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- Corrupt Congress overlooked needs of poor, I ended party's licence to loot: PM

'Exodus' of Assam Congress leaders started after Nyay Yatra: CM

TITABOR, April 8: Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed that an "exodus" of Congress leaders began after Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' passed through the state.

In an interview with PTI at Titabor in Jorhat district, Sarma slammed Gandhi for raking up topics such as caste census and Manipur violence in Assam without having a proper briefing on the ground situation.

Himanta slammed Rahul Gandhi for raking up issues such as caste census, Manipur violence in Assam without knowing ground situation

He claimed that more leaders of the grand old party will join the BJP after the Lok Sabha elections.

"During 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', he (Gandhi) did a lot of (political) harakiri on the roads. People, including Congress leaders, got very offended. That helped us

a lot," he said when asked if the yatra would have any impact on Lok Sabha elections in the state.

Sarma claimed the exodus from Congress started after the yatra and it is continuing.

"Rahul doesn't know the culture of a state. He doesn't study or discuss with his colleagues. He comes and irritates people. If we go to a state, we will have a proper briefing like who are the cultural icons, what things are to be said or not to be said and what are the sensitivities of that state," he added.

The chief minister, who travels extensively across India to campaign for BJP during different elections, claimed that he takes briefing and debriefing before going to a state so (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SC orders status quo at Doloo tea estate in Cachar

NEW DELHI, April 8: The Supreme Court on Monday directed the state government to maintain the status quo at the Doloo tea estate in the Cachar district of the state, where a Greenfield airport is proposed to be constructed.

A bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra questioned the state government for clearing the shrubs in the tea garden without an environment impact assessment report.

The top court also issued notices to the Centre, ministry of environment and forests, the state government and others on a plea filed by Tapas Guha and others.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioners, submitted that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) erred in decision and even for the grant of site clearance and in-principle approvals, environmental clearance is necessary. The NGT on January 25 had dismissed the plea by Guha and others on the ground that environmental impact assessment report is awaited and the environmental clearance (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sonowal asks ULFA(I) to come for talks

If there is peace, there will be development and progress: Union Minister

TINSUKIA, April 8: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal, BJP's nominee for Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency, on Monday urged ULFA(Independent) to come for talks and resolve all issues through discussions.

In an interview with PTI before commencing his day's campaign in the assembly segments of Tinsukia district within his constituency, Sonowal emphasised the dedicated efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah towards restoring peace in the state.

"We have always wanted ULFA to come forward for talks. Let us sit together to discuss to find out an amicable solution", Sonowal said.

He highlighted the Prime Minister's commitment to fostering peace and development across the Northeast region, citing the earnest endeavours made by both Modi and the home minister over the past decade.

"During the last ten years, both the PM and the home minister have made sincere efforts to bring peace in the state and the region", the



minister for shipping, ports, waterways and Ayush said.

Accords have been signed with the pro-talks faction of the ULFA, which was disbanded earlier this year, and all groups of the NDFB, Dimas and Karbi insurgents outfits. ULFA(I) is the only insurgent outfit in Assam, which is yet to come for discussions.

Asked about Dibrugarh and Tinsukia being former hubs of ULFA activities, Sonowal remarked that those days are now in the past.

"If there is peace, there will be development and progress. A peaceful environment fosters motivation for hard work, leading to enhanced earning potential for people from all walks of life," he remarked.

Sonowal affirmed his commitment to continue the transformative efforts initiated by Modi.

"The change in the region is being realised through the efforts of Modiji and we will continue to do so after he becomes the Prime

Minister for the third successive term", Sonowal added.

The Union minister is contesting the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat for the third time, having wrested it for the first time from the Congress in 2004 as an Asom Gana Parishad candidate.

He lost the seat to Congress candidate in 2009 and shifted to Lakhimpur in 2014 from where he won and went on to become a minister of state in the first cabinet of Modi.

He became Assam chief minister in 2016 and after he was succeeded by the current incumbent Himanta Biswa Sarma, he went on to become a Rajya Sabha member in 2021.

Sonowal replaced sitting BJP MP and Union minister Rameswar Teli as the party's Dibrugarh contestant.

He is locked in a triangular contest, the other two being Assam Jatiya Parishad's Lurinjyoti Gogoi as the United Opposition Forum nominee and the Aam Aadmi Party's contender, Manoj Dhanowar. (PTI)

HT BRIEFS

Three held

GUWAHATI: Three persons were arrested and 10,000 YABA tablets seized in Rangia in Kamrup district on Monday, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. The inter-state drug deal was busted by the state police's Special Task Force (STF), he said. "Based on reliable inputs of an inter-state drug deal, STF Assam carried out an operation in the wee hours and intercepted a vehicle in Rangia," Sarma wrote on X. During search of the vehicle, 10,000 YABA tablets were recovered and three people have been apprehended, he added.

Police suspended

JORHAT: The Jorhat police has suspended a senior police constable of ISBT police outpost, Bipul Pathak after receiving a complaint against him of physically assaulting a youth, Gautam Likhok of Elengmora in Jorhat. Pathak had assaulted the youth during questioning in a case related to buffalo theft that happened a week ago. According to sources, Likhok had alleged that he was severely beaten up during interrogation by police personnel and Pathak attacked him the most.

Wildfire

DIPHU: A wildfire has reduced to ashes the house of Bukirang Malang in the Bormarjong village in Amri in West Karbi Anglong. Sources said property worth lakhs, including land documents were consumed by the flames. Amri member of autonomous council and executive member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, D Uphing Maslai visited the site and met the family members. He extended immediate relief materials, including cash to them. In a similar incident, the house of Jose Englung of Mowbenjeng village was burnt down by a wildfire on April 6.

AAP leader Atishi Marlena leads massive road show in Duliajan

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 8: AAP leader and Delhi education minister Atishi Marlena on Monday led a huge road show at Duliajan town in support of Manoj Dhanowar, the AAP candidate for the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat.

Hundreds of enthusiastic supporters of the Aam Aadmi Party joined the procession, which passed through Duliajan town, waving party flags and shouting slogans. Scores of people lined up on both sides of the road to watch the road show and to hear the speech of AAP leader.

Addressing the huge gathering, Atishi conveyed Rongali Bihu wishes to the people. She said, "The people of Assam have always given love and blessings to Arvind Kejriwal. No one thought that the Aam Aadmi Party will win a seat in the Guwahati Municipal Corporation election or win a seat in the Tinsukia Municipal Board election. People love Kejriwal because what



ever he promised, he fulfilled. He constructed world class schools and hospitals, provided free bus travel for women and provided jobs to youths." "In Assam 8,000 schools have been (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ever he promised, he fulfilled. He constructed world class schools and hospitals, provided free bus travel for women and provided jobs to youths." "In Assam 8,000 schools have been (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Charaideo Maidams likely to get UNESCO heritage tag this year: CM Himanta

JORHAT, April 8: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said the Maidams of Charaideo, burial mounds of Ahom royals, are set to attain UNESCO World Heritage Site status by the end of this year.

Praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dedication to the state, Sarma urged the public to support him for a third consecutive term.

Addressing an election rally at Charaideo under Jorhat Lok Sabha seat, Sarma recounted his meeting with Modi where he had placed the request for recommending the 'Maidams' as the country's nomination for UNESCO World Heritage site label.

"Officers in Delhi told me that

there were two proposals for official nomination - our Maidams and Sarnath, the site of Buddhist pilgrimage. When I met our cultural minister, he said he didn't have the courage to approach the PM as Sarnath is in Varanasi constituency," he said.

"I met the PM and requested Modiji to make Charaideo Maidams the lone nomination from the country for UNESCO World Heritage Site last year," Sarma said.

"By this year, the Charaideo Maidams will be part of UNESCO World Heritage site," the CM claimed. Maidams represents the late medieval (13th-19th century) mound (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NCERT warns against pirated textbooks, flags factually incorrect content

NEW DELHI, April 8: The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) on Monday issued a warning against pirated school textbooks, flagging possibilities of factually incorrect content.

It also warned against copyright infringement of its educational materials, cautioning the public against unauthorised printing and commercial sale of NCERT school textbooks.

"A few unscrupulous publishers were printing NCERT school textbooks available on its website under their own name, without obtaining permission from the NCERT. Anyone found publishing NCERT textbooks, either in whole or in part, for commercial sale or using NCERT textbook content in their publications without obtaining explicit

copyright permission, will face legal repercussions under the Copyright Act of 1957," a senior council official said.

"The general public is requested to kindly stay away from such textbooks or workbooks as their content may be factually incorrect as well as against the basic philosophy of NCF (National Curriculum Framework for School Education) 2023. We also urge individuals who come across such pirated textbooks or workbooks to immediately report it to the council," the official added.

The NCERT last week announced that textbooks for Class 3 will be available by the last week of April and for Class 6 by mid-May.

It had said that 1.21 crore copies of the 2023-2024 editions of textbooks for classes 1, 2, 7, 8, 10 and 12 have been released nationwide. (PTI)

FOR A GREENER HARVEST



A farmer sprays fertilizer at a paddy field at Barbhag, Nalbari on Monday. UB photos

Shah to campaign in Assam today

GUWAHATI, April 8: Union home minister Amit Shah will visit the state on Tuesday to campaign for the Lok Sabha Elections. He is scheduled to address a public meeting at Chukuli Bhoria in Lakhimpur constituency in the afternoon, BJP party sources said here.

Lakhimpur is also held by the BJP, with incumbent MP Pradan Baruah seeking a third successive term as he is pitted against Congress candidate Uday Shankar Hazarika. Shah will then take part in a road show from Chaliha Nagar to Thana Chariali in Tinsukia town in the evening, they said.

Tinsukia town comes under Dibrugarh seat, from where Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal is contesting as the BJP candidate.

Sonowal is locked in a triangular fight with United Opposition Forum, Assam, nominee Lurinjyoti Gogoi and Aam Aadmi Party candidate Manoj Dhanowar. (PTI)

State has high voter turnout with more than 82 % polling recorded in 2019 Lok Sabha elections

Right to live before right to vote, peace before polls: People in relief camps

IMPHAL, April 8: "Why should I vote to elect a representative of a place which is no longer mine ... elections mean nothing to us," says a distraught Nobi, who lost her home 11 months ago to ethnic violence in Manipur and is living in a relief camp.

The 42-year-old is not alone as "right to live before right to vote" and "peace before polls" was the common refrain of many who have not been able to return home due to recurrent clashes and lingering hostilities between the warring ethnic groups in the northeastern state.

The state has traditionally seen a very high voter turnout with more than 82 per cent polling recorded in the 2019 elections. But the eth-



nic violence has cast a shadow on the polls this time around with several civil society groups and the affected people questioning the

relevance of holding elections in the current circumstances.

"The government hasn't been able to ensure my right to live with

dignity and they are going to ensure my right to vote?" Nobi asks. "My house was burnt in front of my eyes. I and my family left overnight. We do not even know what is left there."

"Why should I vote for the representative of a place which is no longer mine? This is all a gimmick ... Elections mean nothing to us," Nobi told PTI. The hill state has witnessed sporadic, sometime intense, ethnic clashes since May 3 between the majority Meitei community and the Kukis, resulting in the loss of more than 200 lives. While Meiteis have concentrated in Imphal city, the Kukis have shifted to the hills. The elections for two (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

UCC already incorporated in Indian Constitution: ASDC secretary

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 8: Secretary of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), Daniel Teron said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) was incorporated when the Constitution of India was framed by the constituent assembly and now the BJP wanted to implement what is already there in the Constitution.

Interacting with the media at the ASDC Central Committee office on Monday, Teron said, "Most people of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao are unaware of Article 44 of the Indian Constitution. It was in 1949 that it was incorporated in the Constitution by the constituent assembly. Now it would be wrong to say that Article 44, which provides for Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the country, is the handiwork of the BJP. Actually, the BJP wanted to implement this portion of the Constitution all over India."

Teron said that on March 12 the ASDC delegation met chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma and requested him to keep Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao outside the purview of the UCC as in 1935 these areas were partially excluded areas. The delegation has also told the CM to keep the districts outside the



purview of the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Teron said, "When we met the CM demanding to exclude Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao from the purview of UCC, he agreed. He told us that when the bill will be taken up in the Parliament he will have a discussion with Union home minister, Amit Shah to exclude the two hill districts from the purview of UCC." Teron also said that the ASDC delegation requested (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

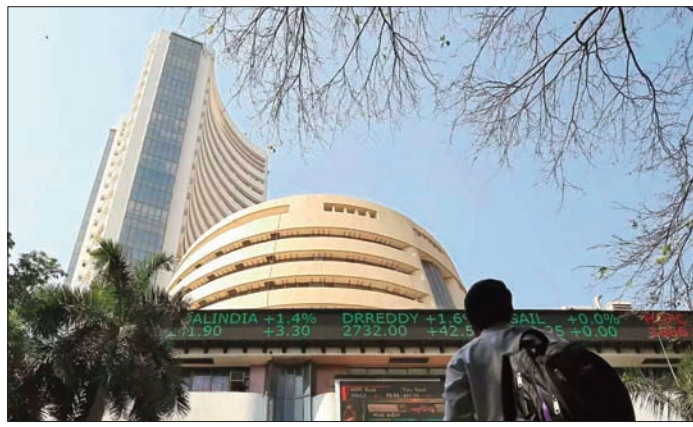
Sensex, Nifty hit fresh peaks on firm global cues, foreign fund inflows

MUMBAI, April 8: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty reached their fresh record highs on Monday, amid optimism in global markets and foreign fund inflows. Buying in index major Reliance Industries also fuelled the rally in equities.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 494.28 points or 0.67 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 74,742.50. During the day, it zoomed 621.08 points or 0.83 per cent to reach a record intra-day high of 74,869.30.

The NSE Nifty climbed 152.60 points or 0.68 per cent to 22,666.30. During the day, it jumped 183.6 points or 0.81 per cent to hit a lifetime high of 22,697.30. From the Sensex basket, Maruti, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, JSW Steel, Larsen & Toubro, Reliance Industries, Axis Bank, and Power Grid were the major gainers.

Nestle, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, Titan, HCL



Technologies and Infosys were the laggards.

"Global equities posted mostly modest moves as investors prepared for a busy week that includes US inflation data, and European Central Bank interest rate decision," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.26 per

cent while smallcap index dipped 0.06 per cent.

Auto index climbed 1.65 per cent, oil & gas jumped 1.51 per cent, energy (1.24 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.14 per cent), realty (1.21 per cent), metal (1.10 per cent) and utilities (0.90 per cent).

Services, teck and IT were the laggards. A total of 266 stocks hit

their 52-week high while 12 hit their 52-week low on the BSE.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were trading in the positive zone. Wall Street ended with gains on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,659.27 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.81 per cent to USD 90.43 a barrel.

"The buoyancy in sentiment continued, led by sectorial tailwinds and Q4 earnings growth expectations. The up-move was largely broad-based, with outperformance by auto, realty, oil & gas, and consumer discretionary, while IT was tepid owing to insipid Q4 growth expectations due to a slowdown in spending," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. (PTI)

Rupee settles on flat note at 83.31 against US dollar

MUMBAI, April 8: The rupee settled on a flat note on Monday at 83.31 (provisional) against the US dollar, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by the strength of the American currency in the overseas market.

Forex traders said investor sentiments got a boost as crude oil prices retreated from their elevated levels, but the strength of the American currency in the overseas market weighed on the local unit and restricted the uptick.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.27 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.23 and a low of 83.33. The local unit finally settled at 83.31 (provisional) against the dollar, unchanged from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee appreciated 8 paise to close at 83.31 against the US dollar as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept the benchmark interest rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the seventh time in a row. (PTI)

Singapore tourism board and PhonePe forge partnership

GUWAHATI, April 8: In a significant move aimed at enriching the experience of travellers visiting Singapore, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and leading Indian digital payments platform PhonePe have inked a two-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The agreement, signed by STB's Chief Executive Melissa Ow and PhonePe's Chief Executive Officer of International Payments Business, Ritesh Pai, solidifies a strategic alliance to leverage the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) linkage between India and Singapore. The collaboration between STB and PhonePe will see joint investments in marketing endeavors across both India and Singapore. These efforts aim to spotlight Singapore's diverse attractions while promoting seamless UPI experiences for tourists across key tourism hubs. This groundbreaking partnership marks the first of its kind between a destination and a UPI payments platform, underlining the mutual commitment of STB and PhonePe to enhance the overall travel experience in Singapore. By enabling travellers to utilize familiar services like UPI payments during their stay, the initiative seeks to streamline transactions and amplify the allure of Singapore's iconic landmarks, rich heritage precincts, and vibrant retail, culinary, and adventure offerings. Melissa Ow, Chief Executive, Singapore Tourism Board, expressed enthusiasm for the alliance, emphasizing STB's dedication to enhancing the Singapore visitor experience for tech-savvy consumers. She highlighted the initiative's aim to integrate Singapore's exceptional offerings into the digital realm.

LG Electronics introduces innovative MoodUPTM refrigerator

GUWAHATI, April 8: LG Electronics, a leading consumer durable brand in India, has unveiled a groundbreaking product in collaboration with renowned fashion designers Gauri and Nainika at the prestigious Lakme Fashion Week. The LG MoodUPTM Refrigerator combines cutting-edge technology with exquisite design, offering consumers a unique blend of luxury and functionality. The MoodUPTM Refrigerator features LED panels on its doors, allowing users to customize the refrigerator's exterior lighting according to their mood or personality. With over 1.7 lakh color combinations, this innovative appliance adds a touch of personalization to any kitchen space, creating a vibrant ambience. Hwang Youngmin, Director of Home Appliances & Air Conditioner, LG Electronics India, expressed excitement about the launch, stating that the MoodUPTM Refrigerator reflects LG's commitment to blending style with cutting-edge technology. The collaboration with Gauri and Nainika underscores a shared vision of vibrant, bold, and optimistic living, encapsulating the essence of 'Life's Good.' Gauri and Nainika echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing the seamless integration of innovation and sophis-

tion in both the refrigerator and their Fall Winter 2024 collection. The collaboration signifies a commitment to merging design with timeless elegance, offering consumers a unique and luxurious experience. Bollywood actress Taapsee Pannu, the showstopper at Gauri and Nainika's fashion showcase, praised the LG MoodUPTM Refrigerator for its innovative features and vibrant colour palette. She highlighted the synergy between fashion and technology, emphasizing the refrigerator's celebration of style and innovation. The LG MoodUPTM Refrigerator boasts a range of intelligent features, including InstaView technology for quick access, retractable shelves for flexible storage, and advanced temperature management for optimal food preservation. Additionally, the refrigerator comes equipped with a built-in Bluetooth speaker, allowing users to connect external devices and play music of their choice. With its sleek design and advanced functionalities, the LG MoodUPTM Refrigerator redefines the kitchen experience, offering unparalleled convenience and performance for modern households. Seamlessly integrated with LG ThinQ™, the refrigerator allows for remote control and monitoring, empowering users with convenience and peace of mind.

BMW group India records remarkable growth in Q1 2024 sales

GUWAHATI, April 8: BMW Group India has reported a robust business performance in the first quarter of 2024, marking a significant milestone in the luxury automotive sector. The company delivered a total of 3,680 cars (comprising BMW and MINI brands) and 1,810 motorcycles (under the BMW Motorrad banner) during the period from January to March. The standout achievement for BMW Group India was the remarkable growth in car sales, which soared by an impressive 51% in Q1. This surge was primarily attributed to the soaring demand for the company's Sports Activity Vehicles (SAVs), Luxury Class models, and Electric Vehicles (EVs). Notably, models like the BMW X7, BMW X3, BMW X1, and BMW 3 Series witnessed overwhelming demand, leading to sold-out inventories. Vikram Pawah, President, BMW Group India, expressed satisfaction with the company's performance, stating, "BMW Group India has achieved unprecedented success in the first quarter of the year. With a remarkable growth rate of +51% in car sales, we have set new benchmarks in the luxury automotive market.

Our strong presence in the luxury electric car segment remains unchallenged, thanks to our diverse range of products. Additionally, our Luxury Class models have established themselves as segment leaders. With exciting new launches on the horizon, we are poised to further elevate our position in the luxury market." In terms of electric vehicles, BMW Group India continued its dominance in the luxury segment, delivering 211 units in Q1, representing a 26% increase from the previous year. The BMW i7 emerged as the top-selling EV, underscoring the growing preference for sustainable mobility solutions in the flagship segment. The upcoming launch of the BMW i5 is expected to further bolster the company's EV portfolio.

The Luxury Class segment witnessed remarkable growth, with sales soaring by an impressive 152%. Models such as the BMW 7 Series, BMW i7, BMW X7, and BMW XM contributed significantly to this success, comprising 20% of total sales. The BMW X7 SAV emerged as the top-selling Luxury Class model, consolidating the company's position in this lucrative segment.

Contd. from Page 1...

'Exodus' of Assam Congress

that nothing goes wrong. "Rahul comes without that kind of briefing. And he, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, ends up humiliating the local people and that creates a problem," he added. Giving an example, Sarma said Gandhi raised the issues of caste census and Manipur violence in Assam although "none of these topics have any relevance here".

"Assam is a casteless society and people do not believe in casteism. If suddenly someone comes here and talks about caste census, nobody will accept that. Caste census may be relevant in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, but not in Assam," he said.

"When you come to Assam and go on speaking about Manipur, people feel disconnected because Manipur and Assam are two different states," Sarma said. He said neither Manipur has any impact on Assam nor has Assam any impact on Manipur.

"But many people coming to Assam started asking questions about Manipur. That means they came without briefing. Every time, Rahul comes to Assam without taking a briefing of Assam and that's the problem," Sarma said.

When asked if it was the fault of Assam Congress for not briefing Gandhi properly, Sarma, who was once a member of the opposition party, chose to blame the Wayanad MP, calling him as an "impatient" person. "Getting an audience for the briefing is the problem. You have to give time, you have to have patience. He (Gandhi) is an impatient person. You need a lot of patience to understand the culture, anthropology and geography. So, you have to give at least two hours before you come to a state," the BJP leader said.

The 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' passed through Assam from January 18 to 25, during which Gandhi had locked horns with Sarma, terming him "the most corrupt CM of India". The eight-day journey remained very eventful witnessing high-voltage drama, accusations from both sides, clashes and multiple FIRs at different police stations. Sarma, in several election campaign meetings in the last one month, claimed that all Congress leaders, including the party's state chief Bhupen Kumar Borah will join the BJP in the coming days.

Asked if he made this statement on the basis of facts or if it was just political rhetoric, the BJP leader said, "Today, if you go to the Congress headquarters or any district office, you will see empty chairs and empty rooms. Because in the last three months, most of the Congress people I know have joined the BJP." "Now, there are hardly 30-40 state leaders in the Congress. I think that after Lok Sabha elections, all other leaders will join the BJP," he said.

In recent times, several hundred Congress members and leaders have joined the BJP across Assam. Dissatisfaction grew after the opposition party published the names of the nominees for the general elections. Voting in 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam will take place in three phases on April 19, 26 and May 7. When asked specifically about his claim of Borah joining the ruling party early next year, Sarma said, "What I have said is that every Congressman will join the BJP in due course of time. Almost everybody, who has filed defamation cases or has spoken against us on the floor of the assembly, has joined us. I don't think Bhupen Borah will be an exception."

Taking strong objection to the statement, Borah has already filed a Rs 10-crore defamation suit against Sarma, claiming that various statements made by the BJP leader have damaged his public image and the party.

The chief minister had also stated that some will be left in the Congress and will never join the saffron party. Regarding his statement, Sarma, without naming anyone, said, "There are two to three leaders in Assam whose fathers were former chief ministers. Also, there may be somebody who is very deeply connected (to Congress) and cannot come or we also would not want to take." "Every political party has a negative list. There are 4-5 people on the list. Barring them, everybody will come," he said.

Presently, there are three Congress politicians whose fathers were former CMs of Assam. Hiteswar Saikia's son Debabrata Saikia is the leader of the opposition in the assembly, Tarun Gogoi's son Gaurav Gogoi is the deputy leader of the party in Lok Sabha and a candidate in this election from Jorhat constituency, while Bhumidhar Barman's son Diganta Barman is an MLA. (PTI)

SC orders status quo at

for the airport in question has not been granted. "Counsel for the Applicants has drawn our attention to the Government of India, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Notification dated May 16, 2008, particularly column under the head 'Environment Clearances' and submits that even for grant of Site Clearance and In-principle approvals, Environmental Clearance is necessary which can only be done once the EIA assessment study is done.

"In our opinion, mere inclusion of a clause under the head 'Environment Clearances' in a Form of the said Notification does not deem the same to be mandatory for purposes of EIA assessment study," the NGT had said.

The plea in NGT had sought seeking a direction to cease further action related to the construction of the Greenfield Airport at Doloo Tea Estate till a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is conducted according to EIA notification and to restore the Doloo Tea Estate to its original condition as of May 12, 2022, by replanting uprooted tea bushes, felled shade trees and rectifying the damage caused to the landscape and ecosystem.

The Airports Authority of India has submitted an application under the Greenfield Airports (GFA) Policy, 2008 to the ministry of civil aviation (MoCA) for the grant of 'site-clearance' for the development of a Greenfield airport at Doloo tea estate in Cachar, Assam.

The ministry of civil aviation has launched Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) -- UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) on October 21, 2016 to stimulate regional air connectivity including in the North Eastern Region, and making air travel affordable to the masses. (PTI)

AAP leader Atishi Marlena

shut down. Medicines are not available in hospitals and health centres. The daily wages of tea garden workers are very low. Land deeds have not been provided. The BJP makes big promises before election, but forget them after winning the elections. The Aam Aadmi Party will provide good schools, good hospitals to the people here. We will pay wage of Rs 450 for tea garden workers, land deeds and minimum support price to tea growers in Assam. This is our promise," she said.

Atishi also appealed to the people to vote for AAP candidate, Manoj Dhanowar who is contesting against BJP strongman and Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP)'s Lurinjyoti Gogoi in the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha seat.

Charaideo Maidams likely

burial tradition of the Tai Ahoms dynasty which ruled in Assam for 600 years. Out of 386 Maidams explored so far, 90 royal burials at Charaideo are the best preserved, representative, and most complete examples of this tradition.

Sarma also maintained that the state holds a special place for the PM as evident in his donning the 'gamusa' (Assamese traditional scarf/ towel) on numerous occasions. "Modi ji had worn the gamusa when he went to take the COVID vaccine. Later, when I asked him why he chose it, Modiji told me that the gamusa gives him courage," he said.

The PM's recent night stay at the Kaziranga National Park attracted further international attention to the tourist site, Sarma asserted.

Listing out the different welfare schemes for people like 'Orunodoi' and 'Lakhpati Baideo' schemes of the state government, the CM claimed that the government is committed to continue working for the people. "Along with 'Modi ki guarantee', you have 'Mama ki warranty'," the CM added, referring to himself being called 'Mama' in the state. (PTI)

Cong launches party's

government. In fact, scams are happening here more than 1.5 times than in the Centre," the AICC leader claimed. "The Nyay Patra is a reflection of the aspirations of the people," he added. (PTI)

Right to live before right

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.

According to officials, more than 50,000 people are living in camps following the unrest. They question the timing of the Lok Sabha elections and say the idea of organising voting in relief camps is nothing but a gimmick as the real issues remain unaddressed. PTI visited four relief camps in the Imphal Valley where the displaced people expressed discontent with the poll process.

Eighteen-year-old Dima, who finished her schooling under the shadow of the conflict, said she has no idea what she is going to do next. "How can I plan studying further in such a situation? And why should I waste my first vote at a time when I feel elections should not be conducted... I won't," she told PTI.

Living in a relief camp set up in the Government Dance College auditorium in Imphal's Peace Compound, Dima spends her day teaching primary school children who have begun going to a nearby government school.

The Election Commission has announced that the displaced population will have the opportunity to cast their votes from relief camps.

KH Khamba (45), who used to run his transport business in the Kuki-dominated area of Moreh, a town near the Indian-Myanmar border that is 120 kilometres from his relief camp, says, "There had to be some resolution for the current situation before elections were conducted." "What did the people we vote for in the past do for us? Yes, we are being kept in camps, food is being given but is that all that is needed to live?" he says. "We left amid the violence and got to know later that my vehicles as well as my house are no longer there as everything has been burnt." Asked whether he will cast his vote, Khamba said, "We are still consulting among ourselves but one thing is sure that we are not happy about the timing of elections in the state."

Thirty-year-old Melody helps out in cooking meals at the camp and also tries to learn incense making to earn a livelihood.

"If the government can conduct elections during such a time, I am sure they can find ways to bring peace and address the concerns of people. Everything that we had built over the years got burnt and now we are supposed to start our lives from scratch and we should also vote?" "Bringing up my two children at a relief camp is not the life I had imagined for myself," she said.

According to Election Commission officials, over 24,000 people living in the relief camps have been found eligible to vote and 94 special polling stations are being set up for the purpose. Posters of political parties, mega rallies and visible movement of leaders -- the traditional elements of campaigning -- are conspicuously missing in the strife-torn state.

The only visible hint of elections is the hoardings put up by local election authorities, urging citizens to exercise their franchise. Major party figures have refrained from visiting the conflict-ridden state to canvass for votes or make electoral pledges.

The Election Commission is conducting various activities to sensitise the voters. "Special teams have been formed to deal with these voters with empathy and we have also started voter awareness activities. The activities are being designed keeping in mind the sentiments of the displaced people, who have lost the comfort of being in their homes, and there is some level of frustration and negativity," chief electoral officer, Pradeep Kumar Jha told PTI. (PTI)

Biden administration announces USD 6.6 billion to ensure leading-edge microchips are built in the US

WILMINGTON, April 8: The Biden administration pledged on Monday to provide up to USD 6.6 billion so that a Taiwanese semiconductor giant can expand the facilities it is already building in Arizona and better ensure that the most-advanced microchips are produced domestically for the first time. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said the funding for Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. means the company can expand on its existing plans for two facilities in Phoenix and add a third, newly announced production hub.

"These are the chips that underpin all artificial intelligence, and they are the chips that are the necessary components for the technologies that we need to underpin our economy," Raimondo said on a call with reporters, adding that they were vital to the "21st century military and national security apparatus." The funding is tied to a sweeping 2022 law that President Joe Biden has celebrated and which is designed to revive US semiconductor manufacturing. Known as the CHIPS and Science Act, the USD 280 billion package is aimed at sharpening the US edge in military technology and manufacturing while minimizing the kinds of supply disruptions that occurred in



2021, after the start of the coronavirus pandemic, when a shortage of chips stalled factory assembly lines and fuelled inflation.

The Biden administration has promised tens of billions of dollars to support construction of US chip foundries and reduce reliance on Asian suppliers, which Washington sees as a security weakness.

"Semiconductors -- those tiny chips smaller than the tip of your finger -- power everything from smartphones to cars to satellites and weapons systems," Biden said in a statement. "TSMC's renewed commitment to the United States, and its investment in Arizona rep-

resents a broader story for semiconductor manufacturing that's made in America and with the strong support of America's leading technology firms to build the products we rely on every day."

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing produces nearly all of the leading-edge microchips in the world and plans to eventually do so in the US. It began construction of its first facility in Phoenix in 2021, and started work on a second hub last year, with the company increasing its total investment in both projects to USD 40 billion. The third facility should be producing microchips by the end of the

decade and will see the company's commitment increase to a total of USD 65 billion, Raimondo said.

The investments would put the US on track to produce roughly 20 per cent of the world's leading-edge chips by 2030, and Raimondo said they should help create 6,000 manufacturing jobs and 20,000 construction jobs, as well as thousands of new positions more indirectly tied to assorted suppliers in chip-related industries tied to Arizona projects. The potential incentives announced Monday include USD 50 million to help train the workforce in Arizona to be better equipped to work in the new facilities. Additionally, approximately USD 5 billion of proposed loans would be available through the CHIPS and Science Act. "TSMC's commitment to manufacture leading-edge chips in Arizona marks a new chapter for America's semiconductor industry," Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, told reporters. The announcement came as US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is travelling in China. Senior administration officials were asked on the call with reporters if the Biden administration gave China a head's up on the coming investment, given the delicate geopolitics surrounding Taiwan.

AJP's Lurinjiyoti Gogoi leads UOF's election campaign in Margherita

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, April 8: On Monday, Lurin Jyoti Gogoi, the president of Assam Jatiya Parishad and the candidate representing the United Opposition Forum (UOF) for the 13th Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency, embarked on an election campaign across various locales within the 83rd Margherita Constituency.

Accompanying Lurinjiyoti Gogoi were notable figures such as Sanjay Kumar Deb, the secretary of the Assam Jatiya Parishad Central Committee, senior Congress leader Manoranjan Borgohain from Margherita, Anita Das Mahanta from Assam Jatiya Parishad, Suresh Bhowmij, president of Jatiyo Chah Shakti Central Committee, Avishek Beldar, President of Margherita Assembly Youth Congress Committee, Tara Prasad Dehingia, president of Margherita Block Congress Committee, Gaurav Sharma, general secretary of Tinsukia District Youth Congress Committee, and many other leaders from the United Opposition



Forum (UOF).

The welcoming gesture for Lurinjiyoti Gogoi was marked by a splendid motorcycle rally, commencing from Lekhapani to Jagun Bazaar.

During the course of the election campaign, Lurinjiyoti Gogoi visited several areas within the 83rd Margherita Constituency including Jagun, Kothasema Model Village,

Udaipur, Hasak Rangamancha, Ledo Bazar Basti, Kumarpatty Gaon Panchayat, Margherita Bazar, and Margherita Segubari.

A large gathering convened at Udaipur Dehing Patkai Samonboi Khetra, Jagun Bazaar, and Hasak Rangamancha where over 3000 individuals from all corners assembled to listen to Lurinjiyoti Gogoi's speech.

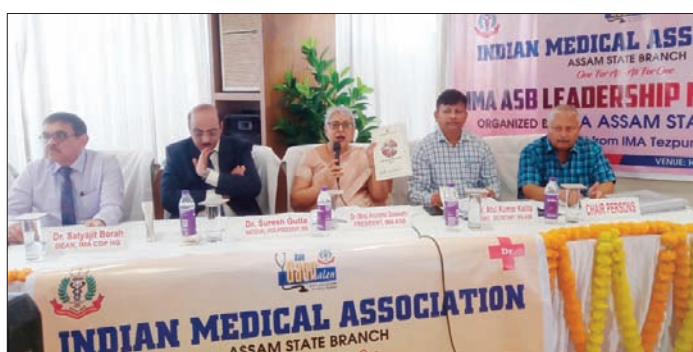
During the campaign, over 500 people from the Jagun region pledged their support to Assam Jatiya Parishad.

In his address, Lurinjiyoti Gogoi criticised the BJP leadership, highlighting the people's disillusionment with false assurances and promises. He expressed concerns over chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's management of funds, alleging a burden of over Rs 1,50,000 crore in loans. Additionally, he raised issues such as inflation, unemployment, border disputes, and alleged financial improprieties by the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Lurinjiyoti Gogoi urged the electorate to rally behind the INDIA Bloc candidate, emphasising the critical importance of the upcoming Lok Sabha election to safeguard the constitution and democracy.

During the campaign in Margherita, Rajjor Dal president and MLA of Sibsagar LAC, Akhil Gogoi, joined Lurinjiyoti Gogoi in his endeavours.

IMA unveils health manifesto and charter of demands ahead of LS polls



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, April 8: Just ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) announced its 'Charter of Demands and Health Manifesto 2024' in a press meet, expressing its commitment to improving the health and healthcare services of citizens just before the formation of the new government. The 'Health Manifesto and Charter of Demands' were released by Dr Arunima Goswami, the Assam branch state president of IMA, Dr Suresh Gutta, the national vice-president of IMA, Dr Satyajit Bora, the national dean, Dr Atul Kumar Kalita, the Assam branch state secretary, and former president of the IMA state branch, Dr Manabendra Goswami.

Expressing deep concern over the menace of fake doctors rising day by day and posing a threat to common men's lives, the IMA manifesto seeks a strict deterrent

central law to tackle the issue. The manifesto advocates that the minimum allocation on health alone should be 2.5 percent of GDP and health spending should exceed 5 percent of GDP, with every citizen entitled to a basic health package supplemented with strategic purchases from the private sector. Further, the manifesto emphasises the need for measures to ensure the quality of drugs, such as strict quality control and adequate staffing of related departments, and to follow a "one nation, one drug, one price" policy. Positioning the IMA's role in certain issues, the organisation declares that it can play a pivotal role in creating awareness and imparting education to health professionals through the promotion of responsible antimicrobial use, capacity building, surveillance, and research on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), which is a new development in the healthcare scenario

worldwide.

Underlining the charter of demands, the organisation urges the government to increase the number of posts of medical officers across the country commensurate with the population. Other demands include waiving off and reducing the high GST burden on health, restricting Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY to strategic purchases from the private sector alone, exempting small and medium hospitals up to 50 beds and clinics from the Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010, to maintain the purity of modern medicine, as every system of medicine has its profile and history. Furthermore, the IMA advocates for enacting a strong central act against violence on doctors and hospitals, as 23 State Hospital protection laws have not brought solace to doctors against violence, and a Deterrent Central Law incorporating the amendments of Epidemic Diseases Act 1897, including all forms of violence against doctors and hospitals, is the first step in the right direction, along with several other demands.

Additionally, the IMA urges the government to observe the birthday of legendary physician of Assam late Dr Bhubaneswar Barooah in a befitting manner, so that the life works and ideals of this multifaceted personality become known to the nation.

Exposure program for foresters in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 8: Aaranyak, the region's premier biodiversity conservation organisation, at the request of the Assam Forest School, Jalukbari, organised an exposure program at the Chandrasing Rongpi Community Resource Centre (CRC) in Kohora, Karbi Anglong, for foresters engaged in two north-eastern states.

The event was attended by 31 Grade I foresters, comprising 25 officials from Assam and 6 officials from Sikkim. They learned how to work with the forest-dependent Karbi community in Kaziranga and Karbi Anglong landscapes.

The aim of the event was to provide insight into community engagement, natural resource management and conservation, alternative sustainable livelihood (ASL), principles, and approaches of community-based eco-culture tourism with reference to Kohora River Basin experiments.

An orientation session led by Aaranyak team members first introduced the organisation's interventions and showcased its conservation initiatives and livelihood interventions such as Journey for Learning and PIRBI. These efforts aim to conserve nature, wildlife, and promote sustainable livelihoods among the Karbi community in correspondence with their cultural and traditional beliefs related to nature.

HT Correspondent
HOJAI, April 8: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria said on Monday that inner urge, determination, perseverance, commitment, and consistency are more important for a student to excel in life than comfort and amenities. The Governor and chancellor of Rabindranath Tagore University made this statement while speaking at the 1st convocation ceremony of Rabindranath Tagore University in Hojai on Monday. He emphasised that education is not only about books but also about enlightening us in all spheres of life. Education, he said, is a life-long continuous process, where one can learn anything at any time. The Governor highlighted that education opens doors to ample opportunities. "Students should be job creators who can contribute to the upliftment of the nation," he added. The Governor expressed his delight at being part of the first convocation ceremony of RTU, stating that it is a historic day for Rabindranath Tagore University. The Governor described convocation as the biggest festival for students, as they are conferred with the degrees for which they have toiled hard for years. He emphasised the vital contribution of parents and teachers, stating that it needs to be remembered and

cherished always. The Governor further remarked that the name of the university, honouring the legendary poet Rabindranath Tagore, makes it a more special and revered place. "Now, it is the responsibility of the students to maintain the honour and respect of Rabindranath Tagore University," he said.

The Governor further lauded the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said under PM Modi's visionary leadership, India is prospering rapidly in all sectors. He also praised chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for his optimistic and bold decisions for the all-round development of Assam, especially in the education sector. Dr Virendra M Tiwari, director of CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology (CSIR-NEIST), Jorhat, graced the occasion as the chief guest. While speaking on the occasion, he highlighted the fundamental principles of Tagore's educational philosophy. He expressed a strong conviction that Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai, will be the torchbearer of the fecund legacy, spirit, and motto of modern education envisioned by Rabindranath Tagore and will blend well to

Only one citizenship application filed under CAA in Assam: Himanta

CM asserts minimal impact of CAA, takes swipe at anti-CAA protests

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 8: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday took a jibe at those protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and asserted that only one person has applied for citizenship under CAA rules in the state to date.

Sarma has been campaigning for BJP candidates in different constituencies since the election dates were announced by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

He said, "It has been a month since the central government notified the rules to apply for citizenship under CAA, and an online portal for it was also launched. But only one person from Assam has applied for citizenship under the provisions of CAA. The person belongs to the Barak Valley region."

Launching a sharp attack on anti-CAA protesters,

the chief minister said, "A section of people tried to make citizens fearful by claiming that lakhs of people would get citizenship under CAA. Now those must be held accountable before the public."

The chief minister also argued that in Bengali-dominated areas in the state, CAA does not have any impact on the ground.

"You can take the Sonari assembly constituency. Many Bengali-speaking people are residing here. But no one has applied for citizenship under the new rules," he added.

Sarma also mentioned, "I have been saying for many days that the applications for citizenship under CAA would be few."

Notably, All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and several other organisations have protested in the state soon after the rules of CAA were notified by the Union government last month.

Congress gains momentum as BJP supporters join

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 8: Congress campaigned in the Chinthong Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency in West Karbi Anglong for the ensuing second phase of parliamentary elections in Assam on April 26. The Congress claimed that more than 300 workers and supporters of BJP had joined them.

Alom Rongpi, the spokesperson of the West Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (WKADCC), stated on Sunday that over 300 strong supporters of BJP had joined the Congress during the joining program held at Umlapher and Ummat.

At Umlapher, 120 families, including village headmen who were supporters of BJP, joined Congress. Similar joining pro-



grams were also conducted at Hawang, Umsapho, and Rongnagar. Joining programs have been conducted in five polling stations.

The joining program was at-

tended by president WKADCC, Sing Teron; vice president, Rupsingh Borong; secretary Manik Engti; IT Cell chairman, Robin Ronghang, and other leaders of the party.

Karbi Anglong Presbyterian Church Synod Conference concludes

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 8: The 9th Karbi Anglong Presbyterian Church Synod (KAPCS) conference, which began on April 4 (Thursday) at the Presbyterian Church Puralangso in Dima Hasao district, concluded on Sunday. The theme of the conference was 'Good foundation of the Church', based on Matthew 16:18.

At the 10 am public worship service, led by Synod Moderator Rev Primingson Millick, the congregation and guests were welcomed, followed by Bible reading and prayer conducted by elder Roland Engti of Putsari Pastorate.

Fraternal delegates from Mizoram Synod, Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Mehngi, Manipur Synod, and the General Assembly Presbyterian Church of India, administrative secretary Rev ST Kaia, offered their greetings.

Speaking on the theme, speaker Rev JF Lalropuia of Manipur Synod preached about the importance of truth and being faithful soldiers of Christ. He emphasised the necessity of prayer, stating, "One has to make a habit of praying and never cease prayer in times of trouble and worry. This would build a relationship with Christ, and if Christ is at the center, miracles will happen."

Later, at 2 pm, a Holy Communion service was held, administered by Synod moderator Rev Primingson Millick. The conference was enriched by beautiful choir performances from Mothade, Umkhermi, Dongkamukam Pastorates, and the Synod choir.

Furthermore, a new Gospel video album of the Karbi Anglong Synod Choir, Volume-3, was released during the conference by Synod moderator Rev Millick. The 10th KAPCS conference will be held at Hamren in West Karbi Anglong district.

The conference was attended by Baithalagso MLA, Rupsing Teron, local member of the Autonomous Council of Dima Hasao Autonomous Council of Garampani constituency, Samsing Engti, and various dignitaries.

Candidates ordered to submit election expenditure registers

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, April 8: Directives have been issued to Gana Suraksha Party candidate Rinku Roy and Independent candidate Pradip Bhandari, contesting from 11-Sonitpur HPC for the upcoming general election to Lok Sabha 2024, by the district commissioner of Sonitpur cum returning officer of 11-Sonitpur HPC on Sunday. According to the letter, both contesting candidates failed to produce the Election Expenditure Registers (day-to-day register, cash register, and bank register) before the expenditure observer/assistant ex-

penditure observer for inspection on April 6, 2024. Therefore, they are directed to produce the mentioned documents by April 9, 2024, for inspection by the expenditure observer. It is further stated that failing to comply will lead to the presumption that they have failed to maintain a day-to-day account of election expenditure as required under Section 77 of the RP Act 1951, resulting in the cancellation of permissions for public rallies and campaigning with immediate effect. Moreover, legal action will be initiated against the contesting candidates as per provisions.

Education illuminates every sphere of life: Guv Kataria

Rabindranath Tagore University's inaugural convocation celebrates academic excellence

HT Correspondent
HOJAI, April 8: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria said on Monday that inner urge, determination, perseverance, commitment, and consistency are more important for a student to excel in life than comfort and amenities. The Governor and chancellor of Rabindranath Tagore University made this statement while speaking at the 1st convocation ceremony of Rabindranath Tagore University in Hojai on Monday. He emphasised that education is not only about books but also about enlightening us in all spheres of life. Education, he said, is a life-long continuous process, where one can learn anything at any time. The Governor highlighted that education opens doors to ample opportunities. "Students should be job creators who can contribute to the upliftment of the nation," he added. The Governor expressed his delight at being part of the first convocation ceremony of RTU, stating that it is a historic day for Rabindranath Tagore University. The Governor described convocation as the biggest festival for students, as they are conferred with the degrees for which they have toiled hard for years. He emphasised the vital contribution of parents and teachers, stating that it needs to be remembered and



cherished always. The Governor further remarked that the name of the university, honouring the legendary poet Rabindranath Tagore, makes it a more special and revered place. "Now, it is the responsibility of the students to maintain the honour and respect of Rabindranath Tagore University," he said.

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decisions for the all-round development of Assam, especially in the education sector.

Dr Virendra M Tiwari, director of CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology (CSIR-NEIST), Jorhat, graced the occasion as the chief guest. While speaking on the occasion, he highlighted the fundamental principles of Tagore's educational philosophy. He expressed a strong conviction that Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai, will be the torchbearer of the fecund legacy, spirit, and motto of modern education envisioned by Rabindranath Tagore and will blend well to

complement the New Education Policy. Speaking on the special occasion, vice chancellor Prof Amalendu Chakraborty said it is a great pleasure and honour for all of us. Rabindranath Tagore University is a prime example in front of us as a budding educational institution for higher education, which has developed rapidly with consistent success and performance by our teachers and student fraternity. He said the location of the university serves an important purpose of socio-cultural solidarity among us. He noted that Assam is a mini-India filled with a mixed population from diverse cultures, and so is Hojai, a mini Assam, which brings together people from various cultures and innumerable social spaces. It is noteworthy that a total of 1124 students were conferred degrees in the first convocation ceremony of RTU, out of which 950 students completed graduation and 184 students completed post-graduation. Notably, 569 students registered their names to attend the convocation, out of which 118 students completed post-graduation from the Arts stream and 56 students completed post-graduation from the Science stream. Additionally, 472 students of Arts, 272 students of Science, and 206 students of Commerce completed gradua-

tion. On the other hand, two students who excelled in post-graduation (2023) at the university were awarded gold medals and degrees.

Nashima Yesmin of the Chemistry department was awarded the Radhika Ranjan Chakraborty Memorial Gold Medal, and Puja Chanda of the Bengali department was awarded the Basanti Chakraborty Memorial Gold Medal. Simultaneously, a student with disability, Neha Das, who had completed her graduation from the department of English in 2019, was also conferred with a degree. At the outset, the ceremony began with the singing of the national anthem and the university Song. Following that, Tilak Chandra Kalita, Registrar (I/c) of RTU, delivered the welcome speech. The convocation ceremony concluded with the singing of the national anthem and the state song of Assam, 'O Mur Apunar Dekh'. It is worth mentioning here that on July 11, 1964, Hojai College was established in Hojai, which has been a beacon of education for more than half a century. Then, on October 16, 2017, Hojai College was upgraded to Rabindranath Tagore University, and the first vice chancellor, Prof Amalendu Chakraborty, joined the institution in the year 2019.

Flying squad officer killed

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 8: An official of the flying squad was killed, and three other squad members were injured in a tragic road mishap on NH 37 at Samaguri. According to sources, Jayanta Kro, an assistant engineer of Kathiatoli Development Block currently appointed as an officer of a flying squad team for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls in the district, lost his life in the accident near Hanhchora Boraliigaon village under Samaguri PS while on duty early on Monday morning. The incident occurred when a TATA Maxximo car carrying the deceased and his team collided with a parked truck near Hanhchora Boraliigaon village.

Jayanta Kro and his teammates, identified as Dipankar Das, Mojild Islam, and a camera person, were promptly rescued by local Samaguri police and transported to a Nagaon-based local hospital in critical condition. Sadly, Jayanta Kro was declared brought dead by the on-duty doctor.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude. - Zig Ziglar

Health sector needs attention

As India grapples with a dire health crisis, underscored by alarming statistics of rising cancer rates, sleep disorders, and mental health challenges, the release of the Health of the Nation 2024 report by the Apollo Group on World Health Day demands urgent attention.

The exemplary healthcare initiatives undertaken by state governments, such as the AAP-led Delhi government's Mohalla Clinics and the Congress-led Rajasthan government's "right to free treatment" legislation, serve as beacons of hope.

The looming health emergency facing the nation necessitates urgent and concerted action from policymakers. The Apollo report serves as a wake-up call, highlighting the need for a paradigm shift in healthcare governance.

Increasing incidents of assaults on Hindu Americans



By: Er. Rajesh Pathak

The incidents of killings of India students in US seem to have got to be just a matter of statistics grabbing the headlines of media alone.

And the centre of which have got to be nowhere but the institutions for higher learning, more notably! But now this ugly turn of event has shown that time has come to act upon to get out of it.

Now question persist as to what harmonise us and them when the jihad is being exported jointly by them in our country!

Jews, Muslims, Chinese students union could flourish, why not that of Hindus to express their solidarity?

Emerging challenges call for setting free from being 'over broad-minded'. When our own population there is so big, why to get into the self-deluding whims of one sided fake bhaicharawad or sense of brotherhood deliberately sponsored by left-liberal echo-system!

So are the things that in the International film festivals the films are shown though after the names Cambodia, Japan, Vietnam; whereas those from India are mentioned as South Asian's.

Ihlan Umar says in full audacity that she is a Somalian first, an American later. And, she will prefer Islamic Sharia to American laws. She gets away all at ease saying so.

Hindus are also needed to be vocal about their identity as Hindu American first, standing organised against any ill-intentioned bid of assimilating them to be a part of South Asians only.

Seeking political gain in the desolate Katchatheevu

The recent uproar in Tamil Nadu concerning the Katchatheevu island, situated in the Palk Strait, has become a political football, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi leveling accusations at the Congress party for its alleged "callous" ceding of the island to Sri Lanka.

The crux of the matter lies not in the peripheral arguments but in the questionable insistence of the Tamil Nadu fishermen to exercise their fishing rights in the Palk Strait, the Palk Bay, and even the waters off the Northeast coast of Jaffna.

Their claim, rooted in the assertion of a centuries-old tradition, seems to disregard the broader implications and reasonable boundaries that ought to govern such activities.

The demarcation of maritime boundaries established in 1974 and 1976 holds no significance for them. They disregard the International Maritime Boundary delineated during those years, rendering it inconsequential to their actions and decisions.

While the demand for regaining control over Katchatheevu from Sri Lanka is often touted as a panacea, it fails to address the crux of the issue. The Tamil Nadu fishermen,

equipped with trawlers that indiscriminately scrape the seabed, have not only depleted fish stocks but have also decimated all forms of marine life in the shallow waters adjacent to the Indian coastline.

Driven by their unsustainable practices that have exhausted their traditional fishing grounds, they have resorted to unlawful incursions into Sri Lankan territorial waters, venturing dangerously close to the island nation's shores.

Consequently, the mere retrieval of Katchatheevu would prove inadequate in resolving the multifaceted challenges stemming from the overexploitation of marine resources and the ensuing diplomatic tensions between the two nations.

With an audacious disregard for the vulnerable position of the North Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen and the lackluster reaction from the authorities in Colombo, certain parties have been engaging in exploitative practices. Their actions demonstrate a brazen willingness to capitalize on the inherent imbalance of power and the perceived ineffectiveness of the government's response.

The Tamil Nadu fishermen, when apprehended, present a narrative to the outside world, claiming that they did not transgress the boundaries of Katchatheevu and that the Sri Lankan navy detained them within Indian territorial waters.

However, if this account were accurate, the Indian Coast Guard, with its strategic bases situated on the Indian side, would have undoubtedly intercepted the Sri Lankan naval forces.

Yet, there has been no recorded instance of con-



frontation or altercation between the Indian and Sri Lankan naval personnel, casting doubt on the fishermen's version of events.

The issue of Indian fishermen crossing into Sri Lankan waters has been an ongoing source of tension between the two nations.

While Indian diplomats have consistently secured the prompt release of detained fishermen, appeasing Tamil Nadu's vocal concerns, this temporary solution fails to address the root cause. In the past, the Sri Lankan navy resorted to firing upon trespassing vessels, but such aggressive tactics have been abandoned to avoid provoking India's ire.

Nowadays, the Sri Lankan authorities refrain from even issuing warning shots, wary of antagonizing their powerful neighbor. This approach, though de-escalating potential conflicts, perpetuates the cycle of incursions and subsequent diplomatic interventions, treating the matter as a mere inconvenience rather than a substantive bilateral challenge.

The long-standing issue of Indian trawlers encroaching upon Sri Lankan waters has been a contentious subject, despite Sri Lanka's ban on trawling imposed in 2017.

According to a statement made by the Sri Lankan Fisheries Minister, Douglas Devananda, on the floor of the parliament, a staggering number of at least 5,000 bottom trawlers from the Indian coastal regions of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Rameshwaram, and Nagapattinam have been relentlessly invading Sri Lankan territorial waters week after week.

This blatant disregard for maritime boundaries and regulations has severely impacted the livelihood of local Sri Lankan fishermen, who find themselves at the receiving end of the unabated bottom trawling activities carried out by their Indian counterparts.

According to Devananda, the Indian mechanized trawlers underwent a significant transformation after the year 2000, following the agreement

struck in 1976. Initially, these vessels measured a modest 36 feet in length and were equipped with engines boasting a relatively modest output of 120 horsepower.

However, in the wake of the new millennium, these trawlers evolved into formidable marine behemoths, with their lengths extending to an imposing 50 to 60 feet, and their engines now packing a substantial punch, ranging from 350 to an impressive 550 horsepower. Large Indian vessels roaming the waters have left North Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen struggling to secure sufficient catches.

"At times, we come back with nothing to show for our efforts, not even enough fish to sustain ourselves," lamented Rasenthiram Mathiyalalan, the secretary of the Aadhikovilady Fishermen Union in Point Pedro, during an interview with the Sunday Times.

"Some days, we come back empty-handed, with barely enough fish to feed ourselves," Rasenthiram Mathiyalalan, secretary of the Aadhikovilady Fishermen Union in Point Pedro, shared with the Sunday Times.

The proposal from India and Sri Lanka to grant permits to Indian fishermen for fishing in Sri Lankan waters has sparked outrage among local fishermen. "We vehemently oppose any such proposals from being put into action," declared Varnakulasingham, a prominent leader among the fishing community.

Despite the existence of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries, its outcomes have been minimal, with the only notable achievement being the agreement from the Sri Lanka side to ensure the humane treatment

and prompt release of captured Indian fishermen.

Historically, the Northern Tamil regions were renowned for their exceptional productivity in supplying top-quality seafood for export.

However, the relentless pursuit of shrimps, blue swimming crab, and cuttlefish by Indian bottom trawlers has drastically altered the landscape. This exploitation has led to an estimated annual loss of around US\$ 750 million to Sri Lanka, impacting approximately 50,000 fisher families.

According to a study referenced in a research paper submitted to the Sir John Kotelawala Defense University, it was found that in 2016, an estimated 1000-1500 mechanized trawlers frequented the waters of the Palk Strait, Palk Bay, and Gulf of Mannar, operating three days a week. During these trips, they managed to harvest around 1900 tons of shrimps and 4000 tons of demersal fish.

Before the invasion of Indian trawlers, Northern Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen were accustomed to earning three times the amount they currently make, with their daily income ranging between just LKR 600 to 800.

Fishermen from the Sinhalese community in South Sri Lanka engage in fishing expeditions in Indian waters, albeit not in the Palk Strait and Palk Bay. Their ventures extend to the deeper expanses of the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, facilitated by multi-day boats.

Occasionally, they encounter interception for fishing in Indian territories but are typically released afterward. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Congress desertions are being hyped by saffron ecosystem

By: Arun Srivastava

Three Congress leaders have just deserted their party within three days, ostensibly because they were feeling dejected. One of them, Gaurav Vallabh, said that he was not ready to listen to the instructions from the party leaders and insinuate that Sanatan Dharma was undesirable.

A week back, a senior leader, Anand Sharma, a Brahmin, spoke out against the Congress leadership, and especially questioned Rahul Gandhi's style of functioning. It is worth mentioning that Sharma has been one of the peers of the 23-group which had questioned the commitment of the leadership to the party.

Though Rahul unfolded his future ideological narrative through the countrywide Bharat Jodo Yatra last year, these leaders, those who feel isolated from his efforts to bring about major ideological reorientation, became anxious of their own political survival. The Congress has traditionally been a heterogeneous conglomeration. All kind of leaders took refuge in the party; from soft leftists to ultra-rightist, like Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. A top leader once quipped: "Congress Shivji ka baarat hai!" (Congress is like marriage party of Lord Shiva), meaning a gathering of all kinds of ideological adherents.

Ever since Rahul started forming a significant grip on the party apparatus, giving it a left-of-centre and pro-social justice re-emphasis, a significant number of Congress leaders deserted the party and stood in queue before Modi and Amit Shah's doors for entry into the BJP. Undeniably, these so-called leaders are only interested in their share of the power pie and living off the ill-gotten fruits of neoliberal corporatism; they simply cannot

survive without it. Hence, what scared them is the perceptibly changing character of the Congress. They could not accept a party with progressive, left-of-centre stance.

The firm stand of Rahul Gandhi and party president Mallikarjun Kharge to give a new shape and dimension to the party has betrayed fears within the entrenched second-tier leadership within Congress, itself a product of the liberalization and privatization era. Rahul is systematically accused of by his own partymen of patronizing young left-oriented leaders.

In fact, the unease in the party was manifest in a letter to Kharge from Sharma a few days ago. Like his peers, Sharma dislikes the caste-census and other inclusionary policies being promoted inside the party by Rahul. In his letter, also sent to Congress Working Committee members, Sharma had argued that the Congress had never engaged in, nor endorsed, identity politics. He said the current departure from this position was a matter of concern for many.

It would be wrong to describe Sharma's action as irresponsible. It reflected his strong class identity and commitment. It would not be wrong to infer that the class of such upper caste leaders nursing strong feudal trait would not like Congress to win the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Termination of status quoist and right of centre politics would harm their class interest. Count the faces that left Congress and joined BJP. Most of them shifted their allegiance because Congress could not be taken for granted anymore to fulfil their narrow class interest.

Leaders like Sharma, Ghulam Nabi and others realise that Congress with its old approach could not aspire to regain its space in Indian politics. BJP, under the watchful eyes of RSS, has been systematically transforming itself. In fact, Modi's consistent attack on Congress is part of the design to allure the Congressmen and make them feel secure.

A serene look at the BJP organisational structure would unravel that most of the state units of the party are managed and controlled by turncoat Congressmen. It is surprising that RSS

never opposed the elevation of such leaders.

In his letter, Sharma argued: "Congress has believed in inclusive approach, which is non-discriminatory in formulating policies for equity and social justice for the poor and the underprivileged. In my humble opinion, this (demand for a caste census) will be misconstrued as disrespecting the legacy of Indira and Rajiv. Also by default, that will be an indictment of successive Congress governments and their work for empowerment of the disadvantaged sections." One would like to know from Sharma whom he intends to fool with his appeal to Congress's illustrious history.

In the recently held assembly elections to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, it was clearly evident how the Congress leaders of these states, instead of reaching out to the Dalits, minorities and EBCs, preferred to prostrate before the rightist elements.

This was the primary reason for the defeat of the Congress in these states. While the upper caste stronghold of their weight behind the BJP, the poor withdrew from the Congress feeling betrayed.

A section of the mainstream media and "enlightened" middle class has been expressing its concern at these desertions. There is every possibility that more leaders may switch over. It must be realised that the purification drive of the Congress is going to be long-drawn exercise.

May be the BJP will win the Lok Sabha election for a third successive term. But that must not be construed as the final burial of Congress. One thing is absolutely clear: Congress has to transform itself and emerge as a phoenix, but in a different form. It cannot continue to be social club of politically divergent elements with no ideological objective or orientation.

Nevertheless, Rahul has to en-

sure that the EBC, Dalit and minorities are completely assimilated within the party. It needs deep ideological interaction. It is intriguing indeed to notice that section of the poor, EBC, Dalits and minorities who have emerged as the neo-middle class are finding themselves comfortable in the cozy company of the BJP.

In Bihar, UP and especially in Bengal, they are the main support base of the BJP. Obviously, the economic empowerment needs a proper ideological balancing and orientation. Congress has to emerge as the voice and face of this deprived section. It is only then the BJP would not be able to lure them.

Apparently, Rahul has come to realise this need which was why he expressed regret for the Congress's past stance on a caste census and argued that the nation cannot progress without social justice. Keeping in view the future, he has made this the ful-

crum of his political discourse. The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) covering 25 crore households was conducted in 2011. The socio-economic data is used now for welfare programmes, but the caste data never got published by the Modi government.

It is not that only that the upper caste Congress leaders are opposed to this policy reorientation of Congress. Even the satraps of the anti-BJP regional parties are not willing to allow space to the Congress, as is being witnessed on the issue of seat-sharing in major states UP, Bihar, Bengal and Maharashtra. These leaders are scared of revival of Congress in a new avatar. They are forcing the Congress to play second fiddle. To some extent, they are right. Ceding space to Congress would endanger their own existence and political survival.

It is also evident that these leaders be vote-getters in their own states, but cannot catch the

imagination of the people across the country, without projecting Rahul as the challenger to Modi. No doubt Congress lost Chhattisgarh, MP, Rajasthan, but at the same time it won Karnataka and Telangana on its own. This sends a loud message to the constituents of INDIA bloc, that no one in the opposition has the ability to take the fight straight into the den of the saffron ecosystem other than Rahul. Others are scared of repression by the state machinery, but he is not. He speaks directly on the face while others evade.

Though Modi popularised the sobriquet "Pappu" for Rahul, it was also used by the Congress leaders, surprisingly by those who were close to Sonia Gandhi. In September 2013, Rahul Gandhi during the "Meet-the-Press" programme of Ajay Maken at the Press Club of India had revealed his ideological vision by denouncing as "complete nonsense" the ordinance to shield convicted lawmakers from disqualification. He had announced his emergence as the new ideology. He had told the nation: "I'll tell you what my opinion on the ordinance is. It's complete nonsense. It should be torn up and thrown away."

It was the beginning of senior leaders starting to feel insecure, and some of them even confided to Sonia to put a rein on him. Most of the leaders, who are seen opposing Rahul in modern times, had ganged up against him. Since he was the Nehru-Gandhi scion, none dared to oppose him publicly at that point of time. But it gathered momentum once Modi came to power and took charge of the attack.

An insight into his functioning would make it distinctly obvious that Rahul is fighting at two fronts: one inside his party against his own partymen and second against the RSS and saffron ecosystem led by Modi. India's political institution has probably not witnessed any political leader who has been under such severe glare and scrutiny. In this backdrop, the people of India can rightly expect from leaders like Lalu Yadav, Akhilesh Yadav and Mamata Banerjee to rise above their narrow political gains and embrace Rahul Gandhi as their joint leader. (IPA Service)



Introducing NavIC 2.0: Leveraging India's strategic space advantage

By: Balak Singh Verma

As India's influence grows in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, space has emerged as a potent springboard, propelling its aspirations with unimaginable speed. At the heart of this celestial ascent lies NavIC, India's indigenous satellite navigation system. Albeit a small one, it will place India alongside the United States (US) (GPS), Europe (Galileo), Russia (GLONASS), and China (Beidou). With the imminent arrival of NavIC 2.0, India will achieve global navigation dominance, by graduating from the extant regional navigation satellite system.

Considerations: NavIC 2.0

NavIC currently comprises a constellation of 10 satellites (nine satellites IRNSS-1A to IRNSS-1I and the latest launched NVS-01 as the tenth satellite), with only five currently operational, positioned in geostationary and geosynchronous orbits. This indigenous system provides precise, dependable, and secure Positioning, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) services within India and its neighbouring region, spanning up to 1500 km from its borders.

The genesis of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) can be traced back to 1999; however, it was during the Kargil conflict that the strategic necessity for an independent satellite navigation system became apparent. Primarily, the constellation was intended for strategic services to ensure self-reliance in times of need whereas, the civilian services were spin-off accrued out of the same space and ground segment infrastructure.

It offers two distinct applications: Standard Positioning Services (SPS) for civilian purposes and Restricted Services (RS) for strategic functions. Since the launch of its first satellite, IRNSS 1A on 1 July 2013 till the launch of the last first generation satellite IRNSS-1I on 12 April 2018, NavIC has been operating on L5 and S frequency bands and the foreign-origin rubidium atomic clocks which were sourced from Israel.

The constellation comprising the first generation series suffered inherent drawbacks in terms of signal penetration, range, infrastructural and design compatibility, cost-effectiveness, interoperability and stability of precise clock timing—three out of seven atomic clocks had failed by 2022.

These challenges led to sub-optimal use of the constellation for about a decade till the launch of NVS-01, without any significantly visible reappraisal, which finally gave rise to a strategic

shift in approach to sustain, expand, and develop NavIC in a whole new avatar.

The recent launch of the first of second generation satellite NVS-01, also known as IRNSS-1J and the 10th satellite of the IRNSS constellation, marks a significant advancement. It introduces the L1 frequency band for civil mobile usage, enhancing the capabilities of the NavIC system.

The NVS-01 satellite incorporates a state-of-the-art atomic clock, developed indigenously to replace the previous Israeli rubidium clock. Alongside improved encryption systems, this satellite ensures superior accuracy, enhanced signal resilience, and optimal performance in challenging environments like urban canyons and dense foliage.

Strategic self-sustenance

Presently, NavIC functions with only five fully operational satellites (including the recently launched NVS-01) to provide the bare minimum navigation signal in the service area. In 2024, IRNSS-1B and 1C are likely to complete their designed lifespan thereby creating a criticality for immediate replacement launches. Thus, the replacement cycle continues to barely sustain the constellation of satellites which provide essential signals with moderate accuracy.

The essence of introducing NavIC 2.0 is to graduate from the current state of sustenance flux to an overarching effective global strategic PNT solution. Therefore, it is to be understood in totality that a fully functional constellation with designed 11 satellites enhances the accuracy and seamless data flow within the limited service region but, expansion of the coverage area to achieve global access is highly inevitable for military operations.

If not today, probably in half a decade, we would be stranded at the current operational crossroads once again, trying to stitch previous gaps. Strengthening the traditional practice of simply maintaining the constellation, which was primarily for technical demonstration purposes at the time of launch, may not be a wise strategy for achieving operational success.

With India emerging as a global power, the need for the expansion of indigenous PNT services across the planet has become a mandatory requirement, especially for disaster management and Out of Area Contingency operations (OOAC).

Shift from a regional navigation system to a global constellation must be undertaken in a phased manner incorporating an ideal and unique homogenous mix of two satellite fleets in Geosynchronous Orbit (GSO) or

Geostationary Orbit (GEO) and Medium Earth Orbit (MEO) to substantiate accuracy in the primary area and assured secured strategic services all across the globe. Deployment of the comprehensive global constellation may not only be technically challenging but would also take a few years to consolidate. Meanwhile, our blueprints need to be put in place straight away.

NavIC 2.0 combination constellation with GSO and MEO satellite layers serve far better, in terms of wider coverage, flexibility, scalability, and resilience. The proposed MEO fleet provides seamless PNT coverage around the planet along with the ability to repurpose it for Earth surveillance whereas, the GSO fleet provides integrated features for military applications other than the dedicated and improved PNT coverage over the Indian subcontinent.

Towards optimal utilisation of the futuristic GSO navigation fleet of NavIC as a force-multiplier to accomplish desired military advantage other than the primary PNT services, the platform provides an ideal base for compound payloads for various strategic applications vis-à-vis persistent surveillance over the area of interest, space situational awareness (SSA), telemetry, tracking and commanding (TT&C), broadcast messaging services, tracking and data relay satellite system (TDRSS) and inter-satellite link (ISL). These applications would provide a strong boost to the military capabilities in terms of surveillance, communications, and command and control.

To acquire strategic self-sustenance in PNT services, expansion of the ground segment with an appropriate fusion of technology in terms of automation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) to revive a robust and fully secure user segment, is mandatory.

All military platforms where there is a need for PNT services either for navigation, targeting, orientation, compatibility, positioning, referencing and other allied applications, must be identified and integrated with the secure indigenous NavIC user RS modules. Military equipment where open-source GPS is in use presently needs to be replaced with the NavIC RS modules ensuring an extensive and comprehensive user base. NavIC once fully deployed and operational provides an ideal secure communication backbone for futuristic CAISR systems.

Strategic roadmap: NavIC 2.0

To make up for the lost time, India must prepare the synchronised blueprint for space, ground, and user segments with

enhanced global coverage features of NavIC 2.0.

The enhanced applications of NavIC 2.0 will not only provide an edge to the military utility of NavIC 2.0 but also establish India commercially at par with the global major four—the US, China, Russia, and Europe. The actions must commence on various strategic facets as discussed, to ensure the usage of global NavIC services by 2028.

Space segment: Replacement of the extant satellites owing to ageing and malfunctioning is desired by 2025 and the launch of an additional 12 satellites in MEO by 2028 (to be enhanced subsequently to 24 or more by 2035). Responsibility should be assigned to the Headquarters of the Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) for defence usage planning and New Space India Limited (NSIL)/ ISRO/ private space sector in conjunction with DRDO for execution.

Ground segment and functional units: A high-speed secure and tailor-made network for strategic control centres, timing facilities, integrity monitoring stations and two-way ranging stations needs to be evolved alongside the space segment by 2025. Standardised military grade fully secure user modules specific to the service/ organisation must be evolved and put in use before the expansion of the constellation.

Services: Other than the vital one-way position, navigation, timing and targeting services provided by NavIC, messaging broadcast services and two-way transmission are essential to fully exploit the indigenous constellation for national security.

Conclusion
NavIC 2.0 represents a paradigm shift, propelling India from regional navigation to a global one. The innate strategic considerations for reinforcing space and ground segments for security applications have given rise to a much-needed proactive shaping of NavIC 2.0.

The strategic roadmap outlined ensures the evolution of NavIC 2.0 with enhanced features, global coverage, and military precision.

As India prepares to replace old satellites, launch new ones, and develop a robust ground segment, NavIC 2.0 is poised to secure India's place among global majors in PNT services. This strategic initiative not only fortifies India's defence capabilities but also places it commercially at par with leading nations in global satellite navigation.

The journey from NavIC to NavIC 2.0 is a testament to India's commitment to technological advancement and self-reliance in the realm of national space security. (Courtesy: ORF)

15 foods that lower cholesterol



By: Lois Zoppi

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that travels through the bloodstream as a part of two lipoproteins: low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and high-density lipoprotein (HDL).

People sometimes refer to LDL cholesterol as "bad" cholesterol because it causes fatty deposits to build up in the blood vessels. These deposits can block blood flow and cause heart attacks or strokes.

HDL, or "good," cholesterol helps remove cholesterol from the body through the liver. High HDL cholesterol levels can reduce the risk of heart problems and strokes.

This article lists foods people can incorporate into their diet to improve their cholesterol levels. It also looks into which foods to avoid.

Foods to eat

Below are a range of foods that may help lower cholesterol as part of a varied diet.

Eggplant

Eggplant is high in dietary fiber with 1-cup containing 2.4 grams (g). As the American Heart Association (AHA) Trusted Source notes, fiber helps improve blood cholesterol levels. It also reduces the risk of developing:

- heart disease
- stroke
- obesity
- type 2 diabetes

Okra

Okra, or lady's fingers, is a warm-season vegetable that people cultivate worldwide. Researchers have found that a gel in okra called mucilage can help lower cholesterol by binding to it during digestion. This helps cholesterol leave the body through stool.

Apples

A small 2019 study found that among 40 participants with mildly high cholesterol, eating two apples a day reduced both total and LDL cholesterol levels. It also lowered levels of triglycerides, a type of fat that enters the bloodstream after a meal.

One apple can contain 3–7 g of dietary fiber, depending on its size. In addition, apples contain compounds called polyphenols, which may also have a positive effect on cholesterol levels.

Avocado

Avocados are rich in heart-healthy nutrients. A 2015 study concluded that eating one avocado a day as part of a moderate fat, cholesterol-lowering diet can improve cardiovascular disease risk, specifically by lowering LDL cholesterol without lowering HDL cholesterol.

One cup of avocado contains 14.7 g of monounsaturated fats, which can reduce LDL cholesterol levels and lower the risk of heart disease and strokes.

Fish

Omega-3 fats, such as eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), are essential polyunsaturated fats found in fish such as salmon, mackerel, and sardines, with well-documented anti-inflammatory and heart health benefits.

EPA can help protect the blood vessels and heart from disease by lowering levels of triglycerides. This is one of many ways it may prevent atherosclerosis and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Other heart health benefits include preventing cholesterol crystals from forming in the arteries, reducing inflammation and improving the way that HDL cholesterol works.

Oats

Oats significantly improved blood cholesterol levels over a period of 4 weeks in a small 2017 study. The team found that the participants' LDL cholesterol levels fell by 11.6% in 28 days.

Other research from 2019 Trusted Source confirms that the soluble fiber in oats lowers LDL cholesterol levels and can improve cardiovascular risk as part of a heart-healthy diet.

A person can add oats to their diet by eating porridge or oat-based cereal for breakfast.

Barley

Barley is a healthy grain rich in vitamins and minerals and high in fiber.

A 2020 paper found that a soluble fiber — beta-glucan — reduces LDL cholesterol by trapping bile acids and limiting how much cholesterol the body absorbs during digestion.

The body uses cholesterol to produce bile acids, replacing trapped ones, which leads to an overall reduction in cholesterol levels.

The beta-glucan in barley also has a positive effect on the gut microbiome and blood sugar control, further benefiting heart health.

Nuts

Nuts are a good source of unsaturated fats, which can help lower LDL cholesterol levels, especially when they replace saturated fats in the diet.

Nuts are also rich in fiber, which helps keep the body from absorbing cholesterol and promotes its excretion.

All nuts are suitable for a heart-healthy, cholesterol-lowering diet, including:

- almonds
- walnuts
- pistachios
- pecans
- hazelnuts
- Brazil nuts
- cashews

Soy

Soybeans and soy products, such as tofu, soy milk, and soy yogurt, are suitable for a cholesterol-lowering diet.

A 2019 analysis of 46 investigations into the effects of soy on LDL cholesterol found that a median intake of 25 g of soy protein per day over 5 weeks lowered LDL cholesterol by a clinically

significant 4.76 milligrams per deciliter.

Overall, the researchers concluded that soy protein can reduce LDL cholesterol by around 3–4% in adults, cementing its place in a heart-healthy, cholesterol-lowering diet.

Dark chocolate

Cocoa, which is in dark chocolate, contains flavonoids, a group of compounds in many fruits and vegetables. Their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties can benefit health in various ways.

In a 2015 randomized trial, participants drank a beverage containing cocoa flavanol twice daily for 1 month. By the end of the trial, their LDL cholesterol levels and blood pressure had decreased, and their HDL cholesterol levels had increased.

However, people should eat dark chocolate products in moderation, as they can be high in saturated fats and sugar.

Lentils

Lentils are rich in fiber, containing 7.8 g per half-cup portion. Fiber can prevent the body from absorbing cholesterol into the bloodstream.

A small 2015 study that included 39 participants who had type 2 diabetes and overweight or obesity demonstrated the positive effects of eating lentil sprouts on cholesterol levels.

Garlic

People can use garlic in many dishes and it has many health benefits. For example, researchers have found that garlic can help regulate serum cholesterol levels. A 2015 meta-analysis also determined that garlic can also help reduce blood pressure.

However, these reviews involved garlic supplements — it would be difficult to include enough garlic in the diet to have a noticeable effect on cholesterol levels.

Green tea

Antioxidants called catechins in certain teas, such as green tea, can benefit health. A 2020 review found that green tea consumption significantly improved cholesterol levels, reducing both total and LDL cholesterol levels without lowering HDL cholesterol levels. The researchers call for further studies to confirm their findings.

Discover nine drinks that can help lower cholesterol.

Extra virgin olive oil

Extra virgin olive oil features regularly in the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet. One of its many uses is as a cooking oil.

Substituting saturated fat with monounsaturated fat, found in extra virgin olive oil, might help reduce LDL levels.

Moreover, extra virgin olive oil has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that can be beneficial to cardiovascular and overall health.

Kale

Kale is an excellent source of fiber and many other nutrients. One cup of boiled kale contains 4.7 g of fiber.

A 2016 review demonstrated the link between fiber intake and a reduction in blood fat levels and blood pressure. Including more fiber in the diet can help lower levels of total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol.

Kale is also very rich in antioxidants, which are good for the heart and help reduce inflammation.

Foods to avoid

The AHA recommends reducing the amount of saturated and trans fats in the diet to lower cholesterol and heart disease risk.

To reduce levels of LDL cholesterol, limit the intake of the following foods which contain high levels of saturated and trans fats:

- fatty meat, such as lamb and pork
- lard and shortening
- butter and cream
- palm oil
- cakes and donuts
- pastries
- potato chips
- fried foods
- full fat dairy products

What reduces cholesterol quickly?

According to the AHA, the fastest way to lower cholesterol through dietary intervention is to reduce intake of saturated fats and heavily processed foods while increasing fiber intake.

How do you lower cholesterol naturally?

The best way to reduce cholesterol is to eat a diet rich in high fiber, whole fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats.

Lifestyle and diet changes can reduce cholesterol levels quickly. These include:

- limiting saturated fats from the diet
- increasing physical activity levels
- reducing alcohol intake
- quitting smoking, if necessary

Are bananas good for cholesterol?

Bananas are rich in soluble fiber and potassium. Both of these can have a positive effect on increasing digestive transit time, lowering cholesterol, and reducing blood pressure, when eaten as part of a healthy diet.

Will drinking a lot of water lower cholesterol? While ensuring adequate hydration is essential to overall health, cholesterol is not a water-soluble fat, and drinking large amounts of water will not lower cholesterol.

Summary

Maintaining low LDL cholesterol levels is important, as it decreases the risk of heart disease and stroke. A person can do this by following a healthy diet that includes high fiber fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, fatty fish, unprocessed soy, and the occasional dark chocolate treat.

It is also important to limit the intake of foods high in saturated fat, as these can increase LDL cholesterol levels and the risk of heart disease, stroke, and obesity. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Optimism and hope can often be used as synonyms – but there's an important gap between them

By: Kendra Thomas

On April 3, 1968, standing before a crowded church, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. painted his vision for justice. "I've seen the Promised Land," he said. "I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land."

Twenty-two hours later, he was assassinated.

King's prophetic words express the virtue of hope amid hardship. He was not optimistic that he would reach the "Promised Land," yet he was hopeful about the ultimate goal.

In conversation, "hope" and "optimism" can often be used as synonyms. But there's an important gap between them, as psychology research suggests.

One of the most common tools to measure optimism asks people how much they agree with statements such as, "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best." Those who strongly agree are regarded as highly optimistic.

But optimism can rely on a sense of luck over action. Self-help books on optimism are lined with hacks — like imagining your greatest possible self or focusing on the best-case scenario.

My psychology re-

search studies how people perceive hope and justice. Long-term hope is not about looking on the bright side. It is a mindset that helps people endure challenges, tackle them head-on and keep their eyes on the goal — a virtue that King and other community leaders exemplify.

We, not me

Hope is often defined in psychological research as having strong will to succeed and plans to reach a goal.

Hope is stronger than optimism at predicting academic success and people's ability to cope with pain. Plenty of scientific evidence suggests that hope improves individuals' health and boosts their well-being.

But branding hope as a self-improvement tool cheapens this long-established virtue. Hope has benefits beyond the self. Thus, many psychologists are expanding the study of hope beyond personal success.

My research team defines this "virtuous hope" as striving toward a purposeful vision of the common good — a hope often shaped by hardship and strengthened through relationships.

Many leaders, including King, have channeled that lesson to inspire change. Centuries of spiritual and philosophical work de-

scribe hope as a virtue that, like love, is a decision, not a feeling.

The myth of time

King wasn't known for looking on the bright side or expecting the best from others. He faced repeated waves of criticism, and, at the time of his death, fewer Americans approved of him than of the Vietnam War.

In "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", King lamented the optimism of moderate white Americans who said they supported his goals but took little action. There is a "strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills," he wrote.

"Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively."

He chastised society for believing that improvement would simply happen on its own. When he said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice", he was not describing its natural trajectory, but what people have the power to change. You cannot expect greener pastures if they are not tended today.

King was not alone in leveraging virtuous hope for justice. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire described hope as an "existential imperative"

that promotes action.

Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in prison, called hope a "powerful weapon."

Forged in adversity

What makes hope a virtue is not its ability to promote happiness and success but its commitment to a greater good beyond the self.

I study virtuous hope in a South African Zulu community, where there are few reasons for optimism. South Africa has the world's steepest inequality.

Unemployment is high, and social mobility is low. This is the part of the country where HIV is most widespread, with the percentage near 50% in some communities.

We studied several people seen as embodying hope, based on their reputation and community suggestions. These individuals demonstrated an unwavering focus on striving for a better future, often unglued from expectations of personal success.

One local farmer nominated by his community struggled to buy seeds for his crops but still helped others apply for grants to buy them. Even when his own future was uncertain, he was not hoarding. He described his hope as a commitment to help others. His hope is not a pos-

sitive expectation but a moral commitment.

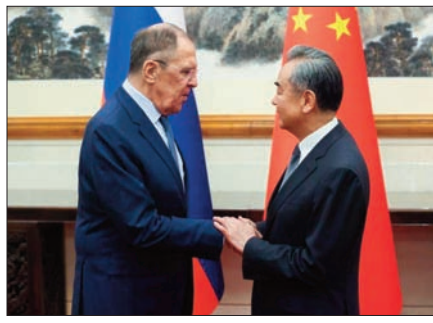
Our interviewees did not describe hardship as a suppressor of hope but as its context to grow.

One unemployed young woman said she had applied for jobs for four years and would continue, though she was not naive about the tough future. She said applying for jobs and reading to her child were her acts of hope. Her hope didn't expect a quick improvement, yet it warded off paralysis.

Many of our interviewees anchored their hope in their Christian faith, as did King. King often referenced St Paul, one of the first Christian writers, who wrote, "Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. Now this hope does not disappoint us."

Hope, in other words, plays the long game: enduring suffering with integrity. Like King's, it manifests in hardship and is refined in adversity. Hope enables communities to march for justice and democracy even while tasting the danger of dictatorship, apartheid or oligarchy. Hope knows it may take another generation to reach the Promised Land, but it acts today to bend the moral arc toward justice. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Russia Foreign Min Lavrov visits Beijing to emphasize ties with strongest political ally



BEIJING, April 8: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in Beijing on Monday to display the strength of ties with close diplomatic ally China amid Moscow's grinding war against Ukraine.

The two continent-sized authoritarian states, increasingly in dispute with democracies, seek to gain influence in Africa, the Middle East and South America. China has backed Russia's claim that President Vladimir Putin launched his assault in 2022 because of Western provocations, without producing any solid evidence.

Russian state news agency Tass said the ministers would "discuss the situation in Ukraine and the Asia-Pacific region, issues of bilateral cooperation and interaction in the international arena," quoting Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova. Lavrov is expected to meet with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, who has visited Russia during the conflict and maintained China's line of not dubbing the Russian war in Ukraine an invasion.

China has at times taken an equally combative tone against the U.S. and its allies. China and Russia have held joint military drills, and are seen as seeking to supplant democracies with dictatorships in areas where they wield influence. Despite its clear backing of Russia in the Ukraine war, China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told reporters Monday that "China has an objective and fair position on the Ukraine issue."

"We have been actively promoting peace talks and political solutions. China is not a creator or party to the Ukraine crisis, and we have not and will not do anything to profit from it," Mao told reporters at a daily briefing. China has also said it wasn't providing Russia with arms or military assistance, although it has maintained robust economic connections with Moscow, alongside India and other countries.

"We have always controlled the export of dual-use items in accordance with the law," Mao said, referring to industrial items that can be used for both industrial or military purposes, such as drones.

"The relevant country should not smear or attack the normal relations between China and Russia," Mao said. "The relevant country" was a reference to the U.S., Russia and China's chief geopolitical rival.

In a phone call last week with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, U.S. President Joseph Biden pressed China over its defense relationship with Russia, which is seeking to rebuild its industrial base as it continues its invasion of Ukraine. And he called on Beijing to wield its influence over North Korea to rein in the isolated and erratic nuclear power.

Adding to the tension between the two countries, U.S. lawmakers generated new legislation that would ban TikTok, the popular social media application, if its China-based owner ByteDance doesn't sell its stakes in the platform within six months of the bill's enactment.

Lawmakers are concerned Chinese authorities could force ByteDance to hand over data on the 170 million Americans who use TikTok. All Chinese firms, especially those in the social media sphere, are obligated to hand over user data to the government. (AP)

Motorcycle bomb kills 2 people and wounds 5 in Pak's restive southwest

QUETTA, April 8: A motorcycle bomb killed two people and wounded five in Pakistan's southwest, a police official said on Sunday.

It's the latest unrest to hit Baluchistan province, where militants have tried to target a naval facility and a government building in recent weeks.

Nobody immediately claimed responsibility for Sunday's blast in Khuzdar, which is on the main highway connecting the provincial capital Quetta with the port city of Karachi in neighbouring Sindh province.

Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Arif Zarkon said a woman and two police officers were among the wounded.

For years, Baluchistan has been the scene of a low-level insurgency by groups demanding independence from the central government in Islamabad.

Although the government says it has quelled the insurgency, violence in the province has persisted.

Last Saturday, an improvised explosive device killed one person and wounded 14, including three soldiers. (AP)

US will push China to change a policy threatening American jobs, Treasury Secretary Yellen says

BEIJING, April 8: The Biden administration will push China to change an industrial policy that poses a threat to U.S. jobs, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Monday after wrapping up four days of talks with Chinese officials.

She also said in Beijing they had "difficult conversations" about national security, including American concerns that Chinese companies are supporting Russia in its war in Ukraine.

But the focus of her trip was industrial policy, and what the U.S. and Europe describe as manufacturing overcapacity in China. Wealthy nations fear a wave of low-priced Chinese exports that will overwhelm factories at home. Yellen cited the manufacturing of electric vehicles and their batteries as well as solar energy equipment — sectors that the U.S. administration is trying to promote domestically — as areas where Chinese government subsidies have driven rapid expansion of production.

"China is now simply too large for the rest of the world to absorb this enormous capacity. Actions taken by the PRC today can shift world prices," she said, using the acronym for China's official name, the People's Republic of China. "And when the global market is flooded by artificially cheap Chinese products, the viability of American and other foreign firms is put into question."

She said the U.S. would host Chinese counterparts for their fourth economic and financial working groups meetings next week "where these issues will be discussed at length." Last September, the U.S. and China formed working groups in an effort to ease tensions and deepen ties between the two nations. The upcoming discussions will coincide with the IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings.

It's unclear how China will respond to such calls. European officials have repeatedly raised the issue on visits to China with no sign

The war, now in its seventh month, has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children

Palestinians returning to Khan Younis after Israeli withdrawal find an unrecognizable city

DEIR AL-BALAH, April 8: Streams of Palestinians filed into the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis on Monday to salvage what they could from the vast destruction left in the wake of Israel's offensive, a day after the Israeli military announced it was withdrawing troops from the area.

Many came back to the Gaza Strip's second-largest city to find their former hometown unrecognizable. With scores of buildings destroyed or damaged, piles of rubble now sit where apartments and businesses once did. Streets have been bulldozed. Schools and hospitals were damaged by the fighting.

Israel sent troops to Khan Younis in December, part of its blistering ground offensive that came in response to a Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7 into southern Israel. Israeli authorities say 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and roughly 250 people taken hostage. The war, now in its seventh month, has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, mostly women

and children, according to local health authorities, displaced most of the territory's 2.3 million people and left vast swaths of the beleaguered Gaza Strip uninhabitable. "Many areas, especially the city center, have become unfit for life," said Mahmoud Abdel-Ghani, who fled Khan Younis in December when Israel began its ground invasion of the city. "I found that my house and my neighbours' houses turned to rubble."

Israel's withdrawal of troops from Khan Younis signaled the end of a key phase in its war against Hamas and brought Israeli troop levels in the tiny coastal enclave to one of the lowest since the war began.

Israel said the city was a major Hamas stronghold and says its operation over the past few months killed thousands of militants and inflicted heavy damage to a vast network of tunnels used by Hamas to move weapons and fighters. It also claimed to have found evidence that hostages were held in the city. With no military pres-



ence in the city, Hamas could seek to regroup there as it has in other areas where the military has scaled back forces. The latest Israeli withdrawal also cleared the way for some Palestinians to make their way back to the area to comb through the mountains of debris to try to hold on to any possessions that remained.

Najwa Ayyash, who also was displaced from Khan Younis, said she was unable to reach her family's third floor apartment because the stairs were gone. Her brother climbed his way up through the destruction and pulled down some possessions, including lighter clothes for her children.

Bassel Abu Nasser, a

Khan Younis resident who fled after an airstrike hit his home in January, said much of the city turned into rubble. "There is no sense of life there," the 37-year-old father of two children said. "They left nothing there."

On Sunday, shortly after the military announced it had withdrawn, lines of Palestinians could be seen leaving Khan Younis with scant possessions. By foot and on bicycle, they carried plastic bags and laundry hampers with whatever they could gather back to where they were displaced to. One carried a rolled-up mattress. Another a standing fan. One man used his bike to move plywood.

The military exodus from

Khan Younis comes ahead of an expected Israeli offensive in Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city where hundreds of thousands have fled fighting elsewhere to seek shelter and which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold.

The city shelters some 1.4 million people — more than half of Gaza's population. The prospect of an offensive has raised global alarm, including from Israel's top ally, the U.S., which has demanded to see a credible plan to protect civilians.

Allowing people to return to nearby Khan Younis could relieve some pressure on Rafah, but many have no homes to return to. The city also is likely filled with dangerous unexploded bombs left by the fighting.

Israel's military quietly drew down troops in devastated northern Gaza earlier in the war. But it has continued to carry out airstrikes and raids in areas where it says Hamas regrouped, including Gaza's largest hospital, Shifa, leaving what the head of the World Health

Organization called "an empty shell." Israel blames Hamas for the damage, saying it fights from within civilian areas.

Khan Younis' main Nasser Hospital has also been that target of Israeli raids, with troops storming it earlier this year because the military said the remains of hostages were inside.

The precise state of the hospital after the troops' withdrawal was unclear. Video from the hospital showed the emergency building appearing to be intact, but debris was strewn around its interior where thousands of displaced people once sought shelter before being forced to evacuate by the military.

Israel says its war aims to destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities and return the roughly 130 remaining hostages, a quarter of whom Israel says are dead. Negotiations brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. meant to bring about a cease-fire in exchange for the release of hostages are underway. (AP)

South Korea launches its 2nd military spy satellite amid animosities with North Korea

SEOUL, April 8: South Korea has launched its second military spy satellite into space, days after North Korea reaffirmed its plan to launch multiple reconnaissance satellites this year.

The Koreans each launched their first spy satellites last year — North Korea in November and South Korea in December — amid heightened animosities. They said their satellites would boost their abilities to monitor each other and enhance their own missile attack capabilities.

South Korea's second spy satellite was launched from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Sunday evening local time, which was Monday morning in Seoul.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said in a statement that the satellite was successfully separated from a rocket. It said it will check whether the satellite functions properly via its communications with an overseas ground station.

Under a contract with SpaceX, South Korea was to launch five spy

satellites by 2025. South Korea's first spy satellite launch on Dec. 1 was made from California's Vandenberg Space Force Base.

South Korea in 2022 became the world's 10th nation to successfully launch a satellite with its own technology by using a homegrown rocket to place what it called a "performance observation satellite" in orbit. But experts say it's economical to use a SpaceX rocket to launch spy satellite and that South Korea needs more launches to ensure the reliability of a rocket.

North Korea is also eager to acquire its own space-based surveillance network to cope with what it calls military threats posed by the United States and South Korea.

After two launch failures earlier in 2023, North Korea placed its Mallyong-1 spy satellite into orbit on Nov. 21. North Korea has since said its satellite had transmitted imagery with space views of key sites in the U.S. and South Korea, including the White House and the Pentagon. But

it hasn't released any of those satellite photos, and foreign experts doubt whether the North Korean satellite can transmit militarily meaningful imagery.

On March 31, Pak Kyong Su, vice general director of the North's National Aerospace Technology Administration, said North Korea is expected to launch several more reconnaissance satellites this year. During a key political conference in late December, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to launch three additional military spy satellite in 2024.

The U.N. bans North Korea from conducting a satellite launch, considering it as a disguised test of its long-range missile technology. The North's November satellite launch deepened tensions on the Korean Peninsula, with both Koreas taking steps to breach their 2018 agreement to lower down military tensions.

In recent years, North Korea has been engaged in a provocative run of missile tests to modernize and expand its weapons arsenals, prompting the U.S. and South Korea to strengthen their military drills in response. Experts say North Korea likely believes that an enlarged weapons arsenals would increase its leverage in future diplomacy with the U.S. (AP)



of any change on the Chinese side. Moreover, one of leader Xi Jinping's major goals is to build the nation into a major power so it doesn't feel compelled to bend to outside pressure.

But overcapacity also affects China — price wars in the electric vehicle sector are expected to drive some makers out of business — and experts have called for better coordination of policies designed to promote new technologies. The government agreed during Yellen's visit to start talks on what the two sides called "balanced growth."

"We intend to underscore the

need for a shift in policy by China during these talks," Yellen said at a news conference held outdoors on a balmy spring day at the U.S. ambassador's residence in Beijing.

Advocating for higher consumer spending in China in response to its large government subsidies to solar, EV and lithium-ion battery industries, Yellen said: "If consumer spending were higher as a share of GDP, there would be less need to have such large investment going into building supply" of green energy products.

On Saturday, the official Xinhua News Agency said that the Chinese

side had "responded fully to the issue of production capacity" during Yellen's talks with Vice Premier He Lifeng, the lead person for China-U.S. economic and trade affairs.

More than a decade ago, the treasury secretary said, a flood of "below-cost Chinese steel ... decimated industries across the world and in the United States. I've made clear that President Biden and I will not accept that reality again."

On the war in Ukraine, Yellen warned that any banks that facilitate the sale of military or dual-use goods to Russia could face U.S. sanctions.

"I stressed that companies, including those in the PRC, must not provide material support for Russia's war and that they will face significant consequences if they do," she said.

Yellen, the former chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve, met with China's central bank governor, Pan Gongsheng, earlier on Monday. (AP)

Ukraine denies a Russian claim that it launched drone strikes on a major nuclear power plant

KYIV, April 8: A senior Ukrainian official has denied Russian accusations that his country's army fired exploding drones at Europe's largest nuclear power plant, which the Kremlin's forces have been occupying and running in southern Ukraine since shortly after the war began more than two years ago.

Andrii Yusov, the spokesperson for Ukraine's military intelligence agency suggested there had been no attack, saying Russian forces routinely fabricate strikes on the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. However, the strikes on this occasion were confirmed by U.N.'s atomic watchdog agency, though it didn't attribute responsibility for the attack to either side.

The plant has repeatedly been caught in the crossfire since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and seized the facility shortly after. The International Atomic Energy Agency, a U.N. body, has frequently expressed alarm about the facility amid fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

The plant's six reactors have been shut down for months, but it still needs power and qualified staff to operate crucial cooling systems and other safety features.

The U.N.'s atomic watchdog agency on Sunday confirmed drone strikes on one of the plant's six reactors, causing one casualty.

The IAEA team did not ob-



serve structural damage to the "systems, structures and components" important to the nuclear safety of the plant, it said. They reported superficial scorching to the top of a reactor dome.

The damage "has not compromised nuclear safety, but this is a serious incident (with) the potential to undermine (the) integrity of the reactor's containment system," the IAEA said on X, formerly Twitter.

IAEA chief Rafael Mariano Grossi said the main reactor containment structures took at least three direct hits. "This cannot happen," he said on X.

Zaporizhzhia is one of four regions that Russia illegally annexed in September 2022.

The Institute for the Study of War, a think tank based in Washington, said Russian authorities are seeking "to use Russia's physical control over the (plant) to force international organizations, including the IAEA, to meet with Russian occupation officials to legitimize Russia's occupation of the (plant) and by extension Russia's occupation of sovereign Ukrainian land." (AP)

SLanka Freedom Party set to face long legal battle in factional clash

COLOMBO, April 8: The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) is set to get into a long legal battle this election year with separate factions trying to gain control of it as Nimal Siripala de Silva, an incumbent minister, was on Monday appointed the party's acting chairman in place of former president Maithripala Sirisena.

SLFP is one of the major and most well-known political parties in Sri Lanka which has ruled the island nation for many years.

"Today we took important decisions to carry out party functions without interruptions. The central committee meeting decided to elect an acting chair," Duminda Dissanayake, the party's national organizer, told the media.

Last week, Sirisena was clamped with a restraining order as the leader of the party after he dropped from party posts de Silva and two others, who are also ministers in President Ranil Wickremesinghe's government.

The trio has already obtained the court's interim orders suspending the action of Sirisena, the 72-year-old former prime minister.

Following the restraining order on Sirisena, the police on Saturday shut the party headquarters after the Sirisena faction complained about the rival camp for allegedly stealing party files.

Sirisena after the court sanction against him accused former president Chandrika Kumaratunga of being behind the move to remove him as the leader.

The 78-year-old Kumaratunga was present at Monday morning's meeting which appointed de Silva as the acting chair.

The Sirisena faction told the media that Monday morning's purported central committee meeting was illegal.

The SLFP, which contested the last parliamentary election held in 2020 under the SLFP banner, has 14 members in the 225-member Assembly.

Some of them are members of the Wickremesinghe government. Sirisena claimed the trio defied the party whip, requiring them to remain in opposition.

The SLFP split comes as political parties are gearing up to face a presidential election in the last quarter of this year, with the next parliamentary polls falling due by mid-next year. (PTT)

Elon Musk will be investigated over fake news and obstruction in Brazil after a SC order

RIO DE JANEIRO, April 8: A crusading Brazilian Supreme Court justice included Elon Musk as a target in an ongoing investigation over the dissemination of fake news and opened a separate investigation late Sunday into the executive for alleged obstruction.

In his decision, Justice Alexandre de Moraes noted that Musk on Saturday began waging a public "disinformation campaign" regarding the top court's actions, and that Musk continued the following day — most notably with comments that his social

media company X would cease to comply with the court's orders to block certain accounts.

"The flagrant conduct of obstruction of Brazilian justice, incitement of crime, the public threat of disobedience of court orders and future lack of cooperation from the platform are facts that disrespect the sovereignty of Brazil," de Moraes wrote.

Musk will be investigated for alleged intentional

criminal instrumentalization of X as part of an investigation into a network of people known as digital militias who allegedly spread defamatory fake news and threats against Supreme Court justices, according to the text of the decision.

The new investigation will look into whether Musk engaged in obstruction, criminal organization and incitement.

Musk has not commented on X about the latest de-

velopment as of late on Sunday.

Brazil's political right has long characterized de Moraes as overstepping his bounds to clamp down on free speech and engage in political persecution. In the digital militias investigation, lawmakers from former President Jair Bolsonaro's circle have been imprisoned and his supporters' homes raided. Bolsonaro himself became a target of the investigation in 2021.

De Moraes' defenders have said his decisions, although extraordinary, are legally sound and necessary

to purge social media of fake news as well as extinguish threats to Brazilian democracy — notoriously underscored by the Jan. 8, 2023, uprising in Brazil's capital that resembled the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection in the U.S. Capitol.

On Saturday, Musk — a self-declared free speech absolutist — wrote on X that the platform would lift all restrictions on blocked accounts and predicted that the move was likely to dry up revenue in Brazil and force the company to shutter its local office.

"But principles matter more than profit," he wrote.

He later instructed users in Brazil to download a VPN to retain access if X was shut down and wrote that X would publish all of de Moraes' demands, claiming they violate Brazilian law.

"These are the most draconian demands of any country on Earth!" he later wrote. Musk had not published de Moraes' demands as of late Sunday and prominent blocked accounts remained so, indicating X had yet to act based on Musk's previous pledges. (AP)



Taking a swipe at the CPI(M), Debbarma accused the Communists of disrespecting his family's legacy

Shah has given guarantee to rectify 75 years of mistakes towards Tiprasa people: Tipra Motha chief

AGARTALA, April 8: Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on Monday said Union Home Minister Amit Shah has assured him of taking corrective steps to rectify "75 years of mistakes towards the Tiprasa people in Tripura."

Addressing a joint rally of BJP, Tipra Motha, and Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) in West Tripura's Khumlung, Debbarma highlighted the significance of this moment, noting that for the first time, the issues of the Tiprasa people have been addressed without any violence.

On March 2, the Tipra Motha had reached an agreement with the Centre and the Tripura government to address the demands of the state's tribal population, including economic, political, land, linguistic, and cultural rights.

Debbarma expressed gratitude towards Shah's acknowledgment of the historical injustices faced by the Tiprasa people over the past 75 years.

"Home Minister Amit Shah has openly said steps have been taken to reverse the mistakes of 75 years of the Tiprasa people. This is a very big statement. Many govern-



ments ruled the country but never disclosed the truth. The Union Home Minister has given us a guarantee", he said. Debbarma also announced upcoming ral-

lies where both Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi are scheduled to speak, urging supporters to participate in large numbers to demonstrate the strength of unity.

Taking a swipe at the CPI(M), Debbarma accused the Communists of disrespecting his family's legacy and dared them to challenge Tipra Motha in Tripura's political landscape.

He also ridiculed the alliance between the CPI(M) and Congress in the state, alleging that the Congress leadership in Delhi had made a clandestine deal with the CPI(M) to sell out the party in the northeastern state.

"I had fought against CPI(M) when I was president of Tripura Pradesh Congress but the grand old party could not win. Now, I understand, they had a secret understanding and the Congress leadership in Delhi sold the party to CPI(M) in the northeastern state", he said.

Despite expressing admiration for Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Debbarma said he could not support him as he believes Gandhi will not work for the welfare of Tripura people. (PTI)

SDF chief Pawan Chamling alleges that he was pushed by SKM workers in Namchi



GANGTOK, April 8: Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) president and former chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling on Monday claimed that he was pushed by rival Sikkim Krantikari Morcha supporters during campaigning in Namchi district.

A video of the incident has gone viral on social media. PTI could not independently verify the authenticity of the video.

In the purported video, Chamling was seen campaigning for SDF's Namchi-Singithang candidate Bimal Rai at Namchi Bazar as SKM workers campaigning for Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang's wife Krishna Kumar Rai who is contesting on ruling party ticket from the same seat coming to the same area and workers of the two rival parties were seen pushing and shoving each other as police rushed to the spot and separated the two warring sides.

Chamling alleged that he was pushed by the SKM workers.

The Namchi police said the supporters of rival parties did come face to face with each other, but no untoward incident took place as cops made a timely intervention and separated the two sides.

The SDF, in a statement, claimed that many party workers including some women were beaten up by SKM activists and

taken to the hospital.

"This is a murder of democracy whereby candidates of opposition party are at risk and being attacked every day by Golay's goons. SDF party condemns the aggressive and criminal tactics of PS Golay who is unfit to hold any post in government," it said.

SKM could not be contacted for comments on Chamling's allegations.

Meanwhile, eight suspected SKM supporters were arrested by Pakyong police for allegedly attacking the house of one Pritam Dhamala in Sawney village on Sunday night which is being used by the SDF's West Pendum (SC) assembly constituency candidate Anup Thatal.

Police said that it received a complaint about the attack on Dhamala's house allegedly by SKM supporters and a Quick Response Team (QRT) was rushed to the spot.

The Sector Magistrate Suren Tamang and SDPO Mahendra Subba also reached there to investigate the matter.

Following a preliminary probe, it was found that eight persons had trespassed into Dhamala's house.

The accused persons also threw stones at the house as a result three persons sustained injuries. All eight accused persons were arrested on the basis of an FIR lodged at Rangpo. (PTI)

Casting of postal ballots begins in Dimapur



DIMAPUR, April 8: To facilitate voting for essential workers, the casting of postal ballots began at the deputy commissioner's office in Dimapur on Monday. The process was overseen by EAC and the nodal officer for postal ballots, Litsenthung Kikon.

Kikon informed that out of 18 eligible essential voters, 15 casted their votes on the first day of the voting day. The postal ballot voting is scheduled to continue till April 10, 2024, and will take place from 9 am to 5 pm each day at the deputy commissioner's office, Dimapur. (NNN)

NDPP president tenders apology for his comment on Frontier Nagaland Territory

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 8: A day after the Konyak civil society organisations, led by the Konyak Union, issued him a summon notice, ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) president N Chingwang Konyak on Monday tendered his apologies for his "indiscretion" in commenting on the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO)-Frontier Nagaland Territory (FNT) issue at an election rally at Wokha on April 5. He said the comment was not related to his election campaign or rally.

Speaking at the rally, Konyak said the ENPO's decision to abstain from participating in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections would be their "own loss". The ENPO resolved not to participate in the elections for failure of the government of India to fulfill its offer to create Frontier Nagaland Territory before announcement of the Lok Sabha elections 2024.



On March 30, the union issued a directive to all its citizens not to engage in comments/remarks on the ENPO-Frontier Nagaland Territory matter.

The Konyak Union on Saturday night issued a summon notice to the NDPP chief to appear at its office at Mon headquarters within 48 hours of receiving the notice to ad-

dress the alleged violations and explain his actions.

Humbly acknowledging and accepting the responsibility for his actions which have contravened the March 30 resolution of the Konyak Union, the NDPP president gave an apology undertaking to the union.

"I understand the gravity of the mistake and assure that such actions will not recur in the future," Konyak said in his undertaking.

In accordance with the March 30 resolution and to uphold the integrity of the Konyak Union, he pledged not to engage/comment on ENPO-Frontier Nagaland Territory issue in any further canvassing or election campaign activities in his individual capacity or in the capacity of the NDPP president.

He further assured to continue to contribute his best and work for the uplift and progress of the eastern Nagaland people and the Konyaks.

USTM management fest MANAGEMIA 2.0 concludes



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 8: Managemia 2.0, the annual Management Fest organised by the department of business administration at the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM), has successfully come to an end here on Saturday. The program was held from April 4-6 at the University campus. Twelve hundred students from 44 universities and colleges, including Delhi University, Jamia Millia University, Tezpur University, Assam University and colleges participated in this event.

Managemia 2.0 featured a wide range of competitions starting from Management games under which there were various competitions like Ideathon, Business Quiz, Ad-making, Logo making, Recycle mania etc., a few competitions under cultural event & sports, stalls and exhibits, and other thrilling activities. All these com-

petitions have been designed in such a way so that they foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, analytical skill, decision making skill and industry exposure among participants. This year's theme of MANAGEMIA 2.0 was "Unlocking Potentials, Transforming Future".

The festival was inaugurated by Pawan Agarwal, CEO & MD of Datamation & Groups and Pubali Giti Borthakur, head People & Delivery Arena at Infosys along with Prof. GD Sharma, vice chancellor, USTM and Dr RK Sarma, adviser USTM on April 4 at NKC auditorium of USTM.

The valedictory programme was held on April 6 where the chief guest was PVSLN Murthy, CMD NEDFI. The occasion was graced by Elvis Ali Hazarika, Asom Saurav Bota Awardee along with Prof GD Sharma, vice chancellor, USTM and Dr RK Sarma, adviser USTM.

Caches of arms and ammunition recovered

IMPHAL, April 8: Manipur police continued to recover caches of arms and ammunition in its ongoing intensified search operations in the fringe and vulnerable areas of the state along with the central security forces. On Sunday also, a huge cache of arms and ammunition was intercepted during a search operation at secluded areas and fish farms in Uchiwa Lamhang area under Mayang Imphal area of Imphal West.

The recovered items were two SBBL guns, four hand grenades, two tube launcher, two sets of Kenwood walkie-talkies, one 9 mm pistol (country made) with magazine, five 7.62 mm SLR ammunition, 21 live ammunition of .303 rifle, 24 live rounds of .38 revolver, one ammunition charger guard, one SLR along with one magazine and one carbine with one magazine. A police source said that the cache of arms and ammunition in a gunny bag was intercepted during the search operation conducted by a combined team of Imphal West police commandos and 33 Assam Rifles. Fish farms, farm houses and other nearby houses were searched during the operation, the police source said.

The weapons were found wrapped with clothes, jacket shirt in a gunny bag and carry bag. The items seemed to be hidden there a few days back, it added. (NNN)

NPCC launches 'donate for Congress campaign'

HT correspondent
DIMAPUR, April 8: The Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) on Monday launched the 'donate for Congress campaign', a crowd-funding initiative, towards the electoral campaign fund of party candidate S Supongmeren Jamir for the Nagaland Lok Sabha constituency.

Launching the campaign, the NPCC said the freezing of accounts of the Congress Party is not just an act of inter-party political upmanship by the Union government but it is an assault on the democratic rights of the common people of India.

The party said the "donate for Congress campaign", apart from the financial contract aspect, is an invitation to the voters of Nagaland to register their protest against this wrong and reassert the centrality of the electorate on the representational democratic processes mandated under the Constitution.

The funds will be directed towards various support programs, such as skill development training, education, and employment opportunities, emphasizing the government's commitment to a

₹ 100 crore allocated for former NLFT militants' rehabilitation in Tripura

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 8: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha announced that the central government has allocated a sum of ₹ 100 crore for surrendered militants of the Nationalist Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a proscribed group known for operating in hilly regions of Bangladesh.

Saha explained during a public gathering in Gabordi, West Tripura district, that the central government has approved this allocation under the Special Economic Development Package for Indigenous People of Tripura, aimed at facilitating the integration of former NLFT members into society and away from violence.

The funds will be directed towards various support programs, such as skill development training, education, and employment opportunities, emphasizing the government's commitment to a



comprehensive approach to conflict resolution, centered on rehabilitation and reintegration.

Tripura will go to polls in two

phases on April 19 and 26. The state has two Lok Sabha seats: Tripura West and Tripura East, both of which are held by the BJP.

Company of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) comprises around 80-100 personnel Around 12,000 paramilitary forces to be deployed in Tripura for polls

AGARTALA, April 8: Around 12,000 central and state paramilitary forces will be deployed in Tripura for the elections, a senior police officer said.

Voting in Tripura West Lok Sabha seat and by-election in Rannagar assembly seat will be held in the first phase on April 19, while electors in Tripura East Lok Sabha seat will exercise their franchise in the second phase on April 26.

"A total of 84 companies of Central Armed Police Force (CAPFs) have been deployed in the state for the elections, with 14 companies of CRPF arriving on Thursday," Assistant Inspector General (Law and Order) Jyotishman Das Choudhury said.

He said no more central forces will be deployed as 84 companies are "enough for conducting the elections in the state".

A company of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) comprises



around 80-100 personnel. Besides, around 4,500 personnel of the state paramilitary force, Tripura State Rifles, will also be deployed for election-related duties, while BSF will continue to remain vigilant along the India-Bangladesh international

border, the police officer said.

He said some central forces will be shifted to areas in the Tripura East Lok Sabha constituency after the completion of the first phase of voting in the Tripura West seat and Rannagar assembly constituency. Vishal Kumar, Returning Officer

of the Tripura West Lok Sabha seat, said that of the 1,685 polling booths in the constituency, 565 have been identified as critical and vulnerable and for those, tight security measures will be taken.

Security forces have already launched operations against anti-social elements, including drug peddlers, he said.

Saju Vaheed, Returning Officer of Tripura East Parliamentary constituency, said, "Vulnerability mapping of polling booths in the seat keeps changing based on inputs from the ground and political parties. Adequate security forces have been deployed to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections."

The Tripura East Lok Sabha constituency has 1,664 polling booths.

Vigil along the 856-km border with Bangladesh has been intensified to thwart any intrusion bid, he added. (PTI)

Rain and thunderstorms predicted in Assam and other NE states

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 8: In a time when the whole of the nation is reeling under a severe heat wave, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued predictions of light to moderate rainfall in various states of Northeast India in the coming two to three days.

According to the forecast available, rain and thunderstorms are expected to occur at most places in Arunachal Pradesh and at a few places in Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura. Moreover, the weather department has issued warnings for thunderstorms and lightning with gusty winds in isolated areas across these states. The wind speed may reach up to 30-40 kmph in Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura.

The alert for thunderstorms and lightning is more likely to occur in isolated areas of Arunachal Pradesh. Furthermore, heavy rain is expected in isolated areas of Arunachal Pradesh. In Guwahati and its surrounding areas, the next three to four days will witness a partly cloudy sky, with one or two spells of rain or thundershowers. The maximum temperature is likely to reach 34°C, while the minimum temperature may dip to 23°C.

Manipur Congress accuses BJP govt of violating model code of conduct

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 8: Manipur Congress has raised concerns regarding alleged violations of the election model code of conduct (MCC) in recent government recruitment notifications in Manipur.

In a letter to the Manipur chief electoral officer (CEO), Manipur Congress president K Meghachandra highlighted various notifications for posts such as co-operative inspector, LDC, farm overseer, driver, peon, and chowkidar, circulating on social media despite the MCC being in effect for the Lok Sabha elections.

Manipur Congress claimed that the recruitment process, including form submissions through employment exchanges, breaches MCC guidelines.

'Photographs of ministers and other political functionaries cannot be displayed in government-owned buildings and premises'

Cong files complaint to EC against PM's remarks on its IS poll manifesto

NEW DELHI, April 8: The Congress complained to the Election Commission (EC) on Monday against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks targeting the party and comparing its Lok Sabha poll manifesto with that of the Muslim League.

A delegation of Congress leaders met EC officials and raised several issues, including the use of pictures and large cut-outs of the prime minister in government buildings and colleges and demanded that those be removed to maintain a level-playing field in the upcoming parliamentary election.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the party has filed a complaint against Modi for making comments against it, alleging that its manifesto attempts to divide the country and impose the pre-independence ideology of the Muslim League.

The prime minister has said in his election rallies that the Congress' manifesto for the upcoming general election smacks of the "politics of appeasement" and carries the imprint of the Muslim League, with "every page reeking of breaking India".

"Every page reeks of breaking India into pieces. The Congress manifesto reflects the same thinking that was prevalent in the Muslim League during the freedom



movement. "It completely bears the imprint of the Muslim League and whatever is remaining is completely dominated by the Leftists," Modi has said.

After meeting the EC officials, Congress leader Pawan Khara said, "We have raised such points before the EC on which we have also discussed earlier and have been registering our objections. Pictures of the prime minister wearing a military uniform are

being misused during the election campaign. There is already an advisory of the EC that this cannot be done during elections. We have urged the EC to take action on this issue as the BJP is continuously committing such crimes."

Khara was accompanied by party leaders Mukul Wasnik, Salman Khurshid and Gurdeep Sappal. The Congress filed another complaint with the poll panel against the use of armed forces in

the election campaigning by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and the EC's notifications in this regard.

The opposition party also raised its earlier complaint made to the EC on April 6 against Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology Rajeev Chandrasekhar for allegedly giving false information pertaining to his financial status in his election affidavit, in contravention of the pro-

visions of the Representation of People Act, Indian Penal Code and the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court.

Another complaint was made against the life-size hoardings and banners of the prime minister installed in various colleges of the Delhi University under the "Viksit Bharat @2047: Voice of Youth Campaign", in violation of the provisions of the MCC that say advertisements, hoardings made at the cost of the state exchequer cannot be used by political parties as the same amounts to poll campaigning at the public's expense.

The Congress said photographs of ministers and other political functionaries cannot be displayed in government-owned buildings and premises as the same would go against the principles of "level-playing field".

It reiterated its complaint made on April 5 against public service broadcaster Doordarshan for airing "The Kerala Story" and said it is "a work of fiction that vilifies a religious community and lends credence to the idea of Love Jihad being writ large in the country".

Publicising such propaganda films could polarise the voters, resulting in communal discord on the lines of religious identity, totally against the spirit of free-and-fair elections, the opposition party said in its complaint to the EC. (PTI)

Corrupt Congress overlooked needs of poor, I ended party's licence to loot: PM Modi

'During the Congress regime, corruption had become the country's identity, and the party thought it had a licence to loot'



RAIPUR/JAGDALPUR, April 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday hit out at the opposition Congress, saying it overlooked needs of the poor for decades since Independence and never understood their pain.

Addressing the BJP's 'Vijay Sankalp Sankhna' rally in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, which will go to polls on April 19, he also said the Congress' manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections has the imprint of the Muslim League.

"During the Congress regime, corruption had become the country's identity, and the party thought it had a licence to loot, he said.

"Since Independence, the Congress overlooked needs of the poor for decades and never understood their pain," the PM said.

"People said what will happen to the poor during the Covid-19 pandemic, but I said I will give free vaccine and ration to them," he said, adding that "due to my government's efforts, 25 crore people have risen above the poverty line."

Speaking at the rally in Chhote Ambal village, held in support of BJP candidates Mahesh Kashyap (Bastar) and Bhojraj Nag (Kanker), Modi said it is the poor that suffers most due to corruption.

"Corruption destroys the rights of the poor. Before 2014, scams worth several lakh crore rupees were committed," he said, adding that former PM Rajiv Gandhi himself had admitted just 15 paise out of every rupee allotted for development work reached the rightful beneficiary.

"Whose claws snatched the remaining 85 paise? Modi has cancelled this licence of loot of the Congress. The BJP government has sent ₹ 34 lakh crore directly into the bank accounts of the beneficiaries in the last 10 years. Every rupee sent from Delhi has reached cent per cent to the poor," Modi said.

Had the Congress been in power now and the 15 paise tradition continued, then ₹ 28 lakh crore of this ₹ 34 lakh crore would have been embezzled, the prime minister said.

He managed to cancel this licence to loot because the people gave him the power to do so, the PM asserted.

Targeting the Congress over a statement of Chhattisgarh's Leader of Opposition Charan Das Mahant, the PM said the opposition party started abusing him when he ended their loot.

But he was fully protected from such abuse because "crores of my countrymen, my mothers and sisters have become my 'raksha kavach' (protective shield)," the PM said.

Since strict action is being taken against corruption carried out by the previous (Congress) government, including against those who duped the state's youth, the opposition party's leaders are saying that his head should be broken with sticks, Modi told the gathering.

"Modi is not afraid of such threats. For Modi, my India is my family. I am busy in saving my country and my family from being looted. I call 'bhastachar hatao' (remove corruption) and they say 'bhastachari bachao' (save the corrupt)," the PM said.

Modi said the Congress and other opposition parties were holding rallies to save the corrupt but they must understand that wrongdoers will go to jail no matter how much they threaten him.

"This is Modi's guarantee," the prime minister said.

Slamming the Congress and other INDIA bloc constituents for declining the invite to the idol consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Modi said, "Ram Navami festival is not far away. This time people will have a glimpse of our Ram Lalla in Ayodhya in a grand temple not in a tent."

He added it was natural for people of Chhattisgarh, the "nanihal" (birthplace of maternal grandparents) of Lord Ram, to be most happy on this dream (of a grand temple) being fulfilled after 500 years.

"The Congress and INDIA bloc are very angry with the construction of Ram temple. The 'royal family' of Congress rejected the invitation for the consecration of Ram temple. The Congress leaders who considered this move wrong were expelled from the party. Those who attended were expelled from the party for six years," Modi said.

It showed the Congress can go to any extent for appeasement, Modi said.

Modi highlighted the work his government had done for tribals in the past 10 years and said the segment was always the BJP's priority.

"The daughter of the tribal community is today the country's President. It is BJP that has given Chhattisgarh a tribal chief minister. The BJP government has created a separate ministry and a separate budget for tribals," Modi asserted.

Elections to 11 Lok Sabha seats in the state will be held in three phases on April 19, April 26 and May 7.

Bastar Lok Sabha is the lone constituency to go to polls in the first phase. (PTI)

Excise policy: ED questions Kejriwal's PA, AAP MLA Pathak

NEW DELHI, April 8: The Enforcement Directorate on Monday questioned Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar and AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak in the excise policy-linked money laundering case, officials said. Their statement is being recorded under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said.

Both of them have been questioned in this case earlier too by the ED. Sources said Kumar's questioning was essential in connection with the engagements of Kejriwal. The 55-year-old CM, also the national convener of the AAP, was arrested by the ED in this case last month. He is currently lodged in the Tihar Jail under judicial custody.

The agency had alleged in its earlier charge sheets that at least 36 accused, including former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and Kumar, "destroyed, used or changed" 170 phones to conceal evidence of "kickbacks" worth thousands of crores of rupees in the alleged scam. The IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) of Bibhav's mobile number is stated to have been changed four times between September 2021 and July 2022, according to

the ED charge sheet filed before a local court last year.

Pathak, the 35-year-old AAP MLA from Rajinder Nagar constituency, is understood to have been called by the agency for questioning in connection with the party's 2021-22 poll campaign for the Goa assembly polls. The ED has alleged that Rs 45 crore "kickbacks", out of the Rs 100 crore "bribe" provided by the 'South Group', were used by the AAP for this campaign.

The agency has claimed that cash payments were made to individuals involved in campaign activities, managed by AAP members like Vijay Nair and Pathak.

The agency informed the court that it has recorded the statements of various persons engaged in the election campaign related activities of the AAP during the Goa elections and it was found that "cash payments were made to them for work like survey workers, area managers, assembly managers etc."

"These persons and activities related to the election campaign were overall managed by Vijay Nair (former AAP communications chief arrested in this case) and Durgesh Pathak, AAP MLA", the ED had said. (PTI)

Former Union minister Birender Singh quits BJP, to join Congress

CHANDIGARH, April 8: Former Union minister Birender Singh on Monday said he has quit the BJP and will join the Congress, the move coming almost a month after his son Brijendra Singh joined the grand old party.

His wife Prem Lata Singh -- a former BJP MLA from Haryana -- also quit the party.

"I have resigned from the primary membership of the BJP and sent my resignation to party chief JP Nadda. My wife, Prem Lata, who was an MLA from 2014-2019, has also quit the party. Tomorrow (Tuesday), we will join the Congress," Birender Singh (78), a prominent political figure in Haryana, told reporters in Delhi.

After quitting the BJP, Birender Singh also met Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda in Delhi. Birender Singh joined the BJP nearly 10 years ago after an over four-decade stint with the Congress. After his son joined the Congress on March 10, there was speculation that Birender Singh would follow suit.

Birender Singh was Union steel minister in the first government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He also held charge as minister of rural development, Panchayati Raj, and drinking water and sanitation.

During the agitation against the now-repealed farm laws, Birender Singh had extended his support to the farmers.

Birender Singh -- who also served as a minister in the Congress government led by Hooda in Haryana -- is the grandson of Sir Chhotu Ram, considered as a "messiah of farmers".

Asked why he quit the BJP, Birender Singh said he had been with the Congress for 42 years but left to join the saffron party in 2014 due to "certain reasons".

"When I joined BJP, I knew the ideology of this party would be different and there would be some differences between the ideologies of the two parties. Later on, I experienced that there was a wider gap," he said.

"During my political career, I connected with people who remained dedicated supporters," said Singh, indicating that this was not recognised by the BJP in the manner it should have been.

On the farmers' agitation, Birender Singh said he had raised the

issue on party platforms and urged that their grievances be resolved.

"I felt that while I was giving suggestions, those were not being heeded," he said.

Responding to another question, he said, "I have said that I may not be in electoral politics but I will continue to be politically active as long as I can."

Birender Singh said he also felt the BJP should have heeded his suggestion to snap ties with the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) several months ago and added that the decision should not have been delayed. "I had said that if the BJP continued to have an alliance with the JJP, then Birender Singh would not be part of the BJP," he added.

Birender Singh's wife Prem Lata Singh told PTI that her husband had a clean image and received a lot of love and respect.

When Birender Singh joined the BJP, it was with the idea that he would remain in the party for the rest of his life, she said.

However, some developments such as the farmers' agitation took place during which Birender Singh stood in favour of the farmers, she said. (PTI)

New govt will transfer ₹ 1 lakh into accounts of women from SC and ST categories, says Rahul

SEONI, April 8: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday exuded confidence to win the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and said the new government will transfer ₹ 1 lakh annually into accounts of women belonging to SC, ST, and backward categories.

Addressing a rally at Dhanora in Seoni district, which is part of the Mandla Lok Sabha constituency, Gandhi also assured to provide guaranteed apprenticeships to unemployed youths.

"Our manifesto mentions three to four revolutionary steps taken by us like transferring ₹ 1 lakh into (bank) accounts of women belonging to SC and ST categories, backward classes, and for women from poor families. This way we will provide thousands of rupees in their accounts every month," he said.

Congress has fielded former minister and MLA Omkar Singh Markam from the Mandla constituency against the sitting MP and Union minister Fagga Singh Kulaste.

The Congress has also promised to double the



money being paid to Asha and Anganwadi workers, Gandhi said.

"We will also bring a new law to ensure that

every unemployed youth in the country gets a one-year apprenticeship in the public and private sector during which they will also get ₹ one lakh as allowance," the former Congress chief said.

After completing the apprenticeship, they will get a job at the same place if they perform well, he added.

"After forming a government at the Centre, we will end the contractual system in employment and will fill 30 lakh vacancies in the government sector," Gandhi said.

The Congress government will frame a law to ensure that farmers get adequate MSP for their crops for which they have been agitating for a long period, he said.

Gandhi alleged the BJP has been purposely terming tribal people as "vanasis" instead of calling them "adivasis" with a motive to uproot them from their land and snatch their first right on the water, forest and land.

"They want to give their (tribals) land to industrialists," he said. (PTI)

India helping five nations develop early warning systems, says IMD chief

NEW DELHI, April 8: India is helping Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Mauritius develop early warning systems to reduce the loss of life and property due to extreme weather events, IMD chief Mrutyunjay Mohapatra has said.

In a conversation with PTI editors, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) director general said India will play the role of a big brother and a peer advisor to Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Mauritius in the efforts to guard against the impact of extreme weather events.

India's efforts are part of the 'Early Warnings for All' initiative announced by the United Nations in 2022 to ensure that everyone is protected from hazardous weather, water or climate events through life-saving early warning systems by the end of 2027.

Mohapatra said India is helping five of the 30 countries identified across the world for the first phase of the initiative of establishing early warning systems.

"Fifty per cent of the countries do not have an early warning system. The poor countries, least developed countries, and small island nations, for example, Maldives and Seychelles, do not have the capacity to provide early warning about extreme weather events. Therefore, people are dying and losing a lot of property because of disasters," he said.

These countries need financial and technical support to augment their meteorological observations.



Financial support will be provided through public-private partnerships and countries like India have pledged to provide technical support, he added.

"We will help these five countries set up meteorological observatories, allow them access to our nu-

merical models, create a decision support system, and computing power," Mohapatra said.

The IMD will provide forecasts and warnings and ministries of communication of the respective nations have been roped in to help develop a system for data

exchange and warning dissemination, Mohapatra said. According to a report released by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in December, 101 countries (52 per cent) now have multi-hazard early warning systems.

The WMO's findings show a concerning trend as disasters increased over five times between 1970 and 2019. Water-related disasters became the most common globally, with tropical cyclones causing the most harm to people and economies.

From 1970 to 2021, the world witnessed nearly 12,000 weather, climate or water-related disasters, resulting in more than two million deaths and economic losses of USD 4.3 trillion.

According to official reports, around 41,789 people died annually from disasters between 2015 and 2022. And the number of people affected by disasters has been rising, with more than 130 million affected globally every year.

In Asia, from 2013 to 2022, more than 146,000 people lost their lives due to disasters and over 911 million were directly affected. Economic damages in 2022 alone were over USD 36 billion, mostly due to flooding and storms.

It is projected that by 2030, the world could face 560 medium- to large-scale disasters each year. Climate change not only makes disasters more likely but also harder to respond to those, the WMO had said. (PTI)

Kannur's country bomb blast sparks political controversy ahead of Lok Sabha polls

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, April 8: With the Lok Sabha polls just weeks away, the recent country bomb blast in northern Kannur that killed a person and injured three others who were allegedly making the crude explosive has triggered a political quarrel in Kerala.

The opposition Congress has accused activists of the ruling CPI(M) of direct involvement in bomb-making, while the Marxist party has denied the charges and distanced itself from the allegations and the persons who were injured in the blast.

Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly V D Satheesan alleged on Monday that the person responsible for making the bomb, who was killed in the blast, was affiliated with the ruling party. Those who were injured in the explosion, which took place at Panur in Kannur district on Friday, and those who had taken them to the hospital were also CPI(M) workers, he said.

"Those who went for the funeral of the deceased person were also activists of the CPI(M). Then how can the ruling party evade responsibility for making the bomb?" Satheesan asked while talking to reporters here.

Asking whether the bomb was made to kill the activists of the Congress-led UDF, he also accused Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who holds the home portfolio, of promoting criminals.

"The chief minister is the one who encourages all criminals in the state. Then he says that they will win the Lok Sabha polls. The LDF will not win even a single seat," the LOP remarked.

Meanwhile, Vijayan assured the public that he would take stringent action, beyond politics, against those involved in bomb making but defended the CPI(M) in the ongoing row.

He also justified the visit of the party's local leaders to the house of Sheril, a resident of Kaivelikkal who had succumbed to blast injuries, saying they did not do anything "prohibited".

While speaking to reporters at Adoor in



Pathanamthitta, Vijayan said the making of bombs cannot be accepted at any cost. "There is no need to make bombs in our state. Legal actions have already been taken in this regard. There is no need to see things politically. It (bomb-making) was a crime, and we have taken action against those involved in it," he said.

While replying to a question, the CM further said he does not think that visiting the house of a deceased person is a "prohibited act" and said consoling the family members was not at all a wrong thing.

CPI(M) State Secretary M V Govindan also defended the party in the bomb blast incident and said it had no role in it.

The party's stand is that there should be no conflict anywhere, he said, and claimed that the CPI(M) is viewing even the attacks against it with self-restraint.

He also accused a section of the media in the state of working as a megaphone of the right wing and spreading false propaganda against the

CPI(M). Govindan also justified the visit of party members to the house of the blast victim, and said that visiting the house of deceased persons is a "part of the culture", the leader said.

One more suspect was arrested on Sunday in connection with the blast. The arrested person -- Amal Babu -- is a local DYFI leader. With this, the number of people who have been arrested in connection with the blast has increased to five, police said.

The blast took place when a country-made bomb was being put together in Panur on Friday, police said.

Sheril, 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 in the blast, the police said.

Besides them, two others -- Vinod and Ashwath -- were also injured in the blast, the police added. (PTI)

Delhi Assembly discusses medicine shortage, health minister says cases to be filed against officers

NEW DELHI, April 8: Cases will be registered against the chief secretary and the health secretary over the shortage of medicines in Delhi government hospitals and dispensaries, Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Monday said in the assembly.

The issues of medicine shortage in Delhi government hospitals and dispensaries and the stoppage of free diagnostic tests at mohalla clinics by "some officers concerned" were raised by AAP MLA Rajendra Pal Gautam through a calling attention motion under Rule 54.

Bharadwaj submitted two reports, including one from the chief secretary and the health secretary, saying they gave in writing that medicines were available in hospitals and mohalla clinics and those unavailable were substituted.

The other report was based on the feedback of MLAs, news reports and his own inquiries, the minister said.

He alleged that the Central Procurement Agency (CPA) tender of 2023 was not finalised despite the availability of bids under a "premeditated conspiracy". Medicines for government hospitals, dispensaries and mohalla clinics are procured through the CPA, he said.

The health minister said the issues of medicine shortage and stopping of tests at mohalla clinics came to light in January. He wrote to the chief secretary for details and action on February 12, and again on March 4 and March 18 but nothing happened.



There are alternative methods of medicine procurement through local purchase or contract rate purchase by the hospitals but the medical superintendents and the medical directors informed in meetings held on March 1 and March 11 that it was made "impossible" due to circulars issued by the Health department, said the minister.

"So, it was a pre-planned conspiracy to stop medicine supplies by obstructing the CPA tender. What will (Chief Minister) Arvind Kejriwal or Saurabh Bharadwaj do if medicines itself are not available at the hospitals and dispensaries?" he said in the House.

Training his guns at Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena, Bharadwaj said he wrote to him repeatedly and pointed out that the chief secretary and the health secretary were "misleading me and the Delhi

government" by "hiding" the shortage of medicines and sought action against them but no action was taken.

Lakhs of people depend on government hospitals, dispensaries and mohalla clinics for medicines, including those for serious ailments, Bharadwaj said and sought to know from the House if criminal prosecution should not be initiated if someone dies or falls gravely ill due to a lack of medicines.

"We will not sit quietly, we will register cases. I will register a case against the chief secretary and the health secretary for this. We will not let it go like this," said the health minister.

Several AAP MLAs, including Gautam, Sanjeev Jha, Rakhi Birla and Mahender Goel raised the issue of unavailability of medicines in hospitals and mohalla clinics. (PTI)

Metro Railway mobile app touches 4.46 lakh Android user mark

KOLKATA, April 8: More than four lakh people have downloaded Kolkata Metro's mobile app on their smartphones, an official said.

A Metro Railway spokesperson Kaushik Mitra said on Sunday that this App 'Metro Ride Kolkata' was developed by the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS).

"The idea of developing such an App was conceived to enable Metro commuters to recharge their smart cards or book QR Code-Based tickets anytime from anywhere," he said.

Mitra said for the benefit of the commuters, 'Metro Ride Kolkata' App was launched on March 5, 2022, on android platform and on March 22, 2024 on iOS platform.

"Till April 6, around 4.46 lakh android users have downloaded this App from Google Play Store and 1400 iOS users have downloaded this App from Apple Store. These figures signify the acceptability and popularity of this App among the Metro users," he said.

To make more commuters aware about it, special promotional films on how to download and use this App are being shown on platform televisions of both old North-South and new East-West Metro stations.

Meanwhile, construction work for underground Victoria station has been taken up in the Joka-Esplanade Metro Corridor, Mitra informed.

While the Joka -Majerhat stretch of this corridor has now been operational, construction work of the Mominpur to Esplanade stretch has got underway.

"The construction work of Victoria station has been taken up by executing agency Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL). Barricading work of the area required for construction of this underground station and other preparatory works are almost complete," he said. (PTI)

Need to develop 'joint culture' for armed forces: CDS at tri-services conference

NEW DELHI, April 8: Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan on Monday called for developing a "joint" work culture by the armed forces, underlining the need to integrate the capabilities of each service by creating structures that enhance the nation's overall warfighting ability. Gen Chauhan was addressing the tri-service conference, "Pariwartan Chintan", that brainstormed on fresh ideas, initiatives and reforms to further propel "jointness and integration" among the three services.

The Chief of Defence Staff stressed the need for distilling the best of each service to give a "de-novo" approach to traditional military concepts to make India's forces future-ready, officials said.

The first-of-its-kind conference primarily delved into various aspects relating to the implementation of the government's ambitious initiative to roll out theatre commands which were conceived as part of big-ticket defence reforms.

"Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan initiated the 'Chintan' by highlighting the need for developing a joint culture for the armed forces, which, while respecting the uniqueness of each service, distils the best of each service to give a de-novo approach to traditional con-

cepts," the defence ministry said.

"He also stressed upon the need to integrate the capabilities of each service by creating structures that increase our efficiency and enhance our warfighting ability and interoperability," it said in a statement.

The ministry said "jointness and integration" are the "cornerstones" of the transformation to joint structures which the Indian armed forces are progressing towards with the intention of being "future ready".

It said the 'Chintan' was curated as a brainstorming and idea incubation discussion to generate new and fresh ideas, initiatives and reforms to further propel jointness and integration in the armed forces.

The conference was attended by heads of the Andaman and Nicobar Command and Strategic Forces Command, commanders of National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College, College of Defence Management and Military Institute of Technology as well as heads of the Armed Forces Special Operations Division, Defence Space Agency, Defence Cyber Agency and the Defence Communication Agency.

The brainstorming was orchestrated by the headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), the

ministry said.

It is learnt that each of the three services put across their work in line with the overall policy approach to ensure jointness.

The roadmap for the theatreisation initiative also figured in the discussions.

According to the theatreisation plan, each of the theatre commands will have units of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and all of them will work as a single entity looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory. At present, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have separate commands.

The theatre commands are being planned to integrate the capabilities of the three services and ensure optimal utilisation of their resources.

One of the key mandates of the Chief of Defence Staff is to work towards the implementation of the theatreisation plan.

Officers from all three services and Headquarters IDS, with diverse service experience also attended the discussion and contributed ideas towards initiating the next generation of reforms related to modernisation, procurement, training, adaptation and collaboration while embracing emerging and innovative technologies, the ministry said. (PTI)

Sub-metre optical satellite assembled, tested in India deployed into space: TASL

NEW DELHI, April 8: Tata Advanced Systems Limited on Monday announced the "successful deployment" into space of its sub-metre optical satellite that was assembled and tested in India.

SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket launched TSAT-1A satellite from the Kennedy Space Center, Florida, in the US on Sunday (April 7), Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) said in a statement.

"TSAT-1A will deliver high-resolution optical satellite images with increased collection capacity, dynamic range, and low-latency delivery through its multispectral and hyperspectral capabilities," the company said.

A wholly owned subsidiary of Tata Sons, TASL is a significant player for aerospace

and defence solutions in India.

TASL, India's leading private sector player for aerospace and defence solutions, and Satellogic Inc, a leader in sub-metre resolution Earth Observation data collection, "today announced the successful deployment into space of TASL's TSAT-1A satellite aboard the Bandwagon-1 mission, which SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket", the statement said.

TSAT-1A was assembled in TASL's Assembly, Integration and Testing (AIT) plant at its Vemagal facility in Karnataka, it said.

This achievement follows the collaboration agreement signed between TASL and Satellogic in November, leveraging Satellogic's expertise to develop and integrate an advanced Earth Observation satellite in India

and TASL's capability to undertake complex system integration, it added.

"This milestone shows TASL's commitment to the space sector. This is a first step. Our partnership with Satellogic has enabled us to deliver an assembled and tested in India, best-in-class, sub-metre optical satellite which was launched by SpaceX. We are grateful for the support we have received from various Indian government authorities for required permissions," TASL CEO and Managing Director Sukaran Singh was quoted as saying in the statement.

"Congratulations to both teams on the efficient collaboration that brought TSAT-1A to life and ready for launch," the statement quoted Satellogic CEO Emiliano Kargieman as saying. (PTI)

AI, power purchase deals to help Delhi discoms meet expected summer peak demand of over 8000 MW

BSES discoms are geared up to ensure reliable power supply to meet the power needs of around 50 lakh consumers of the company

NEW DELHI, April 8: The use of latest technologies such as artificial intelligence and long-term power purchase agreements with other states are among the steps taken by discoms to meet the national capital's high power demand this summer, officials said on Monday.

With high temperatures projected for the season, Delhi's peak power demand is expected to cross 8,000 MW for the first time, reaching up to 8,200 MW, according to State Load Dispatch Centre data.

The officials said the city's previous high was 7,695 MW in 2022 and last year's peak power demand was 7,438 MW.

The peak power demand in the areas covered by BSES Rajdhani Power Limited's (BRPL) -- South and West Delhi -- which were 3,250 MW and 3,389 MW in the summers of 2023 and 2022 respectively, are expected to reach around 3,679 MW this summer, a BSES spokesperson said.

The other BSES discom BYPL recorded the peaks of 1,670 MW and



1,752 MW during the summers of 2023 and 2022 respectively, in its distribution areas of Central and East Delhi. This year it is expected to reach 1,857 MW, he said.

The BSES discoms are geared up to ensure reliable power supply to meet the power needs of around 50 lakh consumers of the company, said the company spokesperson.

These arrangements include around 2,100 MW of green power

that will play an important role in meeting the demand in summer months, he said.

Besides, long-term power purchase agreements and banking arrangements with other states and deployment of latest technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to predict power demand will be used, he added.

The BSES has made power banking arrangements with many states,

from where its two discoms in the national capital will get up to 670 MW of power, the spokesperson said. A Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL) spokesperson said that Delhi's summer peak power demand is expected to surge above 8,000 MW and the company expects its own peak demand to scale up to 2,351 MW this season.

Last summer, TPDDL saw a peak power demand of 2,218 MW in August 2023, she said.

"The peak load of the national capital is projected to reach 8,000 MW in late June or early July amid anticipation of scorching temperatures this year," she said.

"As we approach the summer season, we anticipate the peak demand to reach approximately 2,351 MW within our jurisdiction and we are well-prepared to meet this demand," said Ganesh Srinivasan, chief executive officer of the discom.

"Our proactive approach includes rigorous safety measures and maintenance initiatives across our distribution network," Srinivasan said. (PTI)

Be prepared for 'black swan' events, expect the unexpected: Army Chief to force

NEW DELHI, April 8: Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande on Monday called upon the force to be always prepared for "black swan" events and "expect the unexpected" even as he identified technology as the new area for strategic competition among nations.

In an address at the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington, Gen Pande highlighted the weaponisation of technology, especially its extension across various domains - from information to supply chains.

The Army Chief emphasised the importance of cross-functional synergy among the three services to effectively assess threats, articulate strategies, identify capabilities, formulate policies, achieve preparedness, and respond appropriately within the national security framework.

He further delved into the expansion of warfare into new domains, including space, cyber, electromagnetic spectrum and information technology, sources in the Army headquarters here said.

Gen Pande noted the rapid technological advancement in kinetic war instruments, saying it has made the battlefield increasingly complex, contested, and lethal.

The Chief of Army Staff urged the officers to be always prepared for 'black swan' events and "expect the unexpected".

A black swan event is a high-impact event that is difficult to predict.

The Army Chief pointed out the emergence of new trendlines triggered by this rapid change, underscoring how disruptive technologies are reshaping conventional combat force ratios.

Highlighting India's ascent on the global stage, Gen

Pande stressed the growing need to safeguard India's national interests across expanding strategic horizons.

The Army Chief called for strategic balance, underscoring the necessity for India to be strong and self-reliant in defence capabilities.

He also shed light on the Indian Army's ongoing "transformative initiatives", particularly emphasising the forces' approach in making 2024 the "year of technology absorption".

He highlighted the key areas of focus in the process and said it includes aligning and synergizing technology at strategic, operational, and tactical levels within existing systems.

Under the new initiative, mapping futuristic and emerging technologies as drivers of military technology is a priority, he said, adding strengthening the defence technology ecosystem to maintain a lead in the military technology curve is another focus area.

The Army Chief said the force is ensuring that acquisition and procurement facilitates the seamless induction of technology and it fosters "techno warriors and commanders".

Gen Pande was addressing the faculty and officers of the 79th Staff Course, including 36 officers from friendly foreign nations.

His address covered critical topics such as national security, the geostrategic landscape and emerging trends, and the Indian Army's transformational initiatives.

Addressing the geo-strategic landscape and emerging trends, Gen Pande highlighted the unprecedented scale and speed of change in the current global arena. (PTI)

Not bringing back 'Guardians of the Galaxy' would be huge loss for Marvel: Zoe Saldana



LOS ANGELES, April 8: Actor Zoe Saldana, who played the role of Gamora in the "Guardians of the Galaxy" films, believes the characters from the popular franchise under Marvel Studios should be brought back.

Saldana first portrayed Gamora, an adopted daughter of Thanos and the last of her species, in 2014's "Guardians of the Galaxy." She further appeared in "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2" (2017), "Avengers: Infinity War" (2018), "Avengers: Endgame" (2019) and last year's "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3."

The actor said she would be "the first one" to celebrate when the "Guardians of the Galaxy" return to the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

"I would think it would be a huge loss for Marvel if they didn't find a way to bring back 'The Guardians of the Galaxy'. It's just such a fan-favourite group of misfits, you know? And then at the helm, they had a voice like (director) James Gunn's writing — which is just so marvelous for and very specific for this genre. And it's so great for this genre as well," Saldana said on the "The Discourse" podcast. About her reprising the character of Gamora, she said: "So far, I think that (Gamora is done) for me. But I don't think Gamora has gone for good."

Marvel has not announced plans for another "Guardians" movie, after writer-director James Gunn ended the third film with the creation of a new group including returning members Rocket and Groot as well as new additions Kraglin (Sean Gunn), Cosmo (Maria Bakalova) and Adam Warlock (Will Poulter). (PTI)

Possible to change status quo with small interventions: Kiran Rao on 'Laapataa Ladies'

NEW DELHI, April 8: There is a universality to women's experiences across classes and a lot of it goes unrepresented in cinema, says director Kiran Rao who has attempted to tell a story of self-discovery through two brides in her critical hit "Laapataa Ladies".

The film, which had its world premiere at the 2023 Toronto International Film Festival, released in India to glowing reviews on March 1 and is still enjoying a run in theatres.

Rao, who promoted her second directorial effort across tier-one cities and small towns, said the women she met have probably not experienced being under the veil, but they could still identify with the issues explored in the movie, set in rural India in the year 2001. "There's some sort of universality in a woman's experience across classes and a lot of that goes unacknowledged, unseen or unrepresented in cinema," the filmmaker told PTI in an interview.

"Hearing the response to the film, I realised that it's possible to change the status quo with very small interventions and reclaim some space for ourselves, even within the setup that we, maybe, cannot change. That has been nice to hear from women," she said.

"Laapataa Ladies" is a satirical drama revolving around two young brides, Phool and Jaya, who get swapped during their journey to their in-laws' but the comedy of errors, propelled by the long veil, ends up being an empowering journey for both. The hope, post the movie's theatrical run, is to take it to the nooks and crannies of the country where a story like this may make a difference, Rao said.

"I'm still basking in the love that I'm getting and hoping that more people go and watch it if they have not seen it yet. Going forward, we want to collaborate with organisations that work with communities on gender and women's issues. I have put a word out to people I know in the social sector... I really hope to take the film to villages. It's not a short-term plan, we'll build organically."

The director said "word of mouth" has been her biggest support in taking the film, which stars Nitanshi Goel, Pratibha Ranta, Sparsh Srivastav, and Ravi Kishan. "I'm grateful for that because it means there are people who will go

out to watch a film without stars only on the basis of the trailer," she added.

There have been some lessons along the way as well for the filmmaker, whose last release was her debut "Dhobi Ghat" in 2011.

"You need a multi-pronged marketing campaign to reach people across the country because we have a diverse audience. There are some things that I would do differently when I make my next one," she said.

Film promotions can be hectic but Rao was able to find some moments of quiet by taking detours and spending time with her parents in Bengaluru.

"It's been crazy but in between promotional trips, I went to Bengaluru, I could spend a night with my parents. And that's always wonderful because the comfort of just hearing your parents putting around, having that morning cup of coffee with them, not necessarily needing to talk if you don't want to, but also having loads to share with them, helped me along through it all," she said.

The director said she also managed to have "little expeditions" on her own while travelling from one city to another to promote "Laapataa Ladies", which she backed via her Kindling Pictures alongside Aamir Khan Productions, the company run by former actor husband.

Rao, who worked as an assistant director on films such as "Lagaan" and "Monsoon Wedding" and produced "Taare Zameen Par" and "Peepili Live", has many more stories planned and hopes that the gap between her movies will not be long.

Filmmaking, she said, was something she stumbled into accidentally during college.

The filmmaker, born in Bengaluru and raised in Kolkata, completed her graduation from Sophia College, Bombay University and then joined Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi, for a masters programme in mass communication.

"I didn't know I wanted to make films. After my graduation from Sophia College, I knew I wanted to do something in the arts but I was not sure what. I also didn't want to commit to FTII which was a five-year course at the time," she said. (PTI)

Prime Video announces release of Telugu comedy 'Om Bheem Bush'

MUMBAI, April 8: Telugu comedy film "Om Bheem Bush" is set to premiere on Prime Video on April 12, the streaming platform Prime Video announced on Monday.

Directed by Sree Harsha Konuganti, the movie stars Sree Vishnu, Priyadarshi, and Rahul Ramakrishna.

Prime Video made the announcement on its official X page.

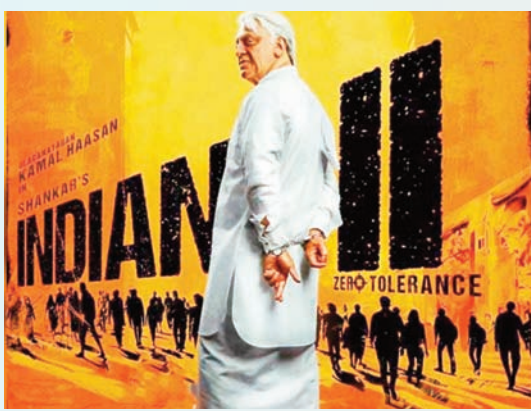
"Three scientists, one wild treasure hunt, guaranteed chaos #OmBheemBushOnPrime, Apr 12," the post read.

"Om Bheem Bush" follows three doctorates Krish, Vinay, and Madhav who establish an enterprise 'Bros A to Z Services' in a village called Bhairavapuram to earn easy money. "However, their lives take an unexpected turn when Krish falls madly in love with the Sarpanch's daughter. In order to marry her, he and his friends must retrieve a treasure guarded by a ghost in the haunted Sampangi Mahal.

"As they embark on this daring mission, they encounter a myriad of challenges. How Krish unravels the ghost's past, addresses his own unresolved issues, and secures the treasure forms the crux of 'Om Bheem Bush'," according to the official synopsis. (PTI)



KAMAL HAASAN-STARRER 'INDIAN 2' TO RELEASE IN JUNE



NEW DELHI, April 8: "Indian 2", starring Kamal Haasan, will hit the screens in June.

Directed by Shankar, the upcoming Tamil film is the follow-up to the 1996 vigilante action thriller "Indian". Lyca Productions shared the release update on its official X page on Saturday evening.

"Gear up for the comeback of Senapathy! INDIAN-2 is all set to storm in cinemas this JUNE. Mark your calendar for the epic saga!" the banner said in the post.

Kajal Aggarwal, Siddharth, Rakul

Preet Singh, SJ Suryah, Vivek, Bobby Simha, Nedumudi Venu, P Samuthirakani, Priya Bhavani Shankar, Manobala, Gulshan Grover, Piyush Mishra, and Brahmanandam also round out the cast of the movie.

Anirudh Ravichander has composed the music of the film and Ravi Varman is the director of photography

"Indian 2" is backed by Subaskaran Allirajah of Lyca Productions and Minister for Youth Welfare and Sports Development, Government of Tamil Nadu, Udhayanidhi Stalin via Red Giant Movies. (PTI)

Ajay Devgn is a director's actor, says 'Maidaan' director Amit Sharma

MUMBAI, April 8: Working with a superstar is only an advantage, says Amit Sharma about his "Maidaan" leading actor Ajay Devgn, who surrendered completely to the director's vision.

The filmmaker, best known for the 2018 blockbuster hit "Badhaai Ho", has teamed up with Devgn for the upcoming period sports drama which explores the golden years of Indian football in the early 1950s and 60s under coach Syed Abdul Rahim.

Sharma praised Devgn, who plays the role of Rahim in the film, for his commitment to "Maidaan".

"If a superstar has agreed to do a film, it's an advantage as the mounting of a film will become bigger. You'll be able to shoot the way you want to, and if the su-

perstar is ready to give you everything while making the film, then it's icing on the cake.

"When Ajay Devgn used to enter the sets, he used to keep the Ajay Devgn persona outside, and enter like Syed Abdul Rahim, his character. He came prepped on sets with his dialogues. Not once he said, 'The trousers are loose, how am I looking?' He would be like, 'Tell me what you want me to do, I'll do it'. He is a director's actor," the director told PTI in an interview here.

Sharma said there are three ingredients essential for a sports-based film: knowledge about the sport, correct team, and getting the emotion right.

"For me, the story was not about football but about Syed Abdul Rahim, who brought glory to

India. I'm telling the story of this unsung hero, who fought for the country, not at the borders but on a maidaan.

"He didn't capture Tiger Hill but he won the Asian Games," he said about Rahim under whose stewardship, the India national football team won gold medals in Asian Games of 1951 and 1962.

A section of social media users have drawn parallels between "Maidaan" and the 2007 hit "Chak De! India", which followed a former hockey player who attempts to redeem himself by coaching and eventually, leading the Indian national women's hockey team to a win.

According to Sharma, the two films are different from one another.

"The difference between 'Chak

De! India' and 'Maidaan' is that while it was a fictional story, this is a true story. If you talk about the dream of a man who is trying to bring glory to India through sports, that emotion is the same. But everyone will have the same emotion, it is there in '83' as well.

"The emotion is same, but the story and style are different. This story is different from 'Chak De! India' because the sports are different, however emotion wise it is the same, but the emotional journey of this person is different, the story is different."

"Maidaan" faced many challenges during its making, including the multiple delays owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and cyclone Tauktae, and Sharma said these crises were beyond his control. (PTI)



SRH recorded the highest team total in the history of the IPL

Inconsistent Punjab face unpredictable SRH in mid-table IPL clash

MULLANPUR, April 8: An inconsistent Punjab Kings will hope to come out with an attacking display to match the ultra-aggressive approach of Sunrisers Hyderabad as the two teams clash in a mid-table battle in the IPL here on Tuesday.

Both SRH and PBKS have two wins and two losses from their four matches to be tied with two other teams in the middle with four points and they will be desperate to break out of the mid-table logjam first.

While SRH have been unpredictable sometimes they have displayed their might with the bat with their top-order firing on all cylinders on most occasions. But the same cannot be said about the Kings. SRH recorded the highest team total in the history of the IPL en route their win over Mumbai Indians, while they also notched up a convincing six-wicket win over reigning champions Chennai Super Kings on Friday.

The likes of Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaassen and Aiden Markram have consistently taken the attack to the opposition bowlers, providing the team with blistering starts.

PBKS too have plenty of big-hitting potential with their batting line-up boosting off Shikhar Dhawan, Jonny Bairstow, Liam Livingstone. But apart from the skipper, none has been able to consistently put up a show so far.

Punjab will hope that their In-



dian players -- Prabhshimran Singh and Jitesh Sharma -- step up just like Shashank Singh, who pulled off a jailbreak in their last match against Gujarat Titans with his highest ever T20 score -- 61 runs from 29 balls.

Both the teams are coming into the match after a win and it could well be a battle of the powerplay when they face off at the newly-built Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Cricket Stadium, which will host only its second IPL game on Tuesday.

Bowling department remains a concern for both teams. While Punjab has struggled at the death overs, Sunrisers faltered with the new ball.

South African pacer Kagiso Rabada emerged as their best bowler with six wickets, but inconsistencies of the likes of death-over specialist Arshdeep Singh and Harshal Patel is a concern. Leg-spinner Rahul Chahar has also been expensive though Harpreet Brar has done well so far.

For Hyderabad, the likes of Jay-

dev Unadkat, Mayank Markande and Bhuvneshwar Kumar have conceded too many runs.

Despite all his experience, Bhuvneshwar has struggled with the new ball though he managed a wicket in the last game. T Natarajan, who returned after missing two games in between, has also claimed four wickets so far.

Skipper Pat Cummins, who has taken five wickets in four games, has looked good but he will need consistent support from his other bowlers.

The Sunrisers bowlers dished out a lot of variations like cutters and slow balls to trouble the batters and they would hope to keep the momentum against the Kings.

It is a 3-2 head-to-head count between SRH and PBKS in the last five meetings, indicating that a tight battle is likely to be on the cards on Tuesday.

Squads:

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Jaydev Unadkat, Jhatavedh Subramanyan, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Pat Cummins (c), Washington Sundar, Shahbaz Ahmed, Sanvir Singh, Glenn Phillips, Nitish Reddy, Marco Jansen, Abhishek Sharma, Upendra Yadav, Rahul Tripathi, Aiden Markram, Heinrich Klaassen, Travis Head, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Agarwal, Abdul Samad, Akash Maharaj Singh, Wanindu Hasaranga, Umran Malik.

Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (c), Matthew Short, Prabhshimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.

Match starts at 7.30 PM IST. (PTI)

IOA chief Usha says Executive Council members trying to sideline her



NEW DELHI, April 8: Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President PT Usha on Monday said that the revolting Executive Council members were trying to sideline her by their acts of defiance, including issuing termination letters to an official appointed by her.

On Friday, nine EC members had pasted a signed notice at the IOA office premises here, asking "unauthorised persons" not to enter its headquarters. The notice, which Usha termed as "arbitrary", was directed at two recently appointed officials.

A majority of EC members had earlier claimed that they had signed a suspension order declaring Raghuram Iyer's appointment as IOA CEO in January as null and void. The EC members also claimed that they had "terminated" Ajay Narang from the post of executive assistant to IOA president.

Usha acknowledged the receipt of the termination letter served to Narang by the EC members but rejected it as "absolute nullity".

"It is disheartening to see that we are still not able to work as a team and each of your acts is an attempt to sideline me," Usha said in her response sent to the revolting EC members.

"I am left with no option but to remind you all that the day-to-day administrative functions including hiring and firing of staff is not the job of the Executive Council. As the EC, we should be using our powers and right for much more important aspects of taking the IOA to heights," she said.

"It is directed to the IOA staff to remove any copies of the notice posted within the IOA Bhawan. Further, the IOA staff is instructed to follow guidance and directives from my office via my executive assistant."

The internal feud in the IOA, which came out in public in January, is still continuing even as three months are left for the Paris Olympics to begin.

Usha said the continuation or termination of Narang, who was appointed on June 7, 2023, would only be based on her recommendation and not on the "whims and fancies of anybody else".

"The termination documents are an absolute nullity. The appoint-

ment of the executive assistant to the president is not within the jurisdiction of the Executive Council and thus the termination is non est and bad in law.

"I am satisfied with the work done by Captain Ajay Kumar Narang (Retd) and do not find any reason to terminate his services," said the legendary track athlete who is also a sitting Rajya Sabha member.

She requested all the EC members "to not act in excess of the powers and responsibilities granted by the IOA constitution and in direct violation of the provisions therein".

"I yet again implore you to start working as a team for the betterment of the athletes and the Olympic Movement in India," she said.

Just a few days after Iyer was made CEO on January 6, 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".

Iyer and Narang, however, had 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.

The salary of the CEO, which is ₹ 20 lakh per month plus allowances (total CTC of around ₹ 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 had also warned the EC members that the International Olympic Committee may intervene and suspend India if they continue to act defiant. (PTI)

Lizaad Williams joins Delhi Capitals as replacement for Harry Brook



NEW DELHI, April 8: South African fast bowler Lizaad Williams was on Monday roped in by Delhi Capitals as a replacement for England's Harry Brook for the remainder of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024," the franchise said in a statement.

Brook, who was signed by Delhi Capitals for ₹ 4 crore, withdrew from the league after his grandmother died in February.

"I was so excited to be picked by Delhi Capitals and was so looking forward to joining up with everyone. Whilst I don't think I should need to share my personal reasons behind this decision, I know there will be many asking why. So I do want to share this," he had shared on his social media page after withdrawing.

"I lost my grandmother last month -- she was a rock to me and I spent a huge amount of my childhood in her home; my attitude to life and love for cricket was shaped by her and my late grandfather," the 25-year-old wrote.

In his inaugural IPL season last year, when he turned up for Sunrisers Hyderabad, Brook set the stage on fire with a 55-ball hundred against Kolkata Knight Riders only to end on an underwhelming note.

In all, he managed only 190 runs in 11 matches after the franchise paid ₹ 13.25 crore to acquire his services. Brook had also pulled out of England's recent five-Test series in India after being part of the pre-tour training camp in the UAE. (PTI)

Hockey India goes with tried-and-tested for women's national camp

BENGALURU, April 8: Seasoned campaigners like goalkeeper Savita Punia and forward Vandana Katarinya were on Monday included in Hockey India's 33-strong list of core probables with some new faces also finding their way into the pruned group that will train here till May 16 for the upcoming FIH Pro League fixtures.

The HI had earlier selected 60 players for the camp before trimming the squad strength based on the selection trials which were held here on April 6 and 7 after the recent National Championship.

The Indian women's hockey team is set to travel to Antwerp and London to face Argentina, Belgium, Germany, and Great Britain in the FIH Hockey Pro League starting May 22.

Hockey India High Performance Director Herman Krus said the new core group has the potential to achieve big things in future.

"The 14th Senior Women's National Championship was used to filter out the best hockey players from across the country, and over the last week the coaches and selectors have further handpicked the 33 players they believe have the potential to propel the Indian women's hockey team to greater heights," said Krus.

The familiar faces include current skipper Punia, defender Nikki Pradhan, mid-fielders Salima Tete,



Ajmina Kujur and Nisha.

India's first-choice forwards like Lalremiami, Sangita Kumar and Katarinya were also in the group.

HI had promised a revamped national camp after the team failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, a big step backwards after the historic fourth-place finish in the Tokyo Olympics. The most notable new additions in the camp were 22-year-old Marina Lalramghaki, who represented Mizoram, and the 25-year-old Manisha Chauhan, who represented Manipur, in the nationals.

Preeti Dubey, who made her last appearance for the senior side during the World League Semifinal in 2017, has clawed her way back into the national setup after impressing the selectors and coaches in the assessment camp here.

Similarly, goalkeeper Madhuri Kindo, defenders Ropni Kumari,

Preeti, midfielder Edula Jyoti and forwards Deepika Soreng and Rutuja Pisal have stepped up from the junior team that featured in last year's Junior World Cup.

The 33-member core group:
Goalkeepers: Savita Punia, Bichu Devi Kharibam, Bansari Solanki, Madhuri Kindo.

Defenders: Nikki Pradhan, Udita, Ishika Chaudhary, Monika, Ropni Kumari, Mahima Chaudhary, Jyoti Chhatri, Preeti.

Midfielders: Salima Tete, Marina Lalramghaki, Vaishnavi Phalke, Neha, Jyoti, Edula Jyoti, Baljeet Kaur, Manisha Chauhan, Akshata Abaso Dhekale, Ajmina Kujur, Nisha.

Forwards: Mumtaz Khan, Lalremiami, Sangita Kumar, Deepika, Sharmila Devi, Navneet Kaur, Deepika Soreng, Preeti Dubey, Vandana Katarinya, Rutuja Dadaso Pisal. (PTI)

Shubhankar is peaking at right time: Coach Jesse Grewal

GREATER NOIDA, April 8: India's number one ranked golfer Shubhankar Sharma is peaking at the right time and will be among the favourites to win a medal, including a gold, at the Paris Olympics, feels his coach Jesse Grewal.

Grewal, the only golf coach to be conferred with the Dronacharya Award, said he has full confidence in his ward to do well at his favourite golf course in Paris.

"I think he is going to have a good year. He has almost qualified for the Olympics and needs to maintain his level. Yes, he can be the first Indian to win a gold in golf at the Olympics as he is peaking at the right time," Grewal told PTI at a Five Iron Golf India event in Greater Noida.

"He has 100 per cent chance. I am just not hopeful, I know he can do it. He is a player who has some favourite golf courses and Le Golf National (2024 Paris Olympics Golf venue) is one of his favourites."

Grewal, who will be accompanying Shubhankar for the Olympics, plans to go early to Paris as part of their preparation for the Games.

"This time we are going a bit early there. He will train in Europe from the beginning of June or May end to prepare hard for the Olympics. The focus is clearly on the Olympics. So that he is prepared in July," he said.

Grewal feels Shubhankar's iron play will be crucial at the Olympics. (PTI)

I like it when people expect me to win matches: Yash Thakur

Thakur returned figures of 5/30, including the wicket of GT captain Shubman Gill

LUCKNOW, April 8: Unlike many, Yash Thakur quite likes the burden of expectations. So, when his Lucknow Super Giants skipper K L Rahul saw a match-winner in him after Mayank Yadav's injury breakdown, the young pacer got the impetus he needed to fetch his maiden five-wicket haul in the IPL.

The 25-year-old from Vidarbha had the spotlight firmly planted on him after pace spearhead Yadav suffered a side strain and left the field mid-match against Gujarat Titans here on Sunday night.

Thakur returned figures of 5/30, including the wicket of GT captain Shubman Gill. This was his maiden five-wicket haul in the IPL and helped his team defeat Gujarat Titans by 33 runs, besides earning him the player of the match honours.

"Mayank is an extraordinary player and the speed he generates. I know my limitations and I know my strength and I only back my strengths," Thakur said of his teammate, who has bowled the fastest delivery of

this IPL. Giving an update on Yadav, Thakur said his now famous teammate is doing fine.

"Nothing to worry. All good," he said. Thakur, who wanted to be a wicketkeeper at the beginning of his cricket journey, credited his match-winning haul to the backing of Rahul.

"After Mayank left the field, (KL) Rahul bhai only said that 'may be this is your day, you can win the match for us'."

"He said, 'don't think much and keep faith in yourself'. He said, 'we'll only focus on the controllables and not waste time on external factors like what has happened to whom,'" he revealed.

"I don't take the pressure of expectations as a concern. Rather I'm happy when people outside or my team expects me to win games. I enjoy this responsibility of winning games for the team."

Thakur said he varied his deliveries, bowling a few slower ones and bouncers to unsettle the batters, which ultimately fetched him success.



"We knew that the wicket was slow, so the plan that we discussed, we stuck to it. Even if we got hit for runs, we would stick

Liverpool avoids damaging defeat to Man United

MANCHESTER, April 8: Having ended Liverpool's quadruple challenge, Manchester United looked set to deliver a major blow to Jurgen Klopp's hopes of bowing out at the end of the season with a second Premier League title.

Time will tell how damaging a 2-2 draw at Old Trafford on Sunday will be to the Merseyside club in the three-way fight at the top, but it could have been so much worse if not for Mohamed Salah's late penalty.

"We should have won the game, that is clear," Klopp said. "As far as I'm concerned, we have a point more than we did before."

It wasn't only the prospect of defeat at the home of Liverpool's fiercest rivals that felt so significant, but the nature of it.

Klopp's team had totally dominated by raining down shots on United's goal in a mismatched first half, but only managed to lead 1-0 at the break through Luis Diaz's goal.

The atmosphere totally changed when Bruno Fernandes struck a stunning equalizer from inside the center circle after a Liverpool mistake and Kobbie Mainoo curled a superb shot into the top corner to give United the lead. (AP)

"We are trying our best. It's not the end of the road for us; it's a very long tournament," he added. (PTI)

Brazil's Endrick wins another title with Palmeiras before joining Real Madrid

Endrick was also part of the Palmeiras squad that won the 2023 Sao Paulo championship title

SAO PAULO, April 8: Teenage striker Endrick has won another title with Brazilian club Palmeiras before he leaves to join Real Madrid.

The 17-year-old Endrick helped his team secure its third consecutive Sao Paulo state championship with a 2-0 win Sunday over local rival Santos.

Endrick, who scored two goals for Brazil in friendlies last month, drew the penalty that allowed Raphael Veiga to open the scoring in the 33rd minute. Anibal Moreno netted the second in the 67th. Santos won the first leg 1-0.

"I know I'm in a new generation, I've been through a lot. I have the dream of becoming an idol for all children," Endrick said after winning the title with Palmeiras. "I know that is difficult because there are people who don't like me, but I want to be a new idol for them. I want them to



look at me and think that if I managed to be here, they can too." Endrick was also part of the Palmeiras squad that won the

2023 Sao Paulo championship title and the 2022 and 2023 Brazilian championship.

He will have just over two months left at Palmeiras before heading to Spain on a lucrative deal with Real Madrid.

During his stint with the national team for friendlies against England and Spain, Endrick said he was regularly asked about his pending move.

"Vini Jr. and Rodrygo asked when I was going to arrive. Lucas Paqueta and Bruno Guimarães too, all asking when I was going to Madrid," he said. "I know I'm going to leave, but my head is still here."

Endrick was also thankful to Palmeiras, where he played in youth divisions.

"Palmeiras was the team that trusted me when I had nothing," he said. "This title is for everyone at Palmeiras, all the staffers and all the fans." (AP)

Fenerbahçe U19 team walks off after 1st-minute goal for Galatasaray



SANLIURFA (TURKEY), April 8: The Turkish Super Cup ended in chaos on Sunday after only 101 seconds when Fenerbahçe players walked off after conceding an early goal against rival Galatasaray, which was declared the 1-0 winner.

Fenerbahçe had already decided to field its under-19 team for the match to protest alleged unfavor-

able treatment by Turkish soccer authorities.

Argentine forward Mauro Icardi scored in the first minute at Sanliurfa GAP stadium after being set up by Baris Alper Yilmaz. The Fenerbahçe players then left the field before the game could resume, drawing whistles from fans. Galatasaray was subsequently

declared the winner, prompting earlier-than-expected celebrations for Icardi's team.

Fenerbahçe president Yildirim Ali Koç spoke of a "rebellion" in a statement on the club's website, where he detailed alleged injustices going back over the years. "It is time for a reset" for Turkish football," Koç said.

Two Fenerbahçe players, Irfan Can Egribat and Jayden Oosterwolde, were banned for one match by the Turkish soccer federation last week after a Superlig game against Trabzonspor. Trabzonspor fans had charged onto the pitch after the final whistle. Trabzonspor was ordered to play six games without fans as punishment.

Fenerbahçe plays at Olympiakos in the first leg of the Europa Conference League quarterfinals on Thursday. The Turkish team had reportedly been unhappy with the timing of the Super Cup ahead of its game against the Greek side. (AP)

Gukesh holds Caruana; Gujrathi falters again

TORONTO, April 8: Grandmaster D Gukesh did well to hold top-seeded American Fabiano Caruana to a draw but Vidit Gujrathi suffered another defeat at the hands of Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia in the fourth round of the Candidates chess tournament now underway here.

On a day when R. Praggnanandhaa played out an uneventful draw with Hikaru Nakamura of the United States, Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan fought hard to split the point with Firouzja Alireza of France to stay in contention in the eight-player double round-robin event that decides the challenger for the next world championship.

Nepomniachtchi became the first sole leader in the event on three points following his second victory with white pieces and he is now followed by Caruana and Gukesh on 2.5 points apiece. Praggnanandhaa is not far behind on two points holding the fourth spot while Gujrathi, Abasov, Alireza and Nakamura have an identical 1.5 points each. (PTI)

Danielle Collins follows Miami title with championship at Charleston Open

CHARLESTON (SOUTH CAROLINA), April 8: Danielle Collins is loaded with confidence and belief in what she can accomplish in her final season after following her Miami Open title with the Charleston Open championship on Sunday.

Collins powered past 11th-ranked Daria Kasatkina for a 6-2, 6-1 victory Sunday, her career-best 13th straight match win as she became the first since Serena Williams in 2013 to follow a hard-court victory at Miami with one on the green clay of Charleston.

And she's open to even more in what is the 30-year-old's final season on tour.

"I'm just trying to keep this train rolling," Collins said after winning her fourth WTA title. "Really be myself out there and not think too much about what's next."

No one's been more dominant the past two weeks than the "Danimal," the nickname she

coined when she signed up for Instagram out of college.

She showed that again this week, dropping just one set in six matches — it was a second-set loss to 2023 Charleston winner Ons Jabeur — to lift a second straight trophy.

She led 3-0 in the opening set, where she broke Kasatkina's serve twice as the crowd cheered the American's every move.

Collins didn't let up in the second set, taking a 5-0 lead before the Russian held serve.

Collins closed the match with a volley at the net, pumping her fist as her face broke into a smile. Kasatkina, who is ranked 11th, played with a heavy wrap on her right thigh. She struggled with her serve throughout, regularly putting herself behind.

The way Collins has played, it was an impossible hole from which to dig out.

"At first, I wanted to say I'll miss you on tour

but after this match I'm not sure," Kasatkina said during the trophy ceremony. "To be honest, I'm going to miss you because you're such a character. Your personality is amazing. Tennis is going to lose a lot after you're done."

Collins had dealt with painful endometriosis, where tissue in the uterus grows outside the uterus. It can cause difficulty getting pregnant if not treated and Collins made a life decision to end her career for other goals like having children.

Her recent success has not changed her perspective or plans for retirement.

"I'm really happy that I can showcase my best tennis in these last couple of events, because I think that's the way I want to go out," she said. "I want to go out with my best results. I know everyone has a different way of retiring and ending their career, but for me I want to go out playing my best tennis." (AP)

Over 4000 runners participate in IIT-G's annual Guwahati Half Marathon

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 8: Techniche, the annual Techno-Management fest of the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IITG), successfully organised the Guwahati Half Marathon on Sunday at the Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Stadium, Sarusajai. The event witnessed an overwhelming participation of over 4000 enthusiastic runners from Guwahati city and beyond Assam, all joining hands to run for a cleaner tomorrow.

The Guwahati Half Marathon featured two types of runs: the "Spirit Run" spanning 6 kilometers and the challenging "Glory Run" covering 21 kilometers. The theme of the marathon, "Run for a Cleaner Tomorrow," echoed the spirit of environmental consciousness and community engagement.

The marathon commenced with the Spirit Run at 5:15 AM,

followed by the prestigious Glory Run at 6:15 AM, both starting from the iconic Karmabir Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Stadium. Participants showcased incredible resilience and determination as they braved the course, embodying the ethos of health, sustainability, and unity.

The accolades of the Guwahati Half Marathon are bestowed upon the following victors:

Spirit Run Male Category: 1st - Nitish Kumar; 2nd - Sandeep Yadav; 3rd - Dinesh Kumar

Spirit Run Female Category: 1st - Gloryfy Kurbah; 2nd - Sangita Bordoloi; 3rd - Padmini Das

Glory Run Male Category: 1st - Chandan Yadav; 2nd - Pawan Singh; 3rd - Bijay Deka

Glory Run Female Category: 1st - Shyamali Singh; 2nd - Rinky Kumari Chauhan; 3rd - Anita Das

Samyak Sharma, Convener of the Guwahati Half Marathon,

expressed his gratitude, saying, "We are thrilled to witness such massive participation in the Guwahati Half Marathon. It's inspiring to see individuals from all walks of life coming together to promote fitness and environmental awareness. This event wouldn't have been possible without the unwavering support of our sponsors, volunteers, and the entire community."

The Guwahati Half Marathon serves as a platform not only for promoting physical well-being but also for advocating for environmental stewardship. As participants crossed the finish line, they left behind a trail of motivation and a commitment to making a positive impact on society.

In addition, influencer nutritionist Shweta Himatsingka graced the event as the star runner, further adding to the excitement and energy of the Guwahati Half Marathon.

Korda wins 4th straight LPGA Tour start



NORTH LAS VEGAS (NEVADA), April 8 : Nelly Korda is on a roll not seen on the LPGA Tour in 16 years.

She won four of the first seven holes, largely making the rest of the final Sunday in the T-Mobile Match Play a formality in beating Leona Maguire 4 and 3 at Shadow Creek.

Lorena Ochoa in 2008 was the last player to win four consecutive starts. Korda, the world's top-ranked player, will try to tie the record of five — set by Nancy Lopez in 1978 and matched by Annika Sorenstam in 2004-05 — in two weeks at the season's first major, The Chevron Championship outside Houston.

Because Korda took seven weeks off after winning in January in her hometown of Bradenton, Florida, this victory was her third straight in a scheduled event. Four players share the record of four in a row, with Mickey Wright doing it twice.

Korda also became the first American since Kathy Whitworth in 1969 to win four of her first five starts in a season.

"I can't even wrap my head around it," Korda said "Such a whirlwind of the last three weeks. I just feel like I was just in go-mode constantly."

This was the first head-to-head match-play singles event between Korda and Maguire, but they have experience against each other in similar settings at the Solheim Cup. The Irish player is 3-1 while representing Europe in team match-play events against Korda.

Korda birdied Nos. 5-7 for a 4-up lead. She was 5 up after 12, saw Maguire take 13 and 14 with pars, and ended the match with a par win on the par-4 15th.

"It's always nice to get a lead, kind of like a cushion," Korda said. "But it's Leona. She's such a fiery competitor. I knew when I lost those two holes in a row, 13 and 14, that I really needed to put my foot down to finish the match off."

Korda earned \$300,000 for her 12th career victory. "You know you're going to have to make birdies if you want to beat her," Maguire said. "Unfortunately, I didn't make enough today. Hats off to her. She is an incredible player and she is playing some great golf right now. All I could do is play my own game, and that wasn't good enough today."

This tournament was entirely match play the first three years and played in late May when temperatures often are in the high 90s. Many of the top players opted not to compete. The format changed this year to three days of stroke play, with the top eight advancing to match play on the weekend. The event also moved back to early April, when temperatures are much more moderate, which helped attract its strongest field.

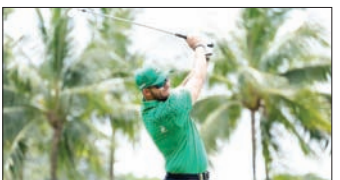
It's a field that Maguire dominated during stroke play, ending the first three rounds at 6-under par, three strokes better than anyone else.

"It almost felt like two separate tournaments this week, the stroke-play event and the match-play event," Maguire said. "To lead the stroke play around this golf course by three at the end of the three days was something I can take a lot of positives from and be very proud of."

Korda had to fight just to get into the match play. She shot 73 each of the first two rounds, but then came through with a 69 on Wednesday to advance to the weekend.

Then she didn't let the opportunity go to waste at one of the more demanding courses on the tour. (AP)

Dean Burmester wins LIV Golf after Sergio Garcia's blunders



DORAL (FLORIDA), April 8: Dean Burmester of South Africa won for the first time on the LIV Golf League by closing with a 4-under 68 and beating Sergio Garcia in a playoff Sunday when the Spaniard hit into the water on the second extra hole at LIV Golf Miami.

It was the third time Garcia has lost a playoff in LIV Golf, and the second time this year.

The former Masters champion, who has yet to win since joining the Saudi-funded league when it launched in 2022, looked to have this one in hand when he holed a 40-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole and then took the lead when Burmester bogeyed the 18th at Trump National Doral.

Garcia badly missed a 4-foot par putt on the 18th hole and shot 70. They finished at 11-under 205, one shot ahead of Matthew Wolff.

Both made par on the 18th on the first playoff hole. The second time around, Garcia came up short of the green and into the water. Burmester made a 3-foot par putt for the win, giving him the \$4 million prize.

"I've been at the receiving end of this," Burmester said. "I felt like I played great. I haven't got it done. Sergio gave me a lifeline."

Burmester won for the third time in the last five months. He won the Joburg Open and South African Open late last year, events co-sanctioned by the European and Sunshine tours.

Masters champion Jon Rahm heads to Augusta National without having won in a year, at least as an individual. His Legion XIII team won for the third time in six LIV events this year. (AP)

Madrid, reinvigorated by the signing of Jude Bellingham last summer Real Madrid will be out for revenge against Man City in the Champions League

MANCHESTER, April 8: The all-time kings of Europe take on the current holders in the standout tie of the Champions League quarterfinals.

For the third year running Madrid and City meet in a match-up in which the winner has gone on to lift the trophy in the past two seasons. And it would be difficult to look beyond either team going on to continue that streak this time around.

City is still in contention for back-to-back trebles after winning the Premier League title, Champions League and FA Cup last year.

Madrid, reinvigorated by the signing of Jude Bellingham last summer, is eight points clear at the top of the Spanish league and aiming for a record-extending 15th European Cup title.

The Spanish giant also has a point to prove after being routed 4-0 by City in the second leg of last year's semifinals.

Then it was City who had a score to settle, having suffered a late collapse at the Bernabeu to crash out in the semifinals in 2022.

Manager Pep Guardiola will likely know how motivated Madrid will be to exact revenge — just as his players were last year — and that adds a subplot to a

tie that is already heavy on intrigue.

Elsewhere, Paris Saint-Germain versus Barcelona is another clash of heavyweights, with Kylian Mbappe aiming to finally lead the French champions to European club soccer's elite trophy before walking away at the end of the season.

Premier League title-chasing Arsenal takes on a Bayern Munich team that is limping towards the end of a miserable campaign in the German league, while Atletico Madrid faces Borussia Dortmund.

REAL DEAL? Madrid has all its attacking players clicking.

Bellingham has struck 20 goals in 32 games this season, including four in the Champions League. Vinicius Junior is peaking just in time to face City with five goals in his last three appearances. Brahim Diaz provides a spark off the bench. And Rodrygo ended a six-week scoring drought in Madrid's last game, a 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao, to keep it on course for winning the domestic league title.

Madrid is on a 27-game unbeaten run at its Santiago Bernabeu Stadium across all competitions dating back to last April. City has found its scoring form over



the past week after hitting four goals in each of its games against Aston Villa and Crystal Palace to stay on the heels of title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal.

ENRIQUE REUNION After a difficult start to his coaching career at PSG, when he had to put up

with Mbappe's bitter contract saga, Luis Enrique has steadily won over fans and the French media - even if it meant dropping Mbappe or taking him off in games.

Enrique won the treble as Barcelona coach in 2015 with Lionel Messi in his team and is still in contention to do this

same at PSG with Mbappe.

Losing has become a distant memory for PSG, which is undefeated in 27 matches since a loss away to AC Milan in November during the Champions League group stage. But playing a rested Barcelona side could be the toughest test of the season.

Xavi Hernandez attempted to shock his team into getting its act together by saying he would quit at the end of the season, something that has coincided with a certain improvement.

Barcelona has gone unbeaten in 11 straight games since Xavi said in late January that he was renouncing the final year of his contract.

Robert Lewandowski, teenager Lamine Yamal and Raphinha are all playing well of late, but the midfield is a big question mark due to injury concerns.

TUCHEL TROUBLE

Bayern Coach Thomas Tuchel wants to end a "frustrating" season, and his tenure, on a high with a trip to Wembley for the Champions League final. But its preparation for Arsenal could hardly have been worse after its latest defeat, this time to Heidenheim on Saturday after leading 2-0.

"There's still the goal of going to

Wembley," Tuchel said Friday. "Everything is being put toward this target. It can't happen that we ease off even 1% in our conviction or in our ambition."

The mood at Arsenal is very different with Mikel Arteta's team looking better equipped to last the course in the race for the title this year after a late collapse last season.

The Champions League run feels like an unexpected bonus, but victory against Bayern will strengthen belief that a trophy double could be on.

ATLETICO SLUMP Atletico has slumped in recent weeks, with six losses and only four wins in its last 12 games overall, as it missed the goals and creativity of Antoine Griezmann. The France forward is now back playing and will be looking for his first goal since Jan. 18.

Diego Simeone's side was enjoying a 25-game unbeaten run at its Metropolitan Stadium until Barcelona delivered a 3-0 rout at Atletico on March 27.

Dortmund has generally saved its best for the Champions League this season. It isn't a Bundesliga contender this year, but wins over Newcastle, AC Milan and most recently PSV Eindhoven have shown it means business in Europe. (AP)