

**6** WORLD

**8** NATION

- Russia renews big attacks on Ukrainian power grid using better intelligence
- After six months of war, Israel's isolation grows with no end in sight
- Work done in 10 years just an appetiser, main course yet to come: PM Modi
- Cong manifesto 'bundle of lies', prepared to create confusion, mislead voters: BJP

## Gaurav confident of toppling Topon

'BJP will lose if number of selfies with me converts into votes'



**MAJULI, April 5:** Welcomed by scores of supporters who showered flowers, played dhols and hugged him during the campaign, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi expressed confidence that he will win the Jorhat Lok Sabha seat, saying BJP MP Topon Kumar Gogoi will definitely lose if the number of selfies clicked with him by the people converts into votes.

Gogoi, the Congress MP of Kaliabor who is fighting this time from Jorhat, spent two days in Majuli -- the world's largest river island located in the middle of Brahmaputra, and addressed as many as 12 street corner meetings across the district.

Majuli was earlier part of Lakhimpur Lok Sabha constituency, but it was added to Jorhat

in the delimitation exercise carried out last year by the Election Commission.

People of Jorhat, a constituency once held by Gaurav's father Tarun Gogoi -- the charismatic late CM, shifted allegiance to BJP in 2014. Among the communities that have a significant population here are Ahom, Tengal-Kachari, Mising and tea tribes.

After Gogoi's Kaliabor seat was rechristened as Kaziranga in delimitation, he was assigned the mighty task of taking on the BJP in Jorhat, which has become a stronghold of the ruling party over the last 10 years. He is hoping to build an emotional connect with the voters, especially the young ones. However, bridging the gap of over 82,000 votes, the margin by which Congress lost the seat in 2019, looks like an uphill task. The 41-year-old Gogoi, who spent the Wednesday (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Nine countries recognised Azad Hind Govt as the legitimate government of India'

### Himanta backs Kangana's remark on Netaji



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 5:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday defended actor-turned-politician and BJP's Lok Sabha candidate Kangana Ranaut's assertion that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was the first Prime Minister of the country.

Sarma said Netaji had established the Azad Hind government four years before Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had become the Prime Minister which was recognised by nine countries.

"To those mocking @KanganaTeam - On 21 October 1943, Netaji established the Azad Hind Govt, of which he was the head, nearly 4 years before Pt Nehru took oath as Prime Minister following transfer of power", the chief minister minister wrote on micro-blogging X.

"Nine countries recognised the Azad Hind Govt as the legitimate Government of India. This subconscious urge to interpret history on the lines of colo-

nialists is called 'Ghulam ki Mansikta'", he added. Actor turned politician Kangana Ranaut, known for her outspoken views, has once again sparked controversy with her latest statement. Representing the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) from Mandi, the Bollywood actress claimed during an event that Subhas Chandra Bose, not Jawaharlal Nehru, was India's first Prime Minister.

Despite efforts by the interviewer to correct her, Ranaut insisted on her assertion, stating, "Let me clear this first. When we gained independence, where did the first Prime Minister of India, Subhash Chandra Bose, go?"

The clip from the interview has since gone viral on social media. However, Kangana Ranaut remains steadfast, adamantly defending her perspective. Her remarks have sparked concerns about the ramifications of historical misinformation, especially when disseminated by influential figures.

### HT BRIEFS

#### Bihu dance

**DIPHU:** A seven day workshop on Bihu dance and dhol baadan (Assamese traditional drum beating) has started at Bakaliaghat Higher Secondary School playground from today. A large number of children participated in the workshop. Suledhar Gogoi and Mrinal Medhi were instructors for the dance workshop. The instructors taught the children Bihu dance and dhol Baadan (drum beating). The workshop is being organised by Bakaliaghat Sarbajani Rongali Bihu Committee. The Bihu Committee president, Shashanka Hazarika and secretary Ajit Bora and Cultural Sub-Committee, president Naba Laskar and secretary Nabajyoti Bora were present during the inauguration of the workshop.

#### Fit India Quiz

**TEZPUR:** Two students of Army Public School, Tezpur got qualified for the state rounds of Fit India Quiz 2023 and have emerged as the state champions in the finals held on Friday. The students who shone in the competition were Mayank Jalan of Class XII from Commerce stream and Prajwal S of Class XI from Science stream. As a mark of reward, the school has been awarded with a cash incentive of Rs 2.5 lakh and students will receive a prize of Rs 25,000 each. The team of Mayank Jalan and Prajwal S will be representing Assam in the National Level, which is to be held in Mumbai later.

## Cultivators, housewives, full-time politicians in fray for first phase Assam polls

**GUWAHATI, April 5:** Cultivators, businessmen, retired government employees, advocates, housewives and full-time politicians are among the candidates in fray for the first phase of polls to five constituencies in Assam on April 19.

Among them, eight nominees, including incumbent BJP MPs Topon Gogoi and Pradham Barua, are cultivators who also engage in full-time politics, according to their submitted affidavits.

Assam Jatiya Parishad president and opposition candidate for Dibrugarh constituency, Lurinjyoti Gogoi, is a farmer, deriving his income from agriculture, his affidavit said.

Union minister and BJP's Dibrugarh candidate Sarbananda Sonowal, along with BJP's Kaziranga nominee Kamakhya Prasad Tasa and Congress's Jorhat aspirant Gaurav Gogoi, have declared their occupation as politicians, drawing salary as MPs.

BJP's Sonitpur candidate and MLA Ranjit Dutta is also a full-time politician, while his family members are involved in various businesses, including a fuel service station, tea garden, and brick industry.

Dibrugarh's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) contestant Manoj Dhanowar has also submitted that he is a politician and a social worker while his wife is a teacher and the managing trustee of an educational and sports foundation.

Congress's Kaziranga candidate Roselina Tirkey is also a full-time politician. A former government engineer, insurance official and a private firm worker are among the retired persons contesting in the first phase.

Two housewives, a full-time politician and a businesswoman are among four women candidates in the first phase.

Kaziranga parliamentary constituency has the highest number of women candidates. While Tirkey is the Congress nominee, Anima Deka Gupta of Voters International Party is a housewife and independent Diluara Begum Chowdhury is a businesswoman owning a dealership of a leading oil PSU.

Another female candidate, Rinku Roy, is contesting from Sonitpur, while the remaining three constituencies in the first phase have no women candidates. Saleh Ahmed Mazumdar of the Republican Party (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Nadda attacks Rahul Gandhi for using religion during polls

**HARIDWAR, April 5:** BJP president JP Nadda on Friday lashed out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for using religion at the time of elections. "There are people who visit temples and wear 'janetu' (the sacred thread) at the time of elections without even knowing how to wear it properly just for utilising religion," Nadda said in an apparent reference to Gandhi without naming him.

He was addressing a gathering of saints and seers here in support of BJP candidate and former chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, who is contesting from the Haridwar Lok Sabha seat.

Nadda also condemned INDIA bloc leaders for being abusive towards sanatana dharma and said there is no place for anti-sanatanis in the country.

"Partners of the coalition do not even dare speak against those who abuse sanatana. Will you give them your blessings?" he asked.

Nadda highlighted the services rendered to sanatana dharma by the Modi government.

He spoke of the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the reconstruction and rehabilitation of a number of temples across the country over the past ten years. Even temples destroyed by the militants in Jammu and Kashmir are being revived, he said. The BJP president sought the blessings of people for another term to Narendra Modi as the prime minister to help him fight a political battle for social development. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Former CJ draws line between 'judicial activism' and 'judicial overreach'

**GUWAHATI, April 5:** Distinguishing between 'judicial activism' and 'judicial overreach', former Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi on Friday maintained that it is the responsibility of the judiciary to choose when to act as a catalyst for change and when to uphold status quo.

He also underscored the need for judicial systems to adapt to the changing times, which is being recognised globally.

"This delicate act of navigation -- choosing when to act as a catalyst for change and when to uphold the status quo -- underscores the Judiciary's immense re-

sponsibility. It is within this context that the distinction between 'Judicial activism' and 'Judicial overreach' becomes profoundly significant," Justice (ret'd) Gogoi said. He was delivering the keynote address at the 76th foundation day of Gauhati High Court.

"Judicial activism is not the same as judicial overreach. The former is a peacemaker; the latter is a trespasser," the Rajya Sabha member added. He said that "adventurous" judicial activism carries with it the risk that decisions, though well-intentioned, sometimes lead to unintended consequences, muddying the waters of legal certainty. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Only 12 women candidates in fray in Sikkim Assembly polls

**GANGTOK, April 5:** Though they constitute nearly 50 per cent of the voters but there are only 12 women candidates out of 146 nominees in the fray for the Sikkim Assembly and the lone Lok Sabha seat in the Himalayan state.

Sikkim has 32 Assembly seats and a lone Lok Sabha constituency. Voting for the Assembly and Lok Sabha seat will be held on April 19. The Himalayan state has a total of 4.66 lakh voters of which 2.31 lakh are women.

In the outgoing Sikkim Legislative Assembly (SLA), there were three women MLAs - Farwanti Tamang from Melli, Rajkumari Thapa from Rangang-Yangang and Sunita Gajmer from Zoom-Salghari (SC).

In the last state Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, there were 15 women candidates. The ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) has fielded four women candidates. In the 2019 elections, the party had fielded three women candidates.

The women SKM candidates include chief minister Prem Singh Tamang's wife Krishna Kumar Rai. She is in the fray from Namchi-Singhihang, while the sitting MLA Rajkumari Thapa, who joined the ruling party from BJP recently has been fielded from Rangang-Yangang.

The SKM has fielded Kalawati Rai from Upper Burtuk against BJP president and sitting MLA D R Thapa, while Pamin Lepcha is contesting from Gnathang-Machong (BL) constituency.

Another regional outfit, Citizen Action Party (CAP-Sikkim) has also fielded four women candidates, while BJP and the Congress have given tickets to two women candidates each. The leading opposition party, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) has not fielded (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Nepali tourist alleges molestation by mob in Assam

**JORHAT, April 5:** A Nepali woman tourist has alleged that she was molested by a mob in Assam's Jorhat district for purportedly dressing in man's clothing.

The police have registered a case in this regard and initiated an investigation now. "Update regarding allegations of an assault on an individual from Nepal. A case has been registered in this regard," Assam Police posted on X on Thursday. It added that the sub-divisional police officer of Titabor is in touch with the complainant and supervising further action as per the law.

The allegations of molestation and police inaction were raised by the victim through a social media video earlier on Thursday.

She claimed that she was picked on by a mob in Mariani area just because she was dressed like a boy. The group (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase Nomination filing concludes

## 6 candidates in fray for Diphu (ST) Parliamentary constituency

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, April 5:** The filing of nomination papers for the 6 Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency for the second phase of elections in Assam, scheduled for April 26, concluded on April 4.

A total of six candidates have officially entered the electoral fray by submitting their nomination papers.

The candidates who filed their nomination papers include Joyram Engleng from the Indian National Congress (INC), Amarsing Tisso from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Jotson Bey from the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), John Bernard Sangma from the Gana Suraksha Party, and two independent candidates backed by the APHLC, JI Kathar and Bikram Hansa. The scrutiny of nomination papers took place today at the District Commissioner's office in the presence of central observers.

Jaydip Mukhopadhyay, IAS, served as the general observer, Shankar Lal Verma, IRS, as the expenditure observer, and T Uniel Kichu Ao, IPS, as the police observer.

District Election Officer and representatives from various political parties ensured a transparent and thorough examination of all submitted documents, maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

With the scrutiny process now concluded, the stage is set for the next phase of the electoral journey. The deadline for withdrawal of candidature has been set for April 8. Following this, the remaining candidates will proceed to vigorously compete in the forthcoming election.

As Assam navigates through this democratic exercise, it underscores the significance of active citizen participation and adherence to electoral norms. A fair and transparent electoral process contributes to the strengthening of its democratic fabric, ensuring the voices of the people are heard and respected.

### 'We know this surge in cases is coming, so we need to start planning'

## Prostate cancer cases to double between 2020 and 2040: Lancet study

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** Prostate cancer cases worldwide are projected to more than double and deaths are expected to increase by 85 per cent between 2020 and 2040, with low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) likely to bear the "overwhelming brunt" of this spike, according to The Lancet Commission on prostate cancer.

The surge in cases is "inevitable", with actual numbers likely to be much higher because of under-diagnosis and missed opportunities for data collection in LMICs, researchers said.

They said ageing populations and improving life expectancy will lead to more cases of prostate cancer in older men, and given that being 50 years or older is a risk factor, lifestyle changes and public health interventions may not be able to prevent the upcoming surge.

"As more and more men around the world live to middle and old age, there will be an inevitable rise in the number of prostate cancer cases. We know this surge in cases is coming, so we need to start planning and take action now," said lead author of the commission, Nick James, professor of prostate and bladder cancer research at The Institute of Cancer Research, London.

The commission called for evidence-based interventions, including early detection and diagnosis, along with education and awareness programmes, to help save lives from prostate cancer in the coming years.



"This is especially true for low- and middle-income countries which will bear the overwhelming brunt of future cases," said James.

The authors called for improving the "poor" levels of awareness in LMICs about the dangers and symptoms of metastatic prostate cancer, such as bone pain, among men and their families.

"One of the common pains in prostate cancer comes from spine metastasis, where the cancer spreads to the spine. While this usually presents in the later stages of the disease, it could even be the presenting symptom. Other pains may be associated with urination or treatment, such as post-surgical or chemotherapy-induced pain," said pain specialist Dr

Lakshmi Vas, director of the Ashirvad Institute for Pain Management and Research, Mumbai.

Similarly, there is a low general awareness that treatments available in LMICs can prolong survival and decrease suffering, including cheap, effective ones such as hormone therapy.

Acknowledging the "fear of suffering" that comes with a cancer diagnosis, Vas advocated for consulting with a pain specialist. "The greatest fear is the suffering associated with cancer and patient education in this regard is very vital. I strongly suggest that right after being diagnosed with prostate cancer, take an appointment with a pain specialist. This way the patients (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Cong promises to raise 50 pc cap on quotas, make MSP legal in manifesto

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** Right to apprenticeship, a legal guarantee for MSP, passing a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs, a nation-wide caste census and scrapping of Agniproth scheme are among the promises made by the Congress in its Lok Sabha polls manifesto released on Friday.

The manifesto, focusing on five "pillars of justice" and 25 guarantees under them, was released at the AICC headquarters in the presence of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

In the 45-page document titled 'Nyay Patra', featuring pictures of Kharge and Rahul and Bharat Jodo Yatra, the opposition party said it would implement 10 per cent quota in jobs, educational institutions for economically weaker sections (EWS) for all castes, communities without discrimination if it comes to power.

The party also promised full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir, besides giving special status to Andhra Pradesh, full statehood to Puducherry, and to amend the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, to declare that Lt Governor shall act on the aid and advice of Council of Ministers of NCT, Delhi.

It also promised to fill nearly 30 lakh vacancies in sanctioned posts at various levels in the central government and said the Rajasthan model of cashless insurance of up to ₹ 25 lakh will be adopted for ensuring universal healthcare across the country.

The Congress will pass a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SC, ST and OBC if it comes to power in the general elections beginning April 19, the party promised.

The party also said it will conduct a nationwide socio-economic and caste census ensuring equitable distribution among all sections as per their population. It said it will review all laws that interfere with the right to privacy and make suitable amendments to various laws to uphold the right to privacy.

Rejecting the 'one nation, one election' idea, the Congress promised that elections to the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies be held as and when they are due in accordance with the Constitution and the traditions of a parliamentary democracy. It also promised to restore the voters' trust in the election process by amending election laws and ensure that VVPAT slips are tallied with EVMS.

The Congress said it will review the new education policy brought by NDA. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## RBI holds repo rate at 6.5 pc for 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive time Home, auto EMIs to remain unchanged

**MUMBAI, April 5:** The Reserve Bank of India on Friday kept the benchmark interest rates unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the seventh time in a row, citing concerns over food inflation in view of IMD's prediction of above normal maximum temperatures during April to June.

As RBI has held key policy rates steady, the EMIs on home and auto loans are likely to remain stable for some more time. The central bank has kept interest rates unchanged since February, 2023.

While unveiling the first bi-monthly monetary policy for the current financial year, RBI has retained its growth and inflation forecast for the current fiscal at 7 per cent and 4.5 per cent respectively.

"After a detailed assessment of the evolving macroeconomic and financial developments and the outlook, it (MPC) decided by a 5 to 1 majority to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent," RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said.

He further said that the six-member MPC would remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns to the target, while supporting growth.

Referring to inflation, Das said food price uncertainties continue to weigh on the inflation trajectory going forward. Also, the tight de-



mand-supply situation in pulses and the production of key vegetables warrant close monitoring, given the forecast of above normal temperatures in the coming months.

"Wheat harvesting is by and large over... wheat availability will not be affected as much as it did 2 years ago, when there were heat-wave conditions starting from March. So, in wheat there is not so much concern. But vegetable prices will have to be watched and any other impact that heat wave conditions may produce," Das said at a post policy press briefing.

Retail inflation in February was 5.1 per cent, with food basket inflation at 8.66 per cent. For the full 2023-24 fiscal, inflation is projected at 5.4 per cent.

In the current fiscal, the RBI expects inflation to be around 4.5 per

cent, with Q1 at 4.9 per cent; Q2 at 3.8 per cent; Q3 at 4.6 per cent; and Q4 at 4.5 per cent.

Recalling 7.8 per cent retail inflation in April, 2022, Das said the elephant in the room at that time was inflation.

"The elephant has now gone out for a walk and appears to be returning to the forest. We would like the elephant to return to the forest and remain there on a durable basis. In other words, it is essential, in the best interest of the economy, that CPI inflation continues to moderate and aligns to the target on a durable basis. Till this is achieved, our task remains unfinished," Das said.

The effort, he said, is now to ensure price stability on an enduring basis, paving the way for a sustained period of high growth.

Das said the Indian economy is

projected to grow at 7 per cent in the current fiscal. This would be the fourth successive year with 7 per cent or above GDP growth rate. The Indian economy is estimated to have grown 7.6 per cent in 2023-24.

"With rural demand catching up, consumption is expected to support economic growth in 2024-25. Urban consumption stayed buoyant as evident from various indicators. The resilience in cement production, together with strong growth in steel consumption and production and import of capital goods, augur well for the investment cycle to gain further traction," RBI said.

It said strengthening of rural demand, improving employment conditions and informal sector activity, moderating inflationary pressures and sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sector should boost private consumption, it added. "Improving global growth and trade prospects, coupled with our rising integration in global supply chains, are expected to propel external demand for goods and services. The headwinds from protracted geopolitical tensions and increasing disruptions in trade routes, however, pose risks to the outlook," RBI said. The real GDP growth for Q1 FY 25 is projected at 7.1 per cent; Q2 at 6.9 per cent; Q3 at 7 per cent; and Q4 also at 7 per cent. (PTI)

## India to stop importing urea by 2025 end: Mandaviya

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** India will by the end of 2025 stop importing urea as a massive push for domestic manufacturing has helped bridge the gap between supply and demand, Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has said.

In an interaction with PTI, the minister noted that the availability of fertilisers is very important for Indian agriculture. He said the country has been using chemical fertilisers for the last 60-65 years to enhance crop production.

Now, Mandaviya said, the government is making efforts to promote alternate fertilisers like nano liquid urea and nano liquid di-ammonium phosphate (DAP). "Use of alternate fertilisers is good for crops and soil health. We are promoting it," he said. Asked about achieving self-sufficiency in urea production, Mandaviya said the Modi government has adopted a two-pronged strategy to end dependency on urea imports.

The minister highlighted that the government has revived four closed urea plants and is reviving one another factory. He noted that India needs around 350 lakh tonnes of urea annually to meet domestic demand. (PTI)

## Chief economist Abhishek Barua analyses RBI's unchanged policy

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 5:** Chief economist Abhishek Barua, hailing from Assam, offered insights into the central bank's decision to maintain its policy rate and stance unchanged despite global economic resilience.

Barua underscored the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) commitment to combating inflation, aligning its approach with other central banks worldwide. He highlighted the RBI's optimism about economic growth, forecasting a robust 7 per cent growth rate for FY25. This positive outlook allows monetary policy to remain stringent, with a focus on inflation control.

"In today's policy announcement, the RBI seems to be moving in lockstep with global trends. Despite signaling moderation in inflation, the central bank opted to keep its policy rate and stance unchanged," Barua said while commenting on the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting.

He further noted the RBI's dedication to maintaining a stable rupee amidst recent global economic turbulence. Barua also hinted at the central bank's preparedness to accumulate foreign exchange reserves, signaling potential resistance against rupee appreciation due to bond inflows and other factors in the coming quarters.

## Centre aims 7-fold jump in wheat procurement from UP, Rajasthan, Bihar this year

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** Amid the heat of the ongoing Lok Sabha electioneering, the Centre has announced plans to significantly increase wheat purchase from non-traditional states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar and set a target of seven-fold jump in procurement to 50 lakh tonnes in the ongoing 2024-25 marketing year.

Further, even as the ban on outbound shipments of wheat continues, "it will be a dream for us to export now", Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra told reporters on Thursday. "UP, Bihar, and Rajasthan have been contributing much less than they could have. We are targeting total wheat procurement of 310 lakh tonne this year. Of which, we are hoping to procure at least 50 lakh tonne from three non-traditional procurement states alone," he said.

While Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar put together contributed only 6.7 lakh tonnes to the central pool during the 2023-24 marketing year (April-March), the Union Food Ministry has decided to procure 16 per cent of the total wheat procurement target of 310 lakh tonne set for 2024-25. Wheat procurement at minimum support price (MSP) is normally undertaken by the Centre's nodal agency Food Corporation of India (FCI) and state agencies. However, cooperatives Nafed and NCCF have also been roped in with a procurement target of 5 lakh each this year. Wheat MSP has been fixed at ₹ 2,275 per quintal for the current year. Since October, the



Centre has been working with these three states to increase the procurement level. Various steps have been taken to address the gaps and it should help boost procurement levels in three states, he said.

Asserting that 2024 general elections is unlikely to affect wheat procurement operations, the Secretary said the increase in wheat procurement from non-traditional states will help restore allocation of wheat under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and other welfare schemes.

The allocation of wheat has been reduced to 184 lakh tonnes annually from the previous 230-240 lakh tonnes under various welfare schemes in view of lower procurement in the last two years, he added. Chopra also said the Centre has not directed traders to avoid buying

wheat from farmers till the government completes procurement. "No such instruction has been given to traders," he added.

Highlighting steps taken to strengthen wheat procurement in non-traditional states, the secretary said the procurement window has been advanced/extended to March instead of April 1, set up a dedicated farmer helpline to address procurement-related queries, intensified media publicity of MSP rate, and drying facilities have been provided for early harvested crop.

Besides, the government has advanced farmer registration from January 1 instead of March 1, simplified farmers' land record verification, including tenant farmers, given flexible procurement targets to agencies.

More importantly, the secretary said the government has decided to ensure transfer of MSP to bank accounts of farmers within 48 hours, streamlined procurement incidental burden for farmers, smoothed banking-related issues such as Aadhaar integration with bank accounts.

The government has also opened more procurement centres targeting production hotspots, set up mobile procurement centres, decide to leverage Self Help Groups, Panchayats, Farmer Producer Organisations, he said.

That apart, the government has ensured institutional preparedness through working capital to agencies to ensure payment of MSP to farmers within 48 hours, he added. (PTI)

## RBI retains GDP growth projection at 7 pc for FY25

**MUMBAI, April 5:** The RBI on Friday retained the GDP growth projection at 7 per cent for 2024-25 fiscal on the back of expectations of a normal monsoon, moderating inflationary pressures, and sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sector. The headwinds from protracted geopolitical tensions and increasing disruptions in trade routes, however, pose risks to the outlook. Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das said while unveiling the first bi-monthly monetary policy of the current fiscal. Going forward, he said the outlook for agriculture and rural activity appears bright, with good rabi wheat crop and improved prospects of kharif crops, due to expected normal south-west monsoon. "Strengthening of rural demand, improving employment conditions and informal sector activity, moderating inflationary pressures and sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sector should boost private consumption," Das said. He further said the prospects of investment activity remain bright owing to upturn in the private capex cycle becoming steadily broad-based; persisting and robust government capital expenditure; healthy balance sheets of banks and corporates; rising capacity utilisation; and strengthening business optimism as reflected in RBI's surveys. (PTI)

In his statement earlier in the day, the governor had said the RBI's goal on inflation is in sight and had asked all not to lower the guard against price rise.

Asked about the timeline, he said inflation is seen going down below the 4 per cent mark in a few quarters of FY25 but will be going back up.

Drawing from the elephant analogy on containing inflation he gave earlier in the day, Das said the "elephant moves at a slow pace" and the "last mile is always challenging."

"We would like the elephant to return to the forest and stay there on a durable basis. We would like inflation to align with the target on a durable basis," he added.

Meanwhile, Das said the potential growth rate has gone up since the last study by the RBI, and added that the average growth for fiscal years 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 comes at 8 per cent.

About the RBI choosing to maintain the real GDP growth estimate at 7 per cent for the current fiscal year, the RBI brass explained that this is due to the base effect of higher growth in the years leading to FY25.

Das said if the growth rate comes at 7 per cent for FY25, it will be the fourth consecutive year of 7 per cent growth rate.

After the release of official data for FY24 growth in May, the RBI will undertake a study on potential growth and real interest rate, he added.

However, the RBI governor refrained from giving any guidance on the monetary policy or the stance going forward. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Gaurav confident of

night at a traditional 'chang ghar' (elevated house), started around 9 am on Thursday with a chit-chat with his campaign team, a mix of both genders of varied ages, about the day's plan. He then straightaway proceeded to Kalitapar village in Pokajara mandal of Majuli for the first meeting. He was welcomed by local artists with traditional 'Bihu Dhol' (drum), whose enticing beats forced him to shake his legs and dance with his supporters.

People showered flower petals and hugged him, while many elderly people kissed the young politician. Some garlanded him with the traditional 'gamocha' (scarf) and the youths mobbed him for selfies.

Supporters raised slogans such as "Gaurav joy, rajgor joy" (Gaurav's victory is people's victory) and "Jikiboi jikiboi, Gaurav jikiboi" (Gaurav is winning for sure), among others. "I am overwhelmed with the love you have showered on me. The number of photos and selfies you have clicked with me, if we convert those into votes, BJP will lose by a huge margin," Gogoi said to a rousing applause and laughter.

Attacking the BJP, he claimed it has been making too many promises before every election, but hardly any of them are fulfilled. "Government schools and colleges are getting closed, prices of medicines are going up, inflation of essential commodities are at an all-time high and farmers' conditions are getting worse," he alleged.

Gogoi also stressed that Majuli, which was once represented by former chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal in the assembly, is gripped by a slew of problems with the government doing least to solve those.

In an apparent reference to CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and his family, he said, "My father was a chief minister for 15 years. Still, I have neither a factory in my name nor a tea garden. There is no factory in my mother's name as well."

Thereafter, Gogoi went to Natun Chapori Mising, Cherepai Khowa and Dhapak villages, and held similar meetings. Taking an hour break, he had lunch at a party worker's house. On the menu were rice, dal, sabji, papad and salad.

After having the home-cooked food, he reached Chumoiri village to begin the last leg of his campaign in Majuli. The street meeting at Bongaon Chariali was the last stop with the voters here.

"Majuli is facing enormous erosion, but the BJP government is doing nothing. The way you are getting me now, I will be there with you after winning also. I will always stand by you in your bad days," he said.

Gogoi along with his team of half-a-dozen party workers left Majuli at 4 pm in a pre-booked single-engine ferry from Aphalamukh ghat on the way to Jorhat town.

After reaching Jorhat, Gogoi had a series of closed-door meetings with different like-minded political and social groups. These meetings continued till around 8.30 pm.

The last programme of the day of the deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha was a dinner meeting with local journalists. After dinner, the members of his team left for their homes to meet again the next morning for another day of the campaign. Jorhat will vote in the first phase on April 19 along with four other seats in Upper Assam. (PTI)

## Cultivators, housewives,

of India, contesting from Kaziranga, works as a private tutor, while another candidate, Pallab Pal Pegu of SUCI (Communist), contesting from Lakhimpur, has no declared occupation or source of income.

In the first phase polls on April 19, 35 candidates are in the fray for Kaziranga, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur constituencies. (PTI)

## Nadda attacks Rahul Gandhi

"This is the time for sanatan's awakening. This is the era of India. Your pious support and blessings will strengthen Modi in the political fight he is waging for the country's development and welfare of all," Nadda said.

Pradesh BJP president Mahendra Bhatt, former chief minister and sitting Haridwar MP Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank and Haridwar MLA Madan Kaushik were also present. Nadda earlier offered prayers at Maa Mayadevi and Bhairon temples.

Juna Peethadhishwar Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Awadheshanand Giri performed the puja for Nadda and performed the yagya rituals. The saints presented a trident to Nadda, blessing the BJP for victory amid chants of "Abki baar 400 paar". The seers said the movement for Ram Janmabhoomi started from Haridwar with the blessings of saints and today it has achieved its objective in the form of a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The blessings to Prime Minister Modi for a third term from Devbhoomi will ensure the BJP's victory, they said. Nadda later held a roadshow in the pilgrimage town and addressed a public meeting at Rishikul Maidan where he termed the INDIA bloc a gathering of corrupt and family centric parties.

Attacking Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and P Chidambaram, Nadda said all of them are either on bail or in jail. AAP's Sanjay Singh came out on bail from jail on Thursday while Kejriwal is in jail. (PTI)

## Only 12 women candidates

a single women candidate in the elections this time. The SDF had given tickets to four women candidates in the 2019 elections and two of them had won the election. No representative of the SDF could be contacted for comments on why the party has not fielded a single women candidate this time. In the lone Lok Sabha constituency in Sikkim in which 14 candidates are in the fray, a woman Bina Rai is contesting as an independent candidate. Dil Kumari Bhandari was the last woman to represent Sikkim in Lok Sabha (1991-96). (PTI)

## Nepali tourist alleges

of six-seven people, including a woman and a local reporter, pulled her hair and tore away half of her T-shirt, the woman alleged. Claiming to be a Nepali tourist visiting Assam, she alleged that she was a victim of racism. The woman also alleged that when she visited the local police station the next morning to lodge a complaint, the personnel were not helpful and laughed at her. (PTI)

## Former CJI draws line

He maintained that the advent of Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has marked a revolutionary shift in the legal landscape, "transforming the judiciary from a passive arbiter of disputes into an active force for social change and at times even bringing in debatable changes in political life and values". The former CJI, however, cautioned that the PIL is also like a double-edged sword.

He said, "On one side, PIL has been instrumental in effecting landmark changes in various sectors, including environmental protection, human rights, and government accountability. On the other side, the broad latitude provided by PIL has sometimes led to what can be seen as judicial overreach, with courts encroaching upon the domains traditionally reserved for the legislative and executive branches and trenching upon political morality." Highlighting the need for judicial systems to adapt, the former CJI said the urgency in this regard has been recognised worldwide.

"These systems are called upon to be prophetic, to understand the undercurrents of their rulings, and to promote an environment wherein the law befriends vitality rather than unwittingly hindering it," he said.

A functional judiciary, endowed with sufficient resources and personnel, is no longer a luxury but an imperative for the sustained development of the nation, he added. "In the absence of timely justice, the public's trust in the institution wanes, and the rule of law is undermined, affecting the nation's overall wellbeing," Justice (ret'd) Gogoi said.

The former CJI maintained that the judicial institutions are not merely constructed of bricks and mortar, rather these are corridors of hope. "The moment hope falters in the hearts of the common man, questioning whether this institution will stand by them through thick and thin, that is the moment we risk losing the essence of our establishment," he said. He asserted that the true measure of the judiciary's strength does not lie in its resistance to executive control or material infrastructure or resilience against external forces. "Rather, its vitality and relevance are deeply intertwined with the faith that the citizen places in it," he said. Innovating ways to make the judicial system more approachable, adaptable, and responsive to the evolving needs of society are integral steps in preserving this trust, he added. (PTI)

## Prostate cancer cases

can be reassured that pain management is possible whatever the stage of cancer might be, and also for other pains that come with cancer treatments. Forewarned is forearmed, after all," said Vas.

As with early diagnostic capacity, there is a need to scale up availability and improve access to treatments for advanced disease in LMICs, the authors said. Globally, the study estimated yearly cases of prostate cancer to be 14 lakh and yearly deaths due to the disease to stand at 3.75 lakh in 2020. The prostate cancer cases are projected to rise to 29 lakh a year and almost seven lakh prostate cancer deaths a year by 2040. The commission includes researchers from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), an inter-governmental agency forming part of the World Health Organisation. (PTI)

## Cong promises to raise

It also promised to enact a law on bail that will incorporate the principle that 'bail is the rule, jail is the exception' in all criminal laws. It further promised to introduce comprehensive prison reforms.

"The 2024 general election presents an opportunity for radically changing the style and substance of governance that has been in evidence in the past decade of Anyay Kaal. We appeal to you to look beyond religion, language and caste, choose wisely, and install a democratic government that will work for all the people of India," the Congress said in its manifesto while appealing to people to vote for it.

It said it guarantees a new 'right to apprenticeship act' to provide one-year apprenticeship to every diploma holder or graduate below age of 25, under which apprentices will get ₹ one lakh a year.

It also promised to provide financial assistance of ₹ one lakh cash transfer to a woman of poor households under the Mahalakshmi scheme.

Only those who have done something and have feared are quitting the party to join the BJP, he said. Kharge also wondered what kind of level playing field is there when the principal opposition party's accounts have been frozen. Rahul Gandhi said this Lok Sabha election is a fighting between forces who are trying to "destroy" the Constitution and democracy in the country and those protecting them.

He said it is a much closer contest than propagated by the media, and expressed confidence of winning the polls. "We do believe that it is very important once this fight is won that we look after the interests of the vast majority of our people," he said, claiming that this is not a nation that will be run by 2-3 people and neither by monopolies.

Asked about who will be the prime ministerial face, Gandhi said, "INDIA bloc has decided that we are together fighting an ideological election, after winning the election, who will be the leader, the PM, the whole coalition will jointly decide."

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "After a decade of Anyay Kaal, this Nyay Patra, centered on the theme of justice, will lay the path for an India that is more prosperous and equitable for all."

Manifesto Committee chairperson and senior party leader P Chidambaram said the primary concern of all and what the country needs is "jobs, jobs, jobs".

AICC general secretary, organisation, K C Venugopal said the party will take its manifesto to the grassroots level and will hold public rallies in Jaipur on Saturday afternoon and Hyderabad in the evening, where top leaders would address. (PTI)

## UPPL witnesses surge in support

CEM Pramod Boro welcomes hundreds of new members as party gains momentum



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, April 5:** The ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has been gaining popularity day by day among citizens in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) districts, and accordingly witnessed a massive joining spree in the entire region.

In Kokrajhar, more than 700 youths from Kokrajhar and Chirang districts have joined the UPPL party at a program at the UPPL youth office, Habrubari in Kokrajhar on Friday amidst the presence of CEM of the Bodoland Territorial Region and UPPL president, Pramod Boro, Women Cell president, Pratibha Brahma, MLA Lawrence Islay, and several senior party leaders.

The newly joined members were offered a warm welcome and felicitation to the UPPL with party mottos.

CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro, said people, including the youths, are impressed with the development and progressive work of the present government, so they are coming forward and joining hands in the development process initiated by the UPPL-led BTR government. He opined that the UPPL party is committed to working for all-round development of society.

He said that the youth will be given opportunities to work in various aspects like environment building, agriculture, education,

sports, etc., in the days to come.

He predicted that NDA alliance nominees across the state of Assam, including the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, are winning the elections with a majority of seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. He said that the NDA candidate for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Joyanta Basumatary, will be winning the elections by a margin of over 3 lakh votes as people cutting across the communities are coming forward to extend support to the NDA alliance candidate.

CEM Boro also addressed a public meeting at Barama in Baksa district where people representing different communities participated. In Tamulpur, nearly 300 people from different political parties have joined the UPPL at a program held at Goreswar in Tamulpur district.

The new members joined the UPPL party in the presence of CEM of BTR and UPPL president, Pramod Boro, MCLA Pabitra Kumar Boro, and several senior party leaders.

Meanwhile, NDA alliance candidate for Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, Joyanta Basumatary, attended several public meetings at Mushalpur of Baksa district.

Basumatary was accompanied by Assam cabinet minister, Urkhaow Gwra Brahma, and senior party leaders.

## SVEEP organises voter awareness prog

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, April 5:** The Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) cell organised a voter awareness programme by performing street plays in front of the district commissioner's office here on Friday. The street play was witnessed by general observer Jaydip Mukhopadhyay, IAS; expenditure observer Shankar Lal Verma, IRS; police observer T Uniel Kichu Ao, and the district election officer. The voter awareness programme aimed to promote voter education and literacy ahead of the upcoming elections.

The highlight of the programme was a compelling street play performed by renowned actor Rajib Kro. Through his captivating portrayal, Kro endeavoured to encourage voters to exercise their democratic right responsibly. The street play not only emphasised the importance of voting but also provided guidance on how to cast a vote even without a voter identity card, ensuring that every eligible citizen can participate in selecting their representatives who safeguard their constitutional rights. SVEEP, the flagship programme of the Election Commission of India (ECI), plays a pivotal role in spreading voter awareness and promoting electoral participation across the nation. This event in Diphu is a testament to the commitment towards fostering a more informed and engaged electorate.

At the end of the street performance, the observers, district election officer, including district icons like Khorsing Terang, Mount Everest; noted singer Pokhila Lekthei, and actor Rajib Kro, inaugurated the district mascots 'Ik and Ingji' (Brother and Sister), and 'VOSOBIPPO', the Indian cuckoo symbolising a new season of democratic engagement. Additionally, they inaugurated a board for a signature campaign on voter awareness and a 'Make a Pose, Take a Snap' board, further enhancing voter engagement and participation in the electoral process.

## Himanta galvanises BJP campaign at Dhekiajuli's Vijay Sankalp Yatra

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, April 5:** Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attended a Vijay Sankalp Yatra on Thursday in Dhekiajuli under the Sonitpur Lok Sabha constituency to intensify the BJP's poll campaign just before two weeks of the commencement of the first phase of the election on April 19. Addressing the mammoth gathering in the meeting held at Dhekiajuli Tea Estate playground, the chief minister said, "Dhekiajuli is integral to our vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' and key areas of focus. Our BJP-led government is making continuous efforts to make Dhekiajuli constituency more beautiful, and cooperation from the people of the constituency would help us to transform the constituency into a model constituency."

He also said that the promise of 100,000 jobs has already been fulfilled, and another 50,000 new jobs would be created in the days to come. CM Sarma also assured several new development works for the Dhekiajuli constituency, including a college, bridge at Gabharu river, a bypass at Dhekiajuli, a nursing school, three AC bus services from Dhekiajuli to Guwahati, developed tea-garden hospitals of the area, a skill development center, an 'SAI' center at Bhotpara Stadium, and a stadium equipped with all modern facilities.

# Union minister endorses Pradan Baruah, and criticises Congress' development record

## Development initiatives narrow Delhi-Dibrugarh gap: Sarba

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, April 5:** Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal campaigned for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh constituencies on Friday.

Sonowal, who is contesting as the BJP candidate for the No 13 Dibrugarh constituency, addressed meetings at Chiring village in Dangori and Jon Kareng in Jonai to muster support for Pradan Baruah, BJP candidate for the Lakhimpur constituency. Sonowal further attended public meetings at Ganesbari Tea Estate in Mohanbari; at Poharikhania village in West Mandal; Chowkidingee Smashan Para in Middle Mandal as well as at Naliapal in East Mandal here on Friday.

While campaigning for Pradan Baruah, the NDA candidate in the Lakhimpur constituency, Sonowal offered his prayers at the revered figure Khiring Khiring Baitoh.

Sonowal endorsed his colleague, Pradan Baruah, who is contesting the Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking about Baruah, Sarbananda Sonowal expressed, "I have a personal acquaintance with Pradan Baruah. He has tirelessly



worked for every assembly constituency within the Lakhimpur Lok Sabha constituency over the years. It's essential to engage with local communities and acknowledge his dedication to addressing public issues. A true public servant is one who consistently serves the people's interests. These qualities are evident in Pradan Baruah's character. During my tenure as chief minister, he prioritised infrastructure development, including

building embankments and dredging rivers in flood-affected areas of Lakhimpur. I urge the respected people of Lakhimpur Lok Sabha constituency to support him on April 19."

Assailing the Congress for their lack of developmental effort for the region, the senior leader, Sarbananda Sonowal said, "People know better about the Congress and the candidates that they project. Today, people are aware, edu-

cated, and rooted in the facts of our country. The words by Congress can't persuade people anymore, but solid development by BJP does. We will only talk about the developments that took place during the days of the Modi government. Today, we can boast about two big bridges which have enhanced the convenience of the people. For more than sixty years of Congress rule, the need and demand for such critical projects fell on deaf ears. It was unimaginable for any popular government to function with such disregard for people's need. The construction of roads and bridges determines the level of development of a place. But after the Modi government took over, the bridges were built at a fast pace. After our request to the then NDA government, former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had released Rs 350 crore to complete the incomplete bridge work at Bogibeel. After Bogibeel, the Dhola Sadiya Bridge, the second bridge at Saraighat, was also constructed in a short span of time. The Congress is just the foundation stone laying government. We have completed most of the foundation stone work that they have laid."

## NECTAR hosts North East Start-Ups and Entrepreneurs' Conclave 2024

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 5:** The North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), an autonomous institution under the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India, organised a North East Start-Ups and Entrepreneurs' Conclave 2024 from March 27 to 28 at the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra here.

Aaranyak's senior scientist Dr Partha Jyoti Das inaugurated a session on 'Drone Simulation' on March 28 as the chief guest. More than 25 young students took part in the drone simulation exercise, which was a competitive event.

The aim of the conclave was to display the vibrancy of the north-east start-up ecosystem, bringing together stakeholders to unite investment, innovation, and connectivity. Dr Das interacted with the students about the importance of applying drone technology in the development sectors of our country and how the same can be used for socio-economic development and natural resources management in north-east India.

## Aaranyak installs solar powered LED lights to mitigate HEC

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 5:** Solar-powered LED lights have been installed in HEC hotspots by premier biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, as part of its unrelenting endeavour to facilitate coexistence in human-elephant conflict (HEC) areas in the region. The initiative aims to mitigate the ongoing conflict, thereby saving lives and property.

The initiative utilises solar-operated standalone blinking LED lights to deter wild elephants from crop raiding and entering human settlements. These devices are customised with two LEDs powered by an inbuilt lithium-ion battery, which is charged by a top-mounted solar panel. The LEDs blink at regular intervals, creating the illusion of human presence and deterring elephants without causing physical harm. This reduction in negative human-elephant interactions facilitates human-elephant coexistence.

Aaranyak plans to install 40 LED lights as elephant deterrents in different areas of Udalguri, Baksa, and Tamulpur districts in the first phase of the initiative, supported by SBI Foundation. Ten such solar-powered LED lights were already installed in No 1 Garuajhar and Uttar Garuajhar vil-



lages located on the bank of the Nonai river under Bhergaon block of Udalguri district on April 1st and 2nd, 2024.

Standalone lights were installed at ten different locations along the bank of the Nonai river in both villages. The LED lights were placed approximately 200 meters apart using eight-foot high bamboo poles and iron mounts to protect the paddy fields and dwellings. Around 500 families will benefit from the effectiveness of the LED lights in deterring wild elephants.

The river Nonai serves as a pathway along which elephants move upstream and downstream. Some

tracks used to divert them to enter villages and damage crops near the riverside and inside the village as well. These particular points were identified in a joint survey conducted by Aaranyak staff and the local community for the installation of LED lights.

Seeing the blinking solar-powered LEDs from a certain distance at night, the elephants perceive them as human presence and move away from the area, avoiding the sharp flashing by the LEDs, instead of entering the village. The local community was involved during the installation process and also took responsibility for the safety of the LED lights.

Previously, Aaranyak had installed five LED elephant deterrent lights in Hastinapur village under Chawlkara block in Baksa district in October 2023 out of the proposed forty LED lights. According to the plan, the remaining LED lights will be installed in No 1, 2, and 3 Bholatar under Bhergaon.

As of now, Aaranyak plans to install LEDs in No 1 and No. 2 Bholatar in Udalguri district, located nearby the Samrang river, Hedayetpur, and some parts of Hastinapur located near the Diring river in Baksa district, and No 2 Dongargaon in Tamulpur district.

## Cachar conducts voter orientation program

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 5:** A voter orientation meeting regarding the upcoming parliamentary election took place at the Silchar municipal conference hall under the initiative of the Cachar district administration SVEEP cell on Friday. The meeting was presided over by the district development commissioner (DDC), Norsing Bey, in the presence of officials from 15 development blocks and 3 municipalities of the district.

It is worth mentioning that a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between the chief electoral officer of Assam, Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLM), and Assam State Urban Livelihood Mission (ASULM) in Guwahati on Wednesday. The CEO of Assam and ASRLM have expressed their desire to collaborate and work together to undertake activities contributing significantly to Systemic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) campaigns in Assam, thus enhancing voter participation and ethical voting across the state.



All initiatives mentioned in the MOU will be apolitical, adhering to ECI guidelines strictly. No stakeholder involved in the MOU will have any political affiliations and will not be associated with any political party or candidate during the period of association with the office of the chief electoral officer, Assam. The key objective of this partnership is to significantly enhance voter participation and ethical voting in the forthcoming 2024 Lok Sabha parliamentary elections.

During the meeting, Dr Arunabha Bhattacharya appealed to the officials present that voting is a fundamental right. He emphasised that a strong and robust democracy is established through the exercise of these fundamental

rights, which play an important role in running the country. Dr Bhattacharjee also underscored the importance of fundamental rights of the voters by participating in the great festival of democracy and urged all voters to participate in voting.

"The real aim is to increase voter turnout in areas where the voter turnout is low," mentioned Dr Arunabha Bhattacharjee. It is worth mentioning that a vigorous publicity campaign is ongoing through the SVEEP cell of the district administration. Taking part in the discussion, Biplab Kumar Nath stated that this great national duty should be fulfilled by exercising the voting rights of every citizen who has the right to vote in the 15 development blocks of the district through self-help groups.

Earlier, on behalf of the district SVEEP cell, Dr Arunabha Bhattacharya presented a Power-Point presentation. Biplab Kumar Nath, project director, ASRLM CACHAR, Mustafa Ahmed Lashkar, project manager ASULM, and other dignitaries were also present at the orientation program.

## 15 candidates submit nominations for Nagaon parliamentary seat

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, April 5:** 15 candidates have filed nomination papers in the Nagaon parliamentary constituency for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, scheduled to be held in the second phase on April 26.

During the scrutiny of the nomination papers filed by the candidates, two nominations out of those 15 were cancelled by the officials concerned on Friday. The names of the candidates whose nomination papers have been cancelled are Independent candidate Biswajit Bordoloi and Hamar Raj Party's candidate Haren Bhumi, respectively.

10 candidates, including BJP candidate Suresh Bora and Congress candidate Pradyut Bordoloi, filed nomination papers on Thursday. The other candidates who filed nominations on Thursday include Abu Ushuf Md Raihan Uddin (Gana Suraksha Party), Samsul Alam (Independent), Biswajit Bordoloi (Independent), Bipad Bhanjan Sarkar (Independent), Rabul Haque (Rashtriya Ulema Council), Haren Bhumi (Hamar Raj Party), Santanu Mukherjee (Bharatiya Gana Parishad), and Nikhil Dekaraja (Khilanjia Gana Sakti), as mentioned in an official press note here.

## Raijor Dal files complaint

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, April 5:** Raijor Dal activists, led by one of the senior leaders Amlan Baruah, lodged a complaint before the District Media Certification and Monitoring Cell against BJP party workers. The complaint alleges that the BJP workers were distributing leaflets, such as Arunodoi forms, to woo voters while the codes of conduct for the parties and candidates are in effect.

## General observer and police observer assess preparations

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, April 5:** General observer, Indian Administrative Service officer H Basavarajendra, and police observer, Indian Police Service officer Gopinath Jatti, arrived in Morigaon on Friday. The two observers held a meeting with the nodal officers and officers in charge of each election cell at the meeting room of the Morigaon district commissioner's office to discuss various aspects. District commissioner and district election officer of Morigaon election district, Devashish Sharma, welcomed the two officers to the district and presented a detailed report on the district-level preparations for the entire election process. The general observer took a detailed look at the work of each cell and made several recommendations for conducting the elections fairly and efficiently. He stressed the importance of proper training for polling officers and employees, emphasising that without proper training, there is a risk of hampering the smooth conduct of the polling process. Therefore, he directed to place more emphasis on training. The meeting was attended by the inspector of police and the Static Surveillance Team, Flying Squad, Video Surveillance Team, etc. The general observer can be contacted directly at 84720-47881 for any objections related to the election in the Morigaon constituency district. The police observer can be contacted at 80088-89160 for any law and order and security-related objections.

## Tezpur University to expand with six new departments

New departments in humanities and social sciences aim to promote interdisciplinary studies

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, April 5:** Tezpur University is set to receive six new departments, coinciding with the completion of one year of vice chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh's leadership.

The six new departments are Economics, Psychology, Political Science, Geography, Performing Arts, and Vocational Studies and Skill Development.

"It has been observed that Tezpur University has been offering programs primarily focused on Science & Engineering. In order to promote interdisciplinary studies and become a multidisciplinary university, TU needed departments that could offer programs in humanities and social sciences as well," Prof Singh, who completed one year on April 4th, said.

Each department will offer specialised programs designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and practical experi-



ence necessary to excel in their respective fields.

"The university has received 240 acres of

additional land contiguous to the existing campus of Tezpur University from the state government. Once allotted to us, we shall be

able to expand our campus to accommodate these new departments," Prof. Singh informed.

It is worth mentioning that the university has launched seven new academic programs for the upcoming academic session 2024-25. The programs include Bachelor of Design (B Des.), Bachelor in Chinese, MTech in Electrical Engineering, MTech in Data Sciences, MA in Women's Studies, Master of Education (MED), and PhD in Law. During Prof Singh's one-year tenure, the university signed MoUs with Bodoland Territorial Council and IIT-Guwahati to fulfill regional aspirations. The Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma Chair is in the final stage for implementation, and the establishment of the Dr Bhupen Hazarika chair is underway. Reflecting on his first year in office, the vice-chancellor expressed his gratitude to the entire Tezpur University community for their unwavering support and dedication.

## Workshop advocates for preservation of Sanatan culture

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAOON, April 5:** AABS secretary-general Tutul Borthakur, addressing a workshop hosted by Morigaon district Brahman Samaj at Sri Sri Vishnu Temple in Pasatia, Morigaon, stressed the significance of preserving Sanatan culture through the continued practice of the Sanskrit language. He urged parents to instill Sanskrit in their children from an early age and underscored the importance of educating them in Vedic rituals alongside Sanskrit education. Borthakur emphasised the altruistic nature of humanity, highlighting the ancient wisdom found in the Vedas and Upanishads, which predate modern science. He urged efforts to impart this wisdom to the younger generation, noting that the insights of the sages about creation resonate with today's scientific understanding.

The workshop was moderated by District Purohit Samaj's secretary, Hemant Sharma, and Morigaon District Brahmin Samaj president Powal Chandra Goswami. The district president said that the cultural legacy thrives through the study of Sanskrit at home and the observance of Vedic rituals. The workshop was attended by Pushpandra Sharma, secretary, Morigaon District Brahmin Samaj, senior and junior priests of Morigaon, and several youths.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

There is always room at the top. -Daniel Webster

NATO's 75th anniversary

As NATO commemorates its 75th anniversary, it stands at a pivotal juncture in its history, poised between its Cold War origins and the evolving dynamics of the modern geopolitical landscape.

In recent years, NATO has turned its attention towards the Asia-Pacific region, identifying China as a new adversary and signaling its readiness to confront emerging threats beyond the European theater.

As NATO enters its 75th year, it must confront these multifaceted challenges with a spirit of introspection and adaptation. Merely expanding its membership or reaffirming its Cold War-era doctrines will not suffice in a rapidly changing world.

Unveiling the healthcare dilemma: Eastern Nagaland's rural realities

Access to healthcare services is essential for promoting the well-being and quality of life of individuals, particularly in remote areas of the Eastern region of the state of Nagaland where access to basic health services is often limited or nonexistent.

In the case of Nagaland, a state nestled in the northeastern part of India renowned for its beautiful and rich culture, tradition, diverse tribal communities and lush landscapes lies a complex tapestry of healthcare characterized by both challenges and non-existent efforts to overcome these shortcomings.

According to various sources, including a study on rural households and an article on health service delivery in developing countries, it is evident that equitable access to healthcare services in remote villages of Nagaland is still a major concern.

Many villagers from remote regions of Eastern Nagaland are still unaware of their fundamental right of basic healthcare amenities and facilities, and they are forced to travel great distances to access the closest medical center if any.

Residents of the remote areas of Nagaland, when asked about the availability and usefulness of medical infrastructure/facilities and resources in their area,



would express their desire for the government to fulfill its duties and provide minimum facilities (as guaranteed by the Constitution of India) required for human well-being.

Research conducted by one of the researchers I came across shows a particular case in Tuensang where the people themselves fear the hospital in their land, believing that people would often die if they visit such a 'place'.

Moreover, as per the report published by "Nagaland Tribune" dated 3rd August, 2023 there was no Doctor at CHC, Seyochung Town since October, 2022.

Also, in a shocking revelation it was discovered that there was no PHC in Choklangan village in Noklak District to serve the medical needs of the population.

are often found to be working in their own hometowns. According to reports, in remote regions like Noklak, Shamator, Tuensang healthcare workers are hesitant to work for reasons best known to them and the people in the government.

This clearly shows the failure of the government machinery in the remotest regions of the state of Nagaland. It is found that the government gives very little focus to the overall development of these remote areas, let alone their healthcare facilities.

Some may argue that medical facilities are being pushed forward in many areas in recent years, but these arguments hold very little truth. People have to wait in long lines to even be able to get registered for their check-ups, after which they will have to wait for another hour for their doctor who visits his workplace once in two or three months to report to his official duties.

Time is seeing all this and is also giving a harsh slap. Congress is no longer credible and moral and power cannot be held without trust and morality.

However, this situation doesn't have to remain the same; the government of Nagaland needs to pay real attention to the needs of Eastern Nagaland. They need to see that healthcare facilities and sufficient dedicated as well as well-trained, highly motivated manpower is reaching to remotest regions like Chen circle in Mon, Villages like Wui, Choklangan in Noklak District and many other villages deep in the mountains where people suffer day and night, regular health check-ups and Administration of various vaccines/medicines, opening of health camps on war-footings, and development of medical infrastructure as well as regional infrastructure in toto will all contribute to the development of these areas, uplifting the people, their welfare and healthcare facilities to create a stronger future generation.

Needs of Eastern Nagaland are different. In all the districts of Eastern Nagaland people are trying to survive and live. Their concerns and needs are very basic which the state government failed to fulfill. They do not have the luxury to imagine five star facilities and modern amenities, but what they expect is to get everything that a civilized human being in India deserves to get from state machinery that is dignified life and constitutional justice.

Nagaland is a diverse land, and each resident forms an important part of its democratic culture; hence, it is important that the Government looks after everyone's all-round needs to ensure justice to all. If at all the government wants to do something good in the state of Nagaland, it should start from Eastern Nagaland. Kohima, Dimapur, Chumukedima have everything-in fact they are overflowing with development, so, for a change, let us start our development and investment projects from Eastern Nagaland, let us build our Nagaland from the remote, forgotten mountains of the "East".

One potential solution to improve access to healthcare services in remote villages of Eastern Nagaland is the implementation of a dedicated outreach program. These programs can bring healthcare services directly to the people in their villages, eliminating the need for them to travel long distances to access their basic healthcare. These outreach programs can include mobile healthcare clinics that visit remote villages on a strictly regular basis, providing preventative and primary healthcare services.

As has been observed that the access to healthcare services in remote villages of Eastern Nagaland is bound by many constraints, ranging from lack of transportation to lack of governmental funding and resources-both financial and medical.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT By: Imsuenla Jamir

Pakistan social media looking for India hand in killing of five Chinese in bomber attack

By: Arun Kumar Shrivastav

On March 27, at least five Chinese nationals along with their local driver were killed in when a suicide bomber collided his explosives-laden vehicle into their convoy. The attack unfolded on the primary highway connecting Pakistan to China.

This tragic incident is not an isolated event. In mid-2021, another suicide car bombing targeted a bus convoy transporting Chinese engineers engaged in Pakistan's largest hydropower project. The attack resulted in the loss of nine Chinese nationals and three local colleagues.

The presence of thousands of Chinese engineers and labourers in Pakistan highlights the significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an integral component of Beijing's expansive Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure program. The CPEC aims to bolster connectivity and enhance economic cooperation between the two nations, yet it also exposes Chinese personnel to heightened security risks in a volatile environment.

While no terrorist group has taken responsibility of the attack on the Chinese convoy, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) launched several deadly attacks on Pakistani security installations since January.

Only a day before the attack on the Chinese convoy, BLA militants targeted PNS Siddique, Pakistan's second-largest naval airbase located in Turbat. While the BLA claimed they infiltrated the base, Pakistani security forces successfully repelled the attack, killing all six attackers.

In January, the BLA claimed responsibility for targeting several military and security installations in Mach, Balochistan. While the Pakistani government downplayed the attack's impact, the BLA claimed control of the area for over 15 hours. In February, twin bombings by the BLA struck Panjgur and Nuskhi army camps in Balochistan, resulting in at least 28 casualties.

In the Gwadar port attack on March 20, eight BLA militants and two Pakistani security personnel were killed. Gwadar Port is a key facility associated with the China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project.

These attacks, particularly on Chinese interests in Pakistan, sparked widespread concern and debate, particularly following controversial remarks made by DaiWW, a prominent social media commentator known for his views on international relations.

DaiWW took to his social media platform to address the attack, highlighting the BLA's alleged connections with India and suggesting a potential collaboration with the United States. He asserted that the BLA's primary objective is to destabilize the region and undermine both Chinese investment projects and the Pakistani government.

According to DaiWW, the BLA's targeting of Chinese assets is part of a broader strategy to impede China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Balochistan. He accused India of supporting the BLA, drawing parallels with past instances where India allegedly fomented separatist movements, notably in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

DaiWW's remarks have stirred controversy, with some questioning the veracity of his claims and others condemning his attempt to politicize the tragedy.

The BLA, designated as a terrorist organization by Pakistan, has long been engaged in a struggle for Balochistan's independence. The attack on the Chinese convoy underscores the volatile security situation in the region and the challenges faced by foreign investors operating in conflict-prone areas.

DaiWW's suggestion of forming a global anti-terrorism force at the national level reflects growing concerns within Chinese circles regarding the security risks associated with overseas investments.

In response to DaiWW's assertions regarding India's alleged support for the BLA, some commentators have dismissed the notion, attributing the attack to internal strife within Pakistan's intelligence agencies. They argue that the attack is a manifestation of internal rivalries rather than external interference, urging for a nuanced understanding of the region's dynamics.

Others have called for a more

proactive approach from China, suggesting collaboration with Afghan counterparts to establish bases in southern Afghanistan. The proposal aims to target BLA leaders and mitigate security threats posed to Chinese interests in the region. However, such suggestions have also sparked debates regarding the potential ramifications of increased militarization and foreign intervention in Afghanistan.

Critics of Chinese and Pakistani policies have seized the opportunity to condemn what they perceive as exploitation of Balochistan's natural resources. They argue that the attack on the Chinese convoy is a repercussion of years of neglect and marginalization faced by the Baloch people, echoing sentiments of resentment towards foreign investments that fail to benefit local communities.

Amidst allegations of foul play and conspiracy theories, voices advocating for a peaceful resolution to the conflict have also emerged. They emphasize the importance of dialogue, diplomacy, and respect for the aspirations of the Baloch people in addressing the underlying grievances fueling the insurgency.

Furthermore, concerns have been raised regarding China's treatment of ethnic minorities, particularly the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. Critics argue that Beijing's policies in Xinjiang exacerbate tensions and undermine its credibility in addressing similar issues elsewhere, including Balochistan.

The Baloch population (total around 16 million) live across Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Balochistan province in Pakistan holds the largest Baloch population, estimated to be around 13 million. Traditionally, they used to move around with their animals to find food and water, but now some Baloch families have settled down. Their main occupation has been raising animals, farming, and trading along old routes.

The Baloch lands have valuable resources like gas, but getting them out of the ground has caused problems like pollution and unfair sharing of the money. The entire region faces problems like violence, lack of roads and hospitals, and dry weather that might get worse with climate change. (IPA Service)

The reason of Congress party's total eclipse

By: Lalit Garg

Country's oldest and strongest Congress Party has disintegrated; the party's loyal and strong grassroots leaders are leaving the party, and joining its biggest rival Bharatiya Janata Party that, too, when Lok Sabha elections are held next year.

Although some BJP leaders and some other parties have also gone to the shelter of Congress, in comparison the number of its leaders leaving Congress is much more. The question is why did such conditions arise for a democratic organization to go into the abyss? A review of its reasons is necessary. Congress Party has not only been continuously losing, but is also breaking and disintegrating its support base, despite these big reasons - the top leadership of the party neither reviewed nor analyzed the reasons lying behind.

Congress is branded with dynasty and filial piety. There is no internal democracy in the party. Top leadership is incapable of taking decisions. There is no policy for the welfare of the majority community of the country. Appeasement policy and blatantly communal agenda are also proving fatal for him.

Despite these big reasons, due to silence in the party, many responsible and courageous leaders are leaving the party or have gone away.

Today's top Congress leadership has become so much 'entrenched' with communal, anti-social, selfish, sycophantic and anti-national elements that it has become difficult to get out of it. There is a snake-rat situation. Neither does it come out nor spits out. The Congress leadership suffers from the illusion of gaining power and the phobia of losing it.

The party leadership should

be surprised at many leaders leaving the Congress, but this is hardly the case, because Rahul Gandhi usually neglects his duty by terming such leaders as cowards or opportunists. He and his close ones are not ready to see and understand the reasons as to why these leaders are leaving the party one after the other.

The joining of BJP by Raveet Singh, grandson of former Chief Minister Beant Singh, is a big blow to the Congress Party, because Punjab is one of those states where the Congress looks relatively strong and the BJP is seen as the third-fourth party.

The situation is similar not only in Punjab, but also in Maharashtra, Himachal and other provinces. This fact should not be ignored that among those who have left Congress were considered close to Gandhi family, like Ashok Chavan, Milind Deora, and Suresh Pachauri. Before this, most of the leaders who were said to be members of Rahul Gandhi's youth brigade have also left Congress.

A large number of leaders who have left Congress are those who have their independent political dominance and identity and are known for their own support base among the masses. Among the leaders close and sycophantic to the Gandhi family, there are very few who have the ability to win elections on their own.

The question is why did Congress fall in this situation? The Congress leaders of the past, who kept the diversity, character and culture of the country intact, before whose statues and pictures we bow our heads and offer flowers, were not ignorant. Today such national thinking and sense of public welfare are being denied and such leaders are being called 'short-sighted'.

Gradually, the big-thinking workers working at the grassroots level in the Congress decreased, and the number of sycophants has increased, which is responsible for the disintegration of Congress.

Time is seeing all this and is also giving a harsh slap. Congress is no longer credible and moral and power cannot be held without trust and morality. A golden vessel is needed for the lioness's milk.

Congress is not fulfilling its national responsibility and organizational responsibility with political skill in an ethical manner. Instead of cursing the darkness, it would have been better if someone had lit a candle at the party's tomb. Time has taught us that the power to illuminate has become dull.

The result of this is that the number of leaders leaving Congress is increasing rapidly, from this it seems that a campaign like leaving the party is going on. Rahul Gandhi may feign that the departure of Congress leaders does not affect the health of the party, but the truth is that now it seems to be making a difference. The results of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections will make this difference even more vivid.

Some leaders are not willing to contest the elections and some have taken back their steps after being declared candidates.

Congress may be showing that it is capable of countering the BJP, but it is not hidden from anyone that it could not give the shape to the front led by it, the India Grand Alliance, which was expected. Congress cannot blame anyone else other than itself for coming to this pass.

The decline of Congress is not a good sign, because it is a national party in the true sense compared to BJP. There is no other national party which has its roots across the country. A strong opposition is also necessary in a democracy, but the ruling party cannot worry about its strength.

The top leadership in the Congress party has become weak. Due to dynasty politics and nepotism, the Congress party is sinking day by day. Earlier, public welfare was the first priority for Congress leaders, but today anti-Modi policies are their priority.

In the name of anti-Modi, she sometimes starts opposing the nation; this change in her priority has also weakened the party.

Congress is also becoming weak because of its appeasement policy. If she doesn't change this policy, her condition will go from bad to worse. It has come to be understood that no party can rule the country by angering the majority community of the country. What Rahul Fake Gandhi says, what he thinks, no clear message is communicated to the general masses?

A decision is taken in Congress which is not a decision at all. People don't understand what has been said. For this reason, many leaders have gone into the background, but are giving the impression that we are on the stage. Many are standing on the stage, but it seems that someone is 'prompting' them.

It is no better than a puppet show which does not say anything on its own behalf. She carries out the tasks whatever she is asked to do. She doesn't even claim to be anything else than a puppet. This may work in a family but a national party cannot be run like this. Centuries have to suffer the consequences of moments. Wrong thinking, wrong decisions and wrong motivation of the top leadership tear apart the fabric of not only the party, but also the nation, the same is happening in the Congress Party.

The entire country is replete with examples of Congress Party's immature politics and mismanagement. In such a situation, the question arises that will Congress, which was limited to 52 seats in Lok Sabha in 2019, be able to retain its current position in 2024?

It seems that the policies and leadership of the Congress Party are bent on proving true to BJP's 'Congress-mukt Bharat' campaign! (The author is a journalist, columnist who can be reached at lalitagarg11@gmail.com)

# Choosing ITI as a campus after X

By: Ranjan K Baruah

In our last edition we published about choosing the right streams or careers after Class X. This time we shall write about an option which can lead us towards employment easily even without having graduation or post graduation. We are talking about the importance of skill development and one of the institutes which can enhance our skills is undoubtedly the Industrial Training Institutes or ITI in short. We can find ITIs in different districts of the country. It is mostly managed by the government but there are ITIs which are managed by private players or under Public private Partnership mode.

Students after passing Class X

may apply for admission in different ITIs. The process is online and hassle free. There are separate campuses or ITIs for girls too which ensures that girls should not be excluded from technical learning and training. Different courses are offered under engineering and non engineering trades but all trades may not be available in all campuses. Aspirants may choose their trades and apply accordingly.

**Examples of few engineering trades are:** Draughtsman (Civil), Surveyor, Turner, Machinist, Electrician, Wireman, Mechanic (Motor vehicle), Draughtsman (Mechanic), Electronics Mech., Ref. & A.C. Mech., Instrument Mechanic, Mechanic Agriculture Machinery, Information Commu-

nication Technology & System Maintenance, Welder, Plumber, Mech. Tractor, Mechanic (Diesel), Pump Operator- Cum-Mechanic, Plastic Proc. Operator, Mechanic Auto Body Repair, Mechanic Auto Body Painting, Maintenance Mechanic Chemical Plant, Plastic Processing Sector, Construction & Wood Working Sector, Information Technology, Fabrication, etc .

Similarly non engineering trades includes trades like Photographer, Stenographer, Secretarial Assistant, Sewing Technology, Computer Operator and Programming Assistant, Web Designing and Computer Graphics, Surface Ornamentation Techniques, Dress Making, Secretarial Practice, Basic Cosmetology, Bodo



Typewriting, Data Entry Operator, Domestic Housekeeping, Event Management Assistant, Insurance Agent, Baker and Confectioners, etc .

We are aware about how employability skills play an important role in one's career. These are professional skills which are a

person's skill set and ability to perform a certain type of activity or task. Employability skills are a person's ability to interact effectively with co-workers and customers. Hard skills are mainly applicable at the workplace. Employability skills are applicable both at the workplace and outside

the workplace. Employability skills complement the hard skills which are occupational requirements of a job. It also complements many other activities even outside the workplace. Presently employability skills are increasingly sought out by employers in addition to standard qualification.

Recognizing this importance of soft skills, the DGT during its 38th Meeting held on 31st May, 2011 recommended introduction of subject "Employability Skills" replacing "Social Studies" in ITI curricula. The Government of India accepted the above recommendation and introduced the subject "Employability Skills" in ITI curricula in place of "Social Studies" from the August, 2012 session. This means apart from

learning the technical skills aspirants also learn about employability skills which enables them to get placement.

Students who take admission in ITIs and complete their courses get opportunities in different places including Public Sector Undertakings (PSU). They may get jobs in government or corporate and other private institutions or even become self-employed. Aspirants may look at the newspaper advertisements or government websites regarding admission announcements of ITIs. *(The author is the Advisor of Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department of Bodoland Territorial Region, Kokrajhar & can be reached at or bkrjan@gmail.com)*

## Assam Secretariat Recruitment 2024 – 7 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 09/04/2024.

Assam Legislative Assembly Secretariat has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 7 Additional Secretary, Protocol Officer, Language Reporter, Assistant Librarian, and Stenographer Posts in Assam Legislative Assembly Secretariat. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

### 1. Additional Secretary

No of posts: 1 (UR)

#### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# Minimum 7 years of experience as Joint Secretary or equivalent in any Govt. Department of Assam.  
# Must have sound knowledge in Constitutional Law and Parliamentary Practice & Procedure.  
# Person possessing Degree of Bachelor of Law from any recognized University shall be given preference.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 50 years and more than 55 (fifty-five) years of age at the time of application.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 30000 -110000 + GP- 17500 P.M. in Pay Band - 4 and other admissible allowances.

### 2. Protocol Officer

No of posts: 1 (UR)

#### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# The Candidate must possess Master Degree in any discipline with minimum 60% marks from any recognized University.  
# The candidate must have 4 years of working experience in any Govt./Semi Govt. Office/Organization.  
# The candidate having degree in Tourism & Hospitality Management will be given preference.  
# The candidate must have good command over English, Assamese & Hindi language.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 35 years and more than 40 (forty) years of age at the time of application.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 30000-110000/- + GP- 14500 P.M. in Pay Band - 4 and other admissible allowances.

### 3. Language Reporter (Grade-II)

No of posts: 2 (UR)

#### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# The candidate should possess Bachelor Degree in Arts/Science/Commerce from any recognized University.  
# No candidate shall be eligible to sit for Speed Test at 100 w.p.m. in Assamese unless the candidate have Certificate of Stenography in Assamese with 80 w.p.m. from any Institute recognized by the Govt. of Assam.  
# The candidate must have adequate knowledge of Computer application with DTP in Assamese.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 21 years and more than 38 (thirty eight) years of age at the time of application.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 22000-97000 + GP- 9400 P.M. in Pay Band - 3 and other admissible allowances.

### 4. Assistant Librarian

No of posts: 1 (UR)

#### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# The candidate must possess Bachelor Degree in Library Science from any recognized University.  
# The candidate must have 5 (five) years of experience dealing with Library Management in reputed Institution/ Organization/Govt. Office and have practical knowledge in digital Library.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 21 years and more than 38 (thirty eight) years of age at the time of application.

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 14000-70000+GP-8700 P.M. in Pay Band - 2 and other admissible allowances

### 5. Stenographer Grade-III (English)

No of posts: 2 (UR-1, STP-1)

#### Educational Qualification & Experience:

# The candidate should possess Bachelor Degree in Arts/Science/Commerce from any recognized University.  
# No candidate shall be eligible to sit for Speed Test at 80 w.p.m. in English unless the candidate have Certificate in Stenography from ITI in Assam or any other Institute recognized by Govt. of Assam/ Govt. of India.  
# The candidate must have adequate knowledge of Computer Application and good command over English Language.

**Age Limit:** The candidate should not be less than 21 years and more than 38 (thirty eight) years of age at the time of application where the upper age limit is relaxable by 5 years for ST (P) candidates i.e. upto 43 years.



## APSC Recruitment 2024 – 17 Computer Operator Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 13/04/2024.

Assam Public Service Commission has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 17 Computer Operator Posts in the office of Assam Public Service Commission. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

**Name of post:** Computer Operator

**No of posts:** 17 posts

**Category-wise vacancy:**

# UR: 8  
# OBC/ MOBC: 5  
# SC: 1  
# STP: 2  
# STH: 1

**Name of organisation:** Assam Public Service Commission

**Scale of Pay:** ₹ 14,000 - to 60,500 - GP: ₹ 6,200

**Age Limit:** The candidates should not be less than 18 years of age and not more than 40 years of age as on 01/01/2024.

**Educational Qualification:** A candidate must have Higher Secondary or Class XII passed from any Government recognized Board/Council.

#### Other Criteria of APSC Recruitment

**Citizenship:** Candidates must be Indian Citizens as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.

#### Residency:

(i) The candidate must be a permanent resident of Assam.

(ii) The candidate must produce PRC issued in Assam for educational purpose/ Employment Exchange Registration certificate as proof of residency along with the application form.

**Age Relaxation:** The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

# SC: 5 years  
# ST: 5 years  
# OBC/ MOBC: 3 years  
# PwBD: 10 years  
# For more details pl read the official notification/s.

**Employment Exchange Registration:** Candidates must be registered themselves in any of the employment exchanges of Assam.

**Small Family Norms:** The candidates have to submit a declaration regarding "The Small Family Norms" in Form-A at the time of applying for the post.

#### Computer Proficiency:

a) Candidates must have good working knowledge of office productivity software tools (independent of any operating system i.e. MS Windows, Linux, Mac etc.) such as —

i) Word Processor,  
ii) Spreadsheet,  
iii) Presentation Graphics,  
iv) Content of Database,  
v) Internet and  
vi) E-Mail.

b) Candidates must possess a minimum 6 (six) months completed diploma/ certificate in computer proficiency, from a Govt. of Assam recognized institution (no breaks in qualification admissible) and must have computing knowledge in Assamese and English Language.

**Application Fee:** Category-wise application fee is as under.

Category	Fee (in Rs.)
General/EWS	₹ 47.20
SC/ST/OBC/MOBC	₹ 47.20
BPL/ PwBD	₹ 47.20

#### Important Dates of APSC Recruitment 2024

# Starting date of submission of online application: 14th March 2024  
# Last date of submission of online application: 13th April 2024

## CBSE Recruitment 2024 – 118 Assistant Secretary, Accountant, JE & Other Posts

Last Date: 11/04/2024.

Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 118 Assistant Secretary (Administration), Assistant Secretary (Academics), Junior Engineer, Accountant & Other posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

### 1. Assistant Secretary (Administration)

No of posts: 18

Pay: Pay Level-10

**Educational Qualification:** Bachelor's Degree from a recognized University/Institution.

**Age Limit:** 35 years

### 2. Assistant Secretary (Academics)

No of posts: 16

Pay: Pay Level-10

**Educational Qualification:** 1. Post Graduate Degree in the relevant subjects/areas from a recognized University/Institute.

2. B. Ed. degree from a recognized university/institute.

3. NET/SLET or equivalent or Doctorate Degree.

**Age Limit:** 30 years

### 3. Assistant Secretary (Skill Education)

No of posts: 8

Pay: Pay Level-10

**Educational Qualification:** Post Graduate Degree in any discipline from a recognized University/Institute.

**Age Limit:** 30 years

### 4. Assistant Secretary (Training)

No of posts: 22

Pay: Pay Level-10

**Educational Qualification:**

1. Post Graduate Degree in the relevant subjects/areas from a recognized University/Institute.

2. B. Ed. degree from a recognized university/institute.

3. NET/SLET or equivalent or Doctorate Degree.

**Age Limit:** 30 years

### 5. Accounts Officer

No of posts: 3

Pay: Pay Level-10

**Educational Qualification:**

Bachelor's degree of a recognised University/ Institution with Economics/ Commerce/ Accounts/ Finance/ Business Studies/ Cost Accounting as one of the subject.

OR

Bachelor's degree of a recognised University/Institution and having SAS/JAO(C) examination conducted by any Account/Audit Services/Department of the Central/State Govt.

OR

Post Graduate of a recognised University/Institution with Economics/ Commerce /Accounts/ Finance/ Business Studies/ Cost Accounting as one of the subject.

OR

M.B.A. (Finance)/Chartered Accountant/ICWA

**Age Limit:** 35 years

### 6. Junior Engineer

No of posts: 17

Pay: Pay Level-6

**Educational Qualification:** B. E. / B. Tech. degree in Civil Engineering from a university/ institution recognized from AICTE.

**Age Limit:** 32 years

### 7. Junior Translation Officer

No of posts: 7

Pay: Pay Level-6

**Educational Qualification:**

Master's Degree of a Recognized University in Hindi with English as a compulsory or elective subject or as the medium of examination at the Bachelor Degree Level.

OR

Master's Degree of a Recognized University in English with Hindi as a compulsory or elective subject or as the medium of examination at the Bachelor Degree Level.

OR

Master's Degree of a recognized University in any subject other than Hindi or English, with Hindi medium and English as a compulsory or elective subject or as the medium of examination at the Bachelor Degree Level.

OR

Master's Degree of a recognized University in any subject other than Hindi or English, with English medium and Hindi as a compulsory or elective subject or as the medium of examination at the Bachelor Degree Level.

OR

Master's Degree of a recognized University in any subject other than Hindi or English, with Hindi and English as a compulsory or elective subject or either of the two as a medium of examination and the other as a compulsory or elective subject at Bachelor Degree Level.

AND

Recognized Diploma or Certificate Course in translation from Hindi to English and vice versa or three years' experience in of translation work from Hindi to English and vice versa in a Central or State Govt. Office, including Govt. of India undertaking.

**Age Limit:** 30 years

### 8. Accountant

No of posts: 7

Pay: Pay Level-4

**Educational Qualification:** Bachelor's Degree from a recognized University/ Institution with Economics/ Commerce/ Accounts/ Finance/ Business Studies/ Cost Accounting as one of the subject.

AND

A typing speed of 35 w.p.m. in English or 30 w.p.m. in Hindi on Computer

**Age Limit:** 30 years

### 9. Junior Accountant

No of posts: 20

Pay: Pay Level-2

**Educational Qualification:** 12th Class from a recognized Board/University/Institution with Accountancy/Business Studies/ Economics/ Commerce/ Entrepreneurship/ Finance/ Business Administration/ Taxation/ Cost Accounting as one of the subject.

AND

A typing speed of 35 w.p.m. in English or 30 w.p.m. in Hindi on Computer

**Age Limit:** 27 years

#### Other Criteria of CBSE Recruitment

**Age Relaxation:** Permissible relaxations in upper age limit for different categories are as under:

# SC/ ST: 5 years  
# OBC/NCL: 3 years  
# PwBD (UR) including women: 10 years  
# PwBD (OBC (NCL) Centre List) including women: 13 years  
# PwBD (SC/ST) including women: 15 years  
# Women: 10 years  
# Ex-Servicemen: 3 years

#### Application Fee:

Candidates have to pay a certain amount as application fee depending up on their category. The details are as given below:

Category	Fee
UR/OBC/EWS	# Group-A: ₹ 1500 # Group- B & C: ₹ 800
SC/ ST/ PwBD/ Ex-Servicemen/ Women/Regular CBSE Employee	Nil

#### Important Dates of CBSE Vacancy 2024

# Starting date of submission of online application: 12th March 2024

# Last date of submission of online application: 11th April 2024

# After six months of war, Israel's isolation grows with no end in sight

**JERUSALEM, April 5:** When Israel declared war against Hamas last October, it stood unified at home and enjoyed broad backing from around the world following an unprecedented attack by the Islamic militant group.

Six months later, Israel finds itself in a far different place: bogged down in Gaza, divided domestically, isolated internationally and increasingly at odds with its closest ally. The risk of a broader regional war remains real.

Despite Israel's fierce military onslaught, Hamas is still standing, if significantly weakened. The of-

fensive has pushed Gaza into a humanitarian crisis, displacing more than 80% of the population and leaving over 1 million people on the brink of starvation. Yet Israel hasn't presented a postwar vision acceptable to its partners, and cease-fire talks remain at a standstill.

Israel declared war in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 cross-border attack, in which the militant group killed 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and kidnapped about 250 others.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set two objectives: de-

stroying Hamas and bringing home the hostages. Despite his repeated pledges to achieve "total victory," his goals remain elusive.

After steadily conquering most of Gaza in a bruising offensive, Israeli ground troops are in a holding pattern marked by small tactical operations and uncertainty over whether the army will march into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, Hamas' last significant stronghold. Netanyahu has repeatedly vowed to invade Rafah, but he faces broad international opposition, including from the United States, because of the hundreds of thousands of dis-

placed Palestinians sheltering there. Netanyahu claims to have a plan to evacuate the civilians, but it isn't clear whether it is ready or would satisfy the Americans.

Even if Israel does invade Rafah, there is no guarantee of long-term success. Although Hamas appears to have suffered heavy losses, its forces have managed to regroup in areas abandoned by Israel.

At the same time, Israel hasn't been able to halt the daily attacks it faces on its northern front from the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. In contrast to Hamas,

Hezbollah's much larger arsenal remains intact, leaving the fate of tens of thousands of uprooted civilians on both sides of the border up in the air. The tensions have threatened to drag in Hezbollah's sponsor, Iran, especially after an airstrike widely attributed to Israel killed two Iranian generals in neighboring Syria this week.

Israel enjoyed broad international support following the Oct. 7 massacre, which was the deadliest attack against Jews since the Holocaust. However, that goodwill has been replaced by impatience and outrage as conditions in Gaza

worsen. More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, around two-thirds of them women and children, according to Palestinian health officials whose death toll doesn't distinguish between civilians and fighters. International aid officials say roughly one-third of Gaza's population is dealing with catastrophic hunger.

Initial expressions of solidarity from Israel's allies have given way to calls for a halt to the fighting. Meanwhile, the U.N. world court, looking into genocide allegations against Israel, has ordered Israel to

do more to protect Gaza's civilians. This isolation appeared to peak on March 25, when the U.N. Security Council, over Israeli objections, passed a resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire. The U.S. infuriated Israel by allowing the resolution to pass.

Things have only worsened for Israel since then, especially following its killing of seven aid workers in what it says was an errant airstrike. Six of the victims were volunteers from countries allied with Israel, antagonizing them and outraging U.S. President Joe Biden. (AP)

*With more assaults inevitable, Ukraine's officials are scrambling for ways to better defend the country's energy assets*

## Russia renews big attacks on Ukrainian power grid using better intelligence and new tactics

**MOSCOW, April 5:** When the Russian barrage hit the Ukrainian power plant, a worker named Taras was manning the control panel — a crucial task that required him to stay as the air-raid siren blared and his colleagues ran for safety.

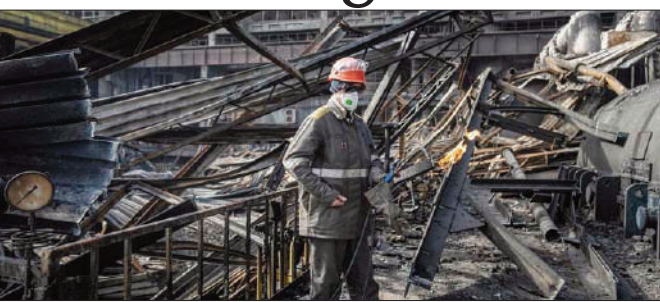
After the deafening explosions came a cloud of smoke, then darkness. Fires blazed, and shrapnel pierced the roof of the huge complex, causing debris to rain down on workers. Following protocols, Taras shut down the coal-fired plant, his heart racing.

In the March 22 attack, Russia unleashed more than 60 exploding drones and 90 missiles across Ukraine — the recent assault on the country's energy infrastructure since the full-scale invasion began in early 2022.

The fusillade reflected Russia's renewed focus on striking Ukrainian energy facilities. The volume and accuracy of recent attacks have alarmed the country's defenders, who say Kremlin forces now have better intelligence and fresh tactics in their campaign to annihilate Ukraine's electrical grid and bring its economy to a halt. Moscow has also apparently learned how to exploit gaps in Ukrainian air defenses.

With more assaults inevitable, officials are scrambling for ways to better defend the country's energy assets.

The March 22 attack — which left 1.9 million people without power, according to analysts —



was among the most intense in Russia's springtime air campaign targeting civilian infrastructure.

DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy company, lost 80% of its power generation capacity in attacks on March 22 and 29, the company said. Plants were destroyed across the country. Russia targeted transmission networks as well.

The bombardment blacked out large parts of Ukraine — a level of darkness not seen since the first days of the full-scale invasion. The strikes also tested Ukraine's ability to make quick repairs.

The Associated Press was given access to two DTEK power plants damaged in the March 22 attack on the condition that the names and locations of the facilities and the full names of workers not be mentioned due to security concerns. The AP was not permitted to provide technical details of damage, including the number of missiles that struck each plant or whether the plant could still function.

After previous assaults, power

station workers were able to restore service fairly quickly. But that became harder after March 22 because of continuing strikes that prevent rebuilding.

The Kharkiv region, which borders Russia and was the hardest hit, is still enduring power outages weeks later. On Thursday, drones struck the region's Zmiivska power plant, plunging 350,000 people into the dark.

"They are trying to take us back to the 17th century," said Serhii, a manager in one of the power plants that was attacked.

Maksym Timchenko, the CEO of DTEK, inspected the grounds of one of the two power stations. Gazing up at the titanic complex, his eyes rested on a gaping hole in the building's scorched facade.

Inside, workers collected debris in wheelbarrows, their faces blackened by floating dust. Cranes removed giant shards of twisted metal and blocks of fallen concrete.

In the dark bowels of the plant's interior, where an intricate network of large pipes connect to in-

dustrial boilers, the steel roof was so pockmarked with shrapnel it resembled a starry night sky.

"I've never seen in my life this level of destruction in a power station, and unfortunately it happened to us," Timchenko said.

He estimates that the company can restore half of the damaged units in two to three months. It's a Sisyphean task: Workers must repair damage over and over again.

This particular plant was targeted late last year, and one unit was destroyed. Timchenko said DTEK planned to repair it by the end of this year.

"But now the same level of destruction has happened to several power units," he said, bringing the Hamas and the company's strategic plans back to square one.

During the agonizing wait for more strikes, Ukrainian officials are discussing how to better protect power generators. One solution may be decentralizing them by creating a network of small facilities that are harder to hit than large plants.

The timing of the attacks perplexed many observers.

Russia usually reserves large-scale attacks on energy infrastructure for the peak winter months, when demand for heat is highest. A spring campaign suggests Russia was behind schedule in unleashing new tactics, said Oleksandr Kharchenko, director of the Kyiv-based Energy Industry Research Center. (AP)

## Ukraine fires more than 50 drones against Russia in one of its biggest air attacks of the war

**KYIV, April 5:** Ukraine fired more than 40 drones into Russia's bordering Rostov region, Moscow defense officials said on Friday, in what appeared to be one of its biggest air attacks in the war and as Kyiv's forces step up their assaults on Russian soil.

Russia's Defense Ministry said a total of 44 drones were "intercepted and destroyed" in the Morozovskiy district, more than 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the border.

The attack damaged a power station, Rostov Gov. Vasily Golubev said.

Russian media reported that there is a military airfield near the town of Morozovsk, but it was unclear whether the airfield was the target of the attack.

The Russian defense ministry said nine more drones were intercepted over Russia's border regions of Kursk, Belgorod, Krasnodar and the nearby Saratov region.

Ukrainian officials rarely comment on such strikes and provided no immediate response.

Drone warfare is a key feature of the war, which has extended into a third year since Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

On the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, where fighting is largely bogged down, low-cost drones are used by both sides to knock out expensive military hardware.

The Kremlin's forces have used large numbers of Iranian-designed Shahed drones to bombard urban areas of Ukraine.

Kyiv, in turn, has developed small but fast-growing defense industry where drones, including deadly unmanned sea vessels, are proving effective.

## 'No ground' for Indian request for return of Kachchatheevu: Lanka Minister

**COLOMBO, April 5:** The statements coming out of India on "reclaiming" Kachchatheevu island from Sri Lanka have "no ground", the Sri Lankan Minister of Fisheries Douglas Devananda has said.

The senior Sri Lankan Tamil politician's comments came days after the Narendra Modi government targeted the Congress Party and its ally the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu accusing them of overlooking national interests in the ceding of Kachchatheevu island to Sri Lanka in 1974.

The BJP has also been targeting the two parties for not ensuring the rights of the fishermen wanting to fish in waters around the Kachchatheevu island.

"It is the election time in India, it is not unusual to hear such noises of claims and counterclaims about Kachchatheevu," Devananda told reporters in Jaffna on Thursday. "I think India is acting on its interests to secure this place to ensure Sri Lankan fishermen would not have any access to that area and that Sri Lanka should not claim any rights in that resourceful area", Devananda said. The statements on "reclaiming" Kachchatheevu from Sri Lanka's hold has "no ground," Devananda has said.

The Sri Lankan minister said according to the 1974 agreement fishermen from both sides could do fishing in the territorial waters of both countries. But it was later reviewed and amended in 1976. Accordingly, fishermen from both countries were banned from fishing in neighbouring waters.

Devananda stressed, "There claims to be a place called West Bank which is located below Kanyakumari - it is a much bigger area with extensive sea resources - it is 80 times bigger than Kachchatheevu, India secured it at the 1976 review agreement." (PTI)

## Yellen calls for level playing field for US workers and firms during China visit

**GUANGZHOU, April 5:** US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen called on Friday for a level playing field for American companies and workers as she began a five-day visit to China in one of the country's major industrial and export hubs.

Yellen told Wang Weizhong, the governor of Guangdong province, that it's important for the U.S. and China to have open and direct communication on areas of disagreement. "This includes the issue of China's industrial overcapacity, which the United States and other countries are concerned can cause global spillovers," she said.

Yellen, the first Cabinet-level official to visit China since President Joe Biden met Chinese leader Xi Jinping last November, has telegraphed that she will raise what the U.S. considers to be unfair Chinese trade practices, a concern shared by many European countries.

Before talks with the governor, she met with American, European and Japanese business representatives to hear their concerns, ahead of what will likely be tough talks on trade and other issues with senior Chinese government officials.

On Friday, Yellen also plans to

speak with American business leaders and take questions from them in the auditorium of a marbled convention center in the Baiyun District of Guangzhou.

"I've heard from many American business executives that operating in China can be challenging," Yellen says in prepared remarks to be delivered at an event hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in China on Friday afternoon.

Citing a recent survey by the Chamber that found that a third of American firms in China say they have experienced unfair treatment compared to local competitors, Yellen says the U.S. has seen China "pursue unfair economic practices, including imposing barriers to access for foreign firms and taking coercive actions against American companies."

"I strongly believe that this doesn't only hurt these American firms: ending these unfair practices would benefit China by improving the business climate here. I intend to raise these issues in meetings this week," she says in her speech.

Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong province, a Chinese manufacturing and export hub that is home to telecom giant Huawei

and BYD, China's largest EV maker. Huawei has been hit hard by U.S. restrictions on semiconductor exports to China and is at the vanguard of Chinese efforts to become self-sufficient and a leader in technology.

Yellen will head to Beijing next. Eswar Prasad, a trade professor at Cornell University, expects Yellen to push Beijing to bolster domestic consumption and ensure fair competition in new technology sectors, especially green energy and electric vehicles, along with adequate market access for U.S. companies.

"Concerns about China attempting to export its overcapacity and simultaneously making a big push into these sectors will be top of mind for the U.S. delegation," he said.

China has pushed back against the overcapacity concerns expressed by both the U.S. and Europe.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said earlier this week that the growth in Chinese EV and solar exports is conducive to green development globally and the result of the international division of labor and market demand.

He accused the U.S. of interfer-

ing with free trade by restricting technology exports to China.

"As for who is doing non-market manipulation, the fact is for everyone to see," he said. "The U.S. has not stopped taking measures to contain China's trade and technology. This is not de-risking," rather, it is creating risks."

Scott Paul, president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing — an alliance of businesses and the U.S. Steelworkers union — told The Associated Press ahead of Yellen's trip that "there is a limited amount of expectations we should have about the Chinese government and how it responds; one thing that Yellen hopefully can and should say is that the U.S. is prepared to use all the tools that we have available through policy to ensure that China's industrial overcapacity doesn't negatively harm our economic and national security interests."

The Alliance released a report in February that says the introduction of inexpensive Chinese autos to the American market "could end up being an extinction-level event for the U.S. auto sector." The U.S. auto sector accounts for 3% of America's GDP, according to the report. (AP)

## Biden tells Israel's Netanyahu future US support for war depends on new steps to protect civilians

**WASHINGTON, April 5:** President Joe Biden issued a stark warning to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday that future U.S. support for Israel's Gaza war depends on the swift implementation of new steps to protect civilians and aid workers.

Biden and Netanyahu's roughly 30-minute call just days after Israeli airstrikes killed seven food aid workers in Gaza added a new layer of complication to the leaders' increasingly strained relationship.

Biden's message marks a sharp change in his administration's steadfast support for Israel's war efforts, with the U.S. leader for the first time threatening to rethink his backing if Israel doesn't change its tactics and allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

The White House would not specify what could change about U.S. policy, but it could include altering military sales to Israel and America's diplomatic backup on the world stage.

Netanyahu's office said early on Friday that his Security Cabi-



net has approved a series of "immediate steps" to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, including the reopening of a key crossing that was destroyed in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack. Administration officials had said before that announcement that the U.S. would assess whether the Israeli moves go far enough.

Biden "made clear the need for Israel to announce and implement a series of specific, concrete, and measurable steps to address civilian harm, humanitarian suffering, and the safety of aid workers," the White House said in a statement following the leaders' call.

"He made clear that U.S. policy with respect to Gaza will be deter-

mined by our assessment of Israel's immediate action on these steps." Biden also told Netanyahu that reaching an "immediate cease-fire" in exchange for the estimated 100 hostages that are still being held in Gaza was "essential" and urged Israel to reach such an accord "without delay," according to the White House. Administration officials described the conversation as "direct" and "honest." Netanyahu's office said the Erez crossing, which for years served as the only passenger terminal for people to move in and out of Gaza, would be temporarily reopened.

It also said Israel would allow its Ashdod port to be used to process aid shipments bound for Gaza and allow increased Jordanian aid shipments through another land crossing. The announcement did not elaborate on quantities or types of items to be let in.

White House National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson welcomed the moves by Netanyahu, adding that the plan "must now be fully and rapidly implemented." (AP)

## No evidence of Bushra Bibi being poisoned, says personal physician

**ISLAMABAD, April 5:** Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi has not been given any poisonous substance, her personal physician has said following a medical checkup after allegations by the ex-prime minister that the former first lady was poisoned while incarcerated at his private residence which was turned into a sub-jail.

On April 2, Khan during the hearing of the 190 million pound Toshakhana corruption case in Adiala jail informed Judge Nasir Javed Rana that there had been an attempt to poison the former first lady and added that she had marks on her skin and tongue as a side effect of the "poisoning."

"I know who is behind it," the 71-year-old former prime minister said, without naming anyone.

He said that if any harm came to 49-year-old Bushra, the Pakistan Army chief (Gen Asim Munir) should be held responsible as members of an intelligence agency were controlling everything at his Bani Gala residence in Islamabad and Adiala jail in Rawalpindi.

At this time, there is no evidence of Bushra Bibi being poisoned, Dr Asim

Yousuf said while speaking to Geo News, adding: We are not conducting any medical tests to ascertain administration of any poisonous substance to Bushra Bibi as no such symptoms are detected.

The physician said that Bushra Bibi's health deteriorated after taking a meal two months ago. However, she started consuming less food due to health issues, he added.

The physician added that he was unaware of her ac-

tual health issues that happened two months back.

Dr Yousuf said that medical tests should be conducted by keeping given her age and to check for any health problems including stomach-related issues.

He said that he would meet Khan, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party the incarcerated founder on Saturday. Regarding Khan's health, Dr Yousuf confirmed that the former premier was doing well now, however, his appetite was not normal after recovering from a minor illness.

During her interaction with journalists before the court appearance, the former first lady had also claimed

that three drops of toilet cleaner were mixed in her food on the eve of Shab-e-Meraj. She said the food and water served by the jail authority tasted bitter.

Responding to a question, Bushra said that someone had told her in jail that toilet cleaner was mixed in her food. She, however, refused to disclose the name of the official. My eyes swell up, I feel pain in my chest and stomach, the former first lady had claimed.

Earlier in January, Khan and Bushra Bibi were sentenced to 14 years in jail in the Toshakhana corruption case about the illegal sale of state gifts which the former premier received during his term. (PTI)

## Rescue teams in Taiwan searching for family feared trapped in rockslide following earthquake

**HUALIEN, April 5:** Rescue teams are searching for a family of five feared trapped in a rockslide following Taiwan's biggest earthquake in 25 years, which has left at least 12 dead.

Two bodies have been found in the Taroko National Park, a tourist attraction famous for its rugged, mountainous terrain in Hualien County about 150 kilometers (90 miles) from Taipei. At least four other victims were found in the park.

Authorities have yet to verify the identities of the latest victims. The family,

surmamed You, had gone on a hike after visiting ancestral sites for the traditional grave-sweeping observances.

Wednesday's 7.4-magnitude quake sent boulders and mud tumbling down mountainsides, blocking roads and smashing cars, and injured more than 1,000 people.

In the county seat of Hualien, crews were working to demolish the five-story Tien Wang Hsing building, which was left leaning at a severe angle, one of scores of buildings damaged around the island. Residents wearing

motorcycle and construction helmets recovered legal documents and other documents before large cement-penetrating drills and backhoes began bringing down the building.

A high school teacher was killed in the building when she returned to her apartment to find her cat just as an aftershock struck, bringing down more debris. Others were still stuck in areas cut off by road blockages, including one Canadian and two persons with joint Australian and Singapore citizenship, according to emergency services. Authorities were using cell phone signals to ascertain their positions. Hualien will face a major challenge to rebuild and bring back tourism, said county head Hsu Chenwei. "After such a strong quake, rebuilding and reconstruction will be an extremely heavy burden, especially for those who still need to make their monthly mortgage payments. That's why people's paths to rebuilding their lives will rely on help from charitable donations," Hsu told reporters. (AP)

# Traders at world's only women-run market question poll relevance amid unrest in Manipur

## Women traders claim nation has forgotten Manipur

**IMPHAL, April 5:** Amidst the lingering aftermath of ethnic conflicts, the women traders at Manipur's iconic 'Ima market' -- the only market in the world run entirely by women -- have expressed a deafening lack of enthusiasm towards the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Questioning the relevance of the electoral process amidst the ongoing turmoil, the women traders from various market associations, are contemplating a boycott of the polls with their major grievance being -- "the nation forgot Manipur".

Nema Devi, a seasoned fish vendor at the market, reflects the sentiment shared by many, emphasising the absence of tangible change despite months of unrest.

"Even 11 months after violence broke out, there has not been a resolution and no restoration of peace. We continue to live by the rule of taking one day at a time. Living in continuous fear and going ahead with our usual lives.

"What will change with the elections? The nation, the government, everybody forgot Manipur." 52-year-old Devi, who has been running the shop in the market for over a decade, told PTI.

Debjani, a vendor selling fruits and vegetables, succinctly said, "Elections nai chahiye" (elections not needed)," echoing the prevailing scepticism.

At first glance, the 500-year-old 'Ima Keithel' is much like any other popular market. Lines of vendors can be seen selling everything from fresh fruit to fish and fabrics from dusk until dawn.

But after walking through its long lanes with more than 4,500 stalls spread across three multi-story buildings and a sea of surrounding tin shacks, one unique aspect becomes hard to ignore: every single trader, without exception, is a woman, a fact they take pride in.

The famous market was also the theme of the state's Republic Day parade this year.

Priya Kharabam, a third-generation pottery trader, questioned the purpose of elections if the status quo remains unchanged.



"If everything has to go on the way it is going on, why do we need elections? What will change?" she asked.

Against this backdrop, a traders' group in the market called Manipur Keithel Phambi Apunba Lup has opted to abstain from engaging in election-related activities, citing governmental disregard for the populace's well-being. "The decision to hold the elections shows that the government has no concern for the life and property of the common people. The people of the state have been witnessing a cycle of violence arising out of conflict between two communities for the last 11 months.

"We have been facing immense hardship due to the protracted violence," said Yunnam Ibeyaima, General Secretary of the traders' body.

The unfolding crisis stemming from clashes between the Meitei and tribal Kuki communities has claimed over 200 lives, with thousands displaced and living in camps. Asem Nirmala, General Secretary of another traders' body in the market called Lukmaisellup, lamented the lack of governmental responsiveness to the prolonged crisis, emphasising the urgent need for

solutions over elections.

"This is the time for solutions. This is not the time for elections. These polls are being enforced at the very wrong time.

"We are contemplating whether we should either not vote or vote in unison against the government in power and give other parties a chance and see if there is restoration of peace. I am trying to counsel the women in the market but they are not keen on voting," she told PTI.

Ima Keithel Joint Coordinating Committee convenor Laishram Ongbi Memma said it was ironic that the government can arrange voting in camps but cannot help the displaced voters in returning to their homes even after 11 months.

"For the last 11 months, the government has not been able to make arrangements for the displaced people to return to their homes but they have alternative arrangements for them to cast vote.

"The women vendors are not against the upcoming Lok Sabha election but the government should prioritise peace instead of election so that each and every citizen can enjoy their voting rights," said Memma.

Some traders find themselves at a cross-

roads, contemplating whether to vote collectively against the incumbent government in pursuit of peace restoration.

As many as 75 'Imas' or 'mothers' (elderly women traders) from the famed market had visited Delhi in June last year and staged a sit-in protest at Jantar Mantar, demanding a solution and opposing any territorial division of the state on ethnic lines.

Expressing disillusionment with the electoral process, Kunjang Phema, a fabric vendor, highlights the failure of elected representatives to address their grievances effectively.

"Why do we choose a representative? So our voices are heard and acted upon. If that has not happened in such a critical situation when will it happen? Why should we vote? We are still contemplating whether to vote or not but if you ask us if we have faith in elections? No," says Phema, who was part of the group.

The elections for two Lok Sabha seats in Manipur will be held in two phases on April 19 and 26.

While Inner Manipur and some segments of Outer Manipur will vote in the first phase on April 19, the remaining segments of Outer Manipur will vote in Phase 2 on April 26. The Election Commission has announced that the displaced population will have the opportunity to cast their votes from relief camps. The effort to facilitate voting for the displaced offers a glimmer of hope amidst the prevailing despair, as the state grapples with deep-seated unrest and a yearning for lasting peace.

Amidst the prevailing unrest and feelings of abandonment, the traders' voices echo a profound sense of disillusionment with the government's response to Manipur's plight.

"The government cannot see that Manipur is burning, it feels like it is some state outside India and hence peace here is not in their agenda. Why should we repose our faith in such a system which has abandoned us at this crucial time? Despite the huge deployment of forces, we do not feel safe in our own homeland," said K Dhaneshori. (PTI)

# EC teams seize ₹ 1 crore cash from vehicle in Arunachal

**ITANAGAR, April 5:** The flying squad and static surveillance team deployed by the Election Commission in Arunachal Pradesh seized Rs one crore cash from a vehicle in Longding district, a police officer said.

The cash was seized from the vehicle at Kanubari check gate on Thursday evening by the EC teams, the officer said.

The vehicle, which belongs to one Harshvardhan Singh, executive director of a private construction company, was following the convoy of Meghalaya chief minister Conrad Sangma, who went to Longding to address a party's election rally, he said.

"The vehicle was not part of the CM's convoy but was following the motorcade," Longding superintendent of police (SP) Dekio Gumja said.

The income tax department was informed about the cash seizure and it will investigate the case and subsequently action will be taken as per the standard operating procedure, Gumja said.

Initial investigation suggested that the cash was meant for labourers payment by the construction company, whose works are going on at three places in the region, including the Sonari Medical College in Assam, Brigade Headquarters at Khonsa in Arunachal's Tirap district and Assam Police Battalion in Sivasagar.

The company also executed many projects in Meghalaya, including the construction of the Legislative Assembly among others.

The flying squads and static surveillance teams along with the police on Thursday also seized ₹ 22.20 lakh in the state capital and another ₹ 16.10 lakh at Seppa in



East Kameng district during vehicle checking, Toko Babu, officer on special duty (OSD) to the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said.

With Thursday's seizure, the total cash seized in the northeastern state so far since the model code of conduct (MCC) came into force, rose to over ₹ 5.48 crore, while the cumulative figure of cash and the monetary value of other seized items including liquor, drugs, precious metals and freebies stood at over ₹ 14.05 crore, he said.

Meanwhile, the state government on Thursday ordered that the issuance of import permits of packaged liquor, bulk spirit and export permits for packaged liquor shall remain suspended with immediate effect till the completion of the election process or until further order whichever is earlier.

However, liquor permits in respect of military and paramilitary units may continue to be issued, Chief Secretary Dharmendra said in an order.

Elections to the two Lok Sabha seats and 50 Arunachal Pradesh assembly constituencies will be held on April 19.

The counting of votes for the assembly elections will be held on June 2 while the counting of votes for Lok Sabha elections will be held on June 4. (PTI)

## SKM chief PS Tamang releases poll manifesto, 'guarantees' social uplift



**GANGTOK, April 5:** Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) president and chief minister PS Tamang on Friday released the party's manifesto for the upcoming assembly and Lok Sabha polls in the state, promising social uplift. The manifesto is based on nine guarantees for social uplift - dignity, capability, good governance, education, health, empowerment, pride, prosperity and social equality.

The 56-page manifesto titled "9 Guarantees of P S Tamang" was unveiled in the presence of senior party leaders and party supporters from Zoom-Salghari, Rinchenpong, Daramdin and Soreng-Chakung constituencies of Soreng and Gyalshing districts.

"As we embark on this journey towards achieving 'Sunowlo Sikkim, Sammriddh Sikkim', I am filled with optimism and determination. With our unwavering resolve and the trust placed in us by the citizens, I am confident that together, we will overcome challenges and realize our collective vision for a prosperous and inclu-

sive society," Tamang said after releasing the manifesto at Chakung playground in Soreng district.

With a few days left before the state goes to simultaneous polls on April 19, Tamang, also the SKM president, started his campaign from the Soreng-Chakung assembly constituency.

The SKM party president will campaign across all six districts and will cover all 31 constituencies. It will conclude on April 15 when he will address a state-level 'Jansabha' (rally) at Rangpo ground in Pakyong district.

The party supremo, who is contesting elections from two constituencies, Soreng-Chakung and Rhenock, urged party cadres to spread the message of the manifesto across the state.

"The next five years after the elections will be dedicated to the people of Sikkim who will see a major transformation from the existing scenario. The programmes and policies lined up in our manifesto will bring about positive change in society," he said.

Tamang said post delimitation, the number of seats in the state assembly will increase to 40 from the current 32. Also, 33 per cent of the 12 seats will be reserved for women, he said.

"All the 40 seats in the assembly will be reserved seats in the 2029 elections. Sikkim will be a tribal state in the coming days," he added. (PTI)

## Voted for CAA in Parliament because M'laya was xempted: Agatha

**SHILLONG, April 5:** Agatha K Sangma, the incumbent Lok Sabha MP and National People's Party candidate for Tura, on Friday said she supported the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in Parliament because Meghalaya was exempted from its provisions.

Despite facing criticism from opposition parties for her stance, Agatha emphasised that she would not have supported the Bill if it included Garo Hills.

She clarified that since the CAA does not apply in Meghalaya, there is no cause for concern.

The Tura MP explained that when the Citizenship Amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament in 2019, Meghalaya and other northeastern states were exempted due to advocacy by then-MP and now chief minister Conrad K Sangma, along with other parliamentarians. Conrad K Sangma had earlier clarified that the CAA would not impact Meghalaya significantly as only a small portion of the state's land was excluded from its purview.

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

Meanwhile, the NPP distanced itself from a cash seizure incident in Arunachal Pradesh, with party chief Conrad K Sangma dismissing it as "baseless" and unrelated to the party. (PTI)

## DMCC appeals to CEC for deferring LS polls in Manipur

**IMPHAL, April 5:** Delhi Meitei Coordinating Committee (DMCC) has written to the Chief Election Commissioner to defer the ensuing Lok Sabha elections in strife-torn Manipur. It also sought the attention of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, the Chief Justice of the High Court of Manipur and the chief electoral officer (CEO) of Manipur on the matter in letters written to them separately on April 1.

The polling for the two Parliamentary seats from Manipur will be held on April 19 and 26.

While seeking the deferment of the elections, DMCC stated that the ongoing ethnic mayhem in Manipur that broke out on May 3 last year, have caused immense physical, psychological, economic and political damages to various sections of the people of Manipur.

According to official records, since May 3 the clash has claimed 221 lives. Among these 101 were Meeteis, 114 were Kukis and six others, it pointed out. Numerous persons have been injured, many persons from either community have been missing, thousands of houses, Meitei temples and churches have been either burnt or destroyed, and nearly 70,000 persons from both the communities were internally displaced and have been sheltered in temporary 319 relief camps.

The economy has been worst affected. Many people have lost their jobs. Thousands of homes and properties have been destroyed beyond recovery, thus reducing thousands of people to abject poverty, it also said. DMCC also claimed that prices of consumer goods

have skyrocketed. Tourism and hotels have been shut down. As many as 159 villages have been affected. A total of 5127.08 hectares of paddy field belonging to Meitei could not be cultivated due to constant armed attack by Kuki militants.

Meanwhile, many sections of the people announced boycotting the ensuing elections besides condemnations by several bodies. Since the state has completely failed to protect the life, liberties, properties of people, they were compelled to protect themselves.

DMCC further pointed out the incidents of looting of over 5000 arms and numerous ammunitions from the armories and police stations located at various places of both the hills and in the valleys. Approximately 1500 arms and ammunitions have been covered by state security forces. This showed that approximately 3500 arms and huge ammunition remained at large and still with people for self-defense as reported in the media, DMCC added.

"The state is still not able to give guarantees to the people that these arms and ammunition will not be used during the election time, which may affect the free and fair conduct of Lok Sabha election," it further added.

In view of these facts and circumstances "we felt that, it is not the right time to conduct 18th Lok Sabha election at this juncture in Manipur state, due to the prevailing ongoing ethnic unrest and problem of rule of law and abnormal situation in the state of Manipur." Thus, it is necessary to reschedule the same on a later appropriate date, DMCC stated. (NNN)



## Manipur to have 94 polling stations for internally displaced persons

**IMPHAL, April 5:** Altogether 94 special polling stations have been identified across Manipur to facilitate voting by internally displaced persons in the ethnic violence-affected state, chief electoral officer PK Jha said on Friday. A large number of people were forced to leave their homes and stay in relief camps and other places since the strife began in the northeastern state in May last year.

Kangpokpi district has the highest number of such special polling stations at 24, followed by Bishnupur (22), Churachandpur (15) and Imphal East (nine). Of the 94 special polling stations, 85 are meant for the first phase of polling on April 19 and the remaining nine will be in the second phase on April 26.

"We have distributed 17,425 identity forms in relief camps for internally displaced persons. Of them, 9,875 have already been submitted," the CEO said. At least 219 people were killed after ethnic clashes broke out in Manipur on May 3 last year, when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribals - Nagas and Kukis - constitute little over 40 per cent and reside in the hill districts. The CEO said 118 model polling stations will be set up across the state, of which 91 will be managed by women only.

Three general observers, two police observers and four expenditure observers appointed by ECI have arrived in the state to oversee preparations and conduct of the Lok Sabha elections, Jha said. The state has two Lok Sabha seats. While Inner Manipur and parts of Outer Manipur will go to polls on April 19, voting for the remaining areas of Outer Manipur will be held on April 26. (PTI)

Project to connect Sikkim with country's railway network for the first time

## Railway Board chairperson inspects Sivok - Rangpo Rail Project

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 5:** Jaya Varma Sinha, chairperson of the Railway Board and chief executive officer (CEO) on Friday carried out an intensive inspection of the on-going Sivok - Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP). General manager of the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, NFR general manager (construction), Satish Kumar Pandey along with other senior officials of the railway construction department accompanied the chairperson during the inspection.

The Sivok - Rangpo Rail Project is one of the most prestigious ongoing national projects in India that aims to connect Sikkim, which has only road connectivity at present, with the railway network of the country. Sinha took stock of the progress of works and inspected the lining works of tunnels 1 and 8 of this project. She also inspected tunnel-7 of the project.

Notably, the first underground railway station within the Indian Railways network, the Teesta Bazar Station comes under this tunnel, marking a pioneering step in the advancement of railway infrastructure in the country. She also inspected the construction work



of the Testa Bridge and Sivok Station.

Later, Sinha also had a brief discussion with the officials of Indian Railway Construction Organization (IRCON) on all the aspects of the Sivok - Rangpo New Rail Project. She emphasised on the safety and sustainability in tunnel construction, which is crucial for ensuring uninterrupted connectivity. On completion of this project, Sikkim will be connected via railways for the first time. The project includes construction of 14 tunnels (total 38.53 kms), 5 railway stations and 13 major bridges.

**KOHIMA, April 5:** Nagaland chief electoral officer (CEO) Vyasan R said full-scale preparations are being made for free and fair elections and also provide a level playing field to all candidates in the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state. Voting for the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state will be held on April 19.

Three candidates - Congress nominee S Supongmeren Jamir, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) and People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) consensus candidate Chumben Murry and Independent Hayithung Tunggo Lotha are in the fray.

"Under the initiative of the Election Commission of India (ECI), all preparations are in full swing for a free and fair election while providing a level playing field to all," Vyasan told PTI in an interview here. He said that a total of 13,17,536 electorates will be exercising their franchise, including more than 19,000 first-time voters.

Nagaland has more female electors than male. The state has 6,60,807 female voters while the number of male voters is 6,56,729, he said.

The state has 22,140 senior citi-



zens above 85 years of age, 6,688 Persons with Disabilities and 7,847 service voters, the CEO said.

Vyasan said the Election Office has been trying to attract voters to the polling booths by holding various awareness campaigns including football camps, radio jingles and video appeals.

The ECI and CEO's office along with the Office of the Returning Officer are working together for a free and fair election by providing a level playing field for all contesting candidates and the political

parties, he said.

The state will deploy 170 to 180 polling parties for the 2,342 polling stations. Around 750 polling stations have been categorized as critical, he said.

Of the special arrangement in the process, postal ballots for senior citizens above 85 years of age and people with disabilities have been provided for them to exercise the franchise sitting in the comfort of their homes.

Asked about the letter submitted by the Eastern Nagaland Peoples'

Organisation (ENPO) to the ECI through his office on April 1 conveying its decision to abstain from the polls, he said there is no further communication.

"There are 738 polling stations in the ENPO area, polling parties will be deputed and polling stations will be set up while it is up to the voters whether to cast their vote or not," he said.

The State Police Nodal Officer for Lok Sabha elections, IGP (Range) Limasunep Jamir told PTI that since the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) security has been beefed up in the state to curb poll-related violence.

"So far the electoral process has been normal and we are hopeful that there won't be any escalation in the law-and-order situation and the state will witness peaceful polling," he said.

He said that the Union ministry of home affairs has sanctioned 48 companies of central armed police force for the state, which are arriving in batches while the final induction will be completed by Monday.

Jamir said that as of now 588 polling stations have been marked as critical and vulnerable. (PTI)

# Work done in 10 years just an appetiser, main course yet to come: PM Modi at Churu rally

JAIPUR, April 5: Highlighting the work done by his government in the last 10 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said it was just an "appetiser" and the main course is yet to come.

Addressing a rally in Churu, his second election rally in Rajasthan in three days, Modi also accused the Congress of insulting the Army and dividing people and said this represented the "identity" of the opposition party.

He further said that the country now is a "new India", which strikes within enemy territory — an apparent reference to counter-strikes in Pakistan after terror attacks in India. "Naya Bharat ghar mein ghus kar maarta hai."

"Today even the enemy knows that this is Modi, this is the new India," the prime minister added.

"No matter how much has happened, whatever has happened till now is a trailer. What Modi has done so far, it was just an appetiser and the main course is still to come," he said. "There is a lot to be done... there are a lot of dreams. We have to take the country far ahead."

Attacking the Congress, Modi said the country was in a bad condition when the party was in power.

"The economy had collapsed due to the Congress' big scams and loot. India's reputation in the world was declining... Even after so many decades of Independence, people were struggling for basic necessities of life," he



added. "People thought that nothing could change, everyone was immersed in despair. In this despair and frustration, in 2014, you gave a chance to the son of the poor to serve you. Disappointment and frustration cannot come close to Modi. I decided that the situation has to change," the prime minister said, adding that India is his family.

In a big crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic when the whole world thought India would be ruined, "we Indians made the country the fifth-largest economy in the world", he said.

"I could have also said that the whole world has faced a disaster, what should I do? Maybe the countrymen would have accepted it, but Modi did not choose that path," the prime minister added. Today, "Modi's guarantee" is

being discussed in the country, he said, adding that Rajasthan is an example of how Modi's guarantees were fulfilled and at what speed.

"I gave a guarantee that cylinders for the poor will be cheaper, it has been fulfilled. An inquiry will be conducted against the Congress paper leak industry, it has been completed," Modi said.

The former Congress government in the state had stalled the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project but after the BJP came to power, not only has the project been approved but work has also started on it, he added. "Whatever the BJP says, it fulfils."

"Unlike other parties, the BJP does not just issue 'Ghoshna Patra', it brings 'Sankalp Patra', Modi said, adding that most of the promises made in the BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' in 2019 have

been kept.

He also attack the Congress for its stand on the Ayodhya Ram temple issue.

"Just now journalists were saying that the Congress has issued an advisory. They are so scared, they have told all Congress units to keep their mouths locked whenever Ayodhya Ram temple is discussed," the prime minister claimed.

"Unko lagne laga hai ki Ram ka naam liya toh pata nahi kab Ram-Ram ho jaye (They feel if they take the name of Ram, it can become 'Ram-Ram' for them)," Modi said.

Targeting the opposition INDIA bloc, he said, "I say remove corruption, they say save corruption."

"The people of the 'Ghamandiya Gathbandhan' are not holding rallies for the election but to save the corrupt," Modi alleged.

The ED alone has seized assets worth more than Rs 1 lakh crore in 10 years, the prime minister said and asked people whether such action against the corrupt should not be taken.

"No matter how many lies the opposition parties spread against me, I am not afraid," he said.

"The Congress and the INDI Alliance have their own interests. They have nothing to do with the welfare and respect of the poor, Dalit and underprivileged people. These are the same people who did not respect Baba Ambedkar,"

Modi said.

"Congress did not allow Bharat Ratna for Baba Saheb for decades. They imposed Emergency. Backward classes commission was not given constitutional status. Modi fulfilled the decades-old demand. BJP gave the country a Dalit president and a tribal woman as president," he said.

Modi said when airstrikes and surgical strikes happened, Congress people were asking for proof.

"What were the Congress colleagues saying about the strike? They were demanding proof of bravery from our Army. Insulting the Army and dividing the country is the identity of Congress," he said.

Modi also said that the Congress has always prioritised appeasement over the country's interests.

"The country has seen what extent these people could go to please others. They said in the court that Lord Shri Ram is imaginary," he said in another attack on the Congress.

The whole country was celebrating when the dream of a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya was fulfilled but the Congress was openly insulting faith, Modi added.

Referring to the law on 'triple talaq', he said it has saved the lives of not only Muslim sisters but also all Muslim families. (PTI)

## Cong manifesto 'bundle of lies', prepared to create confusion, mislead voters: BJP

NEW DELHI, April 5: The BJP on Friday dubbed the Congress' Lok Sabha poll manifesto a "bundle of lies" and alleged that the party, which ruled the country for several decades, did not fulfil any of the promises made in its earlier manifestos for the assembly and parliamentary elections.

The Congress on Friday released its manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections, making a host of promises including the right to apprenticeship, a legal guarantee for MSP, and raising the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs.

The BJP said the Congress has come with such a poll manifesto to create confusion and mislead voters.

"The Congress manifesto is a bundle of lies. It has been prepared to create confusion among voters," BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi told reporters.

The BJP leader said it was an irony that the Congress was seeking people's mandate with the promise that it will "do wonders" this time if voted to power again.

"After remaining at helm for several decades, they are now promising that they will do wonders this time if voted to power. The Congress has titled its manifesto 'nyay patra', which means it admits that it has done 'anyay' (injustice) during its 55-60 years rule in the country," he charged.

Trivedi said the Congress, which ruled the country for several decades, is talking about 'nyay' (justice) today, but its governments did not do justice when in power.

"The Congress did not fulfil any of its promises made in its earlier

manifestos for the assembly and Lok Sabha elections," he charged.

Describing the opposition party's poll promises as "lies", the BJP leader said that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has promised to roll out a scheme to provide Rs 1 lakh to every woman every year, whereas none of the Congress-ruled states implemented Rahul Gandhi's earlier promise of Rs 76,000 to people every year.

"Which are the Congress-ruled states where Rahul Gandhi's promise of giving Rs 76,000 to people has been implemented?" he asked.

He alleged that the Congress, when in power, had not done justice with India's youth and to the country's economy, industry, military and security.

"Those who did not do justice to India's cultural pride, social harmony and capacity have reappeared in disguise and are promising to do justice today," he charged.

Trivedi alleged the Congress remained successful in "misleading" people in the past when the "media was not free, literacy rate was low and communication mediums were not so strong."

"But time has now changed. It's not possible to create a veil of lies," he said.

Trivedi said that the BJP formed its government for the first time at the Centre in 1998 when the country's literacy rate was about 50 per cent and the party formed its government with a clear majority under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership when the country's literacy rate went up to about 60 per cent. (PTI)

## INDIA bloc fighting ideological election, decision on PM candidate after winning polls: Rahul

NEW DELHI, April 5: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the INDIA bloc has decided that its prime ministerial face will be decided by the alliance constituents jointly after it wins the polls and exuded confidence that the NDA's 2024 campaign will meet the same fate as that of 'India Shining' in 2004. The former Congress chief said the Lok Sabha polls are between forces who are trying to "destroy" the Constitution and democracy in the country and those protecting them.

Speaking at the Congress manifesto launch programme, Gandhi said it is a much closer contest than what is propagated by the media, and expressed confidence of winning the polls.

Responding to a question after the release of the party manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls, he said, "This election is about those who want to destroy the Constitution and democracy in the country versus those who want to protect the Constitution and democracy."

"We do believe that it is very important once this fight is won that we look after the interests of the vast majority of our people, that India is not run for two or three large conglomerates but is run for the vast majority of the people, that we are not a nation of



monopolies, we are a nation where there is fair competition among businesses," he said. Asked about who will be the prime ministerial face, Gandhi said, "INDIA bloc has decided that we are together fighting an ideological election, after winning the election, who will be the leader, the PM, the whole coalition will jointly decide."

To a question on the outcome of the polls, Gandhi said unlike many political commentators he cannot predict the future but expressed confidence that this is a "much closer" election than what is being propagated by the media.

"It is a close election and we are going to fight an excellent election and we are going to win the election," Gandhi asserted.

He said there was a similar feeling being generated by the press when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the prime minister in 2004 when there was the India Shining campaign.

"So, we have a similar idea being propagated, India Shining, with two-three new dimensions, with full support by the monopolists of the country. But do remember what happened to the India Shining campaign and do remember who won that campaign," Gandhi asserted.

Gandhi said it is important to understand that this is a fundamentally different election as democracy and Constitution have not been as much at risk as it is today. In response to another question, he said one must understand that what is happening in India's political structure.

"We have to understand what is the foundation of the strategy pre-

pared by the RSS and the BJP and particularly Narendra Modi. Like Narendra Modi has given a monopoly to (Billionaire Gautam) Adani in ports, infrastructure and defence, he has also built a monopoly of political finance by using the Enforcement Directorate, CBI and Income Tax department," he said.

"If you look at the electoral bond scheme, it is clear that Narendra Modi and the BJP have raised political funding through extortion, threats, pressure. (Congress president Mallikarjun) Kharge ji said all those who are corrupt are going to the BJP, there is a reason for that because Narendra Modi wants that political finance is in their hands," Gandhi said. The Congress's bank accounts were frozen and it was left with its original path which was to go to the people, he said.

The party's manifesto is not prepared by the Congress but by the people of India and "we have just written it down", he said, adding that the document is just the "voice of India".

## EC identifies 266 LS seats with lower voter turnout; says 'one size fits all' approach won't work

NEW DELHI, April 5: The Election Commission on Friday said it has identified 266 parliamentary constituencies, including 215 in rural areas, with low voter turnout and is planning targeted intervention to enhance voting percentage in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Municipal commissioners from major cities and select district election officers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh discussed enhancing voter engagement and participation in identified urban and rural Lok Sabha seats.

At its conference on low voter turnout here, the EC said 266 parliamentary constituencies -- 215 rural and 51 urban -- with low voter turnout have been identified.

Eleven states and Union territories -- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Telangana, Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir and Jharkhand -- had a voter turnout lower than the national average of 67.40 per cent in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing the participants, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar stressed that "one size fits all" approach will not work and different strategies have to be worked out for different areas and segments. Polling for the seven-phased Lok Sabha polls begins on April 19.

Kumar emphasised on a three-pronged strategy of providing facilitation at polling stations, such as queue management, sheltered parking in congested



areas; targeted outreach and communication; and involvement of critical stakeholders including RWAs, local icons and youth influencers to persuade people to come to polling stations on voting day.

He told officials to prepare a booth-wise action plan for enhanced participation and behaviour change.

He asked the participants to prepare different strategies for urban and rural areas and plan interventions accordingly for different target audiences.

Discussions were centred on critical issues such as optimising queue management at polling stations and facilitating voting in high-rise buildings.

Urban specific hurdles to increased voter turnout were identified and targeted

city-specific interventions were planned. The officers were encouraged to develop tailored, region-specific outreach programs that resonate with the unique needs and demographics of their constituencies.

The Commission recalled that nearly 29.7 crore eligible voters did not vote in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections "underscoring the scale of the problem which calls for proactive measures".

In the last Lok Sabha elections, of the 50 seats with the lowest voter turnout, 17 were in metropolitan or major cities.

It said recent elections across various states have highlighted trends of urban apathy towards the electoral process, warranting targeted interventions and collaborative endeavours. (PTI)

## Located around 120 km from the state capital Lucknow, Gonda has 25.30 lakh registered voters

# In UP's Gonda, transgenders to help spread poll awareness

NOIDA, April 5: In a novel experiment, the Gonda administration in Uttar Pradesh would be engaging the transgender community to encourage people of the district, that has registered a low polling percentage in the past, to cast their vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

Located around 120 km from the state capital Lucknow, Gonda has 25.30 lakh registered voters and among those 13.50 lakh are males, 11.82 lakh females and 94 from the third gender. It goes to polls on May 20 in the fifth phase of the general elections.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the constituency had 17.70 lakh electors and recorded a voter turnout of 52.2 per cent, much below the state's average of 59.21 per cent. In 2014, it had 17.10 lakh electors and a 51.08 per cent voter turnout, which also was lower than the state's average of 58.44 per cent. In 2009, Gonda had 13.41 lakh electors and a voter turnout of 45.11 per cent.

To increase voter turnout in 2024, District Magistrate Neha Sharma on March 31 held a meeting with members of the transgender community. In addition to 22 representatives of the community, senior officers of the district, including those from the police, par-



ticipated in the meeting.

Buoyed by the idea, the transgenders are busy composing catchy songs while looking forward to holding street plays in the hopes of leveraging the opportunity to raise awareness about elections and also about their community, which has remained marginalised for long.

"This is a very good initiative by the administration to engage the community (transgenders). The administration wants more voter turnout on the day of voting in the district. If we support the adminis-

tration, then it will also come for our help when needed. I hope the initiative helps our community join the mainstream." Amruta Soni, 40, who led a group of transgenders at the meeting, told PTI.

"We will help the administration with raising awareness about elections and voting. During the process, we would interact with government officials too and can directly share with them inputs concerning our community."

"So the idea is for awareness about elections and voting and also about the community's issues among the officials and within the society," said Soni, who is a government officer attached to the state prison department.

When asked about the initiative, Gonda's Chief Development Officer M Arunmozhi said it is part of the administration's wider plan to reach out to transgenders, first-time voters, and persons with disabilities.

"Transgenders in Gonda are concentrated in different pockets and not in a single area. It is an inclusive approach. We started talking to them about the initiative and also about them, like what is their economic status, their health issues and their demands from the government so that in future we can involve them in policy-making also," Arunmozhi told PTI.

She said this is the first time that the district administration, led by Sharma, has reached out to transgenders for such an initiative.

Another transgender, Maahi, who works in the Katra Bazaar of Gonda, said the initiative has got her excited but also concerned about how the administration would approach the awareness programme.

"More efforts are required on the part of the authorities as well as the public to increase the voter turnout," the 26-year-old Maahi

## EC asks Delhi minister Atishi for facts to back her statement on BJP's 'poaching' bid

NEW DELHI, April 5: The Election Commission on Friday issued a show-cause notice to Delhi minister and AAP leader Atishi, asking her to back with facts her statement that the BJP approached her to join the party.

The BJP moved the poll commission a day back against Atishi's "false statement" that the party had reached out to her through someone close and asked her to join it.

The Election Commission notice to Atishi read, "...you are a minister in the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi and leader of a national party. The electors tend to believe whatever is being said from public forum by their leaders and in that sense the statements made by them affect the campaign discourse."

The poll panel said it expects that there must be a "factual foundation" to the statements made by the AAP leader. "...when the veracity of the statements made by you is contested then you must be able to back your statements by a factual basis," it added.

On April 2, the AAP leader claimed that the BJP approached her to either join the party or be prepared to be nabbed by the Enforcement Directorate within a month.

"I was approached by the BJP through a person very close to me who asked me to join the BJP to save and enhance my political career or I will be arrested within a month," she said at a press conference.

In its notice to the AAP leader, the poll authority told her that the matter was being examined in light of the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct and relevant electoral laws. The AAP leader has been asked to respond by Monday noon.

"Now, therefore, you are hereby called upon to furnish your para-wise response to the matter..." the EC notice added. (PTI)

told PTI.

Soni said the community members have requested the district administration to provide them with material for information, communication and education (ICE) related to the subject.

"Once we get it, we'll get on the job. We can perform 'nukkad natak', go around singing songs to raise awareness about the significance of voting during elections," Soni said.

"However, we have made this clear that we are not going to engage in publicity for any political party during the awareness campaign. We were asked by some people that political parties or candidates may also approach us for work, but we made it clear that is not going to happen," Soni added.

Gonda's Superintendent of Police Vineet Jaiswal, who also attended the administration's meeting with the transgenders on election awareness, said the interaction also brought to the fore several issues that the community is grappling with, be it health, or government schemes like housing.

"There is more sensitisation required at various levels to bring the community into the mainstream of development," Jaiswal told PTI. (PTI)

# SC stays Allahabad HC order scrapping Madarsa Education Act, says HC misconstrued provisions of law

*'If the concern was to ensure that the students of Madarsas receive quality education, the remedy would not lie in striking down the Madarsa Act'*

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** In a breather to about 17 lakh madarsa students, the Supreme Court on Friday stayed an order of the Allahabad High Court that scrapped the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004 calling it "unconstitutional" and violative of the principle of secularism.

Observing that the issues raised in the petitions merit closer reflection, a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud issued notices to the Centre, the Uttar Pradesh government and others on the pleas against the high court order.

"The object and purpose of Madarsa board is regulatory in nature and the Allahabad HC is not prima facie correct that establishment of board will breach secularism," the bench, also comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said.

The top court said the high court "prima facie" misconstrued the provisions of the Madarsa Act, which does not provide for any religious instruction.

"The finding of the high court that the very establishment of the board would violate secularism appears to conflate Madarsa education with the



regulatory powers of the board.

"If the concern was to ensure that the students of Madarsas receive quality education, the remedy would not lie in striking down the Madarsa Act but in issuing suitable directions to ensure that the students are not deprived of quality education," the bench said.

The apex court said the high court, while striking down the provisions of the Madarsa Act, directed

relocation of the students.

"This would affect 17 lakh students...we are of the view that direction of relocation of students to other schools was not warranted," it said.

"State shall file counter on or before June 30, 2024. SLP be listed for final disposal in 2nd week of June 2024. The impugned order and judgement of the high court dated March 22, 2024, shall remain stayed," the bench ordered.

At the outset, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the Managers Association Madaris, a body of Madarsas, submitted that the Madarsa regime, which had existed for 120 years, has now been disrupted suddenly, impacting 17 lakh students and 10,000 teachers.

Termining the reasons given by the high court as "astonishing", Singhvi said it did not examine the locus standi of the petitioner who challenged the Act.

Refuting the high court's contention that modern subjects were not taught in Madarsas, Singhvi submitted that Maths, Science, Hindi, English and other subjects were taught there. He said it was wrong to assume that only religious education was imparted at Madarsas.

"We also have very famous Gurukuls in Haridwar and Rishikesh which are doing very good work. My father had a degree from there. Do you shut them down saying they are places of religious instruction?"

"A regime is there uninterrupted for 120 years. 17 lakh students and 10,000 teachers cannot be absorbed with the academic year ending as it would create chaos," Singhvi said.

Additional Solicitor General K M Nataraj, appearing for Uttar Pradesh, submitted that the state government defended the Act but has accepted the high court's judgement which struck down the law.

"When the state accepts the judgement, the state cannot be burdened to bear the expenses of the legislation now. The State is competent to repeal the legislation as well. If the matter requires consideration, then I am not coming in the way," Nataraj said, adding that no Madarsa is being shut down by the government.

Nataraj said the UP government bears a financial burden of ₹ 1,096 crore every year in aid to Madarsas. Attorney General K Venkataramani said the high court's judgment does not have the impact of paralysing the Madarsas and the only consequence would be that there won't be any State aid for them.

"In the facts presented before the High Court, I could not persuade myself to say that the High Court order was incorrect. We are on the entanglement of religion. Any entanglement of religion is the question here," he added.

The top court has posted the petitions for hearing in the second week of July.

The high court had on March 22 declared the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004, "unconstitutional" and violative of the principle of secularism, and asked the state government to accommodate students in the formal schooling system.

The high court had declared the law ultra vires on a writ petition filed by advocate Anshuman Singh Rathore.

It had said the state has "no power to create a board for religious education or to establish a board for school education only for a particular religion and philosophy associated with it."

"We hold that the Madarsa Act, 2004, is violative of the principle of secularism, which is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution of India," the high court had said.

The petitioner had challenged the constitutionality of the UP Madarsa Board as well as objected to the management of Madarsas by the Minority Welfare Department instead of the education department. (PTI)

## NCERT tweaks: Babri Masjid, Gujarat riots, Hindutva dropped

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** Dropping references to the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the killing of Muslims in Gujarat riots and Hindutva, and tweaking the reference to Manipur's merger with India are among the latest set of revisions made public by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in its textbooks.

While NCERT did not comment on the topics being dropped, officials said the tweaks are part of the routine updation and are not linked to the development of new books as per the New Curriculum Framework (NCF). The changes have been made in Political Science textbooks of classes 11 and 12, besides others. According to a document detailing the changes prepared by the curriculum drafting committee of the NCERT, the references to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement have been tweaked "as per latest development in politics".

Chapter 8 on Secularism in class 11 textbook earlier said, "More than 1,000 persons, mostly Muslims, were massacred during the post Godhra riots in Gujarat in 2002." It has been changed to "more than 1,000 persons were killed during the post Godhra riots in Gujarat in 2002". The NCERT's rationale behind the change is "in any riots people across communities suffer. It cannot be just one community".

On Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the earlier textbook stated "India claims that this area is under illegal occupation. Pakistan describes this area as Azad Pakistan". The changed version says, "However, it is the Indian territory which is under illegal occupation of Pakistan and called as Pakistan occupied Jammu and Kashmir (POJK)".

The NCERT's rationale behind the alteration is that the "change that has been introduced is in complete concurrence with the latest position of the Govt of India in regard to Jammu and Kashmir".

On Manipur, the earlier textbook stated, "The Government of India succeeded in pressurising the Maharaja into signing a Merger Agreement in September 1949, without consulting the popularly elected Legislative Assembly of Manipur. This caused a lot of anger and resentment in Manipur, the repercussions of which are still being felt." The changed version says, "The Government of India succeeded in persuading the Maharaja into signing a Merger Agreement in September 1949."

In chapter 8, Recent Developments in Indian Politics, references to the "Ayodhya demolition" has been dropped.

"What is the legacy of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the Ayodhya demolition for the nature of political mobilisation?" has been changed to "What is the legacy of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement?". In the same chapter, references to the Babri Masjid and the politics of Hindutva were dropped. The earlier paragraph read: "Fourth, a number of events culminated in the demolition of the disputed structure at Ayodhya (known as Babri Masjid) in December 1992. This event symbolised and triggered various changes in the politics of the country and intensified debates about the nature of Indian nationalism and secularism. These developments are associated with the rise of the BJP and the politics of 'Hindutva'." (PTI)

## One dead, one injured in blast in Kerala's Kannur

**KANNUR (KER), April 5:** A blast that claimed the life of one person and seriously injured another near Panur in this north Kerala district on Friday stirred up political waters in the state with both the Congress and the BJP blaming the CPI(M) for it, while the Left party denied any involvement in the incident.

The opposition Congress alleged that the blast, which occurred around 1 am according to the police, happened during the manufacturing of country-made bombs by some CPI(M) supporters.

The BJP accused the Left party of trying to create terror by using bombs.

The ruling CPI(M), meanwhile, denied the allegations and said that the two persons involved in the incident were also accused of attacking workers of the Left party, and therefore they were no longer considered as part of the political organisation.

The CPI(M)'s Panoor area committee, in a statement, also said that while the Left party has been trying to maintain peace, its political opponents are deliberately spreading "propaganda" that the injured were party workers to mislead the people.

Sherin, a resident of Kaivelikkal, succumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Kozhikode. The other injured person, Vineesh, lost one palm and is in critical condition, according to the police.

Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly V D Satheesan blamed the CPI(M) for the incident and alleged that the Left party was using its workers to

manufacture country-made bombs and worsening the law-and-order situation during the elections.

Senior BJP leader and the party's Kerala in-charge Prakash Javadekar claimed that CPI(M) is taking refuge in terror as it is losing support among the people.

He also attacked the Congress over the support offered to it by the SDPI and said it was a grim situation before the elections on April 26 in the state.

"Both the LDF and UDF are taking the help of terror outfits, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will approach the Election Commission to take appropriate measures and more vigilance," Javadekar said in a statement.

He claimed that both the Congress and CPI(M) are "upset" with the increase in support at the ground level for the BJP.

Satheesan, in his statement, also questioned whether Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan was indeed in charge of the Home Department as a similar incident had occurred in Thiruvananthapuram just two days ago. On Wednesday, two teenagers were seriously injured when a country-made bomb they were allegedly making exploded in a vacant land at Horizon Park near Mannanthala in Thiruvananthapuram.

One of them lost both his palms, and the other suffered partial damage to one palm. Two others who were with them sustained minor injuries.

Police revealed that all four teenagers were between 17 and 18 years old and had been involved in various criminal cases. (PTI)

## Indian Coast Guard rescues 27 Bangladeshi fishermen

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** The Indian Coast Guard has rescued 27 Bangladeshi fishermen whose fishing boat had drifted inside Indian waters after its steering gear suffered a breakdown rendering them stranded at sea, officials on Friday said.

The swift rescue operation took place on Thursday, they said.

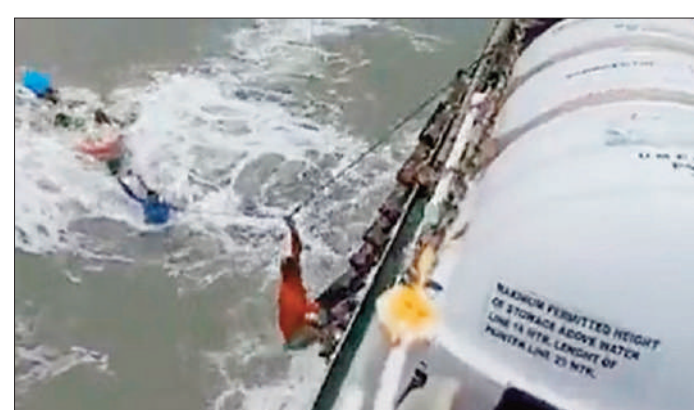
"At about 1130 hrs on April 4, Indian Coast Guard Ship 'Amogh' during patrol at Indo-Bangladesh International Maritime Border Line (IMBL) sighted a Bangladeshi fishing boat (BFB) 'Sagar II' adrift inside Indian waters," the ICG said in a statement.

The ICG ship launched a boarding team to investigate.

During investigation it was found that the boat had a "steering gear breakdown for the last two days and had been adrift since then which led to the boat drifting inside Indian waters", it said.

The BFB had "27 crew/fishermen onboard".

The Indian Coast Guard's technical team tried to identify and rectify the defect, but it was observed that the rudder of the boat was "com-



pletely damaged" and could not be repaired at sea.

"As the sea state and weather conditions were conducive, it was decided that the distressed boat will be towed to the Indo-Bangladesh IMBL and handed over to another Bangladeshi fishing boat operating across IMBL or to Bangladesh Coast Guard Ship in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Indian Coast Guard and Bangladesh Coast Guard," the statement said.

In the meantime, the Indian Coast

Guard regional headquarters at Kolkata established communication with Bangladesh Coast Guard and informed them about the incident and plan of action, officials said.

Bangladesh Coast Guard Ship (BCGS) "Kamaruzzaman" was deployed by BCG for towing of BFB.

"BCG ship 'Kamaruzzaman' arrived near the IMBL at about 1845 hrs on April 4. ICGS 'Amogh' handed over the 27 Bangladeshi fishermen along with their boat to BCG ship 'Kamaruzzaman'," the statement said. (PTI)

## RRTS viaduct in Delhi section likely to be completed by April-end

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) on Friday said the construction of the Regional Rapid Transit System viaduct in the Delhi section is likely to be completed by April-end. Track-laying activities, along with electric traction and signalling work, are underway in the New Ashok Nagar-Sahibabad section, officials said here.

The Delhi section is anticipated to be completed by the end of this year, paving the way for trial runs between Delhi and Sahibabad, they said. The NCRTC officials said the construction of the RRTS viaduct in the Delhi section was nearing completion.

"Less than 500 metres of the viaduct in the Delhi section is now left for construction, which is

scheduled for completion by the end of this month. The Delhi section is about 14 kilometres long which consists of about nine kilometres of elevated section and five km of underground section," an official said.

Construction of more than eight kilometres of viaduct has already been completed in addition to the entire underground section of about five kilometres. The three mainline RRTS stations of Sarai Kale Khan, New Ashok Nagar and Anand Vihar (underground) have already taken shape and finishing works are currently in progress, the officials said.

Once the Delhi section is complete, movement of passengers can be established from Sarai Kale Khan to the currently operational Sahibabad-Modi Nagar North sec-

tion and beyond, they added.

"The RRTS network consists of a five-km-long underground section in Delhi. To connect the Anand Vihar underground station with the New Ashok Nagar RRTS station in the Delhi direction and Sahibabad RRTS station in the Ghaziabad direction, four tunnels have been meticulously constructed.

"The diameter of the RRTS tunnels is 6.5 metres which is highly optimised as compared to global benchmarks of tunnels for a similar design speed of 180 kmph with wider and higher rolling stock," the official stated.

Multi-modal integration is one of the primary focus areas of RRTS implementation. It aligns with the Prime Minister's Gatishakti National Master Plan

for multi-modal connectivity, they said.

By facilitating seamless connectivity between various modes of transportation, such as bus stands, airports, metro stations, and railway stations, the RRTS aims to provide convenient and hassle-free travel experiences, along with enhancing last-mile connectivity for passengers within the NCR. This integration strategy is being implemented across the 82-kilometer-long Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor wherever feasible, they stated.

The Sarai Kale Khan station is designed for seamless integration with adjacent transport modes, such as Veer Haqiqat Rai ISBT, Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway Station, and Delhi Metro Pink Line, they said. (PTI)

## PETA seeks action against MLA Rohit Pawar for dangling crab at presser

**MUMBAI, April 5:** Animal rights organisation PETA has written to poll authorities and Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Sharad Pawar over MLA Rohit Pawar dangling a crab during a recent press conference and sought action against him. The People for Ethical Treatment of Animals said the act violated the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, the Maharashtra Model Code of Conduct, an order issued by Chief Electoral Officer on March 24, 2014 prohibiting the use of animals for election campaigning as well as Election Commission directives.

In the letter to Pawar and District Election Officer Minal Kalaskar, PETA India Advocacy Associate Shaurya Agrawal said, "It is evident from the video that Shri (Rohit) Pawar's use of the crab was pre-planned. For a media stunt, unnecessary pain and suffering were caused to the animal." Research shows crabs are intelligent individuals who can experience pain, and they also explore their surroundings, have good memories, and communicate with each other, Agrawal said.

Following work by PETA India, which highlighted that animals are beaten and terrorised while being used for poll campaigns and rallies, the ECI had prohibited the use of animals for political campaigns, the PETA statement said. In a 2013 notification, the State Election Commission of Maharashtra prohibited the use of donkeys, bulls, elephants and cows during election campaigns and instructed authorities to take strict action against violators, the statement added. (PTI)

## Odisha: Gahirmatha beach bustling as olive ridley turtles return for mass nesting



**KENDRAPARA, April 5:** The Gahirmatha beach in Odisha's Kendrapara district was bustling as the olive ridley turtles returned for annual mass nesting.

Last year, 5.12 lakh turtles had come to Gahirmatha for nesting, between March 8 and 13. This time, the phenomenon was delayed by a month, likely due to a rough sea and a spell of unseasonal rains, said Divisional Forest Officer Sudrashan Gopinath Yadav. "However, it is heartening to note that turtles have finally come to lay eggs at the tranquil beach in the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary," he said.

The natural phenomenon is expected to last for at least a week, he added.

The topography of the beach, free from erosion, is conducive for the turtles to nest, Yadav said.

The beach is a protected area under

the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which conducts missile tests from the neighbouring Wheeler Island. As a result, people are not allowed entry here, except forest guards who are the lone witness to the rare sight of thousands of turtles crawling on the beach making a cacophony.

"The presence of forest personnel on the nesting ground did not bother the turtles as they maintained a distance. Emphasis is on to provide privacy to the turtles during the egg-laying process," said another official.

It's only the female turtles that invade the nesting beaches, usually in the dead of the night, to lay eggs, a phenomenon described as 'arribada'.

"After laying eggs, the turtles leave the nesting ground to stride into the deep seawater. Hatchlings emerge from these eggs after 45-60 days. It is a rare natural phenomenon in which babies grow without their mother," said an official.

Each olive ridley turtle lays about 120-150 eggs, but not all remain intact as predators devour some, he said.

"Besides, eggs are also washed away by sea waves during high tide," he added. (PTI)

## Large-scale climatic phenomena conducive for monsoon: IMD chief Mohapatra

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** As summer scorches large parts of the country, weather scientists have picked up early signs of a favourable monsoon season this year in fading El Nino conditions and lesser snow cover over Eurasia. In an interview with PTI, India Meteorological Department Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said large-scale climatic phenomena were conducive for the southwest monsoon, which is crucial for the largely rain-fed Indian economy.

"This year El Nino is fading. By the beginning of June, it may become a neutral condition," Mohapatra said, referring to the warming of the central Pacific Ocean which is considered one of the factors to impact the southwest monsoon.

He said the second half of the July-September monsoon season may witness La Nina conditions, which refer to the cooling of the central Pacific Ocean.

"La Nina is good for the Indian monsoon. And neutral conditions are good. However, El Nino is not good. In 60 per cent of years, El Nino has had a negative impact on



the Indian monsoon, but last year, it did not have a negative impact,"

Mohapatra said. "This year also the snow cover

is less. That is another positive factor. So large-scale processes are

conductive for monsoon," he said.

The southwest monsoon delivers about 70 per cent of India's annual rainfall, critical for the agriculture sector that accounts for about 14 per cent of the GDP and employs more than half of its 1.4 billion population.

India received "below-average" cumulative rainfall of 820 mm compared to the long-period average of 868.6 mm in the 2023 monsoon season, which was attributed to a strengthening El Nino.

The IMD is set to issue the southwest monsoon forecast later this month.

The IMD considers three large-scale climatic phenomena for forecasting monsoon season rainfall.

The first is the El Nino, the second is the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) which occurs due to differential warming of the western and eastern sides of the equatorial Indian Ocean and the third is the snow cover over the northern Himalayas and the Eurasian landmass, which also has an impact on the Indian monsoon through the differential heating of the landmass. (PTI)

# Bhojpuri cinema needs filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Prakash Jha: Manoj Tiwari

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** Bhojpuri cinema needs filmmakers with sensibilities like Satyajit Ray and Prakash Jha to move forward with changing times, says actor-BJP MP Manoj Tiwari.

In an interaction with PTI editors at the news agency's headquarters here, the former Bhojpuri star and singer said despite massive popularity, the cinema of the region is yet to go national.

"We need to take steps to take Bhojpuri cinema forward. And for that, we also need directors like, say, a Prakash Jha, a Satyajit Ray sahab. We have a lot of viewers, but we are yet to reach that level," said Tiwari, who has starred in over 100 films including "Sasura Bada Paisawala", "Daroga Babu I Love You", and "Bandhan Toote Na".

Ray, a cinema legend, put Bengali culture and ethos on global map with classics such as "Pathar Panchali", "Aparajito" "Apar Sansar" and "Charulata", while Jha has tried to capture the socio-political issues of Bihar through movies like "Gangajal", "Aparaharan" and "Rajneeti".

According to Tiwari, the day filmmakers from the Bhojpuri belt start pitching stories such as "Mirzapur" and "Maharani" for the big screen, it will be in a position to compete with south cinema, which is currently having its moment in the sun.

"Time will come (for Bhojpuri cinema). Web series like 'Mirzapur' or 'Maharani', these stories belong to our region, to Bhojpuri cinema. Cinema is not picking up that kind of content, but the day films start backing such stories, we (Bhojpuri cinema) will start competing with the south film industry."

The Bhojpuri film industry produces around 60-70 films annually, he said, adding the theatrical exhibition industry is not in a good condition today.

When I was doing films, there were times when a movie, which was mounted on a budget of Rs 1.5 crore, fetched around Rs 30-35 crore at the box office. My first ever film ('Sasura Bada Paisawala') earned Rs 56 crore. Today, people aren't coming to watch films in theatres. Another reason for this could be that even owners aren't interested in the theatre business. But, Bhojpuri cinema continues to be a topic of discussion around the world.

I have done 100 films as a hero, but the budget of none of my films is over Rs 1.5 crore. (My films have) earned Rs 56 crore as well as Rs 3 crore in profit as an average of three films. None of my producers were left on the streets. They, in fact, ended up living in palaces," said Tiwari, who is contesting from North East Delhi for a third term in the Lok Sabha.

The MP said Bhojpuri songs tend to clock millions of views online courtesy popular voices like Ritesh Pandey ("Piyawa Se Pahile") and Pawan Singh ("Jai Chhathi Maiya").

The online views of songs by Bhojpuri singers like Ritesh Pandey run into thousands of millions. Then, there's Pawan Singh, who remains in the top seven-eight (most listened to singers) in the country," said Tiwari, who has sung over 200 Bhojpuri songs including "Rinkiya Ke Papa" and "Jiya Tu Bihar Ke Lala" from "Gangs of Wasseypur". (PTI)



## Kunal Kemmu's 'Madgaon Express' earns ₹ 20 crore in two weeks



**MUMBAI, April 5:** Actor Kunal Kemmu's directorial debut "Madgaon Express" has amassed Rs 20 crore at the domestic box office, the makers said on Friday. The comedy, produced by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment, was released in theatres countrywide on March 22. Upon its debut, "Madgaon Express" had received positive reviews and earned Rs 7.16 crore in its opening weekend. "The film has paved a solid journey at the box office. After closing the first week on a fantastic note, it held excellent in week two, and after making Rs 71 lakh on the second Monday, it went on to collect Rs 65 lakh on Tuesday, Rs 62 lakh on Wednesday, and Rs 60 lakh on Thursday, closing the two weeks total with impressive numbers of 20.33 crores," the makers said in a press note. "Madgaon Express" follows the journey of three childhood friends — played by Pratik Gandhi, Divyendu and Avinash Tiwary — who embark on a trip to Goa that goes wrong. Kemmu, whose acting credits include "Kalyug", "Go Goa Gone" and "Lootcase", has also penned the story of "Madgaon Express". The movie features Nora Fatehi, Upendra Limaye and Chhaya Kadam as well. (PTI)

## Andrew Garfield, Cynthia Erivo star in Audible adaptation of George Orwell's '1984'

**MUMBAI, April 5:** British stars Andrew Garfield and Cynthia Erivo are part of Audible's adaptation of renowned author George Orwell's dystopian masterpiece "1984".

The three actors, along with popular stars Andrew Scott and Tom Hardy have lent their voices for the new take, which premiered on Audible's platform on Thursday. The company specialises in producing audio entertainment content.

The novel, which was published in 1949, is set in Airstrip One (formerly known as Great Britain), a province of the superstate Oceania in a world of perpetual war, omnipresent government surveillance, and public manipulation.

The province is dictated by a political system euphemistically named English Socialism (or Ing-soc in the government's invented language, Newspeak) under the control of a privileged Inner Party elite that persecutes individualism and independent thinking as 'thought crimes'.

Garfield leads the adaptation as the protagonist Winston, with Erivo as Winston's lover Julia, Scott as the alluring, mysterious and dangerous O'Brien, and Hardy as the infamous Big Brother.

Garfield, best known for movies such as "Hacksaw Ridge", "Angels in America", "Under the Silver Lake" and "99 Homes", said he is grateful to have got the opportunity to be playing Winston in "1984". "I'm very grateful to Audible to be a part of this new incarnation of Orwell's radical, political classic, 1984. A classic that, disappointingly,

humanity seems to need to be constantly engaged with. To keep ourselves awake and remembering that we each have a soul, and that that soul is full of beauty and value.

"And how vital it is for each of us to resist the forces that wish to subdue and strangle that collective soul. The cast and crew is clearly the best of the best of British and Irish talent. It was truly a joy to tell this story for an audience hungry for their own liberation," the Oscar-nominated actor said in a statement.

The audio version is directed by BAFTA award-winning Destiny Ekaragha and penned by Olivier Award-nominated writer Joe White.

According to Audible, the show stays faithful to the original text, leaning into the horror of the dystopian setting, whilst going deeper into Winston and Julia's love story.

In a world where love and sex are forbidden, Winston and Julia are the last lovers on earth, the official synopsis read.

"1984" cast also includes Romesh Ranganathan as Parsons, Natalia Demetriou as Mrs Parsons, Chukwudi Iwuji as Charrington, Francesca Mills as Syme, Katie Leung as Ling, and Alex Lawther as Ampleforth, among others.

The Audible Original adaptation has been officially authorised and endorsed by the Erivo Estate.

Matthew Bellamy and Ilan Eshkeri serve as co-creators of the soundtrack of "1984". (PTI)

## TV doesn't teach how to deal with success: Actor Eijaz Khan

**MUMBAI, April 5:** Eijaz Khan, one of the most successful actors in Indian television, says he was unprepared for the overnight fame that followed hit show "Kkavyanjali".

The 48-year-old actor started his acting career with small roles in movies such as director Govind Nihalani's "Thakshak", "Maine Dil Tujhko Diya" alongside Sanjay Dutt and Sohail Khan, and Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan-starrer "Kuch Naa Kaho".

In early 2000s, Khan played lead roles on TV shows like "Kkavyanjali", "Kyaa Hoga Nimmo Kaa" and then there was no looking back for him.

"I've seen TV actors throw more tantrums than the biggest film actors. I'm not looking down on anyone but I've seen it on the sets that I've worked on. On TV, no one teaches you how to deal with success, all of us are young. I thought I'm educated, and I would be able to handle it," Eijaz, who is playing a lead role in the upcoming OTT series, "Adrishyam - The Invisible Heroes", told PTI in an interview.

"I had a chip on my shoulder. I used to think, 'without me the world would not turn'. I felt, 'I've worked for long hours, have sacrificed so much, I deserve it all'," he said, recalling his early fame on

the small screen.

Over the years, Eijaz said he realised top actors are humble and collaborative.

"Then you think, 'Who are you to throw tantrums?', it shows in work," he said, sharing how he was impressed with Shah Rukh Khan's humility on the sets of "Jawan".

"Shah Rukh sir finishes the shot, changes (clothes), comes back, hugs, and greets everyone on set and makes them feel special, everyone goes back with a beaming smile on their face. He does it because he can, because God has given him that 'khudai' that he can bring a smile on someone's face. He does this every day, even when he has pain in his knees, or is tired, or whatever may be the time, 4:00 or 5:00 am, he will still do it," the actor recalled.

Eijaz, who has also played prominent roles in "Tanu Weds Manu" franchise, said he is receiving offers for negative roles post "Jawan".

"I'm doing another film. I haven't started work on it yet, we are in the process of finalizing things. However, the kind of work I expected to come my way after "Jawan", that didn't happen, I don't know why," he said.

Television stars have limited opportunities in movies but there are

some actors from the small screen, who have got their due, he said.

"But there's a glass ceiling, and you are told, 'Don't do TV for two-three years, then we will work' or directors have said, 'We will not work with actors who have done 'Bigg Boss' because they are over exposed or 'We are not taking TV but OTT actors.'"

"So, these things happen. However, if you are right for the role, people will cast you, and then you have to keep proving yourself," the actor, who appeared as a contestant on "Bigg Boss 14", said.

"Adrishyam - The Invisible Heroes" revolves around two undercover agents Ravi Verma (Eijaz) and Parvathy Sehgal, essayed by popular TV actor Divyanka Tripathi.

The actor said it is an honour to portray real-life heroes.

"We had the fortune of meeting Prabhakar Alok ji (former intelligence officer), who is our mentor on the show. We were always careful that we do not portray our intelligence agency people in the wrong light," Eijaz said.

"Adrishyam - The Invisible Heroes" is directed by Anshuman Kishore Singh, who has previously helmed TV shows like "Left Right Left". It will premiere on SonyLIV on April 11. (PTI)



# India ready for Australia challenge ahead of Paris Olympics



**PERTH (AUSTRALIA), April 5:** The in-form Indian men's hockey team will look to pass the "litmus test" that the formidable Australian side will pose at home when the two face off in a five-match Test series beginning here on Saturday.

The series offers India a chance to gauge their strengths and capabilities ahead of the Paris Olympics.

"This series serves as a litmus test for our team's preparedness ahead of the Paris Olympics. We aim to fine-tune our strategies and identify areas for improvement to ensure we are in peak form for the mega event.

"Our focus will be on executing our game plan effectively and adapting to the challenges posed by the Australian side," chief coach Craig Fulton said.

The away assignment offers the ideal chance for India to break their decade-long dry spell against Australia and secure a Test series win.

Notably, India won the last away Test series against Australia back in 2014.

Fresh from their impressive performances in the FIH Pro League in February, the Indian squad, under the leadership of

Harmanpreet Singh, is approaching this assignment with confidence.

India's exceptional abilities and unwavering determination were evident as they clinched victories in three out of four matches in Bhubaneswar (within regulation time) and remained unbeaten in Rourkela (also within regulation time). However, they had lost both

their matches against Australia.

With the two sides drawn in the same group at the Olympics, the Test series provides the perfect platform for both to gauge each other's strengths and weaknesses before the ultimate showdown in Paris Games.

"We are geared up for the challenge that lies ahead. Every match is an opportunity for us to showcase our skills and make our nation proud. We are aware of the tough competition Australia presents, but we are confident in our abilities and our preparations," captain Harmanpreet said.

"As a team, we are united and determined to give our best on the field. Our goal is to not only perform well in this series but also to learn and grow as a unit, laying a strong foundation for our campaign in the Paris Olympics."

India and Australia have clashed on the hockey field a total of 43 times since 2013, according to data from the FIH Data Hub.

Among these match-ups, Australia have emerged victorious 28 times, while India have celebrated triumph in eight games. Additionally, seven matches have concluded in a draw.

With India ranked fourth and Australia fifth in the current world rankings, the stage is set for a gripping battle between two hockey powerhouses.

Match starts 2PM IST. (PTI)

## Candidates Chess: Praggnanandhaa holds Firouza; Gukesh draws with Gujrathi

**TORONTO, April 5:** Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa overcame some tense moments before settling for a draw against France's Firouza Alireza while D Gukesh could do little against compatriot Vaidit Gujrathi and shared the spoils in the first round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

It was a quiet start as all four games in the men's section ended in draws while in the women's event Zhongyi Tan drew the first blood at the expense of compatriot Tingjie Lei with the remaining three games ending in draws.

India's R Vaishali played out a draw against countrymate Koneru Humpy, Russians Aleksandra Goryachkina and Kateryna Lagno signed peace while the lowest ranked and only non-Grandmaster Nurgul Salimova of Bulgaria had a good start holding Anna Muzychuk to a draw.

In the men's section the all-American battle between Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura also ended in a draw while Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan started off with an easy draw as white against Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia.

The opening surprises hold a key point in everyone's preparation for a tournament like the Candidates and the opener was not devoid of it. Praggnanandhaa sprang the first one going for the open Ruy Lopez as black against Alireza.

The Frenchman went for the complications he is pretty much known for right from the early middle game. Praggnanandhaa took his chances going for a king side attack after puncturing white's pawn structure.

However as it turned out, the open centre gave enough counterplay and the game took a sharp turn when Alireza went for a pawn sacrifice on move 29 and followed it up with a knight sacrifice on the next turn.

Praggnanandhaa had to find

the only possible defense which the Indian did in quick time. The game was drawn vide repetition on move 39.

Another game to end through repetition of moves was between Gukesh and Gujrathi.

Gukesh was up against the Tarrasch defense which does not find many takers at the highest level. The choice by Gujrathi had the right effect as Gukesh decided not to test his opponent in the main lines and his sedate approach only yielded a stable position. Gujrathi kept looking for his chances in a balanced position and came up with a spectacular Bishop sacrifice on the 17th move. Gukesh immediately figured that accepting the Bishop would be fatal and went for a forced repetition.

"I had not seen the Bishop sacrifice coming," Gukesh said after the game.

The Indian had seen a decent idea for black in the same position and was content with the outcome. Gujrathi was in a jovial mood in the post-game chat. "I found this idea in about 5-10 minutes and I spent the next 25 minutes trying to resist playing it," he said indicating that he was sure he had a draw as happened in the game.

Gujrathi added that Surya Shekhar Ganguly and Daniel Vocaturo (Italy) have been working with him and are both present here to help.

For Gukesh, it is Gregorz Gajewsky of Poland who is now his second for a long time.

"There are some others in the team but I would like to reveal them," said Gukesh.

In the women's section, Vaishali was quite up to the task in holding off Humpy. The Italian opening by Vaishali gave an easy game to the latter and there wasn't much action as the players exchanged pieces quickly.

The minor piece endgame did not offer any chances and the draw was a just result after 41 moves. (PTI)

## Shot put legend Valerie Adams to grace World 10K in Bengaluru as 'ambassador'

**BENGALURU, April 5:** Legendary New Zealand shot putter Valerie Adams was on Friday named the 'International Event Ambassador' for the 16th TCS World 10K Bengaluru to be held on April 28. Adams had won shot put gold in the 2008 and 2012 Olympics, besides bagging a silver (2016) and bronze (2021) before retiring. "The increasing enthusiasm for running in India is both motivating and inspiring," stated Adams, a four-time consecutive world champion,

in a press release. "I am excited to witness the boundless energy and passion that participants will bring to the race."

Since retiring from competitive athletics, the 39-year-old has passionately taken on the role of a spokesperson for women in sports.

Currently, she holds the office of Chair of the World Athletes Commission, where she continues to champion the rights and welfare of athletes globally.

Adams is also closely involved in the

Paralympic sphere, collaborating with her sister, Lisa and other athletes, providing support and guidance.

"As one of the most accomplished athletes in the world, Valerie embodies determination, perseverance, and excellence," said Vivek Singh, Jt MD, Procam International.

"Her remarkable achievements in the field and her commitment to the advancement of sports, particularly for women and para-athletes serve as an in-

spiration to athletes worldwide. We look forward to together celebrating athleticism and our community spirit at the TCS World 10K Bengaluru."

Adams also boasts of being a four-time world indoor champion and a three-time Commonwealth Games winner.

She is only the third woman to win world championships at youth, junior and senior levels. In 2014, she was honoured with the IAAF World Athlete of the Year title. (PTI)

## Some top shooters want relaxation in Olympic trials participation criteria, NRAI says not possible

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** Some top shooters of the country, including Asian Games medallists, have requested the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) for relaxation in criteria for Paris Olympic selection trials so that they can also participate in them.

As per the NRAI's selection criterion, only five shooters in each category based on their national ranking and Qualification Ranking for the Olympic Games (QROG) points are eligible to appear for trials.

Four trials are scheduled in Delhi and Bhopal to select the pistol and rifle contingent for the 2024 Olympic Games, with the winners booking their tickets to Paris. The first two Olympic Selection Trials (OSTs) will be held at the Karni Singh Range here from April 18-27, while the remaining two are scheduled in Bhopal from May 10-19.

But a situation has arisen where some of the 19 shooters, who have earned Paris quota places for the country so far, are currently not in peak form, while several others have shot higher scores in national and international competitions to be in the reckoning for Olympic berths. Besides, there are some shooters who have shot consistently well but just one rank bad score has seen them slip out of the top-five. They felt that they should also be allowed to participate in the selection trials as they had missed the spots by minimal margins. NRAI secretary Rajiv Bhatia told PTI on Friday that five shooters had written to the federation for their names to be included in the upcoming trials.

"So far there is no change in the criteria. We are following them.

Yes, we have received letters from five shooters requesting their names to be included in the trials, but we are not changing the criteria. There is no (NRAI) meeting scheduled (to change the criteria)." A woman shooter who bagged an Olympic quota in 50m rifle 3 positions last year has seen her national ranking drop to 16 but she has been included in the top-5 for the trials because of the Paris berth she had earned.

"That is something I suppose is fair given that she has earned the country an Olympic quota," said a former national rifle coach on conditions of anonymity.

Another leading men's rifle shooter and Asian Games medallist figures in the 50m rifle 3-positions trials but does not find his name in 10m air rifle trials after his ranking dipped because of just one poor score in a World Cup.

It is learnt that two women pistol shooters, one of them an Asian Games medallist, have requested NRAI to include their names for the trials. "It is strange that the federation is refusing to listen to the shooters who have brought international fame to the country," a former shotgun shooter said.

"How does it matter if there are seven instead of five shooters per event in trials. I feel the best should represent the country and the federation should cast its net wide by having more shooters in the trials," he added. "If some shooter has missed the cutoff by a fraction of a point, or due to the malfunction of his pistol or rifle, or he could not get the ammunition of choice, then I suppose there is a genuine reason for him or her to be aggrieved for not being in the short-listed list for trials." (PTI)

## Feud in IOA continues, 9 EC members ask 'unauthorised persons' not to enter headquarters

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** The internal feud in the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) took a new twist here on Friday when nine members of its executive council asked "unauthorised persons" not to enter its headquarters in a notice directed towards two recently appointed officials.

The notice was posted at the IOA office premises after a meeting of nine executive council members on Tuesday.

IOA president PT Usha and most members of the executive council have been at loggerheads since the appointment of Raghuram Iyer as CEO on January 6. Iyer had earlier served as CEO of Indian Premier League side Ra-

justhan Royals.

"This notice is issued to inform that unauthorised persons are not allowed to enter into the building/offices of the IOA," the notice signed by nine members of the executive council read.

"It has come to the notice of the council members that non-approved/terminated staff is entering and occupying the offices which is illegal and amounts to trespassing," it said.

The notice was signed by senior vice president Ajay Patel, vice presidents Rajlakshmi Singh Deo and Gagan Narang, treasurer Sahdev Yadav and members Dola Banerjee, Harpal Singh, Yogeshwar Dutt, Amitabh Sharma and

Bhupinder Singh Bajwa.

It is learnt that Usha is currently not in town though she has been apprised of the development. Just a few days after Iyer was made CEO, 12 out of 15 EC members alleged that Usha "exerted pressure" on them to pave the way for his appointment, a charge the legendary athlete described as "shameful".

In February, a majority of EC members claimed that they signed a suspension order declaring Iyer's appointment as null and void. The EC members claimed that they had also cancelled the appointment of Ajay Narang as executive assistant to the IOA president.

Iyer and Narang had, however, been discharging their official duties since being brought on board by Usha, who asserted that she has full confidence in the newly-appointed CEO and there was no going back on the decision to hire him.

She had also claimed that she had not received any communication from the executive council members on the reported suspension of the CEO.

The salary of the CEO, which is Rs 20 lakh per month plus allowances (total CTC of around Rs 3 crore per annum), is learnt to be at the centre of the feud between Usha and a majority of the EC members, who have claimed

that the IOA president "unilaterally" decided on the matter.

Replying to the charges, Usha said that the appointment of CEO was discussed at length in the EC meeting (in January) and a majority of the members present "ratified" it.

She said most of the EC members recommended a renegotiation of the remuneration fixed for the CEO citing lack of funding at the IOA and it "was reduced by over 30 per cent of the earlier agreed pay".

Usha also warned the EC members that the International Olympic Committee may intervene and suspend India if they continue to act defiant. (PTI)

## Verstappen hopes to use Japan's high-speed Suzuka circuit to reassert his dominance in Formula 1

**SUZUKA (JAPAN), April 5:** Max Verstappen said he found Japan's Suzuka circuit "intimidating" the first time he navigated a Formula 1 car around the figure-eight layout with its high-speed corners and narrow confines.

No longer daunted by Suzuka, the track looks like an ideal bounce-back destination for Verstappen. In the last F1 race two weeks ago in Australia, a fire on his right-rear brakes forced him out on the fourth lap — ending a nine-race victory string.

"I think if you look at Melbourne performance-wise, I think we were quick, but we didn't finish the race," Verstappen said. "So that's not ideal, but our car normally likes the higher-speed corners, so hopefully we can show that again this weekend."

That's what's expected Sunday from the three-time defending F1 champion.

He was the quickest in Friday's first practice session. The second session was dampened by a light rain with most teams deciding

not to run in the damp to save tire wear. Verstappen was among those sitting out.

Verstappen clocked 1 minute, 30.056 seconds in the first practice, 181 ahead of teammate Sergio Perez and 213 up on Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, winner of the Australian GP.

Verstappen won his second Formula 1 season title at Suzuka in 2022, and he dominated in Japan last season as he won his third straight title.

That race was only six months ago. The Japanese race has been moved to the beginning of the F1 calendar in 2024, dovetailing perfectly with a big weekend in the cherry blossom season across the Japanese archipelago.

Rain is in the forecast for Sunday, a weather condition that often greeted the race when it was run in the fall, or autumn.

Verstappen won this season's first two races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, which has been partly overshadowed by the alleged conduct of team principal

Christian Horner toward a team employee.

Verstappen was asked in Japan about his future with Red Bull, amid rumors about a move to Mercedes. "I'm very happy where I'm at," he said. "And, yeah, we want to keep it that way." "I have a contract with Red Bull until '28," he added. "After that, I first want to see if I actually even want to continue."

Ferrari's Sainz said closing the gap on Red Bull could be difficult. "Last year (September) we were, I think, 0.7-0.8 seconds off Red Bull here," he said. "So it's time to see where we are this year and see if we can be at least closer." Sainz will be replaced next season at Ferrari by Lewis Hamilton, so he's job hunting. And he missed the second race of the season with an appendicitis operation.

"I stayed in Australia for a week and started going back to the gym," Sainz said. "Still obviously not lifting heavy numbers like I used to do in the past, but

at least I can get my training done and I'm feeling back to 100%."

Seven-time champion Hamilton - moving to Ferrari next season - went out in Australia with engine failure, and Mercedes teammate George Russell exited in a dangerous crash. Suzuka may not suit Mercedes this time.

"I think there's a clear trend, where we know our strengths in the car, our weaknesses," Russell said. "Definitely performing stronger in the low-speed corners, struggling a bit in the high-speed corners, of which there's more of it in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), more in Melbourne, more in Suzuka." Japanese driver Ayumu Iwasa drove the first practice session for the RB team, hoping to eventually land a full-time ride. Japanese drivers have had limited success in F1, although Takuma Sato did win the Indy 500 twice after struggling in F1.

F1's lone American driver Logan Sargeant crashed in Friday's first practice session. His Williams team does not have a

Williams may run Sunday with a single car driven by Alex Albon.

"It's pretty significant (damage) - went out in Australia with engine failure, and Mercedes teammate George Russell exited in a dangerous crash. Suzuka may not suit Mercedes this time."

"I think there's a clear trend, where we know our strengths in the car, our weaknesses," Russell said. "Definitely performing stronger in the low-speed corners, struggling a bit in the high-speed corners, of which there's more of it in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), more in Melbourne, more in Suzuka." Japanese driver Ayumu Iwasa drove the first practice session for the RB team, hoping to eventually land a full-time ride. Japanese drivers have had limited success in F1, although Takuma Sato did win the Indy 500 twice after struggling in F1.

F1's lone American driver Logan Sargeant crashed in Friday's first practice session. His Williams team does not have a

# RCB, RR look to tackle similar worries to make headway in IPL



**JAIPUR, April 5:** Struggling Royal Challengers Bengaluru and high-flying Rajasthan Royals bizarrely have similar worries to address when they face each other in the Indian Premier League here on Saturday.

The eighth place where RCB are currently on the 10-team table is a fair indication of their troubles, but Rajasthan's all-win record so far and the resultant second place do not necessarily mirror their turmoil. An underwhelming top-order is the intertwining factor between them.

The RCB top-order comprising skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Cameron Green and Rajat Patidar is a storehouse of talent and explosiveness. But none of them have fired either in isolation or in unison, except star batter Virat Kohli, the current Orange Cap holder with 203 runs, who has

made two fifties.

Patidar showed a glimpse of his clean shot-making abilities while registering 29 in their 28-run defeat against Lucknow Super Giants, but he needs to do a lot more to prop up the RCB middle-order.

The Bengaluru outfit will hope for a reversal at the Sawai Man Singh Stadium, a venue that carries similar traits as RCB's home - Chinnaswamy Stadium - in terms of a smooth pitch and a blistering outfield adding value to the batters' shots.

But the aforementioned RCB quartet has company in the Royals' ranks.

Yashasvi Jaiswal entered this iteration of IPL on the back of some excellent recent efforts, but the left-handed opener has made just 39 runs from three matches, and Jos Buttler offers a similar story.

The England T20 captain is yet

to be in his intimidating self, and has managed 35 runs from three outings and his strike-rate across these matches is a mere 85.

The Royals' batting has largely revolved around captain Sanju Samson (109 runs, one fifty) and the highly-improved Riyan Parag (181 runs, 2 fifties) and at some point, the duo will require solid support from others.

However, Rajasthan have an edge over their opponents in the bowling department.

Pacers Trent Boult and Nandre Burger and veteran leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal have worked up a nice early rhythm and have shared 16 wickets between them.

The out of touch Bengaluru batters might just find it tough to tackle the trio at its home turf.

The lone missing piece in Rajasthan's bowling, rather surprising at that, is the patchy form of

Ravichandran Ashwin, who has taken one wicket from three matches while giving away 8.3 runs per over.

But the seasoned off-spinner can turn that around quickly, and he has a fine record against RCB as well.

However, going by their last four matches, RCB seem to be lacking the variety or strength in their bowling to exploit the chinks in Rajasthan batting.

Left-arm pacer Yash Dayal and off-spinner Glenn Maxwell lead their wicket-takers' chart with four wickets apiece but even that really is an inflated picture as the duo hasn't been able to make any real impact on the proceedings.

The modest form of experienced pacers has really hurt them as Mohammed Siraj has leaked over 10 runs an over while Alzarri Joseph and his replacement Reece Topley have given away more than nine runs an over for meagre returns.

**Teams (from):**

**Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan.

**Rajasthan Royals:** Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Keshav Maharaj, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dubey, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger.

Match starts at 7.30 PM. (PTI)

# Virat Kohli under lot of pressure this IPL, other RCB batters need to support him: Steve Smith



**MUMBAI, April 5:** Virat Kohli is "under a lot of pressure" in the ongoing IPL owing to the collective failure of Royal Challengers Bengaluru batters, feels former Australia captain Steve Smith who wants the Indian superstar's RCB teammates to come good in the supporting act.

Kohli has waged a lone battle for RCB this IPL season with 203 runs in four matches at 67.66 with two fifties. The second-best batter, Dinesh Karthik, is way behind with 90 runs in as many games.

Despite Kohli's consistency, RCB have faltered with three losses in four matches throwing them as far back as the seventh spot in the points table. The likes of Glenn Maxwell, skipper Faf du Plessis and Cameron Green have been underwhelming so far with the bat.

"He needs the other key batters to stand up with him, and if they do that, they can turn things around for their season. But, at the moment, they're not so a lot of pressure is on Virat," Smith, a member of the Star Sports Incredible Star Cast, told PTI in an exclusive interaction at the channel's studio here.

"I doubt he'd be putting extra pressure on himself. (But) some of the other top-order and middle-order (batters) need to help Virat," he said. Smith warned that Kohli is not going to score runs in every match and RCB batters must get their act together.

"He started the campaign really well in the IPL and he needs some support. He's not going to score runs on every occasion," he said.

"But, I doubt he'd be thinking that way. I don't think he'd go out and put extra pressure on himself. He'd just go out and play and see what happens in that game."

Smith rubbished the criticism which Kohli has faced time and again in his career over his batting strike-rate saying that no player in the world can read situations as well as the Indian batter. Kohli has been hitting at over 140 in this year's IPL.

"Virat is an incredible player. What he does really well, and probably better than most people in the world, is (that) he sums up the conditions and the situation of the game and plays accordingly," he said.

"If he needs to strike big, he does. If he needs to bring it back a little bit and build some partnerships... You don't need 180 on every ground; 150-160 might be enough on some grounds," he added.

"Virat sums up the conditions really well and the situation. I'm not fussed about the strike rate," Smith continued. Smith also touched upon another controversy-mired subplot in the IPL -- Hardik Pandya's captaincy of Mumbai Indians and the fan backlash he is facing. He understands why Pandya has been subjected to jeering in all three matches so far, but also wants fans to stop holding on to the past.

"Yes and no. Obviously, there was that (booing) going on in the first two games. It sort of becomes a bit of a thing, if that makes sense. But, it was unfortunate, I think. I'd love to see them supporting Hardik. Obviously, there's a lot of huge Rohit fans out there," he said.

"A lot of people are a bit annoyed that he's not the captain of the side. But, everyone needs to let go of that and support Hardik. He's a wonderful player. He had a lot of success at Gujarat (Titans). He's back (as) captain of the side at Mumbai now.

"The senior players need to help him out," Smith said.

Being a subject of severe international scrutiny as Australia captain back in 2018 following the ball-tampering incident in Cape Town which led to him being banned for one year, Smith shared some insights on what it takes to cope with it.

"While all this negativity is out there, he has got to find ways to cope with it and mechanisms to deal with it," Smith said.

"Everyone is different (in) the way they do that. For me, personally, I just block everything out. I don't listen to anything; I don't listen to any comments, or boos, or anything like that.

"It's difficult to say, but you kind of just have to let it be. Block it out as much as you can, and just get on with the job at hand. I think the best way for him to turn people around is if Mumbai start winning, that's the key thing," Smith said. Smith, however, rejected suggestions that the off-field drama has been a factor in MI's three successive losses.

"One thing about the Mumbai Indians is (that) they're notoriously bad starters in the tournament. They've done it on numerous occasions," he said.

"I don't think they'd be too worried just yet. But, they will have to turn things around really quickly. It doesn't look good, 0-3 at the bottom of the table. They have to turn things around really quickly," he added. (PTI)

## IPL 2024: Kuldeep Yadav advised rest as precautionary measure for groin niggle

**MUMBAI, April 5:** Indian spinner Kuldeep Yadav is nursing a groin niggle and has been advised rest as a precautionary measure by the Delhi Capitals team management in the ongoing Indian Premier League.

The 29-year-old left-arm spinner picked up the niggle after DC's second game of the season against Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur, which the team lost.

The player was forced to miss out on the next couple of contests where veteran pacer Ishant Sharma returned to the playing XI.

"It will take some time for him to be match fit," an IPL source told PTI when asked about Kuldeep's status.

Since he is a centrally-contracted player and a T20 World Cup hopeful, National Cricket Academy's sports science and medical team will have a big say in Kuldeep's injury and rehab management.

It is mandatory for franchises to report niggles and injury concerns of an India player to the NCA.

Although he has been travelling with the side for all the clashes, his participation in DC's upcoming tie against Mumbai Indians on Sunday remains doubtful.

Kuldeep has picked up three wickets in two matches at an economy of 7.62. (PTI)

## IPL matches in Bengaluru under NGT scanner



**BENGALURU, April 5:** Amidst the worsening water crisis in the city, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Karnataka State Cricket Association and other state authorities concerned to furnish details of water being used at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium during the IPL matches here.

Apart from the state cricket association, NGT has also asked the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) and Karnataka State Pollu-

tion Control Board (KSPCB) to submit the particulars about the quantity and source of the water by May 2.

"We are studying the notice, and as such the stadium complies with the NGT norms. So, we are confident of going ahead with the matches," said Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) CEO Shubendu Ghosh.

The Tribunal has taken suo motu cognizance after reports emerged that the Chinnaswamy Stadium has been

getting treated water supply for IPL matches.

The NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and Dr A Senthil Vel (expert member) registered the case.

Three matches have already been held at the venue, and it has been estimated that each of those games received 75,000 litres of treated water.

The stadium is scheduled to hold four more IPL matches on April 15 (vs Sunrisers Hyderabad), May 4 (vs Gujarat Titans), May 12 (vs Delhi Capitals) and May 18 (vs Chennai Super Kings).

"We may require around 15,000 litres of water for match purposes and it can be generated from the in-house STP plant," Ghosh had said earlier.

However, the NGT took note of the claims that BWSSB has permitted the supply of treated water to the stadium upon the request of KSCA, particularly from the nearby Cubbon Park area. But the KSCA officials had maintained that they were not using either groundwater or potable water for purposes like watering the pitch or outfield.

The Karnataka government has imposed a strict ban on using potable water for miscellaneous purposes such as gardening and washing vehicles, among others. (PTI)

## Jofra Archer a concern but Ben Stokes has taken right call to miss T20 World Cup, says Stuart Broad



**MUMBAI, April 5:** Former England pacer Stuart Broad has backed talismanic all-rounder Ben Stokes' decision to opt out of this year's T20 World Cup due to fitness reasons but expressed concerns about fast bowler Jofra Archer's never-ending injury woes.

Supporting Stokes' pullout from the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and the USA, Broad said the defending champions will miss his aura but have enough resources to replace him as a player.

"Whatever Ben decides to do for the well-being of himself is the right decision. Ben Stokes has made some incredible decisions in his career that have paid off for him," Broad, a member of the Star Sports Incredible Star Cast, told PTI in an exclusive interaction at their studio here.

"He wants to get back to (being) the all-rounder that he was and he feels like getting some workload through the knee in a controlled environment, without the help of a scale to pressurise the nature of a T20 World Cup, is the best choice," he said.

While Archer has found it difficult to cope with the elbow injury to his bowling arm, getting an England contract for two years is a sign that the management believes the ace pacer would be back to his best soon. Broad said he is hoping to see him back in the World Cup.

"Yeah, it's a concern. First of all, (he is) a friend of mine, a teammate of mine, an amazing talent for world cricket. He has got genuine pace, he moves the ball. He's a match winner," Broad said.

"We've not seen the best of Jofra Archer on the field now, for coming on, nearly four years. He's played bits and bobs, but he's had awful injury problems which is very difficult for him to cope with.

"I think there's positivity from him and the England camp that there's a chance we might see him in the T20

World Cup, which would be a great lift for England fans and cricket fans around the world," he added.

Archer pulled out of this year's IPL from the Mumbai Indians' squad after he suffered another injury setback in November 2023, but he surprised everyone by turning up to play a match for his school team in Barbados, since they were on the verge of being relegated.

The England and Wales Cricket Board was not aware when Archer answered the SOS call and went on to play the game in December.

Broad said it is concerning that Archer's injury keeps coming back but hoped that there would be an end to it eventually.

"It's a concern that his injury keeps coming back, but he's got some really good people around him to help lift him up and drive him forward. Ultimately, he's signed a two-year contract with England cricket, so they must believe that he'll come back to his best as soon as possible," Broad said.

Talking about the T20 World Cup in June, Broad said the only aspect which England might miss about Stokes is the leadership he provides.

Stokes said his pullout from the World Cup is a sacrifice that he is making to be able to remain an all-rounder.

"England, of course, will miss a player of that aura. But England have got the quality to cover that. They've got the batting line-up that's full of hitters and they've got some good pace bowling options and spin bowling options," he said.

"They'll miss the aura and the leadership skills of Ben Stokes, but they can cover him as a player," Broad added.

Having recently retired, Broad said he wants to explore all opportunities to remain associated with the game and remains open to taking up coaching gigs as well.

"I'm interested in everything. I think having only retired from the playing side in August, I wanted to see... I didn't want to sort of dive into anything really specifically straight away. I wanted to see loads of different career paths, to see what I really enjoy," he said.

"Ultimately, cricket is my greatest hobby. I love talking about the game. I love being a part of the game. Whether that's being a pundit, commentary, coaching, just being part of the sport is incredible.

"I love the game of cricket. I love watching it. I love playing it and I will always be a part of it," he added. (PTI)

## Under-strength not under-confident: Allen says NZ will come good against Pak

**NEW DELHI, April 5:** Eight of their senior players are missing from the line-up due to IPL duties but young New Zealand batter Finn Allen is confident that the new-look side would still be a handful for hosts Pakistan when the two sides clash in a five-match T20 International series starting April 18.

Trent Boult, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner and Kane Williamson are all missing from the line-up for the away engagement due to the ongoing league.

"It is an awesome opportunity with players being away at the IPL, for young guys such as Tim Robinson, who have shown their talent and had a good Super Smash tournament here in New Zealand during the summer," Allen told PTI Videos in an interaction facilitated by Sony Network which has acquired broadcast rights of New Zealand cricket's home engagements.

"...it is rewarding for those guys and allows them to get an opportunity at the top level to see where they stand against a formidable Pakistan side," he said.

All-rounder Michael Bracewell will be leading the side. He has not been seen in international cricket since March last year following a ruptured Achilles and a bro-

ken finger and returned to domestic engagements only recently.

"I guess with the upcoming series, we batted out with them at home not too long ago but it is on their turf now and we know from tours in the past, that they are pretty tough to beat at home," the 24-year-old said.

"Hopefully, Mark Chapman can pull through for the boys again like last time, but I think it will be a good challenge and a good series," he added.

Other first-choice players like Devon Conway, Will Young, Tim Southee, Colin Munro and Tom Latham are also missing for various reasons including injuries.

The big-hitting Allen, who has played 43 T20Is and has the highest score by a New Zealander in the format, all-rounder Jimmy Neesham and veteran spinner Ish Sodhi would be expected to be the leading force for the side.

"...conditions will definitely be different, every game is a new game, and you have to start again, so I am looking forward to the challenges and different conditions, and seeing what we can come up with," he said of his own role.

Allen hoped that a solid performance against Pakistan would also help him in T20 World Cup selection.

"Every chance you get to play for New



Zealand or represent your country is a try-out, and an opportunity to showcase your skills... hopefully, selection takes care of itself, just clear minded on going over to Pakistan and trying to contribute to winning a series," he said.

Allen, who is an occasional wicket-keeper, is also quite impressed with

how Rishabh Pant has bounced back after surviving a life-threatening accident in 2022.

"I have been amazed at how Rishabh Pant has come back, coming from what he has had to a year later coming out and showing that he has still got it is pretty awesome to see," he said. (PTI)