

6 WORLD

- 'Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens global security'
- Tensions rise in Australia after a bishop and priest injured

8 NATION

- Indebted to Ambedkar's Constitution: Modi in Bihar
- Exercise to ferry polling personnel in helicopters begins

MODI-FIED GUWAHATI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves to the crowd during a roadshow on GS Road in Guwahati on Tuesday. HT Photo

Shah attacks Kharge for questioning 'relevance' of Kashmir for other states 'PM has given 'guarantee' to introduce UCC in country'

KOTDWAR, April 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a "guarantee" to bring uniform civil code in the country on the same lines as Uttarakhand, Union home minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday.

Addressing an election rally here, Shah also attacked Mallikarjun Kharge for questioning the "relevance" of Kashmir for other states, saying the Congress president is not aware of sacrifices made by the soldiers of Garhwal to save Kashmir.

Shah said right from the inception of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, its leaders had made a promise that there would be no law based on religion in this country and that there would be a uniform civil code (UCC).

"For the first time in the country, Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Dhama has introduced UCC in the state. Modi has given a guarantee in our 'Sankalp Patra' (manifesto) to introduce UCC in



the whole country on the same lines," the BJP leader said.

He also attacked Kharge for questioning the "relevance" of Kashmir for other states.

"Congress national president Kharge says what the people of Uttarakhand and Rajasthan have to do with Kashmir. Kharge does not know that the soldiers of Garhwal shed maximum blood to save Kashmir," Shah said at the rally while campaigning for BJP's Pauri

Garhwal candidate Anil Baluni.

At a rally in Rajasthan recently, Kharge had raised questions over mention of Article 370 abrogation by BJP leaders in their rallies. "Are bhai, yahan ke logon se kya wasta hai (what has it got to do with the people here)," Kharge had said.

Shah said during the Congress-led UPA, anyone would come from Pakistan and return after setting off explosions but after Narendra Modi took (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Flying squad

JAGIROAD: In a bid to curb the circulation of illegal funds that could potentially influence the integrity of the Lok Sabha Election-2024, Flying Squad 01 of 52 Jagiroad (SC) LAC confiscated ₹ 1,00,000.00 from Sabur Uddin Mandal, son of Sultan Ali Mandal, at Bhuragaon Natan Bazar on April 15th, at 10:45 A.M. in Jagibhaktagaon under the jurisdiction of Jagiroad Police Station. This action aligns with the guidelines set forth by the Election Commission of India (ECI), which mandates the seizure of any cash exceeding ₹ 50,000.00 found in vehicles transporting candidates, their agents, party workers, election materials, or any items such as drugs, liquor, arms, or gift items valued at more than ₹ 10,000.00 that may be used to influence voters. This information was conveyed in a press release.

Expenditure observer

HOJAI: To assess the progress of the electoral process in No. 10 Kaziranga Lok Sabha constituency, election expenditure observer Sri Laxman Singh Gurjar (IRS) arrived in Hojai on Monday. He visited the district commissioner's office at Sankardev Nagar and convened a meeting with additional district commissioner Bani Inam Chaddab, Hojai district treasury authority officer, and other officials overseeing the election procedures.

BJP members

MARGHERITA: Under the proficient guidance of Assam Jatiyo Parishad Central Committee secretary Sanjay Kumar Deb, more than 300 individuals, active members, and supporters of the BJP, made the transition to Assam Jatiyo Parishad on Tuesday in various rural areas within the 83 no. Margherita Constituency of Tinsukia district. Sanjay Kumar Deb highlighted that since the commencement of the election campaign, an average of 200 to 300 BJP members have been affiliating with Assam Jatiyo Parishad daily, signaling a growing desire for change among the populace. Furthermore, Deb emphasised the significance of the indigenous Assamese people, Tea Tribes, and Adivasi voters in the upcoming elections under the 13th Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency.

Congress-led INDIA bloc will resolve Naga peace talks if voted to power: Surjewala

KOHIMA, April 16: Senior Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala on Tuesday asserted that the INDIA bloc led by the grand old party will resolve the decades-old Naga peace talks if voted to power at the Centre.

Addressing an election rally in Dimapur in support of party nominee S Supongmeren Jamir for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland, the AICC general secretary dubbed the ruling NDPP as "no direction propaganda party" and the BJP as "Bahut Jhoothi Party", accusing both of failing to deliver to the people.

He accused the BJP and RSS of attacking the country's pluralism

and diverse cultures by undermining the Constitution.

"If voted to power, the Congress-led INDIA bloc will resolve the Naga peace talks. The Framework Agreement was signed in 2015 but nothing has happened in the last nine years. Nobody has seen the contents of the agreement. The Framework Agreement is nothing but Modi's jumla," he alleged.

"It was the Congress under Rajiv Gandhi that signed accords in Assam, Mizoram and Punjab. If the people of Nagaland send Jamir to Parliament, the Congress will resolve the Naga issue to people's satisfaction," Surjewala said.

He said that it was the Congress that had implemented Article 371A of the Constitution which protects the Naga culture, customary law and practices, and ownership of land and property, "but the BJP wants to change the Constitution".

The Congress MP alleged that constitutional ethos of the country, including pluralism, diversity and secularism, were under attack from the BJP and RSS and it was the responsibility of everyone to rise together and prevent the society from being divided.

"The BJP, along with its multiple allies, is propagating a culture of hatred and division in the country by attacking (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Watching rhinos more beneficial: Himanta on Priyanka's roadshow

MAJULI, April 16: Hours after Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra led a roadshow in Assam's Jorhat, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that an "insignificant" number of people attended it and watching rhinos at the Kaziranga National Park would be "more beneficial".

He also said that members of the Gandhi family are fit for advertising campaigns.

"I heard around 2,000-3,000 people gathered (in Vadra's roadshow). It was not significant. Who will come to see Priyanka Gandhi? People will rather visit Kaziranga and watch tigers, rhinos, and time spent there will be more useful,"

he said. The senior BJP leader was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an election campaign at Majuli.

"What's the benefit of seeing the Gandhi family? They look fit for the Amul campaign, so they are Amul babies. It's more beneficial to watch rhinos at Kaziranga than having a glimpse of Amul babies," Sarma added.

Leading a two-km long huge roadshow in support of Congress candidate Gaurav Gogoi earlier in the day, Vadra said the daily wages of tea garden workers will be hiked if the opposition INDIA bloc wins the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Asked (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Training organised for LS polls personnel

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, April 16: As the countdown to the 1st Phase of Poll for the General Election to Lok Sabha 2024 draws near, with 11-Sonitpur HPC also set to go to polls on April 19, 2024, the office of the district election officer, Sonitpur, organised a comprehensive group training session for polling personnel engaged in the Parliamentary Election 2024.

The extensive training program unfolded across two venues, namely Tezpur H S Government School and Tezpur College. Over 5000 polling personnel gathered on Tuesday to receive vital training on their roles and responsibilities in the electoral process. They also had the opportunity to address any queries (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CEM Tuliram Ronghang energises BJP campaign in 6 - Diphu (ST) constituency



HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 16: Intensifying the campaign for BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso from the 6 - Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency, in the ensuing second phase of the Parliamentary election in Assam on April 26, chief executive member (CEM) of KAAC and star campaigner Tuliram Ronghang attended an election rally held at Bhelaguri playground under the Howraghat Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency on Tuesday.

Ronghang, wooing voters, said that peace prevailing in Karbi Anglong has accelerated development.

"With the signing of a peace agreement with six armed groups, normalcy has returned. As peace has prevailed, development has not stagnated and is progressing rapidly. Projects such as the District Hospital in Hamren, a 100-bedded hospital in Bokajan town, and Government Law College in Diphu are currently underway," he stated.

Assuring development for the voters of Howraghat, the CEM announced that under the Asom Mala State government-sponsored scheme, an amount of ₹ 922 crore will be allocated for the improvement of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Not correct to take steps that can overlap legal process: EC on probe against politicians

NEW DELHI, April 16: Amid the Opposition charge of being targeted by central probe agencies in the poll season, the Election Commission on Tuesday said it is committed to protecting level playing field but asserted that it is not correct to take any step that can overlap the legal and judicial process.

Several political parties from the INDIA bloc had approached the poll panel seeking its intervention in the alleged misuse of probe agencies by the government to target their leaders over graft.

Following the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam, the opposition parties had mounted renewed attack on the government for its alleged bid to silence their leaders ahead of parliamentary elections.

In a statement, the EC said it was guided by constitutional wisdom when presented with "live situations" involving political persons which have been under active consideration and orders of the courts based on criminal investigations.

"While the Commission remained unwaveringly committed to protection of level playing field and campaign entitlement of political parties and candidates, it has not found it correct to take any step that could overlap or overrun the legal judicial process," it said.

The poll panel said though it is not obligated to do so, it has put in public domain, for the first time, its enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during first month of its operation, along with details of action taken.

The EC said its move will help

address and stop "misgivings and insinuations" coming from certain quarters, "however small or limited".

During the one-month period of the model code, 16 delegations from seven political parties met the commission to lodge their complaints on alleged violations of poll code and related matters. Many delegations met its chief electoral officers at the state level.

Nearly 200 complaints have been filed by various political parties and candidates at the level of EC and across states. Of these, action has been taken in 169 cases, it pointed out.

The total number of complaints received from the BJP were 51, out of which action has been taken in 38 cases. Similarly, 59 complaints were lodged by the Congress, with action taken (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ULFA-I claims responsibility for attack on Assam Rifles

HT Correspondent
TINSUKIA, April 16: The United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) has claimed responsibility for the attack on an Assam Rifles vehicle carrying a patrol team in Namdang are of Margherita on Tuesday.

In a statement sent to several media outlets, Rumel Axom, a self-proclaimed captain of ULFA-I, alleged that several vehicles of the 13th Assam Rifles were damaged, and multiple soldiers were seriously injured.

According to sources, Hawladar Om Prakash sustained two bullet injuries in the attack and was airlifted to the Dinjan army hospital.

The incident occurred around 8 am when militants fired on the Assam Rifles vehicles as they traveled from Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh, to Margherita. "Militant groups (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The commercial hubs are Dibrugarh and Tinsukia mainly due to easier connectivity' After NHs, major bridges, connectivity focus in Assam's Lakhimpur shifts to peripheral routes

NORTH LAKHIMPUR, April 16: For the people of Lakhimpur, separated from the rest of Assam by the mighty Brahmaputra and with several other major tributaries crisscrossing through the part that lies on the downstream of Arunachal Pradesh, roads and bridges have long remained major demands before the governments.

While it took over 20 years for completion of the rail-cum-road Bogibeel bridge over the Brahmaputra, the people are more optimistic regarding the bridges under construction at present, especially at Ghunashuti over Subansiri and Kharkati-Fatasuti over Ranganadi, which locals claim will further accelerate economic development of the entire northern bank of the



Brahmaputra.
The current BJP-led regime has also focussed on improving waterways simultaneously, exploring the

navigation potential of the rivers that define a crucial part of the identity of Lakhimpur.

"Earlier, election issues used to

focus on providing basic connectivity to our parts with the rest of the state. But this has changed now with the Dhola-Sadiya and Bogibeel bridges opened over the last few years," Pranjal Dutta, a local businessman, said.

"Now, the government is focussing on providing intra-district connectivity as well as to neighbouring districts through multiple points," he added.

Local youth Prince Konwar cited the example of Ghunashuti-Lakhimpur bridge over the Subansiri, which the people have been demanding since the 1950s.

"It takes 10-11 hours to travel to Sivasagar now, but once this bridge is completed by next year or so, it will be a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Karbi Anglong bans alcohol sales from 17 to 19 April in wake of LS polls

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 16: The district commissioner of Karbi Anglong has imposed a ban on the sale of alcohol in the bordering districts of Assam (Karbi Anglong) and Nagaland ahead of the General Election 2024.

"In view of the General Election 2024 for the Parliamentary Constituencies in the State of Nagaland, to be held in the first phase, the Governor of Assam hereby prohibits the possession of any intoxicants by any individual or group of individuals. There is a total ban on the sale of liquor, and distribution of spirituous, fermented, or intoxicating liquors or similar substances at any hotel, eating house, tavern, shop, or any

other public or private place within the adjoining bordering districts of Assam and Nagaland," an official statement read.

It further said that this prohibition is effective for a period of 48 hours, ending with the conclusion of polling on April 19, 2024, starting from 4:00 pm on April 17, 2024.

"Additionally, it extends to the day of vote counting, which is scheduled for June 4, 2024. The period including any re-polling, if required, is also declared as a DRY DAY until the counting process is completed. During this time, all bonded warehouses, IMFL retail "OFF" / "ON" shops, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

4 people killed as car hits tree in Dhubri

DHUBRI, April 16: Four persons, including a woman, were killed as their car hit a tree in the Dhubri district on Tuesday, police said.

The driver of the speeding vehicle lost control and hit the tree on National Highway 17 in Gauripur.

All four persons in the car died on the spot, police said.

The deceased driver was identified as Sahil Ahmed and the other two passengers as Shahid Khandekar and Nur Amin. The identity of the woman is yet to be ascertained, they said.

The vehicle was on the way to Dhubri town from Bongaigaon district.

The bodies were sent for post-mortem examination to the Dhubri Medical College and Hospital, police said. (PTI)

Plight of tea garden workers becomes poll issues in Dibrugarh again

Dibrugarh constituency stands out with highest concentration of tea gardens with workers accounting for 30 % of total 16.50 lakh voters

DIBRUGARH, April 16: The two leaves and a bud, plucked by tea garden workers, may have made Assam's tea industry globally renowned, but the lack of their facilities comes to the fore only during elections with cacophony of promises by politicians to address their plight.

Nestled amidst verdant greenery, the Dibrugarh constituency stands out with the highest concentration of tea gardens in the region with estate workers accounting for 30 per cent of the total 16.50 lakh voters.

The Congress enjoyed the unstinted support of this major vote bloc since Independence till 2014 when the BJP wrested the seat for the first time and retained it five years later.

Serving as a microcosm, it vividly portrays the challenges faced by tea garden workers.

The constituency, comprising two districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, has a total of 301 big estates and 51,063 small tea gardens.

Wages, health, education and land documents (pattas) are the major issues of tea garden workers of the constituency.

Union Minister and BJP candidate Sarbananda Sonowal's campaign has mandatory stops at tea gardens where he shakes a leg with 'jhumur' dancers of the tea tribe and plays their traditional drum before he starts highlighting the party's contribution to improve the life of estate workers.

"During the tenures of Himanta Biswa Sarma and



condition of its workers is pathetic.

"BJP had made many promises for tea garden workers, including ₹ 350 as wage, land pattas of their houses, health and education facilities but all remain unfulfilled," the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president said.

There is a strong resentment against the BJP among the tea garden community in the entire Dibrugarh constituency, he claimed.

The third candidate in the fray, Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Manoj Dhanowar, belongs to the tea tribe community. He claimed that the condition of garden workers here is the "worst in the country and so-called facilities provided by the BJP government have not reached all sections".

"In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the workers are paid ₹ 450 per day, but in Assam, BJP is not even paying the promised Rs 350 and workers are getting a mere ₹ 250," he claimed.

Gogoi said the BJP's neglect of the community is evident from the fact that the sitting MP and Union Minister Rameswar Teli, who also belongs to the tea tribe community, was denied a ticket from the seat this election.

Countering his allegation, Assam minister and Tinsukia MLA Sanjay Kishan, who also belongs to the tea tribe community, was denied a ticket from the seat this election.

Opposition candidate Lurinjyoti Gogoi told PTI that Assam is globally known for its tea industry, but the

electoral process," said Pachiappan P.

The implementation of the model code of conduct has been rigorous in Morigaon, with various authorities ensuring compliance and taking action against any violations. Moreover, key officers have been appointed to oversee the electoral process and address any concerns or objections raised by the stakeholders.

The district commissioner also informed that the flying squad and static surveillance team have seized cash worth Rs 38,35,150 till April 14. This action is part of the ongoing efforts to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process.

A meeting was also convened where the district commissioner, expenditure observer, and representatives of different political parties discussed further arrangements and addressed queries regarding the electoral process. The meeting was attended by ASP Dhruva Jyoti Nath, ADC Pallavi Kachari and Sulakshana Barpatroghain and election officer Jagriti Kalwar.

larily for tea garden workers.

"In Assam, there are 35 assembly constituencies where tea garden voters play a pivotal role, but it is not possible that in each, people from the community will be given tickets to contest," he added.

Health is also a major concern in tea gardens with at least one or two tuberculosis patients in most families and the outbreak of gastro-enteritis is common in these estates, CPI-ML leader Subhas Sen, who works with workers, told PTI.

"There are no well-equipped hospitals in tea gardens. There are no permanent doctors and even if there is, they cater to at least 5 to 10 tea gardens, working on a part-time basis," he said.

The dropout rate among the children of workers is also very high with almost 95 per cent of them not sitting for the matriculation exams, Sen added.

Tea garden worker Durgamani Keot said her daughters have dropped out of school but they "don't want to pluck leaves like me".

Keot said she has received most of the government schemes, like free rice and gas connections, but has yet to get land pattas.

Another worker Kuli Tanti said though she had applied for all government schemes entitled to, she is yet to get the benefits but hopes to get it once the elections are over.

The Dibrugarh constituency will go to polls on April 19. (PTI)

Ishwari Deka of Tezpur clears UPSC



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 16: Earning laurels for the district of Sonitpur, Ishwari Deka from Tezpur has cracked the UPSC examinations securing all India ranking 320, the results of which were released on Tuesday.

Ishwari is the daughter of former vice-principal of the Rangapara College, Ranendra Mohan Deka and Bharati Das, retired principal of Tezpur Government Girls' Multipurpose Higher Secondary School. She resides with her family at Chitrallekha Nagar in Tezpur.

Ishwari passed her HSLC final examination from the Saint Joseph Convent High School in Tezpur with 89 per cent marks and the HS final examination with 97.75 marks from the Kendriya Vidyalaya. After graduating from the Saint Stephens College in New Delhi she pursued her post graduation in English from the Delhi University. She had also appeared in the Assam Finance Service Examination, in which she secured the third position.

Unfolding the secret behind her success Ishwari Deka said that she had nurtured a dream, to crack the civil service examinations since her school days. After clearing the UPSC preliminary exam, she regularly studied to achieve her goal.

Several organization and local residents congratulated her on her feat. A local resident said, "We wish Ishwari a bright future and hope that through her unfathomable talent she would always dedicate herself for the betterment of the people, thereby reflecting the dignity of the district of Sonitpur and her locality as well."

Morigaon prepares for Lok Sabha polls with 7,25,801 voters

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, April 16: The Morigaon district with a total of 7,25,801 voters, is gearing up for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls, which is scheduled to take place on April 26.

Addressing the media on Tuesday, the district commissioner and district election officer Devashish Sharma along with the expenditure observer Pachiappan P said that the voting will take place from 7 am to 5 pm on April 26, with vote counting scheduled for June 4, marking the completion of the entire election process by June 6.

A total of 13 candidates from various political parties are in the fray for the Nagoan Lok Sabha constituency seat, of which Morigaon is a part. In the upcoming second phase of polling, three legislative assembly constituencies of Jagiroad (SC), Laharighat, and Morigaon will be involved. The district comprises of a diverse electorate, with 3,66,678 male voters, 3,59,112 female voters, and 11 third gender voters.

"To facilitate smooth voting procedures, 911 polling stations have been set up in Morigaon with special provisions for all women polling stations and model polling stations. A total of 29 polling stations will be exclusively managed by women," Sharma said.

Among these, six have been designated as model polling stations, three polling stations will be run entirely by young personnel and one polling station will be efficiently managed by women personnel with disabilities, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all voters.

Furthermore, arrangements have been put in place for home voting on April 17, catering specifically to voters with disabilities and senior citizens.

"A total of 545 persons with disabilities and individuals aged 85 years and above will have the opportunity to cast their votes from the comfort of their homes. On April 19, voting for essential services personnel will take place, ensuring their participation in the

electoral process," said Pachiappan P.

The implementation of the model code of conduct has been rigorous in Morigaon, with various authorities ensuring compliance and taking action against any violations. Moreover, key officers have been appointed to oversee the electoral process and address any concerns or objections raised by the stakeholders.

The district commissioner also informed that the flying squad and static surveillance team have seized cash worth Rs 38,35,150 till April 14. This action is part of the ongoing efforts to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process.

A meeting was also convened where the district commissioner, expenditure observer, and representatives of different political parties discussed further arrangements and addressed queries regarding the electoral process. The meeting was attended by ASP Dhruva Jyoti Nath, ADC Pallavi Kachari and Sulakshana Barpatroghain and election officer Jagriti Kalwar.

Sarbananda Sonowal campaigns in Naharkatia, partakes in pada yatra



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 16: Union minister and BJP candidate contesting from Dibrugarh Lok Sabha Constituency (LSC), Sarbananda Sonowal on Tuesday campaigned across the Naharkatia legislative assembly constituency (LAC) at Tarani Pathar, Nigam and Namrup.

Sonowal also took part in a pada yatra, where thousands joined in to rally support for BJP on Tuesday.

Later in the evening, Sonowal also addressed a meeting in Shantipara Netaji park within Dibrugarh LAC.

The Union minister was accompanied by the Union minister of state, Rameshwar Teli, Na-

harkatia MLA, Taranga Gogoi and noted cine artist Pranjal Saikia among other leaders of the party.

Addressing the meeting Sonowal said, "The people of Assam has witnessed how the BJP led double engine government has worked towards development and welfare of the state. Major initiatives have been executed that has led to the enhancement of the quality of living. The main differentiator of BJP is its innate capability to work towards achieving a vision. It has a plan, it has honest intent to put it through which has resulted in the historic transformation of the state and the country. We have done some good work, while pursuing to deliver the best. But, we must keep working towards realising the vision of Narendra Modi to transform India as the third largest economy of the world, a feat that was unthinkable during the misrule of Congress governments."

"Today, the Narendra Modi has already pioneered and prepared a 100-days plan after people elect him back to power for the third consecutive term. On the contrary, the opposition Congress remains aimless, visionless and clueless. People can see this through. The 'Bohagi Bordoichila' will tear through the conspiracy of Congress led alliance as the people of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia will cut them to size," he said.

NFR observes 133rd birth anniversary of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 16: The 133rd Birth Anniversary of Bharat Ratna Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was observed on Tuesday at the Bhupen Hazarika Sabha Griha in the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) headquarters in Maligaon.

Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, general manager of NFR and others officials paid homage by lighting the lamp and offering floral tribute on the portrait of B. R. Ambedkar, also known as the Father of the Indian Constitution.

The officers and staff of NFR, representatives of various associations and unions were also present on the occasion. Speaking on this occasion, Chetan Kumar Shrivastava mentioned about Ambedkar's contribution towards framing of our Constitution, providing justice and equality to all classes of the society. He also spoke on his role in women empowerment and development of under-privileged section of the society.

His whole life is an inspiration for all classes of the society.

Congress leader Pawan Khera slams BJP for using ED, CBI against opposition leaders

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 16: Congress leader Pawan Khera on Tuesday criticised the BJP government for misusing the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against opposition leaders, who raised their voices against them.

Addressing a press conference here, Khera, senior Congress spokesperson, said, "This election is very important in the country's history. The people are in constant fear that if BJP comes into power again, there will be no elections held. Democracy will be finished and the Constitution will be changed as per their wish."

"I appeal to all voters to vote consciously and to vote to save democracy and the constitution. If someone fears them (BJP) and joins their party, they will help him become chief minister. But those who don't come into their trap, they will put behind bars using ED and CBI," Khera stated.

Khera said, "If we form the government, then those officers who helped the BJP to illegally use the ED and CBI against opposition

leaders will not be spared. We will take action against them, and they will be put behind bars. The Congress leader asked why the four-lane highway in Assam has not been completed after many years. "The BJP government promised the six ethnic groups to give ST status, but why have they not been able to tag the communities as ST till date?" Khera asked. "The wages of tea garden workers have not been increased, which was promised by the government during the last parliamentary election. The BJP government has failed to fulfill the promises they made during the last elections," Khera stated.

In BJP, only two persons make decisions. They will not listen to the cabinet; only two persons, Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, rule the whole party. Now, Narendra Modi is afraid because they are claiming 400 plus seats, but the result will tell us the whole story, he said. Slamming Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Khera said, "What Himanta Biswa Sarma said is not important for us. When he (Himanta Biswa Sarma) was in Congress, he was a disciplined man, but now he has changed after joining the BJP."

Baukhungri Festival concludes in Kokrajhar

Festival organised by BTR govt in collaboration with tourism department

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 16: The 11th edition of the Baukhungri Festival, the biggest festival in Bodoland Territorial Region has concluded with two days of colourful programme held along the Baukhungri Hill Harinaguri in Kokrajhar.

The festival comprised of traditional folk culture, indigenous sports and local food traditions at the Harinaguri, which was organised by the government of Bodoland Territorial Region and the tourism department. The celebration of Rongjali Bwisagu also included hill trekking on the last day of Choitra month on April 13.

The event has gained mass participation cutting across different communities from several states of the country.

The concluding day witnessed a prize distribution ceremony, where competition winners were awarded cash prize and gifts by the organising committee amidst a huge gathering of visitors.

On the first day of the event, a



hill trekking competition for men and women was held, which was flagged off at the Harinaguri High School playground. People in large numbers participated in the competition.

In the male category, Puran Rai (Sikkim), Pradip Mahato (West Bengal) and Vivek Chetry (West Bengal) were adjudged as first, second and third spot respectively. In the female category, Sabina Rai (West Bengal), Shyamali Singh (West Bengal) and Madhu Rai (Uttar Pradesh) were spotted as first, second and third respectively.

In the mountain cycling, Alvin-darison Winniag (Meghalaya), Alancemayer Lyngdoh Nanglait (Meghalaya) and Burlungbuthur Narzary (Bodoland) bagged the first, second and third respectively in the men's category. In the women category, Phymai Kyndait (Meghalaya), Bhasati Saikia (Assam) and Rwisumwi Bala Basumatary (Bodoland) were adjudged as first, second and third spot respectively.

Several competitions were held for men and women were also organised, which included mountain bike cycling competition, hills trekking competition, indigenous games and sports competition, showcasing of traditional food items and cultural demonstrations representing different communities.

Bodoland University registrar Subung Basumatary, NRL independent director Sandeep Pradhan, AFA secretary Sangrang Brahma, BTC secretary Ditaka Nanda Hazarika and joint secretary Pami Brahma graced the occasion.

Former KAAC EM Prodig Rongpi joins Congress

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 16: Congress of Karbi Anglong received a boost as the former executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Prodig Rongpi along with his supporters returned to Congress fold. Sources claimed more than 30 party workers from BJP and Nationalist People's Party (NPP) have joined the Congress.

The former EM of KAAC, Rongpi including others were welcomed into the Congress by felicitating them with Karbi traditional turban in a joining programme held at Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (KADCC) office in Diphu on Tuesday.

The former EM said that it was like a homecoming for him. Rongpi had won four consecutive times as member of KAAC from Chinthong Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency, West Karbi Anglong. He first won an ASDC ticket in 2001. Two years later Rongpi then joined the Congress. In Congress he won another two consecutive times as Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) from the same constituency Chinthong and was also an EM



switched to BJP. In 2017 the BJP party gave me a party ticket. I won the election and was MAC and EM, KAAC. But in the last KAAC election in 2022 I was denied a party ticket. Though I was not given a party ticket, I did not go against party principle and stayed loyal to the party."

Rongpi said that although the BJP had given the promise of implementing Article 244(A) of Indian constitution for granting Autonomous State, and though 10 years in power now, has not done it.

"BJP leaders like LK Advani, Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah have made their promises for implementing Article 244(A). Their promises have become lies. But for the Congress Rahul Gandhi has assured to implement it," the former EM said.

He also said his joining the Congress will give a fresh energy to the Congress of Chinthong.

Another person joining the Congress today is Pitor Tisso, BJP state executive member and Prabhari of West Karbi Anglong Minority Morcha.

Tisso on April 15 resigned from the party and within 24 hours he was seen joining the Congress.

Veteran Kannada actor, producer & director 'Prachanda Kulla' Dwarakish passes away

BENGALURU, April 16: Veteran Kannada actor, producer and director Bungle Shama Rao Dwarakanath, popularly known as Dwarakish who is best known for his roles as a comedian in a film career spanning more than five decades, died following a cardiac arrest at his residence here on Tuesday, family sources said.

A doyen of Kannada film industry, the 81-year-old had acted in over 90 movies and produced and directed around 50 movies.

"Morning he had told his son that he was feeling tired and asked him to wake him up at 9 am. When he went to wake him up he did not respond," a family source said.

Tributes poured in for the versatile actor who was "synonymous" with comedy that the audience would start giggling the moment he appeared on the big screen.

"Sharing the screen with great actors like Dr Rajkumar and Dr Vishnuvardhan, he made his own mark in the minds of the audience through his humorous acting. Kannada cinema has become poorer with the death of Dwarakish," Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said.

Tamil superstar Rajinikanth said in a post on 'X': "The demise of my long time dear friend Dwarakish is very painful to me...starting his career as a comedian, he raised himself up to being a big producer and director. fond memories come to my mind.."

Born on August 19, 1942 at Hunsuru in Mysuru district, the legendary actor was a household name in the State during the prime of his career.

He is also credited with introducing noted Hindi playback singer Kishore Kumar to Kannada film industry with the song 'Aadu Aata Aadu' (Play the game) for the movie 'Kulla

Agent 000' in which Dwarakish played the lead role.

A diploma holder in mechanical engineering, Dwarakish made his debut in the tinsel town in 1966 by co-producing a "Mamatheya Bandhana" under the banner of Thunga Pictures.

He tasted big success as a producer with his movie "Mayor Muthanna" starring Kannada matinee idol Dr Rajkumar and Bharathi in the lead roles in 1969.

Being short would have been a drawback for many but Dwarakish turned it to his advantage; the little master of Kannada film industry was fondly called 'Prachanda Kulla' (fiery dwarf).

'Prachanda Kulla', 'Kulla Agent 000', 'Cowboy Kulla', 'Singaporenalli Raja Kulla', 'Kulla Kalli', and 'Hosa Kalla Hale Kulla' were some of the movies he made.

However sombre the plot of

the movie could be, Dwarakish's presence would ensure that there would be an adequate dose of humour, a film critic noted.

Dwarakish's directorial-debut movie 'Nee Bareda Kadambari' in 1985 was well received by the audience. His movie 'Aphamitra', a remake of Malayalam movie 'Manichithrathazhu', was a grand success.

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said Dwarakish brought life to roles as a comedian, hero and supporting actor.

Former Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy said: "Not only as an artist, his unparalleled service to the Kannada film industry as a producer and director is unforgettable. He was an asset to Kannada cinema due to his versatile talent, who acted with great actors like Dr Rajkumar, Dr Vishnuvardhan and Ambareesh." (PTI)

Juicy when there is conflict between two characters: Anne Hathaway on recipe for ideal rom-com



NEW DELHI, April 16: How do you know you have a perfect romantic comedy at hand? For Hollywood star Anne Hathaway, it's when there is a "pleasurable conflict" between two characters, much like one of her favourites "It Happened One Night".

In her upcoming film "The Idea of You", the Oscar winner plays Solene Marchand, a 40-year-old single mother who begins an unexpected romance with 24-year-old Hayes Campbell, played by Nicholas Galitzine, the lead singer of August Moon, the hottest boy band on the planet.

"It Happened One Night", a 1934 love story featuring Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert, starts with some friction between lead characters. It follows Ellie, a pampered socialite seeking liberation from her father, who falls in love with a roguish reporter, Peter.

This conflict, Hathaway said, was also present in "The Idea of You", set to premiere on Prime Video globally on May 2. "One of my favourite rom-coms is one with Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert called 'It Happened One Night' and so any time you can get believable tension and conflict between the two characters, that's very juicy. Conflict is really important but it has to be a pleasurable conflict," the actor told PTI in an international roundtable interview.

Popular in India for her performances in "The Princess Diaries" films, "The Devil Wears Prada", "Interstellar", "Love & Other Drugs" and "One Day", Hathaway said unlike other movies in the rom-com genre, the conflict in "The Idea of You" is not between her and Galitzine's characters but the couple and the world. In the movie, the age difference between Solene, an art gallery owner, and Hayes leads to a paparazzi storm, forcing the couple to evaluate their priorities. According to the 41-year-old star, the fact that the characters get along well was interesting.

"What seemed very fresh to me was: this is a relationship that is clearly working for these two people. It's just outside of the parameters of what society thinks a relationship should look like. The conflict isn't actually between the couple, it's between the couple and the world."

"It's really interesting that we can't be just happy for people when they are happy, we try to complicate it. I love that these two people decide to keep going deeper into their love and not care about what the world has to say about it until they must," she added. (PTI)



'Kaun Banega Crorepati 16' registration to open on April 26

MUMBAI, April 16: Registrations for the 16th edition of the "Kaun Banega Crorepati" will start from April 26, the show's team announced on Tuesday.

Sony Television, which airs the long-running quiz show, hosted by megastar Amitabh Bachchan, shared the news in a post on its official X page.

"So much love has been showered that it is returning once again, #KaunBanegaCrorepati . Starting #KBCRegistrations 26 April at 9pm. #KBConSonyTV #KBC16 #KBCIsBack," the channel posted.

Bachchan, 81, has hosted "KBC" since it started in 2000, except for the third season in 2007, which was hosted by superstar Shah Rukh Khan.

The veteran actor will next be seen in filmmaker Nag Ashwin's "Kalki 2898 AD", also featuring his "Piku" co-star Deepika Padukone and Prabhas, and Rajinikanth's "Vettaivan". (PTI)

AKSHAY KUMAR TO MAKE TELUGU CINEMA DEBUT WITH 'KANNAPPA'

NEW DELHI, April 16: Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar has boarded the cast of the Vishnu Manchu-starrer "Kannappa", the makers announced on Tuesday.

While details about Kumar's role are unknown, the film marks the actor's Telugu cinema debut.

Manchu, who plays the titular role in "Kannappa", shared the news of Kumar's casting on his official X page. "The #Kannappa journey just got more thrilling as we welcome the Superstar Mr. Akshay Kumar to the Telugu Film Industry. Thrilled to announce his debut in Telugu cinema with Kannappa. Get ready for an unforgettable adventure!" the actor captioned his post.

Kumar, who currently stars in action film "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan", thanked Manchu for making him part of the team.

"Thank you @iVishnuManchu for such a warm welcome and making me a part of your #Kannappa journey. Jai Mahakaal," the 56-year-old actor posted on X.

Based on a true story, the upcoming movie will follow the journey of Kannappa, an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva. "Kannappa" is directed by Mukesh Kumar Singh and produced by Manchu's banners AVA Entertainment and 24 Frames Factory.

The film also stars Preity Mukundhan, Mohanlal, Prabhas, Mohan Babu, R Sarathkumar, Brahmanandam, Madhoo, and Mukesh Rishi.

It will be released in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi and English. (PTI)



Tasted success after digital release of '12th Fail': Medha Shankr

MUMBAI, April 16: Actor Medha Shankr, who made her cinema debut with the acclaimed "12th Fail", says she was inundated with congratulatory messages after the film was released on OTT.

Starring Vikrant Massey and Shankr, the Hindi film is based on Anurag Pathak's best-selling novel about the incredible journey of IPS officer Manoj Kumar Sharma and IRS officer Shraddha Joshi.

Directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra, "12th Fail" was a surprise hit at the box office, earning around Rs 70 crore worldwide upon its release last October. Two months later, the digital release on Disney+ Hotstar only amplified its reach. Shankr, who played Shraddha Joshi in the movie, said she received a lot of love from all

quarters once "12th Fail" started streaming.

"I tasted success after the OTT release because of the kind of love I got from the industry and otherwise on the internet. My Instagram literally blew up. This is just my first film and people have been incredibly kind to me."

"Audiences were lovely to me but also the fraternity-directors, producers, actors, they all messaged me, called me, warmed up to me to appreciate my work and how much they loved the film. I hope and pray that I get to work with the kind of filmmakers I've always dreamt of working with," the actor told PTI in an interview here.

The film, based on the 2019 eponymous non-fiction book by Anurag Pathak, recently completed 25 weeks in theatres.

Shankr said she is full of gratitude.

"Twenty-five weeks in the cinemas. It's big. We're just cherishing that moment for now. It's definitely opened up more avenues, more opportunities. But right now, I'm just enjoying the moment."

"People have so much respect and regard for every single actor in the film and the filmmaker. They (audience) look at us as if we have given them some motivation and inspiration. That regard in somebody's eyes is very special," she added. The Noida-born actor, who was earlier seen in projects such as "Beecham House", "Shaadisthan" and "Dil Bekaraar" in supporting roles, said it took her around six years to get a breakthrough.

"I've been in Bombay for the past five-six years now, and it took

me that long to get a film like this. Before that I've done some projects but it didn't give me the kind of recognition I wanted. It was a long journey till this film happened."

One just has to believe in themselves and keep going, said Shankr.

"Every single day we have to restart in our lives because self-doubt is going to creep in from time to time. All the negative talk is going to creep in. But you have to believe in yourself and keep going."

"You have to be your biggest critic and your biggest cheerleader and just give yourself the self-belief because nobody else is going to give it to you. So, you have to give it to yourself and keep going," she added. (PTI)



US Olympic committee strikes sponsorship deal to help athletes get degrees after they retire

NEW YORK, April 16: American Olympic athletes have a new place to turn to lock down college degrees and other skills for life after sports thanks to a partnership U.S. Olympic leaders announced Tuesday with the Denver-based education company Guild. The deal between Guild, organizers of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee is designed to help the Olympic organizations fulfill commitments to help athletes begin the next chapters of their lives after retirement.

Guild says its online platform contains more than 250 offerings, including opportunities for undergraduate and graduate programs, certification programs and career counseling. "You'd be hard-pressed to think that someone's going to go in there and not find something that works for them," said Carrie White, the USOPC's vice president of athlete development and engagement. White said in a recent survey of 5,000 Olympic and Paralympic alumni, around 60%

of athletes who were 39 and younger said they needed help with career and professional development. She said within days of the program's launch earlier this month, some 95 athletes had created profiles on the platform. Guild CEO Bijal Shah said that because Olympic and Paralympic athletes spend most of their time early in life focusing on sports, they sometimes enter the workforce in need of skills for new careers that others in the job market have already acquired. "We thought that their capabilities and the services Guild provides could be an amazing opportunity for those athletes," Shah said. Shah said Guild was formed in 2015 to offer solutions to the reality that "there was a problem in this country around the student-debt crisis," along with the overall cost of post-graduate studies, that often stymied people's quest for degrees and other adult education. Guild works with employers — Walmart, Chipotle and Target are among its big-name clients — that offer programs

for their workers through the company's platform that helps them further their educations, tuition-free. Shah said people who embark on Guild are 2.6 times more likely to move up in their company and two times as likely to see incremental wage increases compared to those who don't. Jess Bartley, who heads the USOPC's psychological services department, said post-retirement planning is one of the most consistently difficult conversations to start up with athletes. It's another example

of how this deal fits into what the USOPC and LA28 are trying to accomplish in an era in which they are increasingly being pressed to consider athletes' overall well-being, and not just how they perform inside the lines. Janet Evans, the four-time gold-medalist swimmer who serves as LA28's chief athlete officer, said "Guild's vision ... aligns with LA28's commitment to supporting the whole athlete, from their performance to their total well-being." White said the USOPC awarded more than \$1.8 million

in tuition grants in 2023 to qualified athletes, most worth around \$4,500 that were paid directly to the schools they attended. Those grants will continue, while the partnership with Guild offers a different option and, White said, more benefit because many programs are fully funded. For programs that are partially funded through Guild, the USOPC will cover up to \$10,000 a year. Athletes who qualify will be eligible to use Guild for up to 10 years after they retire. (AP)

Australian aggression can be countered with better innovative passing: Rupinder Pal Singh

NEW DELHI, April 16: The recent 0-5 drubbing notwithstanding, former drag-flick specialist Rupinder Pal Singh feels the Olympic-bound Indian men's hockey team can counter Australia's aggressive style of play with better defensive coordination and some innovative passing. India were blanked in the five-Test series in Perth some days ago, a disappointing outcome for the team, which did reasonably well in the FIH Pro League before that and is expected to better or match its bronze from Tokyo Olympics at the Paris Games in July-August. Singh, who was part of the 2014 Asian Games gold-winning side, is not too concerned by the final result as he felt the team kept improving with every game. "We lost the first match 5-1, after that the team improved and the score-lines were close, we missed some chances, some work needs to be done prior to the Olympics. The series was a preparation for Paris Olympics, as new variations and players were tried out," he told PTI Videos. Asked how should the team counter Australia's attacking style of play, he said innovative passing could be the trick. "Australia's hard press can be countered, high level of coordination is required for that, defender-to-defender ball transfer, quick passes from defenders to the mid-field, overhead passes



would be useful in countering such a style of play," the 33-year-old suggested. He sees no fault in India's reliance on penalty corners for scoring. "...all international teams, all are dependent on penalty corners -- the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Australia. Defences have become stronger, here PC conversion is

such an important tool that in every match about 1-2 goals have to be scored from them," he pointed out. He described current India captain Harmanpreet Singh as one of the best drag-flickers in the world. He was, however, concerned about the penalty corner conversion rate of the women's team, which is seeking

to rebuild itself after its stunning failure to qualify for the Olympics. "That's a worry (penalty corner conversion), its penalty corner is an important tool in today's hockey we need to work on that," he said. Singh was speaking on the sidelines of a three-day training program organised by Hockey India. It was also attended by

former India goalkeeper Yogita Bali, along with India goalkeepers Adrian D'Souza, Bharat Chetri, Helen Mary, Dipika Murty, Akash Chikte, and PT Rao. Apart from Singh, the other eminent former India drag-flickers who attended the training were Gurjinder Singh, VR Raghunath, and Jaspreet Kaur. The former stars have drawn up a curriculum on the basics of drag-flicking and goalkeeping which would be implemented across all academies and centres in the country. Despite the Olympic heartbreak, women's hockey will do well, according to Bali, who picked Manipur's Bichu Devi Kharibam as the successor for long-serving goalkeeper Savita Punia. "In Bengaluru, we trained with top six goalkeepers of India, and I found Bichhu to be the best in India after Savita. She could be India's number one after Savita," Bali said. Bali said Indian women's hockey has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. "Compared to when I started playing, there are a lot more facilities, now there are scientific advisors, nutrition experts to help the development of the players." "Earlier Indian Railways was the prominent employment provider for hockey players, now several departments are offering jobs, so things are going well," she said. (PTI)

Kane says he plays with 'point to prove' against Arsenal after being released when he was 9



MUNICH, April 16: Harry Kane was released by Arsenal when he was 9 years old. He has been on a revenge mission ever since. The England captain has scored 15 goals in 20 appearances in all competitions against Arsenal — first as a Tottenham player and now while at Bayern Munich — and will look to add to that record in the second leg of the Champions League quarterfinals. Bayern held Arsenal to a 2-2 draw in the first leg in London last week, with Kane scoring. He opened up Tuesday about his feelings when playing against Arsenal after being rejected as a kid. "Up until this year, I've played them at least twice a year for the last 10 years," Kane said at a news conference ahead of Wednesday's game at the Allianz Arena. "It was always a big occasion, a big moment. Of course, always maybe it was in the back of my mind, being released from a young age, that there was always a point to prove and I feel like I'm the type of player who throughout my whole career has had points to prove along the way. "I don't feel that ever leaves you. It will always be in my DNA until I'm retired. There will always be a reason to prove

someone wrong or prove to myself I can do something." Liam Brady, who was Arsenal's academy manager when Kane was at the club, has since said Kane "was a bit chubby, he wasn't very athletic but we made a mistake." Writing in a piece for The Players' Tribune in 2018, Kane said being released by Arsenal "was probably the best thing that ever happened to me, because it gave me a drive that wasn't there before." On Tuesday, Kane said there was more at play now that he had joined Bayern. "I don't think specifically I look back to that and think that because I was released at 9 years old, I really need to make a difference tomorrow," he said. "Now I'm at Bayern Munich, it's just they are a top team in the Champions League." "Of course I have history with (Arsenal) but all I can do is help Bayern Munich qualify for the semifinals of the Champions League." Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard trained Tuesday after coming off in the second half of the team's 2-0 loss to Aston Villa in the Premier League on Sunday with what manager Mikel Arteta said was an injury. (AP)

Candidates Chess: Gukesh draws with Nepomniachtchi to stay in joint lead

TORONTO, April 16: Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh held on to the joint top spot with Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi after they played out an easy draw in the 10th round of the Candidates chess tournament here. The all-Indian duel between R Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi also ended in a draw while Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura defeated Firouzja Alireza and Nijat Abasov respectively to come back within striking distance of the two leaders. With just four rounds to come in the biggest event of the year, Gukesh and Nepomniachtchi have an identical six points each with Praggnanandhaa, Caruana and Nakamura close on their heels half a point behind. Gujrathi, on six points, is sole sixth while for all practical purposes, Alireza and Abasov are out of the race with 3.5 and two points respectively. Nepomniachtchi has not been taking many risks in the event with either colour and his solid play makes him the only player who is unbeaten after 10 rounds. The Ruy Lopez as white gave the Russian just an optical advantage after the opening and the 17-year-old Gukesh ensured parity with some timely exchanges leading to a rook and pawns endgame. The contest was almost uneventful other than the opening part and in the endgame, the players exchanged another pair of rooks and a few pawns to reach a theoretically drawn position. Praggnanandhaa has also been very solid with just a lone loss early in the second round against Gukesh. The 18-year old faced the Berlin defense by Gujrathi who equalised easily as

black. With three minor pieces and the queen off the board early, the rook and opposite colour Bishop endgame did not quite offer chances to either player. The game was drawn after 39 moves. Caruana faced the Sicilian Najdorf by Alireza and secured the advantage out of a side variation. The players overlooked a simple tactic but Caruana still remained ahead in endgame after winning a pawn on the 29th move. Alireza fought on but the result of the game was never in doubt. Nakamura transposed to a French exchange out of a Petroff defense and piled up pressure on the queen side. At one point in a complex middle game, Abasov missed the thread of the position and ended up losing a rook for a Bishop. The rest was just a matter of time and the American wrapped the issue in 58 moves. In the women's section, Tinjie Lei of China ended the unbeaten run of Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia and regained joint lead with compatriot Zhongyi Tan who played out a draw with Koneru Humpy. R Vaishali bounced back after a string of losses in a roller-coaster game with Nurgul Salimov of Bulgaria while Russian Katerina Lagno drew with Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine. With 6.5 points apiece, the Chinese duo of Lei and Tan are sitting pretty with a full point lead over Goryachkina and Lagno. Humpy is a distant fifth on 4.5 points, a half point ahead of Salimova and Muzychuk and Vaishali, despite the victory still holds the last spot on 3.5 points. (PTI)

Despite weather glitch, the Paris Oly flame is lit at the Greek cradle of ancient games

ANCIENT OLYMPIA (GREECE), April 16: Even without the help of Apollo, the flame that is to burn at the Paris Olympics was kindled Tuesday at the site of the ancient games in southern Greece. Cloudy skies prevented the traditional lighting, when an actress dressed as an ancient Greek priestess uses the sun to ignite a silver torch — after offering up a symbolic prayer to Apollo, the ancient Greek sun god. Instead, a backup flame was used that had been lit on the same spot Monday, during the final rehearsal. Normally, the foremost of a group of priestesses in long, pleated dresses dips the fuel-filled torch into a parabolic mirror which focuses the sun's rays on it, and fire spurts forth. But this time she didn't even try, going straight for the backup, kept in a copy of an ancient Greek pot. Ironically, a few minutes later the sun shone forth. From the ancient stadium in Olympia, a relay of torchbearers will carry the flame more than 5,000 kilometers (3,100 miles) through Greece until the handover to Paris Games organizers in Athens on April 26. International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said the flame lighting combined "a pilgrimage to our past in ancient Olympia, and an act of faith in our future." "In these difficult times ... with wars and conflicts on the rise, people are fed up with all the hate, the aggression and negative news," he said. "We are longing for something which brings us together; something that is unifying; something that gives us hope."



Thousands of spectators from all over the world packed Olympia for Tuesday's event amid the ruined temples and sports grounds where the ancient games were held from 776 B.C.-393 A.D. The sprawling site, in a lush valley by the confluence of two rivers, is at its prettiest in the spring, teeming with pink-flowering Judas trees, small blue irises and the occasional red anemone. The first torchbearer was Greek rower Stefanos Douskos, a gold medalist in 2021 in Tokyo. He ran to a nearby monument that contains the heart of French Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the driving force behind the modern revival of the games. The next runner was Laure Manaudou, a French swimmer who won three medals at Athens in 2004. She handed over to senior European Union official Margaritis Schinas, a Greek. The flame will travel from Athens' port of Piraeus on the Belem, a French three-masted

sailing ship built in 1896 — the year of the first modern games in Athens. According to Captain Aymeric Gibet, it's due on May 8 in the southern French port of Marseille, a city founded by Greek colonists some 2,600 years ago. The Belem arrived in Katakolo, near Olympia, on Monday. Lookers-on included a small, enthusiastic group of tourists from the northwestern French region of Brittany, where the ship's homeport of Nantes is, waving French and Breton flags. "We thought it would be a unique opportunity to see the flame lighting at the historic site of Olympia," said Jean-Michel Pasquet from Lorient, near Nantes. "And when we also learnt the Belem would carry the flame ... we said we must do this." But Pasquet said he'd have to watch the Paris Games from home. "For us, it would be really very expensive, unaffordable," to go to the venues, he said. "So we'll watch them on television ... from our armchairs." (AP)

'Four titles in seven months, success of Kolkata's 'Big Three' will have huge impact'

KOLKATA, April 16: The success of Kolkata's 'Big Three' — Mohun Bagan, East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting — will not just have a massive impact on state football but will also have a positive effect on the sport in the country, said All India Football Federation president Kalyan Chaubey on Tuesday. Seven months, four titles, and the 'Mecca of Indian football' was celebrating after Mohun Bagan's maiden League Winners Shield triumph following their 2-1 win over Mumbai City FC at the packed Salt Lake Stadium here on Monday. "Bringing home the ISL Shield, I-League Trophy, Super Cup and Durand Cup to West Bengal is a sign of new-age football in the state, and adaptability of these clubs to the newer norms of football," Chaubey told PTI. "The three giants of Kolkata enjoy enormous fan support in West Bengal, India and globally. I'm sure the success of MB and EB, along with Mohammedan Sporting joining the two in ISL next season, will have a massive impact on Indian football." It all began with Mohun Bagan starting the season with their first Durand Cup title in 23 years, defeating arch-rivals East Bengal 1-0 on September 3 last year.

East Bengal made amends to win the Super Cup, beating Odisha FC 3-2 in Bhubaneswar on January 29. It marked the end of their 12-year trophy drought. Having faced multiple relegation, Mohammedan Sporting came back from oblivion to defeat Shillong Lajong FC 2-1 earlier this month to win the I-League with a round to spare and confirm their promotion to ISL. Mohun Bagan then went on to lift the ISL Shield in front of a record 61,000-plus home crowd at the Salt Lake Stadium. The Green and Maroon brigade will now aim to finish season by lifting the ISL Trophy, which would be a 'High Five' for the Maiden 'Big Three'. Mohun Bagan is the oldest club in India, having been established in 1889, while Mohammedan Sporting came into existence two years later in 1891. East Bengal (established in 1920) also recently celebrated their centenary year. "They are the 'Big Three' of Kolkata football. With historic milestones and to have ruled Indian football for decades, the three have centuries-old football culture and I'm just glad that they have all come around once again to help the city earn the bragging rights," he said. (PTI)

