience behind him now.

"We are getting the best of him.

The investment that RR have made of him, it's starting to reap the rewards. It is pretty exciting what he could offer for the rest of the season for us."

Bond also felt "selfless" Yuzvendra Chahal, who produced a measly spell of 4-0-11-3 to set up Rajasthan's win on Monday, could be back in India reckoning if he continues to deliver.

"The competition is pretty tough, so one of the real challenges for any bowler coming into this tournament is to forget that there is a World Cup, and you start bowling to get into a World Cup team," he said.

"If your team is successful, you are in a winning team, selections and rewards come from that. That has more of been our focus, to forget about all that other noise from the outside and just work really hard for each other.

"If we do that, I have got no doubt people are going to start talking like you are now about Chahal and whether he will feature in a World Cup or not. He is bowling beautifully, and if he keeps doing that, then we have got a massive chance in this tournament," he added. Bond said having knowledge about opposition players also helps in making strategies for his current team.

"When you have obviously spent so much time with certain players, watched them every day and talked to them about their game and the way that they see the game, that definitely helps," he said.

"It was quite fun being on the other side of the team. A couple of dismissals, you get a lot of satisfaction from that."

MI pacer Akash Madhwal said a fresh pitch at the Wankhede Stadium assisted bowlers in the first game but maintaining tight lines was equally crucial.

"We had to get our basics right and had to bowl in the line of the stumps. The pitch had some help for the fast bowlers," said Madhwal, who returned 3/20. (PTI)