

6 WORLD Biden to meet with Philippines, Japanese leaders as worry grows about Chinese Ukraine's parl passes a controversial law to boost much-needed conscripts 7 NATION Under strong Modi govt, terrorists killed on their home turf: PM Will not accept CAA, NRC, Uniform Civil Code: Mamata

Cong admits facing fund crunch, blames Centre

₹ 300 cr received through public funding were stolen by PM: Jairam Ramesh

GUWAHATI, April 11: Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on Wednesday that the party is facing difficulties in supporting its candidates in the Lok Sabha polls, mainly due to financial crunch caused by "steps taken by the Central government".



The Congress leaders are humiliated daily and such attacks are being led by Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Ramesh alleged. Asked if the party is facing any problems due to such action from the government, he said: "I will not disagree that we are facing problems. The attempt is to make us disabled, but we will not. We will stand on our feet and fight back."

us, but we are not. Actually they are scared and that is why they are trying to scare us," Ramesh said. Asserting that the opposition INDIA bloc will get a clear majority of over 272 seats, the Congress leader said all regional parties from Northeast will line up to join the anti-BJP coalition after the Lok Sabha results are out on June 4.

Indo-Myanmar border

Govt gives top priority to country's security: Jaishankar



AIZAWL, April 11: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday said the Centre decided to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and end the Free Movement Regime (FMR) because the government gives top priority to the country's security. He said this while speaking to reporters after releasing the BJP manifesto in Aizawl.

"I think the security of our country, security of our states, including Mizoram, require us to take certain precautions. But the precautions that we are taking right now are in response to a certain situation. Even right now our neighbour is going through a very difficult phase. If things were normal in Myanmar, this would not have happened," Jaishankar said.

HT BRIEFS

FIR against Dy CM

SHILLONG: Voice of the People Party (VPP) legislator from North Shillong Adelbert Nongrum on Wednesday lodged a first information report (FIR) against Meghalaya deputy chief minister in-charge Home (police) Prestone Tynsong, secretary, Home (police) and chairman of the recruitment board for violation of Office Memorandum (OM) on age relaxation. In his complaint lodged with the Sadar police station, Nongrum said, "I request you to kindly register this First Information Report (FIR) against the IGP (R/P) cum-Chairman, CRB and the Principal, PTS cum-member secretary, CRB and other members of the CRB, Meghalaya for criminal offence u/s 218 and 167 of IPC r/w Sec 120A IPC and other relevant provisions of law."

Naga Hoho appeal

DIMPUR: Naga Hoho has appealed to the Naga people to embrace peace and unity, setting aside differences and fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding. In the light of "current environment of broken society", the Naga Hoho said it recognises the urgency of addressing the situation and emphasises that distrust and mutual suspicion, is never the solution. Naga Hoho also said the diverse opinions, demands, and issues within the Naga tribes should be approached through peaceful means, fostering dialogue and understanding among all sections of society.

Poll campaigns

TEZPUR: Adding boost to poll campaigns by the party APCC president Bhupen Borah vehemently criticised BJP led state government on Sunday terming it as a "trouble giving engine" not a "double engine". The APCC chief who attended a series of poll campaign meeting in Sonitpur HPC arrived on Sunday morning at Bandamari Durga Mandap in West Tezpur under Barchala Constituency and addressed a public meeting wherein he claimed that various promises made by the BJP-led Assam govt to take the state on the path of progress and development have not been materialized in the true sense.

Massive election rally in Margherita marks high stakes for BJP as LS polls loom

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, April 11: In the heated run-up to the Lok Sabha elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday ramped up its campaign efforts in the 83rd Margherita constituency, undeterred by adverse weather conditions.

BJP's political heavyweights, including Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union minister Rameshwar Teji, and Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma, alongside other party and coalition leaders. This mass mobilisation aimed to bolster support for BJP candidate Sarbananda Sonowal, with Sarma projecting a victory margin of four to five lakh votes, thanks to the coalition government's pro-people initiatives.

A grand rally at Bargolai Bashbari playground in the Tinsukia district underscored the party's aggressive strategy to retain its stronghold.

The chief minister made a compelling case for the re-election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, linking it to the continuation and expansion of beneficial schemes. He also highlighted the fulfillment of past (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tuliram campaigns for Amarsing Tisso, promises extensive welfare schemes



HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 11: In a significant move ahead of the Parliamentary elections, Tuliram Ronghang, the chief executive member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and a star BJP campaigner, rallied support for BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso in the 6-

Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency.

Addressing a gathering at Rongmanpi Aklam in the Amri Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency, Ronghang emphasised the party's commitment to welfare schemes reaching every individual. During the election meet-

Eid-ul-Fitr celebrated

LAKHIMPUR, April 11: Eid-ul-Fitr was celebrated across Assam with traditional fervour and gaiety on Thursday, with Muslims offering prayers in mosques and Eid-gahs.

Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan when the believers fast from dawn to dusk. The festival is celebrated this year ahead of the Lok Sabha election, making it different from other years.

As national award-winning filmmaker Merajur Rahman Baruah offered namaz at his home town in North Lakhimpur on Thursday, he prayed that the concept of equality, be it of religion or race, is 're-conceived and re-enforced' as the country prepares to elect a new government.

Profuse misuse of social media platforms matter of concern: SC

HT Bureau

NEW DELHI, April 11: The Supreme Court has voiced concern over misuse of social media platforms with posting of messages, comments and articles on subjudice matters.

right to freedom of speech and expression, which have the tendency of undermining the authority of the Courts or of interfering with the course of justice, deserves serious consideration," the bench said.

A bench of Justices Aniruddha Bose (now retired) and Bela Trivedi made the observation while initiating a contempt action against Assam MLA Karim Uddin Barbhuiya for his misleading Facebook post regarding a case reserved for judgment.

The top court said it is very usual for judges to react during the course of arguments being made by lawyers, sometimes in favour of and sometimes against a party to the proceeding.

'BJP-led NDA lacks internal democracy'

AGARTALA, April 11: CPI(M) politburo member and former Tripura chief minister Manik Sarkar on Thursday said the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) lacks internal democracy.

"The NDA has set a target of winning 400 seats in the Lok Sabha elections with the BJP itself targeting to win 370 seats alone, leaving only 30 seats for the 32 non-BJP partners", he said while addressing an election rally in South Tripura's Belonia.

"We don't have any problem with that. It is up to the NDA partners what they think of BJP's target. But if the target materialises, then how will democracy sustain? If the BJP returns to power, this will be the last election in the country", he said.

India, US to reactivate observation system for Indian Ocean

HT Bureau

NEW DELHI, April 11: India and the US have decided to reactivate the Indian Ocean Observing System (IndOOS), a network of 36 moored buoys in the high seas to collect high-resolution ocean and atmospheric data for weather forecasts.



The IndoOS array of buoys fell into neglect and disrepair during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to gaps in observational data considered crucial by weather forecasters, particularly since the links between the Indian Ocean Dipole phenomenon and monsoon were established.

The reactivation of IndOOS was discussed last month during a meeting of earth sciences secretary M Ravichandran with Rick Spinrad, administrator of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the US.

African-Asian-Australian Monsoon Analysis and Prediction (RAMA) programme that was born out of a collaboration between the Ministry of Earth Sciences and NOAA in 2008. "We want to reactivate RAMA. I discussed it with the NOAA chief during my visit to Washington in March," Ravichandran said.

NOAA has agreed to provide instrumentation and India will give ship-time from July for restarting the RAMA array, he said, adding that about 60-90 days of ship-time will be required for the purpose. In an article published in the Bulletin of American Meteorological Society (BAMS), weather forecast-

ASDC launches election campaign in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 11: The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), a regional party based in Karbi Anglong has kicked off its poll campaign to woo voters for the ensuing second phase of Parliamentary election in Assam on April 26.



The party general secretary and candidate for 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency, Jotson Bey in a poll meeting held at ASDC central committee office here on Thursday, blamed All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) for not being able to place a common candidate to defeat the ruling BJP.

"A discussion was held between ASDC, Congress and APHLC to place a common candidate from 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency as we need a collective effort to defeat the ruling BJP. But it was the APHLC President JI Kathar who did not agree to it and went all by himself to contest the election," Bey said.

Blaming the APHLC and its president JI Kathar further, Bey claimed that people is being misled by the propaganda that the BJP is motivating the ASDC to contest the polls so that the BJP wins.



# ADB raises India's GDP growth forecast for FY25 to 7%; to remain major growth engine in APAC region

**NEW DELHI, April 11:** The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Thursday raised India's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7 per cent, from 6.7 per cent earlier, saying the robust growth will be driven by public and private sector investment and improvement in consumer demand.

In its April edition of the Asian Development Outlook, ADB said India would remain "a major growth engine" in the Asia and Pacific region.

For the 2025-26 fiscal, ADB has projected India's growth at 7.2 per cent. Growth will be robust despite moderating in FY2024 and FY2025, it said.

The growth estimates for the current fiscal is lower than 7.6 per cent estimated GDP expansion in 2022-23 fiscal. Strong investment drove GDP growth in the 2022-23 fiscal as consumption was muted, ADB said.

The Manila-based multilateral institution in December last year projected the Indian economy to expand by 6.7 per cent in the 2024-25 fiscal.

"The economy grew robustly in fiscal 2023 with strong momentum in manufacturing and services. It will continue to grow rapidly over the forecast horizon. Growth will be driven primarily by robust investment demand and improving consumption demand. Inflation will continue its downward trend in tandem with global trends," said the Asian Development Outlook.

ADB's growth forecast for the current fiscal is in line with the projections made by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The RBI last week had said GDP growth in the current fiscal is projected at 7 per cent on expectations of normal monsoon, moderating inflationary pressures and sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sectors.

The triggers for growth in FY2024 will come from higher capital expenditure on infrastruc-



ture development both by central and state governments, rise in private corporate investment, strong service sector performance and improved consumer confidence.

Growth momentum will pick up in FY2025, backed by improved goods exports and an increase in manufacturing productivity and agricultural output, the ADB said.

"Notwithstanding global headwinds, India remains the fastest growing major economy on the strength of its strong domestic demand and supportive policies," said ADB Country Director for India Mio Oka.

The Indian government's efforts to boost infrastructure development, while undertaking fiscal consolidation and providing an enabling business environment will help in increased manufacturing competitiveness to augment exports and drive future growth, Oka said. ADB said exports are likely to be relatively muted this fiscal, as growth in major advanced economies slows down but will improve in FY2025.

Imports will outgrow exports in 2024-25, driven by strong domestic demand especially for capital goods and intermediate goods.

"Monetary policy is expected to remain supportive of growth as inflation abates, while fiscal policy aims for consolidation but retains support for capital investment. On

balance, growth is forecast to slow to seven per cent in FY2024 but improve to 7.2 per cent in FY2025," it said. To boost exports in the medium term, India needs greater integration into global value chains, ADB added.

Net exports will continue to subtract from growth in the current fiscal but improve in 2025-26, ADB said, adding in recent years, India's share in global goods exports has remained stable.

A healthy rise of 17 per cent in central government capital expenditure in FY2024 compared to the previous fiscal year together with transfers to state governments will boost infrastructure investment. A new government initiative to support urban housing for middle-income households is expected to further spur housing growth. Private investment is expected to get a boost with stable interest rates.

"With inflation moderating to 4.6 per cent in FY2024 and easing further to 4.5 per cent in FY2025, monetary policy may become less restrictive, which will facilitate rapid offtake of bank credit.

"Demand for financial, real estate and professional services will grow while manufacturing will benefit from muted input cost pressures that will boost industry sentiment. Expectations of a normal monsoon will help boost growth of the agriculture sector," ADB said.

## China protests EU's investigation of subsidies in green industries, calling the move protectionist

**BEIJING, April 11:** China has accused the European Union of protectionism and "reckless distortion" of the definition of subsidies in response to a new EU investigation into Chinese wind turbine makers.

A Chinese trade remedies official made "solemn representations" on the issue in a meeting in Brussels on Wednesday with Martin Lukas, the EU director general for trade defense, the Commerce Ministry said.

"The European side's reckless distortion of the definition of subsidies, and the lack of openness and transparency in procedural standards during the investigation, is a protectionist act that harms the fair competition environment in the name of fair competition," the statement said.

The investigation opened by the European Union on Tuesday is the latest against Chinese companies announced in the past two months under a new EU regulation.

The investigation will look into whether Chinese subsidies are giving wind turbine companies an unfair advantage in the competition for projects in five member countries: Spain, Greece, France, Romania and Bulgaria.

"We're making full use of the tools that we have," the EU commissioner for competition, Mar-

grethe Vestager, said in announcing the move.

A Chinese business group in Europe described the investigations as "an act of economic coercion" that undermines the EU's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

"This action sends a detrimental signal to the world, suggesting discrimination against Chinese enterprises and endorsing protectionism," the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU said in a statement.

The EU also announced investigations last week into two Chinese solar panel makers bidding for a 455-megawatt solar park in Romania. An earlier EU probe into the procurement of 20 electric trains in Bulgaria was dropped last month after the Chinese bidder withdrew from the competition.

Vestager, delivering a speech in the United States on technology and politics, called the approach "whack-a-mole" and said the EU needs to address the issue in a more systemic way. "And we need it before it is too late," she said, according to a text of her prepared remarks. "We can't afford to see what happened on solar panels, happening again on electric vehicles, wind or essential chips."

China thinks the investigations are "targeting an obvious direc-

The government's focus on fiscal consolidation, with a targeted deficit of 5.1 per cent of GDP for FY2024 and 4.5 per cent for FY2025, will enable the government to reduce its gross marketing borrowing by 0.9 per cent of GDP in FY2024 and create further room for private sector credit.

India's current account deficit will widen moderately to 1.7 per cent of GDP on rising imports for meeting domestic demand. Foreign direct investment will be affected in the near term due to tight global financial conditions but will pick up in FY2025 with higher industry and infrastructure investment. Unanticipated global shocks such as supply line disruptions to crude oil markets and weather shocks that impact agriculture output are key risks to India's economic outlook, it said.

The overall health of the banking sector remains robust with the sector continuing to show improved asset quality with gross non-performing assets declining to a 10-year low of 3.2 per cent at the end of September 2023.

Established in 1966, ADB, is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. ADB has 68 member countries, 49 of which are from the Asia and Pacific region.

For developing economies in Asia and the Pacific, ADB forecast GDP to expand by 4.9 per cent on average this year, as the region continues its resilient growth amid robust domestic demand, improving semiconductor exports, and recovering tourism.

"Policy makers should remain vigilant, however, as there are a number of risks. These include supply chain disruptions, uncertainty about US monetary policy, the effects of extreme weather, and further property market weakness in the PRC (People's Republic of China)," ADB said. (PTI)

## Vistara CEO says 'worst is behind us'; operations have stabilised

**NEW DELHI, April 11:** After facing significant flight disruptions recently, Vistara CEO Vinod Kannan on Thursday told the airline staff that the "worst is behind us" and operations have already stabilised.

Pilot woes have forced the Tata Group airline to temporarily cut down capacity by 10 per cent or 25-30 flights daily.

While acknowledging that things should have been planned better, Kannan said it has been a "learning experience".

He also said it has been a challenging start to the new financial year and the airline faced significant operational disruption from March 31 to April 2.

"The anxiety and frustration felt by our customers was matched in even measure to the pain that all of us felt in seeing our much-loved brand drawing negative commentary from various quarters... I assure

you that the worst is behind us, and we have already stabilised our operations, with our on-time performance (OTP) increasing to 89 per cent on 9 April 2024 (second highest among all Indian airlines)," he said in a message to the staff. The full-service carrier has around 6,500 people, including about 1,000 pilots. In the wake of the disruptions, the top management of the airline had held a virtual meeting with the pilots. One of the reasons for the disruptions was also that some section of pilots reporting sick to protest against the new contract that will result in pay revision.

According to Kannan, there were a multitude of reasons for the disruptions, including ATC delays, bird hits, and maintenance activities early last month.

"We were stretched in our pilot rosters and there was not enough resilience to withstand injects that we would otherwise have weathered." (PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Cong admits facing fund

became weaker. He further said that this Lok Sabha election is to save democracy, the Constitution and the diversity of the country. "The PM said it's Amrit Kaal, but it is Anyay Kaal in reality. There have been injustices on farmers, youths, women, labourers and backward classes. This election is to get freedom from the last 10 years' injustices," he said. "The Congress' five justices with 25 guarantees are the solution to free India from the injustices. This is a guarantee of a party, not of any individual," Ramesh said referring to the party's manifesto. He said unemployment and price rise are two big issues, and the Congress 'guarantee card' is prepared to fight against such social inequalities.

Not worrying about the fact that several leaders have left the Congress in recent months, Ramesh said new and dedicated young people are getting opportunities since others resigned. "Many opportunist people left us to get cleaned in the washing machine. The best washing machine in the market is 'Lotus Washing Machine' and the best washing powder is 'Modi Powder'. The Assam CM used it very successfully," he added. Opposition parties often claim the BJP has become a "washing machine", which people facing corruption charges can join to "get clean". "A new and strong Congress is being formed. People committed to our ideology are joining us now. People have made up their mind on who to vote for in this election," he added. On Prime Minister Narendra Modi comparing Congress manifesto to that of the Muslim League, Ramesh termed the comparison as shameful and pointed out that BJP ideologue Syama Prasad Mukherjee had formed the government with the Muslim League before independence. (PTI)

## Govt gives top priority

abolish the Free Movement Regime (FRM) between the two countries. The FRM allows people residing close to the India-Myanmar border to venture 16 km into each other's territory without visa. India shares a 1,643-km-long border with Myanmar and Mizoram, in particular, shares a 510 km border with the neighbouring country. Mizoram government, civil society organisations and student bodies have strongly opposed the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and lift the FRM because they believe that it will "disturb close contact between ethnic communities of the two countries."

The Mizos share ethnic ties with the Chins. The Mizoram Assembly on February 28 had passed a resolution opposing the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and abolish the FRM. Earlier, chief minister Lalduhoma had said that his government has strongly opposed the idea of fencing the international border and scrapping the FRM but the Mizoram government has no authority to oppose the Centre if it goes ahead with its plan. (PTI)

## Massive election rally in

promises, such as the creation of one lakh jobs and the implementation of the Arunoddi scheme, as evidence of Assam's progress and tranquility under BJP's governance. Furthermore, Sarma addressed the controversy surrounding the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), reassuring that the state has remained stable and inclusive under their administration. In addition to election promises, he announced plans to transform the rally site into a mini-stadium and detailed new welfare measures, including health and life insurance for ration card holders, educational support for students, and additional job creation, thereby reinforcing the party's commitment to Assam's development and prosperity. The rally, punctuated by cultural performances and a united show of support, set the stage for what appears to be a fiercely contested battle in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, with the BJP leaving no stone unturned in its quest for victory.

## Tuliram campaigns for Amarsing

initiatives to support girl students financially, promising ₹ 10,000 for college admissions, ₹ 12,000 for degree courses, and ₹ 25,000 for university enrollments. He also announced the integration of the Ayushman health scheme with ration cards, offering free health services up to ₹ 5 lakh for every individual.

In his commitment to infrastructural development, the CEM announced plans to improve all-weather roads linking polling stations in Amri with blacktopping, a project set to commence post-election. The meeting saw the presence of significant political figures, including MP Horensing Bey, BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso, MLA Rupsing Teron, executive member (EM) of KAAC, D Uphing Maslai, and BJP -WKADC president Radip Ronghang, among other party leaders.

## Eid-ul-Fitr celebrated

Baruah, whose documentaries focus on social issues, said that Assam was known as the land of 'Shankar-Azan', referring to the Vaishnavite saint Srimanta Sankardeva and Muslim peer Azan Fakir. For the Film and Television Institute of India graduate who has spent the last few decades working outside the state, his identity of being an Assamese overrides all other identities. "When I went for my studies outside Assam, I introduced myself only as an Assamese as religion is not important for us," he said, maintaining that the religious equality and tolerance that was a hallmark of the state is being eroded at some level. He claimed that Azan's name is getting sidelined, and the ideology and philosophy of Shankardeva are being 'diminished' in its true form. "We need to re-conceive and re-enforce the concept of Shankar-Azan," he added. "Today we celebrated Eid while Bihu, the national festival of Assam, is next week. And after that, there are the elections, which is another festival so to speak. We have to ensure that we re-discover ourselves," Baruah added.

Ahmed also made an appeal for a government focused on growth and inclusive development. "Elections are also a kind of festival for everyone, and an important one at that. Whichever political party may form the government, I would request that they work for all sections, especially the minority people, and take care of everyone's rights and development," he added. Another local business Abdul Qadir also hoped that the election would bring in stability and peace. "We don't know what the results of elections will be. But we do hope it is conducted peacefully," he added. (PTI)

## Profuse misuse of social

All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) in the court. The apex court listed the matter next after four weeks and asked the registry to place the matter before the CJJ for appropriate orders on the administrative side for listing the case before the appropriate bench. The SC initiated contempt proceedings against Barbhuiya for his Facebook post on March 20 in which he had falsely claimed a favourable ruling from the court in an election petition while the court had on that day only reserved its judgment in the matter. Later on April 8, the apex court allowed Barbhuiya's plea and quashed the election petition filed against him. (PTI)

## 'BJP-led NDA lacks

attack the secular fabric of our constitution to install a one-sided rule in the country", he said. Sarkar questioned the construction of the new Parliament House, stating that no MP had demanded it. He argued that the existing Parliament building had sufficient space and accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of prioritising personal glorification through the inauguration of the new Parliament building instead of addressing the nation's fundamental issues. "The old Parliament has enough space. No MP had ever demanded to build a new Parliament building. Modi wanted to glorify his name by inaugurating the new Parliament ignoring the basic problems of the country", he said. (PTI)

## India, US to reactivate

storm surge alerts, initial conditions for monsoon predictions and climate forecasts, tsunami warnings and harmful algal bloom detection. The RAMA moored buoys also provide important verification data for air-sea flux products and satellite measurements. Marine observations are crucial in monitoring and forecasting weather and climate over the Indian Ocean and the surrounding rim countries. They also help maintain long-term continuous maritime records, provide information on the ocean's health and are critical for establishing baselines to assess natural variability and human-forced climate change. (PTI)

## ASDC launches election

of the Karbi and Dimas communities, amounting to a betrayal by the APHLC. According to Bey, this oversight resulted in a lost golden opportunity for these communities. On calling the ASDC a 'dead horse' by APHLS, Bey replied that ASDC is still an active political party since 1989 and has been contesting elections.

"It is Ji Kathar's APHLC that is a dead horse. The APHLC ceased to exist during the hill state movement in 1969, but now Kathar has raised that dead horse again," he concluded. Attacking the Congress, Bey opined that it was the Congress that has brought Hindi speaking community into Karbi Anglong. The ASDC demanded the eviction of illegal settlers in Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) land in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, but the present BJP government is not doing it. He criticise the earlier MPs and MLAs for not speaking in the Parliament or in State Assembly on burning issues of Karbi Anglong.

Meanwhile, the party has released its election manifesto for the ensuing second phase of Parliamentary election in Assam on April 26 and it has fielded its general secretary and former chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Jotson Bey as its party candidate. In the manifesto, demand of an autonomous state is on its top agenda and the party has also given emphasis for protection of inter-district and interstate boundaries of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, to fight for the cause of indigenous people and giving equal rights and status to women.

## PhonePe's Share Market expands with futures & options segment

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 11:** In a strategic move to bolster its trading capabilities, PhonePe's Share Market unveiled the launch of its Futures and Options (F&O) segment, reaffirming its commitment to providing traders with advanced tools and resources. The addition of F&O marks a significant milestone in the platform's evolution, aiming to enrich the trading experience through an enhanced focus on intelligence-driven features. Since its inception seven months ago, Share Market has rapidly amassed a considerable user base, boasting over 1.55 million lifetime customers and facilitating more than 1.4 million monthly active Mutual Fund SIP transactions. Moreover, Share Market has emerged as a key player in delivering intelligence-driven insights to over 75,000 daily engaged users, while managing 1.5 lakh demat accounts. The introduction of F&O capabilities augments Share Market's offerings, empowering traders with comprehensive option chain analysis to monitor contracts across various indices and stocks. Futures and Options contracts are integral to investor and trader portfolios, enabling effective risk management, position hedging, and optimization of returns through efficient portfolio strategies.

## Govt extends till May 15 implementation of spl registration, return filing for pan masala, gutkha Cos

**NEW DELHI, April 11:** The government has extended the deadline for implementation of special procedure for registration and monthly return filing of manufacturers of pan masala, gutkha and similar tobacco products till May 15.

Earlier in January, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) had announced the introduction of a new registration and monthly return filing procedure effective April 1, 2024.

The move to overhaul the registration, record-keeping, and monthly filing of such businesses was aimed at improving GST compliance for manufacturers of pan masala and tobacco products.

The GST law was also amended via Finance Bill 2024, to say that manufacturers of pan masala, gutka and similar tobacco products will have to pay a penalty of up to Rs 1 lakh, if they fail to register their packing machinery with the GST authorities with effect from April 1.

However, this penalty provision



is yet to be notified.

The procedure was to be applicable for manufacturers of pan-masala, unmanufactured tobacco (without lime tube) with or without brand name, 'Hookah' or 'gudaku' tobacco, smoking mixtures for pipes and cigarettes, chewing tobacco (without lime tube), filter khaini, jarda scented tobacco, snuff and branded or unbranded 'Gutkha', etc.

The CBIC, through a notification, extended the date of implementation of this special procedure

by 45 days till May 15.

The manufacturers of such tobacco products were required to furnish the details of packing machines being used for filling and packing of packages in Form GST SRM-I, electronically within 30 days of the notification coming into effect i.e., April 1, 2024.

Also a special statement of return filing GST SRM-II was to be filed by the 10th of the succeeding month. Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said neither the GST Network has issued any

advisory on the new procedure nor released new filing utilities. As a result, the government has decided to defer the implementation of the new procedure by 45 days to May 15.

"This delay by the GST ecosystem has led to challenges for the industry in implementing the new scheme mid-year. Ideally, any new scheme should be implemented at the start of a new financial year to allow for smoother transitions and better compliance," Mohan added.

In February last year, the GST Council, chaired by the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts, had approved the report of a panel of state finance ministers on plugging tax evasion in pan masala and gutkha businesses.

The GoM had recommended that the mechanism for levy of compensation cess on pan masala and chewing tobacco be changed from ad valorem to a specific rate-based levy to boost the first stage collection of the revenue. (PTI)



## Ahom organisations boycott meeting with Gaurav Gogoi in Sivasagar

Gogoi participates in Eid prayers, promises separate engagement with Ahom groups

**HT Correspondent**  
**SIVASAGAR, April 11:** Eleven Tai Ahom organisations, including ATASU, TAYPA, Ahom Sena, and others, boycotted the meeting with INDI block candidate Gaurav Gogoi in Sivasagar on Thursday, while other organisations opposing BJP participated in it.

These included CPI, Asom Jatiya Parishad, Asomiya Yuva Mancha, Asom Chatra Yuva Samilani, Jatiya Sangrami Sena, Jagrity Mahila Samity, Sangrami Yuva Chatra Parishad, Sangrami Sena Asom, and five others. Basanta Gogoi, president of ATASU, said that the Ahom organisations boycotted the meeting on the technical ground as the invitation for the meeting was through a Facebook post by a district-level office bearer of the Congress



and not by the candidate.

Meanwhile, Gaurav Gogoi took part in the mass prayer at the Sivasagar Central Eidgah Maidan along with hundreds of devout Muslims on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr on Thursday.

He was accompanied by Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi. After the prayer session, Gaurav Gogoi told the media that he would have a meeting with the Ahom organisations separately on another day.

Clarifying his stand on the

six indigenous community issues, Gogoi said that he was there with the agitators in support of their demand whenever they carried out demonstrations in New Delhi.

He said he supports the inclusion of the six communities in the 6th Schedule.

Addressing the media, the Sivasagar MLA said that CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, Sarbananda Sonowal, and the BJP were the killers of the Panchsahids in the anti-CAA movement.

Since the ministry of CM Sarma has recognised them as swahids, the government should take responsibility for their families.

He also demanded that the government scrap the CAA as it has claimed that only one person has so far applied for citizenship under the new dispensations.

## Eid-ul-Fitr celebrated with religious devotion and joy

**HT Correspondent**

**HOJAI, April 11:** In synchronisation with the rest of the world, Eid Ul-Fitr was celebrated across Hojai district with solemnity on Thursday.

Eid Ul-Fitr marks the end of the fasting period of the Islamic month of Ramadan and ushers in the month of Shawwaal.

Thousands of Muslims joined the celebration of Eid-Ul-Fitr at Hojai Eidgha Maidan, Nilbagan Eidgha Maidan, Daboka Eidgha Maidan, Udali, Jugjiaan, Murajhar, Gopal Nagar, Kapasbari, Lanka, Lumding.

For Muslims, Eid Ul-Fitr is not only the signal of breaking the fast, but it also signifies the attainment of communication with the divine spirit and religious virtue, characterised by sacrifice, self-discipline, and acts of charity.

Many Muslims attended prayers and listened to a Khutba or sermon on the first day of the month of Shawwal, in every corner of the district.

There is a belief that if a Muslim has



not given Zakat al-fitr during Ramadan, he or she can give this on Eid-Ul-Fitr.

Zakat al-fitr is a form of charity consisting of a quantity of food, such as rice, barley, dates, raisins, or wheat flour, or its monetary equivalent given to the poor.

Many Muslims also prepared festive meals to share, wore new clothes, visited relatives, and gave gifts or chocolates to children.

On this occasion, Hojai markets were thronged with children enjoying the fes-

tivity by purchasing varieties of food items and sports items.

**Our Gossaigaon correspondent adds:** The Muslim community in Gossaigaon, like their brethren around the world, celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr on Thursday, commemorating the conclusion of the holy month of Ramadan with religious enthusiasm and fervour.

Since morning, thousands of followers of Prophet Muhammad thronged the masjid for mass prayer and exchanged greetings with each other.

The celebration, synonymous with forgiveness, pledging solidarity, social gatherings, family reunion, and giving to charity, was observed by the Muslim community as per religious traditions, along with the rest of the world.

Notably, Hangrama Mahilary, founder president of BTC, attended the mass prayer at Gossaigaon Jame Masjid and extended wishes to the Muslim community. He urged them not to politicise the occasion.

## Khaddi festival celebrated in Margherita

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, April 11:** Khaddi (Sarhul), the traditional festival of the Adivasi community, was celebrated on Thursday with fervour and harmony at Powai 3 no line Sarna Sthal under the Margherita sub-division of Tinsukia district.

Khaddi (Sarhul) is the traditional festival along with the new year of the Uraon community, which was organised by the Assam Pradesh Kudukh Uraon Sangh Powai Regional Committee in collaboration with the Uraon community and local residents.

The program began with a cleanliness drive, followed by a prayer to the Sarna Nature Goddess, plantation of saplings by Rajiv Gogoi, headmaster of Powai Asomiya ME School, inauguration of Khaddi (Sarhul) Aakhada, a cultural procession, and concluded with the welcome of distinguished guests.

Sunil Uraon, general secretary (in charge) of Assam Pradesh Kudukh Uraon Sangh



Central Committee, said that Khaddi (Sarhul) is the traditional festival of the Adivasi community people living all over the world, where every year we celebrate this festival with great fervour and enthusiasm.

He requested the chief minister to grant a government holiday during the Khaddi (Sarhul) traditional festival of the Adivasi community.

## Lecture on women health and hygiene

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 11:** Assam Rifles organised a 'Lecture on Women's Health and Hygiene' at Charduar Hall in Lokra, Sonitpur district on Thursday, as stated in a press release.

The lecture aimed to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining good hygiene practices and addressing specific health issues that affect women.

By providing valuable information and guidance, Assam Rifles sought to promote healthier lifestyles and improve the overall well-being of women.

Through such initiatives, Assam Rifles contribute to building a more informed and empowered community, ensuring better health outcomes for women and their families. A total of 64 women attended the lecture on the subject.

## Rabies awareness meeting in Balipara



**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, April 11:** In response to the number of rabies cases reported in cattle and a confirmed case of rabies in cattle recorded under Block Veterinary Dispensary, Balipara, at Pakbil village on April 2 last, an awareness meeting on rabies was organised jointly by the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department and Health Services Department at Addabarie, Khelmati (Jagadhatri Mandir) recently.

The case was reported on April 2 and confirmed on April 4 after a post-mortem by the Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department, Sonitpur, with the help of rabies rapid antigen test kit available in the district disease laboratory. The owners of the deceased cattle and staff of Balipara Veterinary Dispensary, Balipara, are currently receiving anti-rabies vaccination from the Public Health Centre, Balipara.

Moreover, the animals from the affected household have also been provided free vaccination from BVD, Balipara. In this regard,

additional district commissioner (veterinary), Sonitpur, Dr Garga Mohan Das, urges all to keep strict vigilance on the issue and maintain proper care. The expert panel for the meeting comprised the district surveillance officer, Sonitpur, sub divisional medical & health officer, Balipara, Sonitpur district veterinary officer, and veterinary officers of the district, along with the IDSP and NRCP team of Sonitpur. They interacted with the public of the area and discussed the symptoms of Rabies, preventive measures, and the importance of vaccination in animals and humans, with an emphasis on the disadvantages of traditional medicines. Furthermore, first aid and washing of bite sites with soap for 15 minutes were promoted profusely during the awareness meeting. A small interactive session was conducted prior to the start of the awareness session to assess the knowledge and attitudes of the people, and post-awareness meeting, the same was assessed to measure the impact of the conducted awareness meeting.

Underlining the matters discussed in the meeting, the departmental officials also expressed, "Rabies is one of the most fatal, zoonotic, and yet neglected diseases with underreporting as one of the hindrances for controlling rabies." However, there has been a changing trend observed amongst the people regarding reporting as nearly 40 attendees raised various FAQs regarding rabies and prevention.

## 23 candidates in Arunachal assembly polls have criminal cases

Report was prepared after analysing the self-sworn affidavits of 142 out of 143 contesting candidates

**ITANAGAR, April 11:** Twenty-three candidates in the fray for the April 19 Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh, have criminal cases registered against them, according to a report of a civil society organisation.

The report prepared by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Arunachal Pradesh Election Watch, which was released on Wednesday, revealed that out of the 23 candidates with criminal cases in the northeastern state, 20 have declared serious criminal cases against them in their affidavits.

The report was prepared after analysing the self-sworn affidavits of 142 out of 143 contesting candidates in the assembly polls.

The affidavit of BJP candidate Ratu Tech, who won from the Sagalee constituency unopposed, could not be analysed due to the unavailability of his clear and complete affidavit on the Election Commission website, the report said.

In the 2019 assembly polls in the state, out of 184 candidates analysed, 29 had declared criminal cases and 26 have declared serious criminal cases against them.

Out of the 142 candidates analysed, 98 are from national parties, 27 are from state parties, four from



registered unrecognised parties and 13 independents, the report said.

Of the 23 candidates, the ruling BJP has fielded 11 candidates with criminal cases against them, Congress (4), NCP (3), National People's Party (NPP) and Peoples Party of Arunachal with two each and one independent, respectively.

Candidates with serious criminal cases against them include nine from BJP, four from Congress, NCP (3), PPA (2) and two candidates from NPP. (PTI)

## BJP Sikkim manifesto promises protection to rights of Sikkimese people

**GANGTOK, April 11:** The BJP on Thursday released its Sikkim election manifesto which promised to ensure the protection of the rights of the Sikkimese people and to make the Himalayan state an educational hub, if the party wins the Assembly elections. BJP president J P Nadda on Thursday released the party's Sikkim Assembly election manifesto here in the presence of BJP Sikkim incharge, Dilip Jaiswal, Sikkim state president, DR Thapa and other party leaders.

"Enough is enough, it is time Sikkim comes to join the mainstream. We have had enough of regional parties in Sikkim. We have to say goodbye to regional parties and corruption which these regional parties are involved in" said Nadda.

He said that the BJP wanted a people-oriented, progressive and development-oriented government in Sikkim.

"We want the lotus to bloom even in the mountains. Our manifesto ensures that every Sikkimese gets the best from the schemes and policies being given to the citizens. We want a clean government in Sikkim. Development for the people directly is what

we want so let us all come together and make the lotus bloom," he said. The BJP is contesting in 14 out of the 32 Assembly seats in Sikkim. Elections to the Sikkim Assembly will be held on April 19.

The 74-page manifesto said that the BJP is committed to safeguarding the essence and substance of Article 371F, ensuring the protection of the rights of the Sikkimese people.

It also stated that the party will work towards addressing the Limbu-Tamang seat reservation demand through active engagement with all relevant stakeholders and further set up an expert committee to address the demand for tribal status for the 12 left-out communities of Sikkim. The manifesto states that the party is committed to strongly advocate to the Central government for the inclusion of Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu languages in the Eight Schedule of the Indian constitution.

For the development of education the party said that it will work towards developing Sikkim as an educational hub and will establish the Sikkim State Board of Education to integrate Sikkim's rich history and heritage into the school curriculum. (PTI)



## Over 24,500 IPDs to cast votes amidst special arrangements



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 11:** Over 24,500 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are among 20,29,023 voters to exercise their franchise in the two Lok Sabha seats for Manipur which will go to the polls on April 19 and April 26.

There would be 2,955 polling stations in the two Parliamentary Constituencies. The Election Commission of India arranged 94 Special Polling Stations in 10 districts in the state to facilitate voting by the IDPs.

The special arrangements were made as over 61,000 in-

dividuals belonging to the Meiteis and Kukis were displaced and they are taking shelter at different relief camps across the state owing to ethnic violence that started on May 3, 2023.

Manipur has two Lok Sabha constituencies: The inner Manipur constituency, encompassing the Meitei-majority valley areas, and the Outer Manipur constituency, designated for Scheduled Tribes (ST).

The chief electoral officer of Manipur Pradeep Kumar Jha in a statement said that Imphal West would have 8 special polling stations (3 for

Inner, 5 for Outer), Imphal East 9 (5 for Inner, 4 for Outer), Bishnupur 22 (11 each for Inner and Outer), Thoubal 2 (1 each for Inner and Outer), Kakching 5 (2 for Inner, 3 for Outer), Churachandpur 15 (2 for Inner, 13 for Outer), Kangpokpi 24 (4 for Inner, 20 for Outer), Tengnoupal 4 (1 for Inner, 3 for Outer), Jiribam 1 (Outer), Ukhrul 4 (Outer).

The ensuing elections will be conducted in two phases, with the Inner Manipur seat scheduled for polling on April 19, while voters in the Outer Manipur constituency reserved for scheduled tribes will cast their votes on April 19 and 26. Manipur has 60 assembly seats.

Electorates of 47 Assembly segments including all the Assembly segments of Inner Manipur PC and 15 Assembly segments of Outer Manipur PC would go to polls in the first phase on April 19.

The remaining 13 Assembly segments of Outer Manipur PC would go to polls in the second phase on April 26.

Notably, 32 Assembly segments come under Inner Manipur PC while 28 Assembly segments are clubbed under Outer Manipur PC.

## Baukhungri festival kicks off in Kokrajhar

11<sup>th</sup> edition of the festival showcases indigenous sports, folk culture, and traditional food



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, April 11:** The Baukhungri Hill along the Harinaguri of Kokrajhar is all set to host the 11th edition of Baukhungri festival, the biggest festival in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), which started on Thursday with a two-day program scheduled.

The massive preparation and arrangements have been completed so far to hold the festival, featuring traditional folk culture, indigenous sports, and local food traditions at Harinaguri.

The festival is organised by the govern-

ment of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and the Tourism Department, marking the celebration of Rongjali Bwisagu with hill trekking on the last day of Choitra month, on April 13.

A mass hill trekking event along the Baukhungri Hills is being organised, attracting people from across communities to attend the mega event.

Several competitions among male and female categories are also being organised, including mountain bike cycling competition, hills trekking competition, indigenous games and sports competition,

showcasing traditional food items, and cultural demonstrations representing different communities.

The organising committee members of the festival are seen busy discharging their duties and responsibilities to ensure the smooth success of the mega festival event. Remarkably, the festival is regarded as the biggest festival in the Bodoland region, marking the celebration of Rongjali Bwisagu on the last day of the Choitra month, highlighting competitions such as mountain bike cycling, hill trekking, and Bwisagu dance competition, along with traditional food preparations of Gwka-Gwkhwi with a hundred herbs and Jwo bidwi competition during the event. The winners of the competitions will be awarded cash prizes and gifts.

"The festival is organised every year on the last day of the Choitra month while celebrating the Rongjali Bwisagu. Participants from different states of the country have already arrived in Kokrajhar to participate in the cycling competition and hills trekking events. The event spot is now looking attractive with decorations along the hills," said a member of the festival organising committee.

"I come every year to Kokrajhar to participate in the Baukhungri festival, which is regarded as the biggest festival in the region," said a festival participant from West Bengal state.

## Morigaon district admin imposes fishing restrictions

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAOON, April 11:** The Morigaon district administration has imposed restrictions on fishing under Section 23 of the Fishery Act and Rules for 1953 (As amended 2005) of the Government of Assam. Through these restrictions, the administration has instructed all fishermen and fish traders to refrain from fishing with small household nets, big nets, hanging nets, or any other net of 7/14 cm, considering that the breeding season started on April 1, 2024, and will continue until July 15, 2024.

Drag nets are prohibited throughout the year if the mesh size is less than 1.2 cm. Section 23(A) of the Fisheries Act and Rules prohibits the catching and selling of roe, bahu, mirika, mali, chital, kharia, pithia, gharia, and kubi during the breeding season (laying eggs and fry) from May 1, 2024, to July 15, 2024. In the case of fishing by any method, whether for self-consumption or sale, fish less than 23 cm in length such as rou/bah/mirika/mali/chital/kharia/pithia/gharia etc., and less than 10 cm in length, are banned from August 2024 to October 31.

Violation of these restrictions may result in fines under Sections 22 and 41 of the Assam Fisheries Act, as well as confiscation of nets and other fishing gear used. Violators of the said Act may also be subject to arrest and action under Section 7(1) of the Indian Fisheries Act, 1897, and Section 27 of the Fisheries Act, 1953.

## Demow doctor invited to international conference

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, April 11:** The Demow Model Hospital, situated in Demow Konwar Dehingia, has achieved a milestone in snakebite treatment. In January 2024, the hospital celebrated three consecutive years of zero deaths due to snakebite from 2021 to 2023. Dr Surajit Giri, an anaesthesiologist and snakebite specialist at Demow Model Hospital, along with his team, successfully prevented fatalities in snakebite cases.

Dr Surajit Giri has been invited to the 22nd World Congress of the International Society on Toxinology, scheduled to be held in Singapore from May 20 to 25, 2024. He will present the Snake Bite Demow Hospital Model at the congress, jointly hosted by the National University of Singapore and the International Society on Toxinology.

## Voter awareness and sensitisation programme organised

**KOHIMA, April 11:** In a bid to promote electoral literacy and engage first-time voters, the Electoral Literacy Club at Kohima College Kohima, in partnership with the deputy commissioner and the district election officer, was organized a one-day Voter Awareness and Sensitization Program at the college's conference hall recently.

The programme aimed to equip first-time voters with essential knowledge about the electoral process, their rights, responsibilities, and the significance of their participation in the democratic process. With an interactive approach, the initiative sought to bridge the gap in electoral understanding among the youth. EAC Kohima and Nodal Officer for SVEEP, Limakumla Pongner applauded the collaborative effort and stressed the significance of such initiatives in fostering a culture of informed citizenship. She emphasized the importance of youth participation in the electoral process, stating that empowering the first-time voters with adequate knowledge and awareness is important in nurturing a vibrant democracy. (NNN)



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn. -Benjamin Franklin

## NCERT's Textbook Revision

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), entrusted with shaping the intellectual landscape of our nation's youth, is at the heart of a contentious debate over revisions to school textbooks. The proposed changes, particularly regarding the depiction of the Ayodhya dispute in the Class XII political science textbook, have ignited a fervent discussion on historical accuracy and the dissemination of divisive ideologies to impressionable minds. At the crux of this debate lies the alteration of content in the textbook 'Politics in India since Independence,' a staple in school syllabi since 2006-07. The section in question, detailing the Ayodhya dispute and its aftermath, has been earmarked for revision, with a noticeable shift in emphasis towards the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the 2019 Supreme Court verdict mandating the construction of a temple. The proposed revisions seek to present a narrative that elevates the significance of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement while downplaying the historical context surrounding the Babri Masjid demolition. However, a critical examination reveals discrepancies between the revised text and established historical records. Contrary to claims of a "centuries-old" dispute, historical evidence indicates a much shorter timeline, with the legal wrangling beginning only 74 years ago after the surreptitious placement of an idol within the Babri Masjid in 1949.

Moreover, the deletion of references to the Babri Masjid demolition from both the summary and exercise sections of the textbook raises concerns about the integrity of historical representation. The omission of such a pivotal event, which reverberated across the nation, undermines the comprehensive understanding of contemporary Indian politics and the Ayodhya dispute. It is imperative to recognize that education serves as the bedrock of informed citizenship, and any attempt to distort historical truths for political expediency undermines the fundamental principles of intellectual integrity. While acknowledging the significance of the Supreme Court's verdict on the construction of the Ram temple, it is essential to confront the historical realities that precede it. The legacy of the Ayodhya dispute extends beyond legal judgments and political movements; it is intertwined with the fabric of Indian secularism and democracy. By sanitizing the narrative and erasing uncomfortable truths, we risk depriving future generations of the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate complex socio-political landscapes.

As guardians of academic rigor and intellectual honesty, NCERT must adhere to the highest standards of scholarship and resist the pressures of ideological agendas. The revision of textbooks should be guided by a commitment to historical accuracy and a nuanced understanding of our nation's complex past. Furthermore, the role of educators and policymakers extends beyond the dissemination of information; it encompasses the cultivation of critical thinking and empathy. Students must be equipped with the tools to interrogate historical narratives critically and appreciate the multiplicity of perspectives that shape our collective consciousness. The proposed revisions to NCERT textbooks demand vigilant scrutiny and principled resistance to any attempts at historical distortion. As stewards of education, we owe it to future generations to uphold the sanctity of truth and the integrity of academic discourse. Only by confronting our past with honesty and humility can we hope to build a more enlightened and inclusive future for our nation. In the pursuit of historical accuracy, NCERT must prioritize scholarly integrity over political expediency, ensuring that textbooks reflect the nuanced complexities of India's rich and diverse heritage.

## The legacy of AFSPA: Narendra Modi's journey towards peace and progress

In the labyrinth of India's tumultuous history, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) stands as a divisive symbol of authority, often invoked in the name of national security but criticized for its draconian measures. The narrative surrounding AFSPA has evolved over decades, reflecting the shifting sands of politics, security challenges, and societal aspirations. As we navigate through the annals of time, it becomes imperative to critically examine the trajectory of AFSPA and its contemporary relevance in the context of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure.

Enacted in 1958 amidst the backdrop of escalating violence in the northeastern states, AFSPA was initially conceived as a localized response to insurgency. However, successive governments expanded its ambit, perpetuating a cycle of militarization that engulfed not only the northeast but also regions like Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir. The specter of AFSPA loomed large, casting a shadow of fear and distrust over communities already grappling with socio-political upheavals.

For years, dissenting voices echoed through the corridors of power, calling for the repeal of AFSPA. The English print media, with its eloquent prose and unwavering commitment to justice, became a staunch advocate for change. Yet, it was not until the advent of the Modi government that tangible progress was made in addressing the root causes of conflict in the northeast. With unparalleled focus and determination, the Modi government embarked on a journey of reconciliation and development, laying the groundwork for peace negotiations and infrastructure revitalization. The gradual withdrawal of AFSPA from several states stands as a testament to the efficacy of this approach, underscoring the transformative impact of proactive governance.

The resurgence of hope in the northeast is epitomized by the historic peace settlement with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in 2023. Once synonymous with violence and strife, the region now emerges as a beacon

of progress, offering boundless opportunities for its inhabitants. This remarkable turnaround reaffirms the notion that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of prosperity and stability. Beyond the confines of the northeast, AFSPA's legacy intersects with other fissures in India's socio-political landscape. The emergence of the "Red Corridor" exposed the deep-seated roots of Naxalism, a menace exacerbated by years of neglect and apathy. Under successive Congress administrations, the Naxal problem reached unprecedented levels, prompting dire warnings from the highest echelons of power.

Yet, it was the Modi government's resolute action and strategic foresight that stemmed the tide of insurgency, ushering in an era of unprecedented security and stability. The decline in terrorist attacks outside of Jammu & Kashmir, coupled with a proactive approach to intelligence gathering, underscores the efficacy of this paradigm shift in counter-terrorism efforts.

Moreover, the Modi government's comprehensive overhaul of outdated legal frameworks, culminating in the enactment of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, marks a watershed moment in India's legal history. By modernizing archaic laws and championing progressive reforms, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to justice, equality, and the rule of law.

In the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's legacy is indelibly intertwined with the narrative of peace, progress, and prosperity. From the tranquil vistas of the northeast to the bustling streets of metropolitan cities, his vision for a safer, more inclusive India resonates with millions of citizens.

As we stand at the precipice of a new dawn, poised to exercise our democratic rights, let us not forget the transformative journey that brought us here. The lotus button on the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) represents not merely a political symbol but a testament to the aspirations of a nation yearning for change, progress, and a brighter tomorrow.



## One more national election to end a fractured mandate

Nearly one billion voters in the world's largest democracy will walk to their respective polling booths to vote and elect a new government. This momentous journey of India as a democracy has been tremendously meaningful throughout its post-colonial life. Upholding its defined democratic values enshrined in the constitution, India has made a place among the comity of nations that have chosen to adhere to the path of democracy. There have always been divergent views on its democratic essence, especially criticizing its evolutionary practices. We were always under scanner from agencies and groups and countries across the globe that looked at India as a wonder, a landscape that houses the world's largest population and the one that has been faced with the unspeakable instances of colonial aggression and invasion for centuries.

Still it never failed to grow as a democracy that according to Narendra Modi is a glorious wonder that, in his case, made a 'chaiwala' its Prime Minister. Yet its growth as a unique society that holds the largest cultural and regional diversity with its civilizational unity underpinning its essential existence was denounced. There have been consistent efforts to demean, manipulate and disproportionately discourage its pride as a great civilization and its efforts to regain and revitalize its cultural roots have been viewed as a majoritarian belligerence.

Though India's aspiration to emerge as a global power has been gaining momentum under the regime of Narendra Modi, it has also been deliberately vilified for this aspirational growth. The national election we are marching for is expected to further strengthen the aspirations of India and give it a fresh fillip.

Being Indians we have credible reasons to stay humble in a

world that is deeply polarized in the name of religion, region and ideological differences. And being the largest population and the fastest growing economy, we still have reasons to remain resoundingly joyful and distressingly concerned as well. The diversity that we are and the unity that we drumbeat about while ravages of war and ethnic conflicts cripple the dreamy fortunes of a large segment of the world population, India still survives on what it consciously calls its civilizational alignment that is by habit and principle accommodative and the collective well-being of the populace is being set as a reason for its survival.

India's G20 Presidency was of course an indication, a journey that we decided to take the world which is infested by a mix of bullying, intransigence and greed through the glorious wisdom of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (World is one family). The world is shaken by political turmoil and sectarian dissonance and many more destructive factors and at times what we face in India is a replica of what the world is reeling under. There is a new mood of confrontation sweeping through its underbelly and all that has been disruptive cannot be solved with political activism alone. For that even democracy sometimes fails to bring actual solutions.

There, we as a nation need to grow beyond petty political gambles and understand our value as a peaceful civilization that holds the power to console the perils of people across the globe. Elections every term put India through tremors of disenchantments and excitements. But there is an unquestionable enthusiasm spiraling through our metaphorical motherland Bharat that houses almost 18% of the world's population in every election season.

In truth electoral democracy of India remains undisrupted with a



large number of the country's population turning out for casting its votes. Almost a turnout of 960 million voters will be controlled and helped exercise their franchise by 15 million or more polling officials through more than a million polling booths under the country's powerful Election Commission.

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: M. R. Lalu

Democracy by all means especially in the season of election is a festive occasion for its people irrespective of diverging political views acrimoniously staying face to face admonishingly screeching on one another. Above all, the supreme judicial establishment on which the country has full faith frequently pulls up the politically authoritarian demeanors of the executive asking it fierce questions. The latest interventions by the judiciary had shaken the political parties off their saga of electoral bonds, asking them to be accountable and also commanding the bank to reveal the real line of contributors. By the apex court scrambling it forever, the parties are turned a mirror on to reflect as to what should be the depth of clarity and integrity and alertness that the electorate seeks through the process of democracy.

In the lead up to the parliamentary elections, every term we witness an unsolicited combination of parties shamelessly teaming for relevance and the government piling up cases against opposition parties with an attitude of deliberate warmongering. Apart from that, there is a harsh temperament active in the air throughout this period. That even a mild disagreement and verbal clash on religious matters grow into severe conflagration exposing its volatility as a fraught society.

Though democracy is expected to hold a sway on disruptive tendencies, it sometimes fails to maintain amiability. There are instances of instant provocation leading to the destruction of public property, while collective and revengeful collaboration of aggressive people block life of common man extensively with riots and riotous behavior, India is still known for its best democratic credentials. Again, there are instances wherein the disenchantment goes deeper as its democratic practices fail to deliver justice to its citizens equally.

Given such realities, we have to also appreciate its attempts to shed imprints of colonialism. The present government, in a remarkable display of determination, began to change our approach to our true existence. Its efforts to democratically bring India's suppressed cultural

ethos to recognition, has infused more confidence in the collective thoughts of its people. It is democracy and democracy alone is helping the country in its march towards progress. And it will be the single reason that would ensure its growth. Its development for all is its criteria for survival.

Pakistan that chose to become a theocratic state has perished almost everywhere while India kept its momentum of progress exponentially smooth. Politics apart, India's demography and its cultural values definitely go hand in hand with its largest segment of population evolving through a momentous transformation. It considers the nation supreme and it does not allow rattling subjects of dissonance to dig deeper. Shedding colonial imprints one by one, we still have a long road to walk.

National Elections 2024 seem to seek support for forces that relentlessly work for India's transformation. The elections and the results should once again restore the momentum of our cherished goal of togetherness and a sense of coexistence needs to flourish uninterrupted. This festival of democracy is a reminder that at least should help us see the country through the prism of a nation, which survives beyond the petty arguments of the union of states theory.

An ideal feeling of nationalism helps a voter to choose an ideal candidate from among a crowd of aspirants. Once again, this election does not seek a fractured mandate. Starting from individuals to families to the nation, this thought for the collective wellbeing of its people should protrude into effect. In practice, electoral democracy can make it happen and that is its strength. And a fractured mandate topples this dream. (The author is a freelance journalist who can be reached at mrlalu30@gmail.com)

## BJP's advantage and the challenges of the Opposition

By: Dipak Kurmi

The ongoing era of political coalitions, as characterized by former Marxist leader Jyoti Basu, remains a complex puzzle for both the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies within the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance. This evolving landscape presents challenges and uncertainties, with both sides navigating through various permutations and combinations of political dynamics.

On one hand, the INDIA bloc represents a cohesive coalition, formed organically to unite diverse interests. However, at the regional level, finding compatible partners proves challenging due to the absence of inherent alliances. Coalitions are meticulously constructed to pool votes and amplify their collective influence, aiming to secure more seats collectively than individually. Consequently, the inability to broker seat-sharing arrangements proves detrimental to the INDIA bloc while offering advantageous opportunities for the BJP.

The coalition's lack of cohesion stems from its diverse origins and ideological foundations. Some parties, such as the Left parties, DMK, Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, and Shiv Sena, are deeply rooted in specific ideologies. Conversely, breakaway factions like the Trinamul Congress and Nationalist Congress Party contribute to the mix. Many emerged as anti-Congress entities and maintain their regional antagonism towards the party, exemplified by leaders like Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal and Pinarayi Vijayan in Kerala. Arvind Kejriwal adopts a multifaceted approach, collaborating with allies in Delhi while opposing them in Punjab. Despite their diverse origins and strategies, all these parties currently share a common stance as anti-BJP entities.

The BJP has emphasized the disparities among the members of the INDIA bloc, labeling the alliance as a non-starter due to its apparent disintegration. Additionally, the BJP has accused the coalition of colluding to deceive the public. By conflating these criticisms, the BJP underscores the intricate nature of coalition building within a challenging political environment.

The dynamics have bestowed upon the BJP the perception of being straightforward, steady, well-coordinated, and led by a commanding figure who makes decisive decisions. Conversely, the INDIA bloc seems unstable, lacking organization, entangled in conflicting interests, and burdened by numerous leaders without a clear icon.

The challenges of negotiating seat allocations, along with Nitish Kumar's departure and the dissolution of the "Mahagatbandhan" in Bihar, have reinforced the perception that the INDIA bloc is fragile and incapable of serving as a viable alternative to the BJP under its decisive leader.

The notion of the new coalition transforming into a cohesive, well-structured entity was debunked as a myth, as asserted

by Mamata Banerjee, with support from allies like Arvind Kejriwal and Akhilesh Yadav. Even the BJP and other stakeholders recognized that regional differences would persist despite the formation of the INDIA alliance. While Mamata Banerjee's proposal for regional parties to challenge the BJP individually on their home turf had merit, it was ultimately deemed unrealistic in practice.

Evaluating the coalition's potential and capabilities presents a multifaceted challenge. Can the coalition wield enough influence to intimidate even Prime Minister Narendra Modi? On the day of the INDIA bloc's massive rally at Delhi's Ramliya Maidan, Modi's remarks in Meerut conveyed a defiant stance, asserting, "I am not scared." This implied that the Opposition's attempts to instill fear were perceived as a tactic to deter him from addressing their alleged corruption scandals.

In essence, the public narrative portrays contrasting images of both the Opposition and Mr. Modi. On one hand, the Opposition is depicted as a formidable force, yet internally fractured and vulnerable to disintegration. Conversely, Modi's image is carefully crafted into two distinct personas: firstly, as a determined leader focused on delivering results and fulfilling promises, and secondly, as a solitary figure tirelessly fighting against corruption, dynastic politics, and social division.

The notion of a fearful Narendra Modi

is not only absurd but also warrants analysis as a strategic maneuver.

If the BJP's leader is indeed mobilizing his core support base, it suggests a level of uncertainty regarding the attainment of his goal of securing 370 out of 543 Lok Sabha seats in the upcoming election. However, this seems contradictory, as Modi's campaign heavily emphasizes his assurances of ushering in a fully developed economy in his third term, implying a high level of confidence in his re-election as Prime Minister.

Despite the perplexing shifts in the BJP's campaign narrative, the truth remains that the Opposition lacks the agility and astuteness to counter these maneuvers effectively. Expressing apprehensions about the elections being akin to a "fixed" cricket match, orchestrated for a BJP victory and Modi's return as Prime Minister for a third term, fails to offer any fresh insights or alternative perspectives.

The Ramliya Maidan rally provided a platform for the unified Opposition to connect with voters nationwide, with coalition partners from various states participating in the event. However, its inability to effectively capitalize on this opportunity highlights a lack of strategic planning to challenge the BJP's narrative and offer a compelling alternative vision to voters.

Drawing a contrast between urging voters to decide between dictatorship and democracy and soliciting their input on the

release of Arvind Kejriwal illustrates a difference in approach: one abstract and the other concrete, prompting tangible action. Merely alluding to "match-fixing" without proactive engagement fails to resonate with voters effectively. It appears that the leadership of the INDIA bloc has yet to articulate a clear directive for voters beyond advocating "No Vote to the BJP."

In contrast, the BJP's campaign operates on two fronts: rallying voters to support its stance against both the collective Opposition and regional parties, while simultaneously positioning itself as the sole provider of stability amid uncertain times. By leveraging conditions of uncertainty, the BJP has transformed the destabilization of the Opposition, particularly state ruling parties, into a strategic advantage. This involves tactics such as engineering defections, fragmenting parties, and taking legal action against key figures, including current and former chief ministers like Kejriwal and Hemant Soren, the latter stepping down before facing arrest by the Enforcement Directorate. The INDIA bloc has been deeply preoccupied with countering the BJP's destabilization tactics, leaving little opportunity to transition into a credible alternative. Consequently, it remains entrenched in its role as the perennial opposition, constantly challenging but unable to emerge as a transformative force. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

## POST BAG

## Heatwave warnings and the importance of Wet bulb temperature

Sir/Ma'am

It is only April; the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has already declared heatwave warnings for isolated pockets of Rajasthan. The criteria for IMD to declare a heatwave warning for an area is when that particular area crosses the 45 degree Celsius mark. But India has in the last 10 years seen a rise in the relative humidity which is the problem here.

A particular place may show temperatures of 30 degree Celsius but because of relative humidity the temperature felt on our bodies is generally higher than the displayed temperature which we in simple language say "feels-like" temperature or felt temperature. Wet-bulb test is an internationally agreed upon temperature test which has set the safe limit of 30 degree Celsius and crossing that limit the possibility of human death due to heatstroke rises. Many places in India have crossed the wet bulb temperature but as IMD does not recognize the wet bulb test it did not issue a heatwave warning. The IMD should revamp its testing processes and recognize the wet bulb temperature.

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## Effectiveness in question

Sir/Ma'am

The recent Supreme Court's directive to summon yoga guru Ramdev baba and Patanjali Ayurved MD Acharya Balkrishna highlights a pervasive issue: the spread of false medicinal claims. The petition by the Indian Medical Association (IMA) brings attention to this urgent matter.

Claims about medicinal benefits, regardless of the medical system, must be supported by evidence. Patanjali's promise to avoid asserting curative properties and disparaging other medical systems seems to have been broken, jeopardizing public health.

The Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954, aims to curb such deceptive practices, but its effectiveness is in doubt. Penalties under the Act are insufficient to deter profit-driven unethical behavior.

Legislative reform is necessary to update our regulatory framework, with proposed amendments offering a chance for improvement. Collaboration among stakeholders, including doctors, patients, and pharmaceutical companies, is crucial to combat misinformation, especially on social media.

Strengthening legal provisions and establishing robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are essential. Transparency and accountability must guide regulatory oversight to build consumer confidence and ensure adherence to ethical standards.

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# Crime in India's largest cities: An analysis

By: Ramanath Jha

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) published its annual report on crime in India for 2022 on 6 December 2023. The crime rate, an internationally accepted measure, is the total volume of crime per hundred thousand population during a calendar year. The rate of crime is a fair quantification of lawbreaking since absolute numbers of crime in large geographies with bigger populations are likely to show a greater volume of crime than the smaller ones. The figures calculated per hundred thousand population make size and population redundant and provide a symmetrical field, enabling a fair comparison among states, districts, and cities in the country.

The 19 metropolitan cities for which NCRB has provided separate data hold 8.12 percent of the national population as of 2022. However, their share of cognisable crimes is 14.65 percent. Similarly, these cities accounted for 233,114 cases filed under special and local laws (SLL), making 10.29 percent of all SLL cases. This seems to corroborate the widely acknowledged finding by criminologists that crime rates are much higher

in larger cities than in smaller towns and villages. The reasons cited are more opportunities on account of greater access to wealth in cities, lower probability of recognition, detection and arrest and the attraction of larger cities to draw criminals from near and far. While this seems to hold good in absolute percentages for India's largest urban agglomerations, some of the data does not always bear this out. This article refers to some of them.

Delhi outstrips all other cities in terms of crime rate, standing at 1,832.6, which is 3.36 times the city average of 544. Jaipur (916.7), Indore (767.7), Kochi (626.7) and Patna (611.7) follow. Kolkata emerges as the most peaceful city with a low crime rate of 78.2. Chennai (211.2), Coimbatore (211.2), Surat (215.3), Pune (219.3), Hyderabad (266.7), Bengaluru (337.3), Ahmedabad (360.1), Mumbai (367.3), Kozhikode (397.5), Kanpur (401.4), Ghaziabad (418.0), Nagpur (516) and Lucknow (521) have all crime rates lower than the city average (544).

About murder in metropolitan cities, Patna tops the list with a murder rate of 5.2 murders per lakh population. Lucknow (4.5), Jaipur (4.3), Indore (3.3) and

Ghaziabad (3.1) follow. Kolkata (0.2), Kozhikode (0.3), Mumbai (0.7), and Kochi (0.8) have all less than 1 murder per lakh population.

As a percentage, the 19 urban agglomerations (UA) accounted for 7.12 percent of all nationwide murders, lower than their total average population percentage (8.12). The rate of kidnapping and abduction was highest in Delhi (34.2), followed by Patna (32.4) and Indore (31.1). Chennai (0.4), Coimbatore (0.4) and Kochi (0.9) had the lowest rates. Cities, as a percentage, scored higher than their population in kidnappings and abductions than the rest of the country (12.99 percent). Patna, Lucknow, Ghaziabad and Kanpur were the kindest to age. They had no recorded cases of crime against senior citizens.

Crime rates against women were the highest in Jaipur (239.3), Delhi (186.9) and Lucknow (161.4). Gender crime in 2022 marked a 12.3-percent jump over 2021.

A total of 48,755 cases were registered in 2022; this figure was 43,414 in 2021. Coimbatore (12.9), Chennai (17.1) and Kolkata (27.8) emerged as the most women-friendly cities. Delhi recorded the most crimes against children (7,400), fol-

lowed by Mumbai (3,178) and Bengaluru (1,578). Coimbatore (83), Patna (127) and Kochi (206) were at the bottom of the table. There were 3,996 cases registered in the 19 cities regarding crime against senior citizens, marking a 6.3-percent decrease over 2021 numbers. Delhi (1,313), Mumbai (572) and Bengaluru (458) accounted for the most cases.

In the area of economic offences, a total of 40,760 cases were registered in the 19 metropolitan cities. This was a jump of 15.8 percent over 2021. Out of these, 88.4 percent of cases were forgery, cheating, and fraud. Here, cities as a percentage, were responsible for 21.07 percent of all cases. The record of cyber crimes was even higher, with 37.06 percent registration of crimes in cities.

Cyber crimes also showed a huge upward trend in volume in these cities. A total of 24,420 cases were registered, which was an increase of 42.7 percent over 2021. The overall performance of India's criminal system was not very encouraging. The conviction rate for major heinous crimes was poor. For murder, it was 42.5 percent, for rape 17.9 percent, and for kidnapping and abduction 38.6 percent.

Jaipur, Indore, Kochi, Patna, Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kanpur, Ghaziabad, Nagpur and Lucknow exceeded the average crime rate of their states. The exceptions are Kolkata, Chennai, Coimbatore, Pune, Hyderabad and Kozhikode. They have crime rates that are lower than the state average. The widely accepted theory that urban centres have a greater propensity towards crime is borne out in the case of 12 cities.

However, six other cities, as cited above, do not support that widely held belief. Neither does the theory that larger cities would have a greater crime rate than the smaller ones hold. Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Pune are among the eight largest cities in the country. However, as cited above, their crime rates are lower than some of the smaller ones like Patna, Jaipur or Indore.

While NCRB data is the most comprehensive set of data, it suffers from some data deficits. Firstly, all crimes are not reported by citizens. Secondly, police officers in some cases are known to practise what is called the 'burking of crime', a term indicating the practice of not registering an FIR (First Information Report) in the case of a



crime that allows the local police officer to present a better picture about the position of crime than what actually exists. Thirdly, NCRB has practised the 'principal offence rule'. This means that if there is a combination of offences in a single FIR, such as murder and rape, the offence would be counted in its more heinous content, that is murder. These three cited factors lead to a reduction in the total volume of reported crime.

Another area of deficit is the unavailability of data in regard to all urban areas in the country. This would need an enormous effort at separate data collection. However, as a beginning, it should be easy to collect and put together data generated by the 69 police commissionerates in the country that have been established over the years in the larger urban areas.

Subsequently, data collection

could be expanded to 'A' class cities and other smaller cities in stages. The increasing urbanisation in the country would surely demand that.

Furthermore, the nature of crime in countries is becoming more complex. New kinds of crime are emerging and more laws are being enacted, requiring more heads of crime under which data has to be collected. India also faces a paucity of research into the causes of crime. As the country urbanises, the nature and complexity of crime is very likely to increase.

Data collection, therefore, has to rise to the occasion and continuously examine how it goes about collecting and organising its data. It is initiatives such as these that will enable the country and the police administration to face the challenges on the crime front in urban India. (Courtesy: ORF)

## Why East India remains a challenge for the BJP

By: Sumanta Roy & Spandan Roy Basunia

The eastern states of Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand, with 96 Lok Sabha seats collectively, are significant for any national party seeking victory in the general elections, individually or in an alliance.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's influence in these three states has increased since 2009 when it won 41 seats to 45 in 2014. In 2019, the party won 61 seats, powered by inroads in West Bengal where it picked up 18 seats, taking the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance past 300 seats.

But the BJP may not find it so easy to translate its gains into electoral success. Voters approach national and state elections differently. At the same time, the political landscape in the three states has seen immense flux.

Seeking to win a record third term in 2024, with ambitions of crossing 400 seats, the Hindutva party will have to hold on to its gains, especially in these three states, over the past few years.

### 2019 election

During the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the BJP and its allies were in power in both Jharkhand and Bihar, which may have contributed to their success in these states. Administrative control in the state can work to the advantage of the ruling party, like in the case of rolling out welfare schemes that can give it an edge.

In Bihar, the BJP and its allies the Janata Dal (United) and the Lok Janshakti Party together won 39 of 40 Lok Sabha seats. In Jharkhand, the BJP and ally All Jharkhand Students Union won 12 of 14 seats. In West Bengal, too, the BJP made inroads, winning 18 of 42 seats despite being an opposition party.

Since then, in the assembly elections, the BJP lost Jharkhand to the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-Congress alliance later that year. Two years later, the Trinamool Congress swept the 2021 West Bengal state elections despite a fierce fight by the BJP. In West Bengal, too, the Trinamool Congress had initiated welfare schemes such as Duare Sarkar, or government at your doorstep.

In February, after a series of flip flops, Nitish Kumar and the Janata Dal (United) returned to an alliance with the BJP in Bihar, which is the only of these three eastern states where it is in power.

### Three poll fronts

In 2021, the Trinamool Congress won 213 of 294 seats in the West Bengal

assembly. The BJP bagged 77 seats – currently down to 68 due to defections.

But the Hindutva party's string of defeats in the panchayat and municipal elections and by-elections that followed has made it difficult to keep up the momentum from the 2019 Lok Sabha election, when it got 40.7% of the vote share.

Its vote share plunged to 37.97% in the 2021 state elections, dipped further to 23% during the 2023 panchayat elections.

In Jharkhand, the BJP's Lok Sabha success did not translate into a victory in the 2019 assembly elections. The BJP alliance lost power despite winning 33.37% of the vote share in the state.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP and its allies, the Janta Dal United and Lok Janshakti Party, dominated Bihar with a vote share of 54%, according to think tank Lokniti-CSDS.

In 2020, the BJP-Janata Dal United won the Bihar state elections. Two years later, Nitish Kumar walked out of the alliance in 2022 and rejoined hands with the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Congress.

Kumar switched sides again in January, returning to the NDA fold. Significantly, in the months before, Kumar had criticised the lack of progress in talks among parties of the INDIA Opposition bloc for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

### State politics

It is not just electorally but also on other fronts that the BJP may face a tough fight in the three states.

In Bihar, during its short-lived tenure, the Congress-Rashtriya Janata Dal and Janata Dal (United) Mahagathbandhan, or grand alliance, government emphasised job creation.

This may favour the perception of these parties, especially following the lakhs of recruitments in government jobs in the state since late 2023.

During the government's floor test on February 12, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Kumar's former deputy Tejashwi Yadav sent a message that the Opposition was united. "I am not alone," he said on the floor of the state assembly. "Congress and Left are with me, and we will defeat BJP."

In Jharkhand, Chief Minister Hemant Soren's arrest put the government in a challenging situation. The Enforcement Directorate arrested Soren on January 31 in connection with a money-laundering case. But Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader Champhai Soren was sworn in as chief minister on February

2, countering the BJP's claims of dynastic politics in the state.

In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee's new handouts, declared during the state budget, are likely to benefit the Trinamool Congress.

The budget, announced in February, increased the provision for women under the financial assistance scheme Lakshmir Bhandar. The monthly allowance has been increased from ₹ 500 to ₹1,000 for general category women and from ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 1,200 for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women.

The state budget also introduced the Karmashree Scheme, modelled on the Centre's rural employment guarantee scheme, offering up to 50 days of work.

The Centre owes West Bengal ₹ 2,770 crore under the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. The amount has been pending for nearly a year. Alleging corruption in the state, the Centre has withheld payments, including wages, under the scheme, which has led to labourers suffering.

### What 2024 could hold

The BJP is leaving no stone unturned, neither on the political nor religious polarisation front. It has followed the Ram temple inauguration by notifying the controversial Citizen-ship Amendment Act, which is especially likely to affect West Bengal. Fears among Muslims when the law was passed in 2019 reflected in increased support for the Trinamool Congress in the state assembly elections.

Under the BJP, central agencies have been accused of targeting opposition leaders for a few years now. Abhishek Banerjee, widely considered Mamata Banerjee's successor, has been questioned by the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate in connection with a teacher recruitment scam. Two Trinamool Congress ministers have been jailed for their involvement in alleged jobs and ration scams.

In Bihar, former chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav and his son and party leader Tejashwi Yadav were questioned in the land-for-jobs scam.

For the BJP, the main task now lies in holding on to and expanding the inroads it has made in these three states. That voters tend to vote differently in Lok Sabha and state assembly elections may work in favour of the BJP to some extent. The Opposition parties, on the other hand, face the uphill task of retaining their support from state assembly elections. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

## India's diplomacy approach: The difference between Jaishankar and Nehru

By: Omair Ahmad

In one of the most short-sighted phrases used in diplomatic history, the US Secretary of State James Baker III said of the Balkans wars of the 1990s that, "We don't have a dog in that fight". Yugoslavia was falling apart, and Europe, supposedly celebrating the victory of the "free world", dithered in the face of some of the worst crimes against humanity committed on the European continent. In the end, to their credit, it was the Americans that finally intervened to end the violence, but not before Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, endured 4 years of siege, and the Bosnian Serbs murdered around 8,000 men and boys in the city of Srebrenica.

India is not America, and the Russian war on Ukraine is not a replay of the Balkans war – although it is justified by some Russians a response to the expansion of US and NATO activities that started with the bombing of the Serbs.

Nonetheless, for most Indians, most importantly our foreign minister S Jaishankar, India does not have a dog in that fight, although he used different words, saying in June 2022 that, "Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe's problem is the world's problem but the world's problems are not Europe's problem".

For students of Indian diplomacy, this seemed simply an unacknowledged rip-off of Nehru's 1948 address to the UN General Assembly. But the distance between the two speeches is vast, and

what Nehru said was in the exact opposite direction of what Jaishankar's line of reasoning seems to suggest: that India only cares about its own strategic interests.

Nehru's speech is worth reading in full, but the operative phrases are worth talking about as India resolutely ignores the challenges of the war in Ukraine.

Speaking in November in France, Nehru said: "May I say that we are equally interested in the solution of European problems; but may I also say that the world is something bigger than Europe, and you will not solve your problems by thinking that the problems of the world are mainly European problems? There are vast tracts of the world which may not in the past, for a few generations, have taken much part in world affairs. But they are awake; their people are moving and they have no intention whatever of being ignored or of being passed by."

This is not an isolationist point of view. Nehru was saying that India, and other post-colonial countries, were profoundly interested in European problems, and was drawing a strong link between handling wars in one place and those of another. This is the exact opposite of Jaishankar suggesting that the challenges India has with China are separate, and solving problems in one area has little or no connection with problems in another. Jaishankar's views do not seem to be shared by Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping. As the leader of China left Moscow in March 2023, he told his Russian counter-

part, "Now there are changes that haven't happened in 100 years. When we are together, we drive these changes." Something to which Putin agreed. What changes could these two countries be talking about? The most obvious seems to be what both Xi and Putin seem to define as their spheres of influence. In the case of Russia, the larger area under Soviet control, and in the case of Xi – the reclamation of what is defined as the larger Chinese areas. And as China has indicated with the renaming of areas in Arunachal Pradesh, this includes what was once the areas under Tibetan control.

India stoutly rejects these claims, but both Chinese and Indian claims are just that, claims. They have little legal validity. The Chinese claim rests, frankly, on the conquest of Tibet, and a reading of history that ignores any Tibetan independence. India's claims rest on the fact that, as the inheritor state of British India, treaties between British India and other entities, such as Tibet which agreed to the McMahon Line as the boundary in the Shimla Agreement of 1914, are legally binding. There is only one problem. China never recognised the McMahon Line, or Tibet's authority to determine boundaries. And in 2008 the British government formally stated, "Like every other EU member state, and the United States, we regard Tibet as part of the People's Republic of China."

In blunt terms, there is no legally recognised border between India and China. That is why it is called

the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

There is only one way that a border can be recognised, and that is by a treaty. But the path to that treaty can either be through diplomacy or by force.

In Ukraine, Vladimir Putin has determined that he will carve out a new treaty by force, one that will enjoin Russia as one of the major powers of Eurasia. Through its actions in Hong Kong, on the South China Sea, against Taiwan, and on the LAC, China seems to be doing something similar. Frankly the two leaders have said so publicly.

Nehru, in 1948, recognised that there were no such things as problems to be solved by Europeans by themselves. He knew that the post-colonial countries had a role to play in global governance, and had, "no intention whatever of being ignored or of being passed by" because the outcome of such problems impacted them. He was speaking in the aftermath of the Second World War, in which millions of Indians were forced to serve, and during which European decision-making played a key role in the Bengal Famine, leading to about 3 million Indians dying of starvation. More than 75 years later, New India, it seems wishes to say the opposite, that we have no dog in this fight. But then maybe the question is a different, and it is that despite its privation and weakness, the huge challenges left after decolonisation, India had a lot of fight. New India, it seems, is a dog with no fight left in it. (Courtesy: The Wire)

## The Gaza Truce Googly Peace remains a chimera

By: Lt General Prakash Katoch

The drama of talks for truce in Gaza is being enacted once more – this time in Cairo. But truce in Gaza remains a chimera because neither the United States-led West nor the present government of Israel 'actually' wants it.

Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu has said many times over that there will be no truce in Gaza without the return of hostages. He is reiterating this again concurrent to the truce talks in Cairo.

Notably, the demand is about release of hostages, not "hostage exchange" despite thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. The present number is not known but in April 2022, reportedly there were 4,450 Palestinian security prisoners in Israeli prisons.

This includes 160 children, 32 women and over 1,000 administrative detainees indefinitely incarcerated without charge. The number may have now gone up to around 6,000-7,000.

Aid to the besieged in Gaza is mired with disinformation and deceit. Aid convoys are being attacked by Israeli forces, the hungry coming to collect the food-aid fired upon and killed, and crossings for humanitarian aid blocked at will. Killing of aid workers is deliberate to ensure aid for the besieged is stopped altogether. According to the United Nations 196 aid workers have already been killed.

The UN anyway is getting as emasculated as its predecessor – the League of Nations. The little hue and cry over the recent killings of aid workers is only because it included foreigners – British and Australian aid workers.

Earlier, Israel had justified killing of aid workers by saying they were Hamas supporters but this time can't say so because foreign aid workers have been killed.

Israel has said 'sorry' for killing aid workers and reportedly sacked two officers. The US has said that killings of aid workers is "unacceptable" and the POTUS Joe Biden has shed some

crocodile tears – end of story.

The end result is that aid agencies are withdrawing from providing the humanitarian relief which is desperately required. Meanwhile, thousands of people in several Arab countries and in Muslim countries like Pakistan continue to show solidarity with Palestinians and protesting against Israel for the genocide in Gaza.

Anti-Netanyahu protesters taking out rallies in Tel Aviv have been attacked by security forces. There are calls for Netanyahu to step down.

However, replacing Netanyahu would lead to reopening of corruption charges against him, which were already being investigated before he became Israel's Prime Minister once again. Interestingly, the erstwhile Netanyahu governments had been financing Hamas – same way the US was funding, arming and training the Islamic State.

The latest is that Israel has withdrawn some forces from Khan Younis in southern Gaza, encirclement of Gaza continues and NrtcaNetanyahu has said Israel is one step away from victory. At the same time, Netanyahu has indicated that his intent to invade and attack Rafah remains intact.

The only question is if this will be delayed or executed immediately after the truce talks in Cairo, which may be inconclusive like similar earlier attempts although there is speculation about some sort of temporary truce – to be broken shortly thereafter?

Around 1.3 million Palestinians out of the 1.7 million displaced are in Rafah. An Israeli attack on Rafah will be phase two of the genocide, perhaps much larger and gory than what has happened till now.

More than three dozen congressional Democrats, including Nancy Pelosi, have urged Joe Biden to halt weapon transfers to Israel that Biden had recently approved; citing Israel killing aid workers and starving Palestinian children dead and dying of starvation because of Israeli blockade.

The letter signed by the senators also states:

"In light of the recent strike against aid workers and the ever-worsening humanitarian crisis, we believe it is unjustifiable to approve these weapons transfers. It also calls on the US to withhold future arms transfers pending a US investigation into the airstrike on the World Central Kitchen (WCK) humanitarian workers or if Israel; if Israel fails to sufficiently mitigate harm to innocent civilians in Gaza.

Concurrently, Democrat Senator Chris Coons has said that weapons transfer to Israel should not be delayed or halted because of the possibility of Iran attacking Israel in retaliation to the Israeli strike on the Iranian Embassy in Syria.

It would be no surprise if the Israeli strike on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus was on advice of the US-CIA in order to widen the conflict in the Middle East, draw Iran into the war, and negate calls for the US to stop supply of weapons and armament to Israel.

Israel's Haaretz newspaper noted: "We must admit defeat. It shouldn't be said, but there is no choice, we have completely failed. The objectives of the war will not be achieved, prisoners will not return under military pressure, security will not return, and international hostility and isolation will not disappear. We failed and that's reality".

Another big charade being played by the US is that Netanyahu is not listening to the Joe Biden Administration. Israel was designated as a major non-NATO ally way back in 1987 by the then US President Ronald Reagan and has since then cooperated with the US-led NATO in multiple domains.

Operations by Israeli forces would have full US support notwithstanding the selective disinformation by the US and the West to the contrary. Same goes for the speculation that support for Israel by its allies is dwindling, which is based on odd statements. Call this the "clash of civilizations", the US policy of warmongering for financial and strategic gains, or whatever. This is a harsh reality which is unlikely to change. (Courtesy: The Citizen)



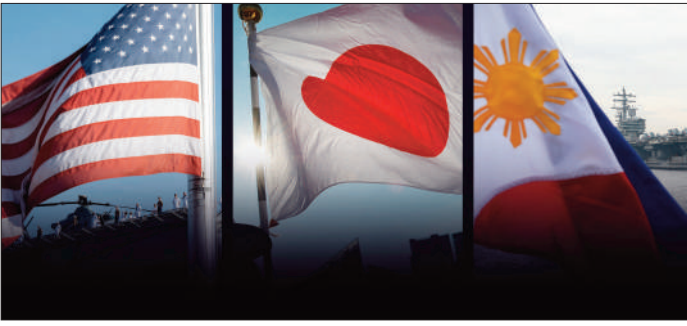
The summit comes a day after Biden held one-on-one talks with Kishida and feted the Japanese premier

# Biden to meet with Philippines, Japanese leaders as worry grows about Chinese action in Indo-Pacific

WASHINGTON, April 11: President Joe Biden is bringing together Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House on Thursday as the three nations use their first-ever trilateral summit to try to show they are in lockstep about countering China's military assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. The leaders are expected to announce that their coast guards will hold a joint patrol in the Indo-Pacific in 2024, a follow-up on law enforcement drills carried out last year by the allies in waters near the disputed South China Sea.

The US Coast Guard will also welcome Filipino and Japanese coast guard members onto a US Coast Guard vessel during the patrol for training, according to senior Biden administration officials who requested anonymity to preview the talks. The summit comes a day after Biden held one-on-one talks with Kishida and feted the Japanese premier with a glitzy state dinner at the White House, a diplomatic honour meant to recognize Tokyo's growing clout on the global stage.

It was also designed to send a clear signal that the Democratic administration remains determined to build what it calls a "latticework" of alliances in the Indo-Pacific



even as it grapples with the Israel-Hamas war and Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

Biden on Wednesday reflected on the fact that Japan, once a fierce US enemy, has become one of the closest American partners and an indispensable ally in a shared push for peace, security and prosperity in the Pacific and beyond.

"Just a few generations ago, our two nations were locked in a devastating conflict," Biden said with Kishida by his side for a pomp-filled arrival ceremony at the White House. "It would have been easy to say we remain adversaries. Instead, we made a far better choice: We became the closest of friends."

Thursday's three-way summit will also have a large economic component with several major US-based companies — including Meta, UPS, and Greenbrier Energy — announcing investments in the

Philippines, administration officials said. The new deals come after Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo visited Manila last month to announce more than USD 1 billion in new investment by American companies in the Philippines. Administration officials have acknowledged growing concern among all three countries about provocative Chinese action in the Pacific, which will be a large focus of the leaders' talks.

The White House sees the summit as countering China's attempts at "intimidation" and sending a message that China is "the outlier in the neighbourhood," according to an administration official.

Relations between China and the Philippines have been repeatedly tested by skirmishes involving the two nations' coast guard vessels in the disputed South China Sea. Chinese coast guard ships also regu-

larly approach disputed Japanese-controlled East China Sea islands near Taiwan.

The so-called "gray-zone" harassment by China has included shining military-grade lasers at the Philippine Coast Guard, firing water cannons at vessels and ramming into Philippine ships near the Second Thomas Shoal, which both Manila and Beijing claim. In 1999, Manila intentionally ran the World War II-era ship aground on the shoal, establishing a permanent military presence there.

Biden, in a wide-ranging phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping last week, raised concerns about China's operations in the South China Sea, including efforts to impede the Philippines, which the US is treaty-obligated to defend, from resupplying its forces on the Second Thomas Shoal.

"The main intent of this trilateral agreement is for us to be able to continue to flourish, to be able to help one another, and... to keep the peace in the South China Sea and the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea," Marcos told reporters before departing for Washington on Wednesday. Chinese officials have bristled at criticism over their action in the South China Sea and blamed the US for exacerbating tensions.

"Countries outside the region,

led by the US, have been cobbling together small groupings in the South China Sea," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said Wednesday. "They have been stoking confrontation in the name of cooperation, flexing muscles in the name of peace, and sowing chaos in the name of order. This is no doubt an act of hegemonism."

Biden has made improving relations with the Philippines a priority since Marcos became the country's president in June 2022. The relationship has had ups and downs over the years and was in a difficult place when Marcos took office.

Human rights groups said Marcos' predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte's "war on drugs" resulted in thousands of extrajudicial killings.

Marcos, the son and namesake of the country's former dictator, as a candidate said he would look to pursue closer ties with China. But he's increasingly drifted toward Washington amid concerns about China's coercive action.

Biden hosted him for talks at the White House last year, the first Washington visit by a Philippine president in more than a decade. Biden also met him on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly soon after Marcos took office, and dispatched Vice President Kamala Harris to Manila in 2022 to meet him. (AP)

# Ukraine's parl passes a controversial law to boost much-needed conscripts and fill army ranks

KYIV, April 11: Ukraine's parliament passed a law on Thursday that will govern how the country recruits new conscripts, following months of delay and after thousands of amendments were submitted to water down the initial draft.

Lawmakers dragged their feet for months over the law, which is expected to be unpopular. The law was spurred by a request from Ukraine's military, which wanted to mobilize up to 500,000 more troops, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in December. Exhausted soldiers, on the front lines since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, had no means to rotate out for rest, while many thousands of Ukrainian men evade the draft.

The law was passed to the backdrop of an escalating Russian campaign that has devastated Ukraine's energy infrastructure in recent weeks.

Authorities said Russian overnight missile and drone attacks again struck infrastructure and power facilities across several regions and completely destroyed the Trypilka thermal power plant, the largest power generating facility in Kyiv region. The law brings into effect a host of changes to the current system by expanding the powers of Ukrainian authorities to issue draft notices using an electronic system.

Incumbent army chief Oleksandr Syrskiy and Zelenskyy have since revised that figure after conducting an

audit, saying the number needed was not as high because soldiers can be rotated from the rear.

Former army commander Valerii Zaluzhnyi's dismissal from his post was reportedly over the mobilization issue. The vote came after parliament's defence committee removed a key provision from the draft Tuesday that would ensure the rotation of servicemen after 36 months of combat, a move that surprised some lawmakers as it had been a promise of the Ukrainian leadership.

Lawmaker Oleksii Honcharenko said in a Telegram post that he was shocked by the move to remove the provision. It was likely taken out because, considering the scale and intensity of the war against Russia, it would prove difficult to implement.

Ukraine already suffers from a lack of trained recruits capable of fighting, and demobilizing soldiers on the front lines now would deprive Ukrainian forces of their most capable fighters. On Wednesday, the parliamentary defence committee instructed the Defence Ministry to draft a comprehensive bill on demobilization of military personnel within the next eight months, news reports cited ministry spokesperson Dmytro Lazutkin as saying.

In nighttime missile and drone attacks, at least 10 of the strikes damaged energy infrastructure in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. (AP)

# South Korea's PM and top presidential officials offer to resign after election defeat



SEOUL, April 11: South Korea's prime minister and senior presidential officials offered to resign en masse on Thursday, after their conservative ruling party suffered a crushing defeat in parliamentary elections.

The results of Wednesday's elections were a huge political blow to President Yoon Suk Yeol, likely setting back his domestic agenda and leave him facing an intensifying political offensive by his liberal opponents during his remaining three years in office.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo and all senior presidential advisers to Yoon, except those in charge of security issues, submitted their resignations, according to Yoon's office. It didn't immediately say whether Yoon accepted their resignations.

Executive power in South Korea is heavily concentrated in the president, but the prime minister is the No. 2 official and leads the country if the president becomes incapacitated. Yoon said he will "humbly uphold" the public sentiments reflected in the election outcome and focus on improving people's economic situations and on reforming state affairs, according to his office.

In a separate news conference, ruling People Power Party leader Han Dong-hoon said he would step down as well to take responsibility for the election defeat.

With most of the votes counted, the main opposition Democratic Party and its satellite party appeared to have won a combined 175 seats in the 300-member Na-

tional Assembly. Another small liberal opposition party was expected to win 12 seats under a proportional representation system, according to South Korean media tallies.

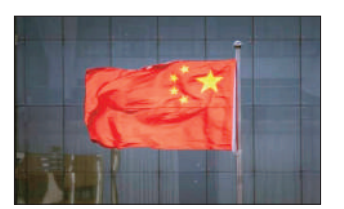
Yoon's ruling People Power Party and its satellite party were projected to have obtained 109 seats. The final official results were expected later on Thursday.

But the outcome means the liberal opposition forces will extend their control of the parliament, though they likely won't have the super majority of 200 seats that would give them the power to overturn vetoes and even impeach the president.

Wednesday's election was widely seen as a midterm confidence vote on Yoon, a former top prosecutor who took office in 2022 for a single five-year term.

He has pushed hard to boost cooperation with the US and Japan as a way to address a mix of tough security and economic challenges. But Yoon has been grappling with low approval ratings at home and a liberal opposition-controlled parliament that has limited his major policy platforms. (AP)

# China sanctions 2 US companies over 'support for arms sales to Taiwan'



BEIJING, April 11: China on Thursday announced sanctions against two U.S. companies over what it says is their support for arms sales to Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy Beijing claims as its own territory to be recovered by force if necessary.

The announcement freezes the assets of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems and General Dynamics Land Systems held within China. The measure also bars the companies' management from entering the country.

It wasn't immediately clear what, if any, assets the companies have within China, which remains heavily reliant on foreign aerospace technology even as it attempts to build its own presence in the field. (AP)

# Japanese PM Fumio Kishida to address Congress amid scepticism about US role abroad

WASHINGTON, April 11: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will head to Capitol Hill on Thursday for an address to US lawmakers meant to underscore the importance of keeping a strong partnership between the two countries at a time of tension in the Asia-Pacific and scepticism in Congress about US involvement abroad.

Kishida was in Washington this week visiting President Joe Biden as the White House completed hosting each leader of the Quad — an informal partnership between the US, Japan, Australia and India that is seen as important to countering China's growing military strength in the region.

Kishida is expected to talk about the future of the relationship between Japan and the US. He will be addressing many Republicans who have pushed for the US to take a less active role in global affairs as they follow the "America First" ethos of Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

The Republican-controlled House has sat for months on a USD 95 billion package that would send wartime funding to Ukraine and Israel, as well as aid to allies in the Indo-Pacific like Taiwan and humanitarian help to civilians in Gaza and Ukraine.

While the package does not include any direct funding for Japan, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said earlier this week that he hoped Kishida's visit would underscore "that we're in a world-

wide situation here against the enemies of democracy — led by China, Russia and Iran."

Japan has taken a strong role in supporting Ukraine's defense against Moscow as well as helping humanitarian aid get to Gaza. It is also seen as a key US partner in a fraught region where China is asserting its strength and North Korea is developing a nuclear programme.

"Japan is a close ally — critical to both our national and economic security," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer in a statement. "This visit will continue to deepen the diplomatic and security relationship between our two countries and build on the strength of decades of cooperation."

Kishida was also attending a US-Japan-Philippines summit on Thursday in another effort to bolster regional cooperation in the face of China's aggression.

In Congress, House Speaker Mike Johnson has held up the foreign security package since its Senate passage in February but is now working to advance it in the coming weeks.

It will be a difficult task to navigate the deep divides on support for Kyiv among Republicans. Making matters worse for the Republican speaker, he is already facing the threat of being ousted from the speaker's office. Kishida, who was elected in 2021, arrives in Washington while facing political problems of his own in Japan. Polls show his support has plunged as he deals with a political funds corruption scandal within his ruling Liberal Democratic Party. (AP)

# 2 Philippine navy pilots killed after a training helicopter crashes near a public market and homes

CAVITE, April 11: A Philippine navy training helicopter crashed near a seaside city, killing the two pilots on board and narrowly missing a fruit market and neighbourhood, where some horrified residents ran for their lives, officials and witnesses said on Thursday.

Nobody on the ground was injured when the Robinson R22 helicopter crashed near early-morning marketgoers and residents in Cavite City, 21 kilometres (13 miles) south of Manila.

Military spokesperson Col. Francel Padilla said the cause of the crash was not immediately known, but the two pilots had "executed emergency procedures."

Joann Nicolas Laristan said she was hanging her laundry when she saw the helicopter flying unusually low near a church before it collided with two trees beside an empty workers' shed about 50 meters (164 feet) from her home.

"I got really scared because the crash happened just nearby," Laristan told The Associated Press. "I ran back to my home and grabbed my children."

Other residents said they were roused from sleep by the loud noise of the crash.

Several residents expressed relief that the helicopter did not hit their homes or the nearby public market, which was starting to draw a crowd after daybreak.

Police investigator Armand Geniuo told AP the helicopter took off from Sangley Airport for a routine training flight around Cavite province and crashed less than 10 minutes later. The instructor pilot and his navy colleague were extracted from the wreckage by paramedics and rescuers but were later declared dead in two hospitals, Geniuo said.

The navy mourned the death of the pilots and said an investigation was underway.

"No stone will be left unturned as we endeavor to prevent this kind of accident from happening again," a navy statement said.

The Philippine military is among the weakest in the region and has struggled for decades to modernize and strengthen its navy, army and air force while dealing with long-running Muslim and communist insurgencies.

In recent years, it has started to shift its focus to external defense, including in the disputed South China Sea, where the Philippine navy and coast guard have faced an increasingly aggressive Chinese coast guard and suspected militia fleets in high-seas territorial confrontations. (AP)

# Vietnam sentences real estate tycoon Truong My Lan to death in its largest ever fraud case

HANOI, April 11: Real estate tycoon Truong My Lan was sentenced on Thursday to death by a court in Ho Chi Minh city in southern Vietnam in the country's largest financial fraud case ever, state media Thanh Nien said.

The 67-year-old chair of the real estate company Van Thinh Phat was accused of fraud amounting to \$12.5 billion — nearly 3% of the country's 2022 GDP. She illegally controlled the Saigon Joint Stock Commercial Bank between 2012 to 2022 to siphon of these funds through thousands of ghost companies and by paying bribes to government officials. Lan's arrest in October 2022 was among the most high-profile in an ongoing anti-corruption drive in Vietnam that has intensified since 2022. The so-called Blazing Furnace campaign has touched the highest echelons of Vietnamese politics.



Former President Vo Van Thuong resigned in March after being implicated in the campaign. But it's the scale of Lan's trial has shocked the nation. VTP was among Vietnam's richest real estate firms, with projects including luxury residential buildings, offices, hotels and shopping centers. Analysts said the scale of the scam raised questions about whether other

banks or businesses had similarly erred, dampening Vietnam's economic outlook and making foreign investors jittery at a time when Vietnam has been trying to position itself as the ideal home for businesses trying to pivot their supply chains away from China.

The real estate sector in Vietnam has been hit particularly hard: An estimated 1,300 property firms withdrew from the market in 2023, developers have been offering discounts and gold as gifts to attract buyers, and despite rent for shop-houses falling by a third in Ho Chi Minh City, many in the city center are still empty, according to state media. In November, Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, Vietnam's top politician, said that the anti-corruption fight would "continue for the long term." (AP)

# Current developments in Pak may lead to another 'Dhaka tragedy', warns ex-PM Imran Khan

ISLAMABAD, April 11: Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan drew a parallel between the political developments in Pakistan now and the circumstances leading to the 1971 Dhaka tragedy, warning that the present situation in the cash-strapped country could result in economic collapse.

The Dawn newspaper reported that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founding chairman in a message from Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail reminded the current dispensation that "countries and institutions could not survive without a stable economy."

PTI Central Information Secretary Raouf Hasan relayed Khan's message to the media during a press conference after the party's legal team met the 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician in jail on Wednesday, the day Eid was celebrated in Pakistan.

Barrister Raja told the media that Khan looked determined, though worried for the country and its people. Raja, who narrated Khan's message, said, "When you don't

give rights to the people, you cannot say the economy will grow."

"In 1970, army chief Yahya Khan wanted a hung Parliament, but when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's party got a clear majority, the army held a fraud by-election in which 80 seats of Awami League were snatched as Yahya Khan wanted to become president," he said, referring to the political developments in the then East Pakistan.

"I want to remind the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report that we are again going to repeat the same blunders which we made in the past. In 1970, there was the London Plan and today again a government has been imposed through the London Plan," Raja quoted Khan as saying.

Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party have repeatedly said that the outcome of the February 8 general elections was rigged and that the powerful Pakistan Army favoured the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to assume power. (PTI)

# Myanmar's ethnic Karen guerrillas claim to have seized the last army base defending key border town

BANGKOK, April 11: Guerrillas from the Karen minority on Thursday claimed to have captured the last of the army's outposts in Myawaddy township in eastern Myanmar, virtually clearing the way for them to take over the town of Myawaddy, the major crossing point for trade with Thailand.

The Karen National Union, the ethnic group's leading political body, said in a statement posted on Facebook that its armed wing, acting together with the affiliated Karen National Defence Organisation and allied pro-democracy forces, had captured the garrison of the army's Infantry Battalion 275, about 4 kilometres (3 miles) to the west of the town before dawn on Thursday, after besieging it since the start of the week.

The fall of Myawaddy would

be another major setback in the army's war against resistance forces since last October, when an alliance of three ethnic rebel groups launched an offensive in the country's northeast.

Over the past five months, the army has been routed in northern Shan state, where it surrendered control of several border crossings with China, and in Rakhine state in the west, and is facing active challenges elsewhere.

The nationwide conflict in Myanmar began after the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021 and suppressed widespread nonviolent protests that sought a return to democratic rule. Myawaddy, in Kayah state, is opposite the Thai district of Mae Sot in Tak province and is connected by two bridges across

the Moei River. It is Myanmar's most active trading post with Thailand.

The fighting in Myawaddy has alarmed officials in Bangkok, who fear the prospect of large numbers of people fleeing across the border. Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara said Tuesday that Thailand can accommodate about 100,000 people in safe areas on a temporary basis. Mae Sot district has in the past sheltered thousands of Myanmar villagers seeking safety.

With Infantry Battalion 275 garrison's capture, all army out-

posts in the township have been seized and the resistance groups will pursue those soldiers who remain at large, said the statement from the KNU.

"We want to inform the public not to fear and to cooperate with us," the statement said.

In a separate statement, the KNU said re-treating soldiers seeking to cross into Thailand for refuge were hiding on the Myanmar side of a No.2 Myanmar-Thailand Friendship Bridge.

Photos carried by Thai media showed men they identified as Myanmar soldiers resting by the

bridge.

The Karen are the third biggest ethnic group in Myanmar, making up about 7% of its 58 million population. Like other minority groups living in border regions, the Karen have sought greater for greater autonomy from Myanmar's central government for decades, with the KNU and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army leading their struggle.

Although the Karen are among the most experienced of the armed ethnic groups, they lack the heavy weapons some other rebel organizations have, and also suffer from factionalism. The Karen make up a large part of the 87,000 refugees from Myanmar who live in nine long-term refugee camps in Thailand after fleeing previous rounds of fighting. (AP)





# Will not accept CAA, NRC, Uniform Civil Code: Mamata

**KOLKATA, April 11:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said she will not allow implementation of the CAA, NRC and the Uniform Civil Code in the state.

Addressing a gathering here at the Red Road on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, she claimed that some people will try to "engineer riots" during elections and urged those who participated in the programme "not to fall prey to the plot".

Eid-ul-Fitr marks the culmination of the fasting month of Ramadan.

"We will not accept the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, National Register of Citizens and Uniform Civil Code. We will not accept any forcible implementation of these. I do not know how to hate people. I do not deliver hate speeches. I want everybody to live like brothers, in peace and harmony. If we will live unitedly, nobody will be able to cause harm to us. Do not let anybody break this unity," Banerjee said while addressing the gathering at the Red Road.

"Till I am alive, nobody will be able to cause harm to you. I will keep fighting them. I have learnt from you people not fearing death, but it's the other way round," she added.

"... there will be people who will be trying to engineer riots in the name of religion. You keep your cool and we will not let them to succeed in initiating riots here," Banerjee said.

In an apparent reference to the BJP, Banerjee alleged that with the elections closing in, the central government agencies are being "used" to scare the people, mainly the opposi-

tion leaders.

"A few people want that during this election to scare people in the name of agencies. Drive the CBI, ED, Income Tax, and NIA after them. I will tell them (BJP) to construct a jail and put everyone behind the bars. But will you be able to put the entire population of 130 crores in jail? I am ready to give blood for the country, but not ready to allow this torture go on," she said.

Banerjee without taking any name further alleged that at the moment when the election is around, a selected few Muslim leaders in the country were getting calls with offers.

"Today, during this election time, you are selecting and calling chosen Muslim people asking them what they want... I tell you they do not want anything," she elaborated.

Asserting that in Bengal, people are living in peace because there is brotherhood among different communities.

"Remember your honesty has helped people in Bengal to stay in peace. Live in peace and it is our responsibility to look after your security and nobody will be able to torture you," she said.

She asserted that her party TMC's fight is against the BJP.

"We are in West Bengal with your blessings. Remember it's the TMC who is fighting against the BJP. We will decide about the INDIA bloc later. But in Bengal, please see that no vote goes to any other party," she said. TMC national general secretary and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee accompanied her at the Eid meet. (PTI)

# No bar on political parties from contesting municipal polls, allocation of symbols not arbitrary: Delhi HC

**NEW DELHI, April 11:** The Delhi High Court has said there is no bar under the Constitution on political parties, which are granted recognition by the State Election Commission (SEC), from contesting municipal polls.

The court has also said the allocation of poll symbols to political parties by the SEC for municipal elections is reasonable and not arbitrary.

The court passed an order to this effect while dismissing a petition that had sought a direction to the SEC here to stop putting the reserved symbols for political parties on the list of contesting candidates.

The plea had also sought a direction to the SEC to conduct the election to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) without the reserved symbols, which allegedly violated the petitioner's fundamental rights as enshrined under Article 14 (equality before law) of the Constitution.

"In light of the law laid down by the Supreme Court, the recognition granted by the SEC to the political parties to contest municipal elections is within its jurisdiction and not ultra vires. There is no bar under Article 243A or Article 243R on political parties from contesting municipal elections," the court said.

A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet P S Arora said the backbone of the Indian democracy is the people themselves,

who go on to choose their representative by way of direct elections. "When the first general election of India was held, a vast majority of electors consisted of people who were illiterate and could not even read the names of the contesting candidates. Therefore, after deliberations and after weighing different options, a system of use of election symbols for the contesting candidates was put in place to help the electors exercise their franchise in favour of the candidate of their choice," the bench said.

The court said the SEC, in the symbol order of 2022, granted recognition to the national and state parties already recognised by the Election Commission and provided for allotment of symbols to the contesting candidates.

"We are of the considered opinion that the symbol order 2022 issued by the SEC in exercise of its powers under Article 243ZA of the Constitution, section 7 of the DMC Act and Rule 15 of the Rules of 2012 is not ultra vires," the bench said. According to the record, petitioner Lokesh Kumar unsuccessfully contested the 2022 MCD election from Green Park as an independent candidate.

He had challenged certain rules of the 2012 MCD Rules, which grant power to the SEC to recognise national and state parties for municipal polls and adopt their election symbols. (PTI)

# Under strong Modi government, terrorists killed on their home turf: PM in Uttarakhand

**RISHIKESH (UTTARAKHAND), April 11:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said under the strong BJP-led government at the Centre, the country's security forces are eliminating terrorists on their home turf.

Addressing an election rally here, Modi said the echoes of 'Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar' (Modi once again) were being heard across the country as people have seen the benefits of a stable government.

"Enemies took advantage and terrorism spread whenever there were weak and unstable governments in the country. But under a strong Modi government, our forces are killing terrorists on their own turf," he said.

The prime minister said he stopped the corrupt from looting the country and their anger against him was at its height.

Modi said the "weak" Congress governments in the past could not strengthen the border infrastructure. Now, roads and modern tunnels are being built along the borders, he added.

The prime minister accused the Congress of questioning the entity of Lord Ram and opposing the construction of the Ayodhya temple.



He added that the party was forgiven for this and invited for the consecration ceremony at the Ayodhya temple but it chose to boycott the event.

"Going one step ahead it has now publicly declared a war against Shakti in Hindu religion symbolised by revered goddesses like Maa Dhari Devi, Maa Chandrabani and Jwalpa Devi of Uttarakhand," he said, addressing the BJP's Vijay Sankalp Rally at the IDPL's hockey ground in Rishikesh.

Such a declaration by the Congress will add fuel to the fire in the ongoing "conspiracy" to destroy the culture of Uttarakhand, Modi said, asking people to give a "befitting reply" to the opposi-

tion party. He was referring to a recent remark by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. The party had later said that the BJP took the comment out of context.

Describing Uttarakhand as the land of the flower 'Brahma kamal', he asked people to push the lotus button during polling and put all five Lok Sabha seats into the BJP's kitty.

He said this was necessary to fulfil its pledge for a developed India, of which a developed Uttarakhand is going to be a significant part.

"But my expectations are even bigger this time. You have to break all past records. You have to win all booths," he said.

# INDIA bloc promoting own family members: Amit Shah

**MANDLA (MP), April 11:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday slammed the INDIA bloc for practising dynastic politics, and said that in the upcoming elections, people have to choose between the one leader who worked for taking every section of society forward and those who promote their own family members. He was addressing a public meeting in Mandla (ST) Lok Sabha seat for Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate and Union minister Faggan Singh Kulaste.

"There is a team led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the one led by Congress party leadership. The only aim of the 'ghamandia' (arrogant) alliance is to promote their own family members, while Modi's only aim is to take forward the poor, tribal, Dalits, backward and every section of the society," he said. In the 10 years of Modi rule, 25 crore people have come out of the below poverty line mark in the country, he said.

In Madhya Pradesh alone, 95 lakh farmers were given the Kisan Samman Nidhi assistance, 70 lakh women got the facility of tap water in their houses and more than four crore people got the benefit of the Ayushman Bharat scheme that guarantees treatment up to Rs five lakh free of cost, he said.

The Union government also constructed toilets in 80 lakh households in the country to give dignity to women, and 88 lakh sisters and mothers were provided with LPG cylinders for a smoke-free kitchen, Shah added. (PTI)

# PM's response on China 'ineffective, feeble': Cong



**NEW DELHI, April 11:** The Congress on Thursday targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "ineffective and feeble" response to China for its border transgressions, and demanded that he apologise to 140 crore Indians for his June 2020 statement that no one has entered India nor has anyone occupied any post.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said that in his interview to Newsweek magazine, "the Prime Minister was at his cowardly worst".

In a post on X, he said the PM's only comment on China's repeated infringements on Indian sovereignty was that the India-China border situation needs to be addressed urgently to resolve the "abnormality" in the bilateral interactions.

"The prime minister had a chance to send a powerful message to China. However, his ineffective

and feeble response is likely to only encourage China further in asserting its claim on Indian territory," Ramesh said.

"The prime minister's reaction to the China issue is not only disgraceful but also disrespectful to our martyrs who made the supreme sacrifice in defending our borders," he said.

"The prime minister should apologise to the 140 crore Indians for deceiving them on national television on June 19th, 2020, with his statement 'Na Koi Ghussa Hai, Na Hi Koi Ghus Aaya hai' and keeping the nation in dark about his failures in protecting the borders with China," the Congress leader also said.

In an interview with Newsweek magazine, which described India's rise as "unstoppable", Prime minister Modi has asserted that stable and peaceful relations between India

"I am confident that the people of the state will teach the Congress a lesson in the coming Lok Sabha polls," he said.

Modi said his government has stopped the loot by the corrupt so their anger against him is at its peak.

"Isn't corruption detrimental to the country? Shouldn't the country get rid of it? I am fighting this big war with the strength of your blessings," he said.

Under Congress government the advantages of government schemes did not reach the beneficiaries due to middlemen, he claimed.

But under the BJP government benefits of the schemes are reaching the beneficiaries directly through their bank accounts, he said.

Compared to the past, the country has been strengthened manifold under a strong and stable BJP government, he said.

He said terrorists were now being hit on their home turf - "ghar mein ghush kar" - in contrast to the time when "weak" governments ran the country. The apparent reference was to cross-border strikes in recent years after terrorist attacks in India.

He said a strong BJP government also had the courage to ab-

rogate article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir after seven decades, make a law against triple talaq, implement the one rank one pension scheme and provide reservation to women in legislatures.

He said the "weak" Congress governments could not strengthen the border infrastructure. Now, roads and modern tunnels are being built along the borders.

Modi spoke of Rishikesh's tourism potential. It is a unique blend of adventure and spiritual tourism, he said.

He spoke the mega road, rail and air infrastructure projects underway in the state and said they would boost tourism in the state like never before and create employment opportunities.

The BJP government in Uttarakhand led by Pushkar Singh Dhami is working constantly towards achieving the goal of making it a leading state by 2025, he said.

Rishikesh, where the rally was held, falls under Haridwar Lok Sabha constituency. Chief Minister Dhami, Haridwar candidate Trivendra Singh Rawat, Tehri Garhwal MP Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah and Pauri Garhwal candidate Anil Baluni shared the dais with the prime minister. (PTI)

# Smriti Irani accuses Rahul Gandhi of taking PFI support in Wayanad LS seat

**AMETHI (UP), April 11:** Union minister and Amethi MP Smriti Irani on Thursday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has taken the support of the banned Popular Front of India to contest the Lok Sabha election from Kerala's Wayanad seat.

While addressing a Yadav Sammelan at her residence in Gauriganj, she said, "Rahul Gandhi took the support of the terrorist organisation PFI that made a list of Hindus to kill, to contest the elections in Wayanad."

Irani is seeking a re-election from the Amethi seat where she defeated Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. She also raised the issue of the absence of flags in the rally of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUM) and the Congress earlier this month in which Rahul Gandhi took part.

Irani claimed that Rahul Gandhi has also made an agreement with the IUM to waive the flag of either of the parties. "When they can sell the flag of its party for their own selfishness, so you can think about what they will do to you," she

Continuing her attack against Gandhi, the BJP leader said, "When a minister from Karnataka asked Rahul Gandhi why he was contesting elections from Wayanad, he replied that the people of Wayanad are more loyal. 'I want to ask, are the people of the area from where he was MP for 15 years not loyal? Are they traitors?'" Irani asked.

The Modi government is being formed and there is a Yogi government in the state, she said. (PTI)

# Former Congress spokesperson Rohan Gupta joins BJP



**NEW DELHI/AHMEDABAD, April 11:** Former Congress spokesperson Rohan Gupta joined the BJP on Thursday, marking the defection of yet another visible opposition face to the ruling party in the election season. Gupta, along with some other leaders, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the presence of Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri and the party's national general secretary Vinod Tawde as he accused his former party of having lost direction and credibility due to its drift from its traditional stands on issues, such as nationalism and Sanatan Dharma.

Former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Parmpal Kaur, who recently resigned from the service, her husband Gurpreet Singh Maluka, who is the son of senior Shiromani Akali Dal leader Sikander Singh Maluka, and Youth Congress leader Jahanzaib Sirwal also joined the ruling party at a ceremony, lauding India's rise under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Gupta last month turned down the Congress's candidature for him from the Ahmedabad East Lok Sabha seat, a BJP citadel, and then quit the party as he blamed his "constant humiliation and character assassination by a leader connected with the communication department" of the grand old party for his decision, an apparent swipe at Jairam Ramesh, the Congress general secretary in charge of the party's communication department.

The leader who has "Ram" in his name asked them to keep mum when Sanatan Dharma was being insulted, Gupta told reporters, adding that those who have never fought an election are formulating the vi-

sion for the Congress. The Congress has gravitated to the Left, the former social media head of the party said. On one hand, the party said it respected the Supreme Court verdict paving the way for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya but on the other, it did not attend the consecration ceremony of the temple, he said. Gupta cited the Congress's stand on a host of issues, including its opposition to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and aligning with a party like the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) despite its strident criticism in the past, to make his point.

Gupta expressed his support to the BJP leadership's agenda of a "viksit Bharat" by 2047 and lauded Modi's vision. Recently, another former Congress spokesperson, Gourav Vallabh, also joined the BJP.

The three other leaders lauded Modi for India's global rise and development under his watch.

Tawde said their presence will further strengthen the BJP. Sirwal said "political brokerage" in Jammu and Kashmir has been finished by the BJP.

Maluka said he is joining the saffron party for the development of Punjab.

Gujarat Congress spokesperson Manish Doshi told reporters in Ahmedabad that Gupta's allegiance to the BJP was exposed when he decided to turn down the Lok Sabha poll ticket offered to him by the Congress.

"Unofficially, Gupta was associated with the BJP for a long time. It was an inside story and we knew it beforehand that staying with the Congress was his game. The Congress party gave him positions, prestige and he used this to make money and then went on to betray the party," Doshi alleged.

"We knew everything from the start. The party gave him a chance to contest the election and this (his backing out of the poll race) revealed everything. Now, he is reading out the script given to him by the BJP," the Congress leader said. While withdrawing his candidature from Ahmedabad East, Gupta had said he was doing so at his ailing father's insistence.

His father refused to avail of treatment in the ICU, where he was rushed to due to a panic attack, unless he gave in to his demand, Gupta had said.

In 2004, Gupta's father, a Congress candidate, lost the Lok Sabha polls from Ahmedabad. (PTI)

Large number of men, women and children sporting traditional attires thronged the streets and marched in processions in different parts of the state after performing traditional rituals and offering prayers at different Sarna Sthals, place of tribals' worship

# Sarhul, Eid celebrated in Jharkhand

**RANCHI, April 11:** Jharkhand's biggest tribal festival 'Sarhul' and Muslim community's 'Eid-ul-Fitr' were celebrated with religious and traditional fervour amid elaborate security arrangements across the state on Thursday.

Jharkhand chief minister Cham-pai Soren, Governor C P Radhakrishnan and Union minister Arjun Munda greeted the citizens of the state on the occasion of Sarhul and Eid.

To mark the Sarhul, large number of men, women and children sporting traditional attires thronged the streets and marched in processions in different parts of the state after performing traditional rituals and offering prayers at different Sarna Sthals, place of tribals' worship.

The CM, Governor and the Union minister participated in the rituals of the Sarhul festival in different places in Jharkhand's capital Ranchi.

"Sarhul is a pious festival for tribals. Eid is also being celebrated today and the festival of Navaratri is also underway. I would like to extend my best wishes to people of all these communities," the chief minister said after offering prayer at a Sarna Sthal on the campus of Tribal Hostel in Ranchi.

Soren also visited Siram Toli and Karam Toli where he offered his prayers to the Sal tree.

The governor and Munda participated in the Sarhul festival organised by the department of tribal



and regional language of Ranchi University.

Speaking on the occasion, the governor said, "Sarhul is celebrated across the state marking the beginning of the spring season. Sarhul means worshipping trees and nature. The worshipping of trees, animals and forests is not in our blood but it is in our genes that will never go off. It is the greatness of our culture and way of our living."

He said that every citizen of Jharkhand is an environmentalist by birth as they have got so much affection towards nature. "Our elders have designed the Sarhul festival so that we worship the tree as God," he said.

Munda said, "Through the Sarhul festival, tribal acknowledges that we have no existence without nature. Tribals never want to leave nature. So, it has incorporated it in its lifestyle, tradition and

customs."

The three-day festival begins on the third day of the month Chaitra. People of various tribes such as Oraon, Munda and Ho pay oblation to the Sal tree and thank mother nature for providing shelter, livelihood and food to them. Sarhul, also called the spring festival, started with rituals in the morning, followed by a forecast of rains during the upcoming rainy season by 'pahans' (priests) based on traditional practices.

As per the tradition, two earthen pitchers filled with water are placed under a sal tree and kept overnight at the Sarna Sthal. The priest after reviewing traditional methods of prediction announced that Jharkhand would get normal rainfall this year and harvest will be good.

In the afternoon, colourful processions were taken out from different corners of the city by the tribals. Men and women were seen dancing to the tune of tribal songs, while children were seen marching with placards carrying messages 'Ped-Paudhe Mat Karo Nast Varna Saans Lene Me Hogi Kast' (Don't destroy plants and trees, otherwise it will be difficult to breathe) and 'Jahan Hariyali, Wahan Khushali' (Where there is greenery, there is happiness).

Eid-ul-Fitr was also celebrated with religious fervour across Jharkhand on Thursday amid tight security.

In the state capital Ranchi, a large number of people offered Namaz at Harmu Idgah, Upper Bazar Jama Masjid, Doranda Idgah, Kadru Idgah and Iqra Masjid.

Adequate security arrangements have been made across all 24 districts of Jharkhand for the two major festivals.

Rajeshwar Nath Alok, Ranchi's additional district magistrate (law and order), said elaborate security measures have been put in place by the district administration to ensure the peaceful passage of both festivals.

He mentioned the deployment of sufficient security personnel and magistrates at strategic points throughout the city, along with installation of CCTV cameras in key locations and the use of drones and personnel with video cameras to monitor any anti-social activities. (PTI)



# I might breach the 90m mark before Paris Olympics: Neeraj Chopra

**NEW DELHI, April 11:** Olympic gold-medallist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra is aiming to breach the 90m mark before the Paris Olympics and says the way his preparations are going, it could happen anytime soon.

Chopra's best throw in competition came during the 2022 Stockholm Diamond League, where he hurled the spear to a distance of 89.94m. While he has breached 90m in training, he has yet to match it in competition.

The 26-year-old, who will be aiming to retain his Olympic gold in Paris, said on Thursday,

"I will try to breach the 90m mark before that (Paris Olympics). Hopefully, it happens before Paris, everything is going on smoothly, so (people) might not have to wait till the Olympics, it might happen before that. The preparation is good." The reigning world champion's confidence stems from the fact that he has had a good off season, where he focused on fitness and strength, coupled with the success he has achieved after winning gold in 2020 Tokyo.

"During the start of the season, the focus was on fitness and strength and no specific

javelin training. I think I got a lot of improvement in technique because of that. Besides, the strength and conditioning training in South Africa and Turkey has also gone well," said Chopra during a virtual interaction from Turkey.

Chopra added that following the Tokyo Olympics success his "self-confidence" had really gone up, which will help him tremendously going into Paris.

"After Tokyo, the self-confidence has definitely gone up. Besides, I have also played quite a few events... two world championships, a silver and a gold there, won the Diamond

League trophy, made some good throws, then retained the Asian Games gold (in Hangzhou) as well.

"So, the success between Tokyo and Paris has given me a lot of confidence that yes I can do it against strong competitors," added Chopra.

"My mind tells me it's the second Olympics, so this time I am more mentally and physically prepared for Paris. I have not done much as far as mental training goes but I know, 'yes this is my second Olympics' and that feel is there.

Chopra also said he had tried to overcome the shortcomings

in his technique following the Tokyo success.

"Before Tokyo, whatever shortcomings I had and during the years leading to Paris, I have worked on them. The best part is everything is going smoothly and I am very positive." Chopra will begin his competitive season with the Doha Diamond League Meeting on May 10, followed by the prestigious Paavo Nurmi Games in Turku, Finland on June 18, where he will be up against 19-year-old sensation Max Dehning of Germany, the latest entrant in the 90m club.

"They (two tournaments) are

very crucial in the run-up to Olympics, to get that competitive feel back (after the off-season). I will also decide in consultation with my coach and team which competitions to take part in."

Dahlin has emerged as a strong competitor of late and the youngster is set to pose a big challenge to Chopra in the months to come, following his 90.20m throw recently. But Chopra said, he is relishing the prospect of meeting him in competition. "When I competed in Tokyo and elsewhere, most of my competitors came in boasting of 90-plus throws. So,

it's not such a big deal. What matters is what you do on that particular day. "I am excited to compete against Dahlin. But it depends on the kind of pressure they (competitors) are able to handle. That is the biggest challenge. I'm sure I will play a lot of matches with Max (Dahlin). Never played with him before. It will be interesting, I will enjoy."

"He skipped the 80 (metres) completely. From 70m, he (straightway) came up with a throw of 90m. It (such a thing) has happened for the first time and I will enjoy his challenge," said Chopra. (PTI)

## PARAG IS SECOND ONLY TO KOHLI IN THE LEADING RUN-GETTER'S LIST

# Riyan Parag's potential is there for everyone to see: RR's Sangakkara



**JAIPUR, April 11:** Rajasthan Royals director of cricket Kumar Sangakkara has praised the inform Riyan Parag, saying his potential is there for everyone to see but the Sri Lankan legend fell short of stating that the youngster deserves a place in India's T20 World Cup squad.

The 22-year-old is second only to Virat Kohli in the leading run-getter's list this IPL season having scored 261 runs, with a top score of 84 not out and a strike rate exceeding 158.

The hard hitter's 76 off 48 balls went in vain as Gujarat Titans overhauled the imposing 196-run total off the last ball of the innings here on Wednesday to break the Royals' four-match winning streak on Wednesday.

"I think his (Parag's) potential is there for everyone to see. I think for Riyan it's really about concentrating on Rajasthan and this season, and whatever happens (being considered for T20 World Cup) will happen after that," said Sangakkara in response to a question about whether the Assam cricketer could be in

line for an India berth for the World Cup later this year in the West Indies and the USA.

"I think you should never get too ahead of looking at things to find the future. As long as he keeps his head down, he is working hard, he is batting well, he is very organised, he's worked hard in the off-season, he just needs to keep doing those good things and, if he does all that, good things will happen," added the charismatic former Sri Lankan, one of the greatest batters with more than 12,000 Test and 14,000 ODI runs. Sangakkara also defended his star spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who went wicketless in his four overs on Wednesday, with pacer Kuldeep Sen (3/41) and leg spinner Yuzvendra Chahal (2/43) grabbing the spotlight.

"Ash (Ashwin) is one of the greatest spinners to play the game and you can't have great days all the time. Once in a while, you have a bad day. Ash is a fierce competitor and he'll come back.

Sangakkara said that RR lost the game in the last two overs.

Pinch-hitters Rahul Tewatia (22 off 11) and Rashid Khan (24 not out off 11) played a pivotal role for GT when the 2022 IPL champions required 40-odd runs off the last three overs.

"I think we were right there, Kuldeep Sen coming in to bowl three brilliant overs; we just lost it towards the back end. We probably did not use the pitch as well as we should have but that's the way the game goes.

Tewatia, who came at a time when Sen had GT struggling following three quick wickets, said he had the self-belief that 40 runs off the last three overs was very much achievable.

"We needed 40-odd runs in three overs. I was batting with Shubman and Rashid was still to come. We were telling each other that 2-3 hits can change the game. 40 in three if you have wickets in hand... it's a matter of 2-3 big hits only.

"If there is one big over then 40 in three overs and with the impact-player rule, then I suppose it's chaseable" added Tewatia. (PTI)

**LUCKNOW, April 11:** Delhi Capitals' bowling unit will have to punch above its weight against an in-form Lucknow Super Giants, who will start as overwhelming favourites in an Indian Premier League match here on Friday. LSG, who sit on the third spot on the points table, seem to have all their bases covered even though rookie pacer Mayank Yadav, who bowls thunderbolts in excess of 150 kmph, is likely to miss the match because of an abdominal niggle.

The 21-year-old bowled just one over against Gujarat Titans before walking off the field, complaining of soreness last week. In Yadav's absence, another rookie pacer, Yash Thakur starred with a five-wicket haul against GT. He will have the company of Naveen-ul-Haq, Krunal Pandya and leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi among others.

LSG boasts of a strong opening pair of Quinton de Kock and KL Rahul. The South African has scored two half-centuries but the captain is yet to convert his starts into something meaningful. The flamboyant Nicholas Pooran has been in sensational form, adding meat to LSG's total at the fag end of the innings.

The major concern for the Lucknow outfit, however, remains Devdutt Padikkal who is yet to reach double digits.

The visitors, on the other hand, are looking like an outfit bereft of a Plan B as it became apparent in their 106-run hammering by

Kolkata Knight Riders. The latest loss to a struggling Mumbai Indians has left them languishing at the bottom of the points table with the worst net run rate of -1.370. The primary worry is the composition of the Indian pace attack, which just lacks spunk.

The onus will be on Khaleel Ahmed and old warhorse Ishant Sharma once again but the duo hasn't been able to deliver consistently. Mukesh Kumar is expected to be back from injury but he has also not set the stage ablaze with his performance.

And, medium pacers Sumit Kumar and Rasikh Dar could well be lambs for slaughter against the likes of de Kock, Stoinis and Pooran.

To add to their woes, pace spearhead Anrich Nortje has been unable to shrug off the rust since coming off his injury, leaking runs at an economy of 13.43 in four outings.

DC has struggled to find the silver lining in their 2024 campaign barring skipper Rishabh Pant and Tristan Stubbs' form.

The main issue is the team's lack of depth in Indian talent on the bench. This deficiency does not instil confidence in the team. Prithvi Shaw got some much-needed runs but he needs to do more at the top. But, save Abhishek Porel, none of the uncapped Indian players have measured up, which has led to over-reliance on their overseas recruits who have also been stuttering. (PTI)

## If India make right choices, they will excel at T20 WC: Dawid Malan

**NEW DELHI, April 11:** With Indian cricket bursting at the seams with young talent, the Rohit Sharma-led squad could set the stage ablaze at the upcoming T20 World Cup if the selectors make the "right choices", reckons England's swashbuckling batter Dawid Malan.

The T20 global showpiece will be held across June in the West Indies and USA, and inaugural edition winners India will enter the tournament as one of the favourites to lift the trophy.

"With the ongoing IPL, we are seeing the rise of several new Indian players making a mark and if the board makes the right choices there is enough and more talent to help India excel at the upcoming T20 World Cup," Malan said on Thursday.

"Further, while Virat (Kohli) has been away from T20 cricket, his performances (in IPL) certainly show that he

makes a strong contender for making the final team," he added. While youngsters such as Mayank Yadav and Riyan Parag have impressed with their speed and consistency respectively, superstar Kohli is currently the leading scorer with 316 runs from five innings, though his strike rate of 146 remains a matter of discussion.

Malan was speaking after entering into a partnership with 'Linebat News', an international sports gaming company.

The 36-year-old Malan, who last played for England in the 2023 World Cup, wasn't part of the white-ball series against the West Indies and amid fears of his international career coming to an end, he recently joined the coaching staff at his county Yorkshire ahead of the 2024 season.

Malan though remains hopeful of finding a place in the England squad for the T20 World Cup. (PTI)

## Praggnanandhaa, Vidit score crucial victories; Gukesh continues in joint lead

**TORONTO, April 11:** Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi scored crushing victories, while D Gukesh held on to the joint top spot with a draw in a brilliant sixth-round outing for the Indian men's team at the Candidates Chess Tournament here. Praggnanandhaa prevailed over Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan, while Gujrathi got the better of Frenchman Alireza. Gukesh's draw came against American Hikaru Nakamura.

With eight rounds still remaining, the 17-year-old Gukesh and Ian Nepomniachtchi continue to share the lead in the men's section with four points each in their kitty.

Russian Nepomniachtchi, who is playing under the FIDE flag, played out a draw with top seeded American Fabiano Caruana. There was disappointment for India in the women's competition as R Vaishali suffered a re-

versal, losing to Kateryna Lagno of Russia. Vaishali, who is the elder sister of Praggnanandhaa, now has a lot of ground to cover if she has to come back in the tournament.

Koneru Humpy also lost, to Tingjie Lei of China, while Nurgul Salimova of Bulgaria found

Alireza and Abasov who both are reeling with just 1.5 points close to the half-way stage in the biggest event of the year.

In the women's section, Zhongyi Tan of China made another stride forward and scored a win over Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine. With 4.5 points in her bag from six games, Tan seems to be running away in this section and the only threat comes from Goryachkina who is a half point behind.

Lagno stands third on 3.5 points, half a point ahead of Lei. Vaishali and Salimova remained on 2.5 points and surprisingly Humpy is at the bottom of the tables on two points with Muzychuk.

Praggnanandhaa started as a huge favourite against Abasov and did not disappoint his fans. The Tarrasch defense has found more than a few takers here in the event but on Thursday Praggnanandhaa was at his technical best. (PTI)



her nemesis in Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia.

Praggnanandhaa shares the third spot with Caruana on 3.5 points and Gujrathi is not far behind on the joint fifth spot alongside Nakamura with three points.

It was the end of the road for

## Rashid's commitment makes him franchise favourite across T20 leagues: Gavaskar

**NEW DELHI, April 11:** Rashid Khan's commitment towards all aspects of the game, including the willingness to put his body on the line, makes him one of the most sought-after players in T20 leagues across the globe, feels the legendary Sunil Gavaskar.

Needing 15 in the final over and two off the last ball, Gujarat Titans scripted a sensational last-ball win with the Afghan leg-spinner hitting an unbeaten 24 off 11 deliveries. He also took one wicket, giving away just 18 runs in his four overs.

"Yeah, he didn't hit the wickets like he usually does, but when he was needed with the bat he came and delivered," Gavaskar said on 'Star Sports Cricket Live'.

"This is the reason he's such a wanted player by franchises all around the world. They want him because they can see his commitment, batting, bowling and fielding," he said.

Apart from his batting and bowling, Rashid is an agile fielder who never shies away from attempting a risky dive.

"Look at the way he gives everything while he's fielding. Bowlers sometimes can be a little concerned about diving on their bowling shoulder, because if they dislocate their shoulder careers are in threat.

"Not with Rashid Khan, he just wants to give 100 per cent."

Gavaskar compared Rashid to England Test skipper Ben Stokes,



who has given this season's IPL a miss.

"There's another cricketer who is not playing in this IPL but who's again similar, is Ben

Stokes. Anytime you see Ben Stokes batting, bowling or fielding he's a 100 per cent, he gives it everything.

"And those are the cricketers

that coaches and captains want, they might not always deliver but you know the percentage is not going to be anything less than a 100 per cent," added Gavaskar.

The batting legend was also impressed by young skipper Shubman Gill, who fought a lonely battle for the most part of GT's innings before Rashid and Rahul Tewatia's cameos.

"I am very impressed with Shubman Gill because, again, he was not getting the kind of support that he would have wanted at the other end. You want somebody to be there to build a partnership. At the start of the innings, if you have a bit of a partnership, it eases quite a bit of your problems. (PTI)

## Monterrey beats Messi and Inter Miami to advance to the CONCACAF semifinals

**MONTERREY (MEXICO), April 11:** Lionel Messi's first trip to Mexico for an official match did not end well.

Brandon Vazquez, Germán Berterame and Jesus Gallardo scored goals and Monterrey beat Inter Miami 3-1 on Wednesday night in the second leg of the two-game, total-goals series to secure a spot in the CONCACAF Champions Cup semifinals.

Vazquez opened the scoring in the 31st minute, Berterame added a goal in 58th and Gallardo sealed the win in the 64th as Monterrey advanced to the next round with a 5-2 aggregate score.

Diego Gómez scored Miami's goal in the 85th minute. Messi started the match, but he had just one scoring chance in the first half.

"As a coach, I'm happy to eliminate a great team. Gerardo (Martino) and Leo are a great coach and player who are recognized worldwide," Rayados coach Fernando Ortiz said. "We have the satisfaction to win the series, but we are thinking of Tigres," Monterrey's next opponent in the Mexican Clausura.

Before the series, Ortiz said that he was confident of his team's talents, but was afraid that the referees could be influenced by Messi's presence.

"I said that we were going to beat them, not for a lack of respect for Miami, just because I thought that my players would understand what needed to be done," Ortiz said. "To me, Leo is the greatest player of all time, I did not mean to offend anyone, I just gave an

honest opinion."

Messi, who played two exhibition matches in Mexico in 2011 and one in 2006, missed the chance to lead Miami to its first semifinals in this tournament.

"Today's defeat takes away the illusion that we have to keep moving forward in this competition," said Miami coach Gerardo Martino.

Messi, the 36-year-old Argentinian, won the Leagues Cup last summer and was trying to win his second tournament since he signed with Miami a year ago.

"We've competed well in the first game against Monterrey and in this one we did until Berterame's goal, that's when the series ended," Martino said.

Messi, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner, returned from a hamstring injury that had sidelined him since a March 13 Champions Cup match against Nashville to play the second half of last Saturday's Major League Soccer game at Colorado, scoring once in a 2-2 draw. Monterrey, the team with the highest payroll in the Mexican league, will take on the Columbus Crew in one of the semifinals. America, the reigning champion in Mexico, will play against Pachuca in the other. Pachuca beat Costa Rican club Herediano 2-1 on Wednesday to advance.

Monterrey is trying to advance to its first final since in 2021, when it won its fifth CONCACAF title.

Inter Miami finished the match with 10 men because Jordi Alba received a red card in the 78th minute. (AP)