Israeli airstrike in southern Gaza city of Rafah kills at least 9 Palestinians

Pak PM set to visit Saudi to advance investment talks

Like Amethi, Congress' 'sahabzade' will also lose Wayanad LS seat: PM

Modi govt cares only for super rich, posing threat to Constitution: Rahul



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DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024

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HTBRIEFS

Meeting held

DIPHU: The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang had a meeting with the Kuki Civil Society Organisation (KCSO) at Saijang in the premises of Kuki Gaonbura Association's office. A leader of KCSO, John Thangew appreciated the development-oriented government of the BJP. He stated the difficulties and grievances of the Kuki tribe in Karbi Anglong before the CEM. The Kuki leader said that they will vote for the BJP candidate Amarsing Tisso. Executive Member of KAAC, Surja Rongphar; president of BJP East Karbi Anglong District Committee, Roland Killing and chairman of GinFed, Tongthang Touthang among others were present in the meeting.

Polling percentage

TEZPUR: The poll process of general election held in Sonitpur HPC on Friday in the first phase passed off peacefully showing no major setback. The average voter turnout percentage in the constituency is 78.47 while LAC wise latest voter turnout percentage is shown 77.60 in Dhekiajuli LAC, 77.17 in Barchala, 78.16 in Tezpur, 79.67 in Rangapara, 79.27 in Naduar. 80.20 in Biswanath ,80.09 in Behali, 78.69% in Gohpur and 75.55 in Bihpuria. Bihpuria LAC presents the lowest poll percentage of 75.55 percent in comparison to 8 other assembly segments under the 11- No Loksabha Constituency while Biswanath LAC shows the highest 80.20 percent polling.

Poll violence

IMPHAL: Several organisations have strongly condemned the incidents of violence that marred voting processes at several polling stations across the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency on April 19. Khwairamband Nupi Keithel Apunba Imasing condemned sporadic incidents of violence reported in several polling stations yesterday, particularly disrespect shown by the armed miscreants

Issue No. 100

Anurag Doloi of Jorhat tops rank-holders' list

Boys outshine girls in HSLC examination ● Pass percentage stands at 75.7%

GUWAHATI, April 20: Boys outshone girls in the class 10 board examinations in Assam, results of which were declared on Saturday.

The overall pass percentage in the High School Leaving Certificate (HSCL) examination held in February-March this year was 75.7 percent, the Board of Secondary Education, Assam, (SEBA) said.

The total percentage was an improvement over the last two years, with the pass percentages in 2022 and 2023 being 56.4 percent and

72.6 per cent respectively. A total of 4,19,078 students, comprising 1,87,904 boys, 2,31,164 girls and 10 transgenders, had appeared in the examination.

The pass percentage among boys was 77.3 per cent, girls 74.4 percent and transgenders 80

Chirang district had the highest pass percentage at 91.2 per cent, while the lowest of 60.9 per cent was in Udalguri district. The SEBA also announced the top three rank

holders, with three students sharing the third position. Anurag Doloi of Pragya Academy Senior Secondary School of Jorhat topped the list, scoring 593 marks out of a total 600.

Jharna Saikia of Shankardev Shishu Vidya Niketan, Biswanath Chariali, bagged the second position with 590 marks. The third rank was shared by Manish Pratim Saikia of Island Academy, Majuli, Bedanta Choudhury of Stella Maris School, Sarupeta, and Devashree Kashyap of Ramanujan Senior Secondary School, Nagaon, scoring 588 marks.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma congratulated those who cleared the exam, while urging those who did not fare as expected to continue working harder.

"Congratulations to all my young friends who

have successfully passed their HSLC exam this year. I wish you all the best for a bright future ahead," he wrote on X.

"For those who aren't happy with the results, I want to tell them - one exam is NEVER a make or break exam. Life will always give you several more chances. Identify the numerous talents you are bestowed with and keep working hard! You will go places," Sarma added. (PTI)

Anurag wants to become software engineer

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 20: Anurag achieved an impressive score of 593 marks, with a perfect 100 in four subjects: Advanced Mathematics, General Science, General Mathematics, and Social Science, placing him at the top among the five rank holders this year. Notably, SEBA has recognised only five rank holders for the first time

The atmosphere at Pragya Academy was one of jubilation as students and teachers celebrated this remarkable achievement, especially since this was the first batch from the school to appear for the HSLC exam. At Anurag's residence in Kasogoral, the air was filled with joy as neighbors and well-wishers gathered to congratulate him on his success.

Addressing the media at the school campus, Anurag expressed his gratitude for the support of his teachers and parents, attributing his success to their guidance. He also acknowledged the role of his previous school, Jonaki Sangha, in laying a strong foundation for his academic journey. Anurag revealed his aspirations to pursue higher studies at Pragya Academy and aim for admission to prestigious institutions like IIT or NIT to study computer science, with the goal of becoming a software engineer.

When asked about his study routine, Anurag shared that he dedicated 12 to 13 hours daily to his studies, incorporating breaks for activities like playing the tabla, listening to music, and short naps. Despite the rigorous schedule, he maintained a balance in his routine. In addition to his academic pursuits, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Congress wants to remove ban on PFI: Shah



JAIPUR/KOTA, April 20: Accusing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of spreading lies on the issue of reservation, Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday said even if the opposition party wants to do away with quota given to SC, ST and OBCs, the BJP will not allow it to happen.

Addressing rallies in Rajasthan, Shah also claimed that the Congress wanted to remove the ban on the Islamic extremist outfit Popular Front of India (PFI). He hit back at the opposition's 400 seats was aimed at changing the

"When Congress got a majority, they used it to impose Emergency... we got the majority in 2014 and 2019, we did not use it remove reservation but to remove Article 370, to build Ram temple... bring CAA... give reservation to women ... we used our majority to remove poverty, to secure the country," Shah said.

"Rahul baba, you should not lie. Even if the Congress party wants to remove SC, ST and OBC reservation... we will not allow it to remove reservation. This is Modi's guarantee. These (Congress) people are spreading lies," he said. He claimed the Congress has harmed the interest of Other Backward Classes (OBC) the most.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi belongs to the OBC community, Shah said, adding that it was Modi who imclaim that the BJP's slogan of winning plemented schemes for various com-

munities among the backward classes. Shah said Modi worked to give constitutional recognition to the National Commission for Backward Classes.

"We worked to give 27 per cent reservation to OBCs in all central institutions in the country. Modi, under whom respect for the country increased globally, also comes from the OBC community," he said.

Shah said that before the Modi government, there was no scheme in the country for communities such as blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters and boatmakers, but Prime Minister Modi 'spent Rs 13.000 crore and connected them with skill development and selfemployment schemes". "The Congress government did not implement the Mandal Commission report. During a discussion in Parliament on the reservation, Rahul baba's father Rajiv Gandhi spoke against it for two-and-ahalf hours," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Modi alleges conspiracy by big players to remove him from power

CHIKKABALLAPURA/BENGALURU April 20: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said big and powerful people in India and abroad have joined hands to remove him

Addressing a mega public meeting in Chikkaballapura, near here, he said, "Mothers and sisters have come in a large number here. Your struggle and the challenges you face to nurture your family, Modi has seen this in his house. These days, big and powerful people in the country and abroad have united to remove Modi." "But, because of Nari Shakti and Maatru Shakti's blessings and Suraksha kavach (safety armour), Modi is able to move on fighting challenges." "Serving mothers, sisters and daughters and protecting them is Modi's priority," he said, listing out measures taken by his government for women's welfare in ten years like supporting their self help groups and creating 'Lakhpati Didis'.

The prime minister said the first phase of voting for Lok Sabha on Friday has gone in favour of NDA and 'Viksit Bharat'. Targeting the INDIA bloc, he said the oppo-

sition alliance doesn't have a leader at present, and has no vision for future, and "their history was of scams. Praising JD(S) patriarch and former Prime

Minister H D Deve Gowda who shared the stage with him, for his energy and commitment at the age of 90, Modi said he too draws inspiration from him.

"His (Gowda) commitment towards Karnataka, the pain in his heart for the plight of

Karnataka today and the 'josh' in his voice, is the testimony for Karnataka's bright future," he said, as he thanked Gowda for his "blessings". The JD(S) joined the NDA in September last year.

Earlier, in his speech, Gowda hit out at Congress, chief minister Siddaramaiah and deputy chief minister D K Shivakumar over a sarcasmlaced newspaper advertisement campaign alleging that the Modi government's gift to Karnataka was empty 'Chombu' (a small, round water container).

Pointing at scams like 2G and coal gate during UPA rule under Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi, he said, "After looting the resources of the state and the country during the Congress regime, Modi was given the empty 'Chombu', which the prime minister has turned into 'Akshaya Patre' in ten years."

Modi, later addressing a public rally in Bengaluru, said in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, people gave a record (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP wants to continue loot: Cong slams FM's remarks on electoral bonds



NEW DELHI, April 20: The Congress on Saturday hit out at the BJP over finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's reported remarks that electoral bonds will be brought back after consultations, alleging that after looting ₹ 4 lakh crore of public money, they want to "continue the loot."

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh's attack on the BJP came after Sitharaman told the Hindustan Times that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) intended to bring back electoral bonds in some form after consultations with all stakeholders if it is elected back to power after the 2024 general election.

In a post on X, Ramesh said, "Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has declared that if the BJP returns to companies against donations. (PTI)

to power, they will bring back the Electoral Bonds that the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional and illegal!" "We know that the BJP looted ₹ 4 lakh crore of public money in the #PayPM scam. Now they want to continue the loot," he alleged.

Ramesh listed what he said were the "four methods of PayPM." "Prepaid Bribery - Chanda do, Dhandha Lo. Postpaid Bribery - Theka Do, Rishvat Lo. Combined Cost of Pre-paid and Post-paid Bribes: ₹ 3.8 lakh crores," Ramesh said.

"Post-Raid Bribery - Hafta Vasuli. Cost of Post-Raid Bribes: ₹ 1,853 crores. Farzi Companies - Money Laundering. Cost of Farzi Companies: ₹ 419 crores, he said. "This is the most important election of our lifetime. Thankfully, as ground reports make clear, this corrupt brigade is on its way out!" the Congress leader asserted

In February, the Supreme Court delivered a judgment striking down the electoral bonds scheme.

Following a directive from the apex court, the State Bank of India, which was the authorised seller of electoral bonds, shared data on electoral bonds which was then made public. The Congress has alleged that the electoral bonds data has exposed "corrupt tactics" of the BJP such as quid pro quo and grant of "protection"

Karbi Anglong, WKA celebrate improved HSLC performance

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 20: Following the announcement of the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) results for 2024 by the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA), the district-wise analysis revealed significant progress in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts, with both securing improved positions.

Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) for Education, Richard Tokbi, expressed his appreciation during a press conference held at his official residence on Saturday, applauding the collective efforts aimed at enhancing education in the region, historically ranked at the bottom.

"The HSLC pass percentage for Karbi Anglong is 81.06 percent and for West Karbi Anglong is 78.2 percent, positioning them at 8th and 18th places respectively. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to KAAC and CEM Tuliram Ronghang for their unwavering support. Together, we established an Education Reform Committee and conducted extensive education awareness programs involving stakeholders, student organizations, education officers, and teachers. This achievement is dedicated (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Plastic production threatens 1.5 degrees Celsius limit, new study warns

NEW DELHI, April 20: If the current rate of plastic production continues, it could use up the global carbon budget to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius by as early as 2060 or no later than 2083, according to a new study.

The study by the United States' Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) comes ahead of the fourth round of United Nations negotiations for an international treaty to end plastic pollution in Ottawa, Canada, during April 23-29. It is estimated that global plastic production today accounts for around 12 per cent of total demand for oil and 8.5 per cent of total demand for natural gas.

Greenhouse gas emissions during primary plastic production come from burning fossil fuels for heat and electricity, and other processes that don't involve burning. About 75 per cent of these emissions happen before the plastic is even formed.



Burning fossil fuels is the primary reason for the increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which are driving up global temperatures. The study suggests that primary plastic production needs to decrease by around 12 to 17 per cent

per year starting in 2024 to avoid breaching the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit set by the Paris Agreement.

In 2019 alone, primary plastic production generated about 2.24 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO2e), which is 5.3 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions (excluding agriculture and LULUCF (Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry).

In contrast, the global aviation sector produced 0.6 GtCO2e in 2019, while the entire global transport sector, including aviation, produced 8.3 GtCO2e. Under a conservative growth scenario (2.5 percent per year), GHG emissions from primary plastic production would more than double to 4.75 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO2e) by 2050, accounting for 21-26 per cent of the remaining global carbon budget for a 50 per cent chance of staying below the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold.

At a growth rate of 4 per cent per year, emissions from primary plastic production would increase more than threefold to 6.78 GtCO2e, accounting for 25-31 per cent of the remaining global carbon (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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Centre aims to make India attractive destination for manufacturing, services: Sitharaman

AHMEDABAD, April 20: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the Centre has tailored policies to make India an attractive destination for manufacturing and services, and the aim was to produce not just for the domestic market but for exports as well.

She was responding to a query on American tech billionaire Elon Musk postponing his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Policies have been made to attract investments. We want manufacturers and investors to come and produce not just for India but also for exports. We will try to attract manufacturers and investors through policies," she told reporters. Tesla CEO Musk on Saturday said his visit to India has been delayed due to the company's heavy obligations.

"When big companies show interest to come to India, we will do everything to make it attractive for them to come and invest. In that process, if there is anything to discuss, we will certainly discuss. But whatever we have done, we have done it through policy," Sithara-

Asserting the Union government's approach has helped especially after China plus one started being a concern for many industry experts, she said policies have been tailored in such a way so as

India growing when

world is in stress: CII

president-designate

KOLKATA, April 20: Sanjiv Puri, presi-

dent-designate of leading industry body

CII, said that India is growing when the

Speaking at an event here on Friday

"CII has a rich legacy built over decades.

We will certainly be looking forward to

contributing to the growth of the economy

and industry", Puri said. He said "This is

also an interesting moment because this is

India's moment. There has been numerous

policy interventions made internally, and

the global factors which give us the tail-

winds. The country is growing at a time

Puri said that there are lots of opportuni-

ties in India which has a huge talent pool.

"The world is looking at us so far as supply

chain and digital transformation are con-

cerned. India also has the advantage of the

He said big opportunities lay both in

services and manufacturing. "The country

needs to harness these opportunities. Re-

forms agenda to accelerate and enterprises

and sustainable growth which is important

thrives. Decarbonisation will address the

issue the climate change but will take time.

Enterprises and government need to work

Puri stressed the need for an inclusive

"Industry can survive when society

need to play competitiveness", Puri said.

demographic dividend", he added.

when the world is at stress.

to create livelihoods.

together", he said. (PTI)

night, Puri, also the chairman and managing

director of ITC Limited, said that the pres-

ent juncture is an interesting moment.

world is going through a phase of stress.



tion for manufacturing and for

services Speaking about inflation, she said it never crossed the tolerance band, except for one month, under the Narendra Modi government, whereas before that (pre-2014) the economy was in a bad shape and inflation was in double digits.

"At that time (pre 2014) nobody had any expectations from the country. After much hard work, we have emerged as the world's fifth largest economy and are confidently saying we will be third in the next two to two-and-half years," the Union minister said.

On employment, Sitharaman said there was lack of complete data from both the formal and informal sectors, but asserted initiatives of the Centre have ensured

done through the Finance Act that was passed in Parliament on February 1, 2023," she said.

'We just said tax treatment remains the same. Make a claim in the year you pay to the MSMEs. How can you claim when you have not made payment?" she asked.

Queried about the Indian rupee weakening against the US dollar, she said the fluctuation was due to global uncertainty, wars as well as uncertainty in supply of crude oil from the Middle East

Earlier, addressing industry leaders from Gujarat on 'Viksit Bharat -2047', she said 28 per cent of total capital under Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme has come to the state, which has shown remarkable alertness in the last 10-12 years. So semiconductor manufacturing for India comes first in Gujarat, which has a policy as well as government and ecosystem ready for manufacturing for Viksit Bharat 2047, she said.

"The IFSC at GIFT City in Gandhinagar is a big gateway for services to grow in Gujarat. A world-class financial services centre very close to Ahmedabad is just the key for India to reach that kind of global market for attracting more investment and more financial operations," Sitharaman said.

She also said Gujarat was in third position in attracting FDI in

Gems, jeweller exports in FY24 dip by 12.17% to ₹ 2.65 trillion: GJEPC

not saying this pride but while ac-

cepting its weakness. All I can say

regarding employment is that the

money given to people and start-

schemes...people in crores have

availed support. Between October

2022 and November 2023, through

the Rozgar Mela, Modi has given

government jobs to 10 lakh peo-

ple," she said. When asked about

the rule that requires larger compa-

nies to pay Micro, Small and

Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

within 45 days of receiving goods

or services, Sitharaman said the

law has been existence since 2007-

came and said the 45-day payment

is not happening within that finan-

cial year. But within that financial

year, this amount is shown as ex-

"Later MSMEs themselves

08 and is not new.

through

NEW DELHI, April 20: Gems and jewellery exports declined by 12.17 per cent to ₹2,65,187.95 crore (USD 32,022.08 million) during 2023-24, compared to the previous financial year due to high interest rates in the US and slow recovery in China, Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) data showed.

Gems and jewellery exports in FY23 stood at ₹3,01,925.97 crore (USD 37,646.17 million), according to GJEPC data.

"The last financial year was very challenging for all product categories. This was mainly due to slowdown in the US, India's biggest export market in the segment, due to high interest rates. Also, slow recovery in China post Covid-19," GJEPC chairman Vipul Shah told PTI.

Meanwhile, the overall exports of Cut and Polished diamonds declined by 25.23 per cent during

FY24 to ₹ 1,32,128.29 crores (USD 15,966.47 million) compared to ₹ 1,76,716.06 crores (USD 22,046.9 million) for the same period of previous

Provisional gross export of Polished Lab Grown Diamonds dipped by 13.79 per cent ₹ 11,611.25 crores (USD 1,402.3 million in FY24 compared to ₹ 13,468.32 crore (USD 1,680.22 million) of FY23.

However, according to the provisional export of total gold jewellery witnessed a growth of 20.57 per cent at ₹ 92,346.19 crore (USD 11,140.780 million) in FY24 against ₹ 76,589.94 crore (USD 9,538.84 million) in the previous year. Provisional gross export of silver jewellery dipped by 43 per cent in FY24 at ₹ 13,406.1 crores (USD 1,616.42 million) from ₹ 23,556.71 crores (USD 2939.9 million) in FY23. (PTI)

HDFC Bank reports strong growth in Q4 results

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 20: HDFC Bank Limited released its financial results for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2024, showcasing robust performance and significant growth across key metrics. The bank recorded a net profit of ₹165.1 billion for the quarter, marking a notable increase of 37.1% compared to the same period last year. Profit before tax (PBT) stood at ₹157.6 billion for

In the consolidated figures for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, HDFC Bank reported a profit after tax of ₹640.6 billion, reflecting a substantial growth of 39.3% over the previous fiscal year. The total balance sheet size surged to ₹36,176 billion as of March 31, 2024, a significant uptick from ₹24,661 billion reported on

March 31, 2023. Total deposits also witnessed a robust growth, reaching ₹23,798 billion, a 26.4% increase compared to the previous year. The bank's net revenue soared by 47.3% to ₹472.4 billion for the quarter, with net interest income climbing to ₹290.8 billion, up by 24.5% from the same period last year. The net interest income for the entire fiscal year surpassed ₹1 trillion, reaching ₹1,085.3 billion, indicating a growth of 25.0% over the previous fiscal year.

Despite the challenging economic environment, HDFC Bank maintained its asset quality, with net non-performing assets (NPAs) at 0.33% of net advances as of March 31, 2024. The bank's distribution network expanded significantly, with 8,738 branches and 20,938 ATMs spread across 4,065 cities and towns.

Elon Musk says India visit delayed due to Tesla obligations, looking forward to coming later this yr

NEW DELHI, April 20: American tech billionaire Elon Musk on Saturday said his proposed visit to India has been postponed due to 'very heavy Tesla obligations".

The electric carmaker Tesla CEO -- who was expected to be in India on April 21 and 22 and scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi -- wrote on X that he is looking forward to coming to India later this year.

"Unfortunately, very heavy Tesla obligations require that the visit to India be delayed, but I do very much look forward to visiting later this year," Musk wrote on X in response to a post, which stated that his India visit planned for April 21-22 has been postponed as the reason could be that he needs to attend Tesla's earnings call on April 23.

Earlier this month, he had confirmed his visit to India with a post on X saying, "Looking forward to meeting with Prime Minister @NarendraModi in India".

In June last year, Musk met with Modi during the latter's US visit and stated that he planned to visit India in 2024 while expressing confidence that Tesla would enter the Indian market soon.

His proposed visit had raised expectations that he would announce plans for electric car maker Tesla to set up shop in the country, along with his satcom venture Starlink.

It was also expected that Musk would announce plans for Tesla to set up its manufacturing unit in India and investments for the same that could be to the tune of billions of dollars and the way forward for selling Tesla electric cars in India at the earliest.



Not just electric cars, he is also eyeing the Indian market for his satellite internet business Starlink, for which regulatory approvals are awaited. Musk had in the past called for import duty reduction in India for it to be able to sell Tesla cars in the country.

His planned visit to India came weeks after the government announced a new electric vehicle policy, under which import duty concessions will be given to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like Tesla.

On Thursday, an advisor representing Tesla -- The Asia Group (TAG) -- had attended a stakeholders' meeting on the new EV policy, along with those from Vietnam's EV maker VinFast and all the major manufacturers in India, including Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata, Mahindra, Kia, Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, Renault, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi.

The stakeholder consultation meeting was aimed at seeking inputs for the guidelines to be framed for the new EV manufacturing policy.

As per the policy, the companies that would set up manufacturing facilities for EV passenger cars will be allowed to import a limited number of cars at lower customs/import duty of 15 per cent on vehicles costing USD 35,000 and above for five years from the date of issuance of the approval letter by the government.

At present, cars imported as completely built units (CBUs) attract customs duty ranging from 70 per cent to 100 per cent, depending on the engine size and cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value.

CBUs, whose CIF value is more than USD 40,000, attract a 100 per cent import duty (for petrol engines sized more than 3,000 cc and diesel engines sized more than 2,500 cc). Whereas those with CIF value under USD 40,000 attract 70 per cent duty (for petrol engines sized under 3,000 cc and diesel engines sized under 2,500 cc).

The new EV policy seeks to promote India as a manufacturing destination for EVs and attract investment from reputed global manufacturers. Last year, Tesla approached the Indian government seeking duty cuts to import its vehicles in India.

In 2022, Musk said that Tesla, which was earlier seeking a reduction in import duties to sell its vehicles in India, would not manufacture its products unless it is allowed to first sell and service its cars in the country.

In August 2021, Musk said that Tesla may set up a manufacturing unit in India if it first succeeds with imported vehicles in the country. Tesla wanted to launch its vehicles in India, "but import duties are the highest in the world by far of any

large country!" Besides Tesla, he has also been trying to start in India operations of Starlink, a constellation of 4,000 low Earth orbit satellites, to provide internet to remote locations or areas where normal communications infrastructure is not functional. Musk's satcom venture courted controversy in 2021 after it began pre-orders without proper licensing, forcing the government to clarify that Starlink was not licensed to offer satellite-based internet services in India.

The telecom department had cautioned the public not to subscribe to the services that are being advertised by the Musk-backed company.

Later, in November 2022, Starlink applied for a GMPCS (Global Mobile Personal Communication by Satellite) license.

Earlier this week, sources in the Department of Telecom said the licence application of Starlink is under process, and the government is examining the security aspects. (PTI)

HDFC Bank posts ₹ 17,257 cr profit for Q4; sets aside ₹ 10,900 cr floating provisions

MUMBAI, April 19: HDFC Bank on Saturday reported a ₹ 17,257.87 crore net profit for January-March on a consolidated basis, over 2 per cent higher than that in the preceding quarter.

Its consolidated net profit for FY24 came at 64,060 crore. On a standalone basis, the country's largest private sector lender reported a net profit of ₹ 16,511.85 crore in the January-March quarter as against ₹ 16,372.54 crore in the October-December quarter.

In July 2023, the bank merged its home loan-focused parent HDFC into itself. The city-headquartered bank set aside over ₹ 10,900 crore in floating provisions towards any setbacks in the future, courtesy ₹ 7,340 crore gain on the sale of education loans focused Credila to private equity majors.

HDFC Bank chief financial officer Srinivasan Vaidyanathan told

are created during benign times like the current phase, and stressed that it is not done in anticipation of any event.

The bank, which is among the first lenders to announce the numbers for the quarter, reported that the core net interest income grew to ₹29,080 crore for the reporting quarter, while the other income grew to ₹ 18.170 crore.

On the net interest margin (NIM), wherein it had to face investors' concerns earlier, it reported a 0.04 per cent improvement to 3.44 per cent for the reporting quarter.

Vaidyanathan declined to share any outlook on it but said that the number is influenced by the composition of the loan book and the cost it pays for the deposits, and it used to be 4-4.4 per cent in the past

18.4 per cent deposit growth on a normalized basis for FY24, will not depend on rates as an incentive to draw liabilities, Vaidyanathan said, adding that attracting retail money is the priority for it.

It reported a loan growth of over 17 per cent during the fiscal year gone by on a normalised basis, accounting for the loans which came in after the merger with HDFC Ltd, Vaidyanathan said, declining to give any outlook.

The credit-to-deposit ratio stood at 104 per cent, he said, explaining that it has shot up following the merger and if one were to exclude the impact of the same, it is at a flat level. Its overall slippages came at ₹ 7,300 crore for the quarter, and there has not been any uptick in the unsecured book stress despite the regulatory concerns on Vaidyanathan said. (PTI)

NSE IX gets SEC class relief; permits US clients to trade on equity index

NEW DELHI, April 20: NSE International Ex- set up at GIFT City in June 2017 and recognised by change (NSE IX) has received US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) class relief, allowing US clients to participate in trading Equity Index Option

Contracts on the bourse, according to a statement. The class relief allows NSE IX members to get acquainted with equity indices at NSE IX through activities with approved broker-dealers and financial

institutions in the US. Also, this class relief permits eligible broker-dealers and large financial institutions based in the US to trade on these index derivatives options contracts through NSE IX members, subject to compliance with the applicable laws, the bourse said in the statement on Fri-

day. NSE IX is an International multi-assets exchange

the International Financial Services Centre Authority

Earlier in November 2020, it became the first International Exchange in Gift City to get an exemption under part 30 by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC).

The CFTC exemption enables NSE IX members to trade in futures derivatives for US clients.

These exemptions permit NSE IX members to accept US clients' funds directly for the purpose of trading in futures and options contracts on NSE IX even without the members having to get registered with the CFTC and SEC as a futures commission merchant or SEC member respectively. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Anurag wants to become

Anurag is also a brown belt in Karate, showcasing his diverse interests and achievements. Anurag comes from a family with a strong academic background; his father owns a furniture shop and holds a postgraduate degree, while his mother is a college teacher in Mathematics. He also has an elder sister who has excelled academically, completing her masters in mathematics with distinction.

Congress wants to remove

he claimed. Shah said that if people had voted for Congress in the previous Lok Sabha elections, Kota would have become a stronghold of PFI. "People voted for Modi, he has finished PFI and put them (PFI people) behind bars. Now these people say they will remove the ban on PFI". "Do you think PFI should be banned or not?" the home minister said.

Urging people to vote for the BJP candidate, Shah said, "Press the button of the lotus symbol on the EVM so hard that electric shocks are felt in Italy." Shah was addressing an election rally in support of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, the BJP's candidate and sitting MP from the Kota Lok Sabha seat.

He said that on one side is Modi who became a world leader due to his hard work and patriotism, while on the other side is "Rahul Baba" who came from dynasty politics. Shah alleged that the Congress was anti-development. "The Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project was not allowed to move forward by the former Gehlat government for five years, but the Bhajan Lal government worked to take it forward in these months," he said.

Earlier, in an election rally in Bhilwara, Shah expressed confidence that Rajasthan was going to give all 25 Lok Sabha seats to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the third time.

He also targeted former chief minister Ashok Gehlot, saying that he was "stuck" in the election campaign of his son Vaibhav Gehlot, the Congress candidate from the Jalore parliamentary constituency.

"The son is going to lose the election by a huge margin," the Union minister claimed, referring to Vaibhav "The first phase of elections was held yesterday (Friday). All 12 seats of Rajasthan that voted in the first phase will go to Narendra Modi. Rajasthan is going to make a hat-trick of giving all 25 seats to Narendra Modi

'he said. Targeting Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and that they go on vacations abroad every three months. "Priyanka Gandhiji returned from Thailand after a vacation in the middle of the elections," he added Shah said voting for Modi meant voting for the creation of "Mahan Bharat". "Modi fulfilled all promises he made in the last 10 years," he added. The Union home minister hit out at Congress leaders for not attending

"The public will never forgive those who did not visit Ram Lalla out of greed for vote bank," he said. Shah said that during the former UPA government's rule, terrorists used to infiltrate and carry out attacks. "When the Modi government was formed, terrorists attacked again in Pulwama. They forgot it was not a Congress government anymore but a BJP government and that Narendra Modi is the prime minister. In just 10

the consecration ceremony of the Ayodhya Ram temple, alleging that they were afraid of losing their vote bank.

days, Modi eliminated terrorists by conducting surgical and air strikes in Pakistan," he added. There is peace in Kashmir and the northeast. Naxalism is on the verge of ending. Modi has worked to secure the country and make it prosperous. In 10 years, Modi worked to bring the economy from number 11 to five. Make Modi the prime minister for the third time and India will become the third-largest economy," Shah said. The Union minister also highlighted the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission as an achievement of the

Karbi Anglong, WKA celebrate

to them, and we must continue to prioritise education in the years ahead," Tokbi stated. Tokbi emphasised the significance of this success when compared to the results of the past decade. It is worth mentioning that in 2022, the HSLC pass percentage for Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong was 49.92% and 42.71% respectively, while in 2023, it increased to 75.47% and 66.33% respectively.

Meanwhile, Chandrasing Teron High School in Diphu, a government institution, celebrated a remarkable achievement with a 100% pass rate. Out of 23 students, who appeared in the examination, seven of them achieved 1st Division and 16 securing 2nd Division, showcasing their dedication and hard work.

Modi alleges conspiracy

number of seats to the BJP, which has made the country strong. India was earlier considered among "fragile five", but today every country in the world wants to strengthen friendship with India and investors want to invest in the country. India today is among the world's top five economies, he said. India today is not the one that follows, but has become the "first mover". "This has happened in just ten years." In this election, INDIA bloc leaders are going around with an "old tape recorder," while Modi and his friends

are seeking blessings once again with the track record, the prime minister said.

The Congress and INDI Alliance's focus during the campaign is Modi, his parivaar, and false allegations about the prime minister, while Modi's focus is on India's development in the 21st century, its prosperity and its global image. The NDA government is doing record investment in social, physical and digital infrastructure, the prime minister said. Modi said the Karnataka Congress government's only focus is corruption.

Bengaluru's founder Nadaprabhu Kempegowda had dreamt of a magnificent city, but the Congress government in very less time, has ruined the situation here. Congress has changed tech city into tanker city, and has left it to the water mafia, he said.

Whether it is agriculture or urban infrastructure, the budget is being cut in every sector in Karnataka, he said, adding, Congress' focus is only on corruption, but not on the issues faced by people of Bengaluru. "Only Central government projects are going at a fast pace in Karnataka," Modi said.

Karnataka is going to the polls in two phases. While 14 Lok Sabha segments in the southern parts of the state will vote on April 26, the remaining 14 constituencies in the northern parts will vote in the second phase on May 7. (PTI)

Plastic production threatens

budget, the study said. Under these two growth scenarios, cumulative GHG emissions from primary plastic production could total 106-126.6 GtCO2e between 2019 and 2050, which is 21-25 per cent of the remaining carbon budget. The share of the carbon budget allocated to primary plastics increases to 26-31 per cent when considering a smaller carbon budget that offers a 67 per cent chance of staying below the 1.5 degrees Celsius

The researchers said such detailed modelling of individual primary plastic polymers, where production value chain stages are fully taken into account, can provide a sound technically neutral and scientific foundation to inform the global plastic treaty and enable stronger coordination with other global treaties on climate change.

Such modelling is also critical to understanding the climate impacts of proposed mitigation measures under the treaty, as most of these are either polymer-specific or would have different implications per polymer, they said. Swiss non-profit EA - Earth Action released "The Plastic Overshoot Day" report last week, saying global plastic waste generation has risen by 7.11 per cent since 2021. The report said the world is expected to generate 220 million tons of plastic waste this year, 70 million tons of which will end up polluting the environment. (PTI)

Jharna Saikia, Devashree Kashyap bag 2nd, 3rd positions in HSLC Exam While Jharna scored 590 marks, Devashree scored 588 in examination

BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 20: Jharna Saikia, a student of the Sankardev Sishu Bidya Niketan in Biswanath Chariali, bagged the second position in the HSLC examinations this year.

Jharna, who is the daughter of Surendra Saikia and Jonali Saikia, hails from the Garehagi village in BIswanath district. She scored a total of 590 marks and held the second position out of the top 10. She scored 98 in Assamese, 100 in English, Social Science and in Advance Mathematics, 94 in Mathematics, 98 in General Science.

A joyous environment prevailed inside the Sankardev Shisu Bidya Niketan, her native village as well as in the entire Biswanath Chariali town. Several organisations and individuals congratulated and felicitated her for her covetous achieve-

While Jharna's father is a businessman, her mother is an Anganwadi worker.

Expressing her joy, Jharna said that she studied 10 hours per day regularly and took help from tutors in some subjects. She likes to read books and

"I will pursue my higher secondary studies from Biswanath Chariali and wish to become a doctor in future," said Jharna.

Meanwhile, Biswanath MLA Pramod Borthakur also handed over a cash token worth ₹50,000 for to Jharna for her academic achievement. The school authority too has announced a cash reward of ₹ 20,000 for her.

Our Nagaon correspondent adds: Devashree Kashyap from Ramanujan Senior Secondary School, a leading private educational institute of the town, has brought laurels to the district by bagging the top 3rd position in the High School Leaving Certificate Examination, 2024, the results of which have been declared by Assam Board of Secondary Education (SEBA) on Saturday.

Devashree secured a total of 588 marks with 99 marks in Assamese, 96 marks in English, 96 marks in general mathematics, 97 marks in general science, 100 marks in social science and advanced mathematics respectively

She is the daughter of Jayanta Tamuli and Junmoni Bora, employees of the transport department and residents of Nagaon Shiva Nagar at Amulap-

"I was expecting good results, but I didn't expect to get a place in the state level. I'm very happy to achieve the rank. I studied regularly and did not take any private tuition during the session," Devashree Kashyap said while interacting with a

"The teachers of our school and my parents are behind this success," Devashree said adding that she will pursue the higher secondary course in the science stream in the same institute here

Our Sivasagar correspondent adds: Students



of several schools in Sivasagar have passed out with flying colours in the HSLC examination, the results of which were declared on Saturday.

The Sivasagar Fuleswari Girls' HS School achieved a 100 per cent results in the HSLC examinations. Out of 140 students that appeared from the school, 85 students passed out in the first division with one student receiving distinction marks, 11 students got star marks and 55 were placed in the second division. In Bezbaruah HS School, 28 students got first division, 90 second division, while one student failed.

In Government HS School, 66 students got first division including six students with distinction marks and 25 star holders. Of the total 123 students who appeared in the HSLC examination, one student failed.

Newlook Academy achieved 100 per cent pass percentage with six distinctions and 10 star marks. Of the 20 students who appeared in the examination, four passed in the first division.

From the TRG Town HS School, one student got distinction, six star marks, 49 first division and 5 second division while 3 failed. The Salaguri HS School achieved 100 per cent pass percentage with three students getting distinction marks, 11 star marks, 13 achieved first division, seven achieved second division and one third division.

Out of the 26 students who appeared in the HSLC examination from the Melachakar Sanjardev Sishu Bidya Naketan, 20 passed in the first division, including one distinction and four star marks and six second division.

From the Holy Name School, 111 students got

divisions, while two students failed. Meanwhile, from the Adarsha Bidya Bhawan 12 students got first division including one distinction and two star marks. Out of 56 students from the Gadhula Brown School, 22 students passed in the first division including two distinctions and seven star marks. From the Twinkle Star Academy nine students passed, of who eight achieved the first divi-

Our Demow correspondent adds: The results of the HSLC Examination were declared on Saturday where students of different educational institutions in Demow.

The Pass Percentage of the HSLC Examination 2024 in Sivasagar district is 85.1 per cent. In St. Mary's School, Raisai, Demow a total of 39 students appeared, among who three students secured distinction marks and 18 students secured star marks. In advanced mathematics, Annaldeep Das, Neetish Neehar Konwar and Shrilyghya Borgohain of St. Mary's School secured 100 marks. Annaldeep Das secured 93.33p er cent.

In Hem Chandra Borgohain English Model English High School, four students secured the first division and five students secured the second division. In Swarna Bidyapith School, four students secured the first division and six students secured the second division with letter marks in computer and English.

In Demow Higher Secondary School, four students secured star marks, 23 students secured the first division, 52 students secured the second division and 33 students secured the third division. In Nitaipukhuri Higher Secondary School, 13 stu-

cured the second division and one student secured the third division.

Our Margherita correspondent adds: The St. James School, private English medium of Margherita achieved 100 per cent pass percentage in the HSLC examination result, which was declared by SEBA on Saturday. Of a total of 40 students, one student got distinction marks, eight students secured star marks, 29 secured first division and 11 secured second division

Sushil Kalita co-owner of ST. James School Margherita said, "Every year our students pass out with flying colours, where headmaster Navan Chakma and all the teaching staff work in a dedicated manner to impart quality education to the students." The Margherita Gandhi Vidya High School, A'R and T Co School Margherita and Emmanuel English School have also achieved a 100 per cent pass percentage in the HSLC examination. Anil Kumar Singh, headmaster of the

Margherita Gandhi Vidya Mandir high school said that this year a total of 15 students appeared in the matric examination, among who two students secured first division and 13 students secured second

Our Kokrajhar correspondent adds: The Chirang district has achieved the highest pass percentage of 91.29 per cent in the HSLC examina-

On the other hand, the Baksa district achieved the third highest pass percentage with 86.9 per cent in the HSLC examination.

Notably, the Chirang district had achieved the first position in the examination last year.

achieved 100 per cent pass percentage with 52 first divisions and five second divisions respectively. The UN Academy, Kokrajhar has achieved a pass per centage of 97.93 per cent in the HSLC final examinations.

The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro extended best wishes to all successful students in the HSLC final examinations across the state.

Speaking on the occasion, Boro said, "HSLC is the first step towards higher education in every student's life. I congratulated all students who have achieved cleared the HSLC examinations with good results."

On the overall pass percentage performance in Chirang and Baksa districts of BTR, Boro extended his hearty congratulations to all students and said that a healthy academic atmosphere is developing in the state at present.

Heartiest congratulations to all who have successfully cleared their HSLC Examination, 2024. Both the districts have made us incredibly proud and I convey my best wishes for the future endeavours of the students. It's a matter of great pride for BTR that Chirang and Baksa have secured the first and third positions respectively among the best performing districts in the HSLC examination," he said. "This is a reflection of our commitment and renewed push to augment the region's education sector. Kudos to all the students, teachers and officials for their dedication towards academic excellence," Boro further said.

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha have also extended their con-

25 students injured in Vijay rally at Ďalgaon

HT Correspondent DALGAON, April 20: At least 25 students were injured in an acci-

dent that occurred during a Vijay rally, which was organised at Dalgaon to celebrate their good performance in the HSLC examination, the results of which were declared on Saturday.

According to sources, the students of the Sialmari Jatiya Vidyalaya of Dalgaon took out a Vijay rally soon after the results were declared. About 50 students were on board the vehicle bearing the registration number 'AS 25 CC 5117', which suddenly turned turtle. 25 students were injure, among who three students sustained serious injuries. All of them were rushed to the Kharupetia BPHC. which referred them to the Mangaldai Civil Hospital for better treatment. The teachers of the school also reportedly took part in

Assam: 37 nominations found valid for third phase of LS polls; scrutiny for Kokrajhar due

GUWAHATI, April 20: Altogether 37 nomination papers were found to be valid for three Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam that will go to polls in the third phase on May 7, officials said.

The scrutiny of the papers for Kokrajhar, however, is yet to be completed, they said.

In the Guwahati constituency, out of 10 candidates who filed their nomination papers, eight were found to be valid, including BJP's Bijuli Kalita Medhi and Congress' Mira Borthakur Goswami, who are expected to be locked in a direct fight for the prestigious seat, which is current held by the BJP.

For the Dhubri constituency, 15 candidates were found to have filed valid nominations after scrutiny, with papers of four nominees getting rejected.

The minority-dominated seat is likely to witness a triangular contest among AIUDF chief and sitting MP Badruddin Aimal, seeking to return to the Lower House for the fourth consecutive term.



Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain and NDA nominee Zaved Islam of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP).

In Barpeta, one set of nomination papers was rejected, leaving 14 candidates in the fray, the officials said.

The fight for Barpeta is also expected to be a three-cornered one among CPI(M)'s Manoranjan Talukdar, AGP's Phani Bhusan Choudhury and Congress' Deep Bayan.

Congress' Abdul Khaleque holds the Barpeta seat, but he was not given the

The scrutiny of nominations for Kokrajhar constituency could not be completed on Sunday as per schedule.

"It has been adjourned... it will be done on Monday," an official said, without elaborating on the reason.

A total of 16 candidates had filed their nominations in Kokrajhar, which is reserved for the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category. Among them is sitting MP Naba Kumar Sarania, whose writ petition in the Gauhati High Court, challenging the striking down of his ST (Plains) status by the State Level Scrutiny Committee, was dismissed on Thursday.

He had been representing the constituency as an independent since 2014. The last date of withdrawal of nominations is April 22.

Out of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state, polling in the first phase for five constituencies was conducted on Saturday, while it is scheduled for another five seats on April 26. (PTI)

BJP trying to destroy Constitution adopted during Cong rule: Mahima

SILCHAR, April 20: Congress leader Mahima Singh on Saturday accused the BJP of "attacking and trying to destroy" the Constitution which was adopted after Independence during the rule of the grand old party.

Addressing a press conference here, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) communications coordinator for Assam alleged that unemployment was at an all-time high but the grand old party would do everything possible to solve this problem if it comes to power at the Centre.

"While the Constitution was adopted during the Congress rule, the BJP is attacking it and trying to destroy it. Demonetisation, wrongful GST, unconstitutional electoral bonds are all results of BJP's 'Mann ki Baat'," she added. On the other hand, the "futuristic vision" of the Congress resulted in the implementation of the Right to Education, Right to Information and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Singh claimed.

"The pain and plight of every common Indian will be reflected in their votes this Singh said that for the first time in 140

years, Census has not been conducted in 13 years, while unemployment is at its highest in 45 years. "During the UPA tenure, 75 lakh people got jobs every year from 2004-2012, while the number was 29 lakh per year from 2013-2019. It dipped further after 2019,' she added.

On inflation, the Congress spokesperson claimed that LPG cylinders have become costlier by 120 per cent, milk by 71 per cent, flour and mustard oil by 59 per cent, diesel by 64 per cent and petrol by 37 per cent as compared to 2019. "Crimes against Dalits have increased by 48 per cent, the number of migrants from India has more than doubled, and 23 crore Indians have been pushed into poverty under BJP rule," she claimed.

India ranks 111 out of 125 in the World Hunger Index, while 86 women are raped every day in India, she claimed.

Singh claimed that the Congress manifesto 'Nyay Patra' guarantees fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. (PTI)

Two summer special trains to operate from Guwahati

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 20: The

Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) will operate two pairs of special trains from Guwahati to meet the escalating demand of passengers during the summer rush.

One special train will operate between Guwahati and Sambalpur in Odisha, while another will operate between Guwahati and Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra in Jammu and Kashmir. Both these trains will operate for 10 trips each in both directions. Both the special trains will consist of AC 3-tier, sleeper class and general seating coaches for the convenience of passengers

Accordingly, the Sambalpur -Guwahati Special will depart from Sambalpur at 18:50 hours on every Monday from April 22 to June 24 to reach Guwahati at 01:20 hours on Wednesday. In return direction, the Guwahati – Sambalpur Special will depart from Guwahati at 08:00 hours on every Wednesday from April 24 to June 26 to reach Sambalpur at 16:15 hours on the next

During its both ways journey, the special train will run via Kamakhya, New Bongaigaon, New Alipurduar Jn., New Jalpaiguri, Kishanganj, Malda Town, Bhattanagar, Kharagpur, Balasore, Kapilas Road, Angul, Kerejanga

Also, the Shri Mata Vaishno

Devi Katra - Guwahati Special will depart from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra at 21:30 hours on every Friday from April 26 to June 28 to reach Guwahati at 19:10 hours on Sunday. In return direction, the Guwahati - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Special will depart from Guwahati at 23:20 hours on every Monday from April 29 to July 1 to reach Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra at 20:45 hours on Wednesday. During its both ways journey,

the special train will run via Kamakhya, Goalpara Town, New Bongaigaon, New Cooch Behar, New Jalpaiguri, Kishanganj, Katihar, Barauni, Hajipur, Gorakhpur, Gonda, Bareilly, Saharanpur, Ambala Cantt, Ludhiana, Pathankot Cantt, Jammu Tawi etc. Another special train, the Mysuru - Muzaffarpur - Mysuru is being operated between Mysuru and Muzaffarpur for 08 trips each on every Monday from Mysuru (with effect from April 15) and on every Thursday from Muzaffarpur (with effect from April 18). During its both way's journey the train will have stoppages at Jolarpettai, Vijaywada Jn., Palasa, Malda Town, Kumed-

pur, Katihar, Barauni Jn. etc. The details of stoppages and timings of these trains are available at IRCTC website and are also being notified in various newspapers and social media platforms of

Jorhat registers 79.89 % of Assam Rifles organises Noted social worker Dimbeswar polling in LS elections

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 20: The final poll percentage for the 14 Jorhat Lok Sabha constituency is 79.89 per cent. A Jorhat district administration official stated the Mahmora Legislative Assembly constituency with 81.81 per cent registered the highest poll percentage among 10 Legislative Assembly constituencies of the Jorhat Parliamentary seat. This was followed by the Nazira Legislative Assembly, which registered 81.71 per cent of polling. Majuli with 81 per cent recorded the third highest poll percentage

among the 10 Legislative Assembly seats, while Jorhat Legislative Assembly constituency recorded the lowest poll percentage of 75.49 per cent. While the poll percentage of Demow was 80.93 per cent, Sivasagar registered 80.58 per cent of polling, Titabar with 79.41 per cent of polling, Teok with 79.39 per cent of polling, Mariani with 77.73 per cent of polling and Sonari with 80.47 per cent of polling and Jorhat with 75.49

cleanliness drive

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 20: The Assam Ri-

fles organised a cleanliness drive at Lokra Garrison under Sonitpur district on Saturday. The Assam Rifles in collaboration with local communities conducted a cleanliness drive at the Lokra Garrison. This initiative not only reflects their commitment to environmental stewardship, but also underscores their dedication to fostering positive relationships with the communities they serve. By actively engaging locals in such endeavors, the Assam Rifles not only contribute to the cleanliness and beautification of the area, but also strengthen bonds of trust and cooperation. Such initiatives are pivotal in enhancing the perception of the Assam Rifles as an integral part of the community, working hand in hand

Basumatary passes away

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 20: Noted social worker and retired teacher, Dimbeswar Basumatary breathed his last at the Tezpur Medical College in Tezpur.

Basumatary was a resident of Purani Ghatua area under Bahbari Mouza in Sonitpur district. He was suffering from prolonged illness. He was 75.

Born on January 16, 1949 late Dimeswar Basumatary did his matriculation in 1971 from the Chandranath Sarmah HS School and passed his HS final from the Tezpur College. He graduated from the Darrang College in 1985. He served in the Purani Ghatua LP School and retired as CRCC of Bandarmari cluster in 2013. He was also the general secretary of the West Tezpur Anchalick ABSU from 1984 to 1986. He also served the Bahbari Anchalick Boro Sahitya Sabha in different capacities from v1996 to 1999.

Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Award conferred on social worker Uttam Teron

Award includes Rs 50,000 in cash, citation, memento, photo of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, April 20: The 6th Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Award 2024 has been conferred on Uttam Teron, founder of the Parijat Academy.

The award was presented to Teron during the 165th birth anniversary celebrations of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma at Shree Shree Madhavadeba International Auditorium, Shrimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati on April 18.

Ramesh Ch Deka, vice-chancellor of the Cotton University and chief guest of the programme presented the award to him. The award includes Rs 50,000 in cash, a citation, a memento and a photo of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. Ajit Boro, president of Gurudev

Kalicharan Brahma Trust delivered the welcome speech. The meeting was presided over by Taren Boro, former president of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. Basistha Bujarbaruah, RSS Kshetra prasarak, Assam Kshetra inaugurated the programme. Floral tributes were offered to Gurudev by the guests.

Speaking on the occasion, Ramesh Ch Deka said, "Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma inspired people to develop spirituality, which helps people to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Gurudev is not only the Dharma guru, but a great social reformer. He is truly a Gurudev for

The meeting was attended by Surjya Kt. Hazarika, President of Axom Sahitya Sabha, Nilo Kt Gayary, general secretary of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Hemanta Narzary, president of the Guwahati Boro Association Ganesh Daimary, secretary of Bathou Mahasabha and many more. A book titled Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and Brahma Dharma written by Dhiraj Kumar Bayan and released by Nilo Kt Gayary, general secretary of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and mouthpiece of the trust 'Gurudevni Bwswn' is being inaugurated by Hemanta Narzary, president of the Guwahati Boro Association.



Editor's pick

Rahul Gandhi holds on to Wayanad despite speculation

ven as the Indian National Congress was burning midnight oil about the Lok Sabha constituency from where Rahul Gandhi would contest this time, The Pioneer has reported that the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi clan would not leave Wayanad from where he was elected with a mammoth majority of four lakh votes in the 2019 edition of the General Election. The report was prepared after speaking to a cross-section of the electorate in the Wayanad constituency who were unanimous in their opinion that Rahul Gandhi should contest from Wayanad

Those who reacted to the queries posed to them included hardcore CPI(M) members and activists who made it known that Rahul should register a much bigger majority than that of the 2019 poll because the opponent happened to be Annie Raja of the CPI and K Surendran of the BJP. Annie, the spouse of D Raja, CPI's national general secretary, had rubbed Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the wrong way and the CPI(M) cadres consider it as a cardinal sin. Raja too had publicly questioned the capability of Vijayan and this made the CPI(M) activists furious. Had the Congress or BJP leaders criticized Vijayan, they would not have bothered but the CPI had crossed the Lakshman Rekha (it could be Stalinist Rekha since the comrades do not accept Ramayana). The CPI(M) comrades would certainly teach Annie Raja a lesson or two in the art of politics. The truth is that the CPI(M) leaders wanted Rahul Gandhi to contest from Wayanad so that the CPI would lose one seat for sure.

The decision to field Surendran, the Kerala State president of the BJP, was made much later. Surendran himself knows that he would lose by a big margin but he has to kowtow the party line. The information coming out of the BJP office is that he may be given a gubernatorial position even if he loses the security deposit. There are no suitable candidates in Kerala BJP to challenge the supremacy of Rahul Gandhi and the Congress. The question being asked by Wayand voters is that how many people remember the names of the 2019 challengers to Rahul

What is interesting is that the animosity between the CPI(M) and Congress has come down drastically with Gandhi filing the nomination from Wayanad. Though the Congress leaders lambast the CPI(M), it is just a façade to convince the hardcore members of these parties that there is no alliance between them. But what the people of the State see in TV channels and newspapers is the video images and pictures of Sitaram Yechury and D Raja hugging and kissing Rahul Gandhi while in Tripura former CPI(M) Chief Minister Manik Sarkar openly campaigning for the Congress party's candidates.

Kerala is the only State where they act as if they are rivals and enemies. By the next election, one can see the Congress and the CPI(M) fighting it together in Kerala against the BJP-led front (provided the Hindutva party leadership throws out all the rotten eggs from its basket). There is no difference between the Congress and the CPI(M) as of date.

Political pundits have been asking both parties to officially legalize the ties so that the entire secular parties could be arrayed under the flag of the Congress across the country against the "communal and fascist" forces. The secular parties include the Muslim League! In Marxist parlance, they say that whoever aligns with the CPI(M) is secular while the BJP is "communal and fascist". The CPI(M) does not have any issues in accepting the former NDA constituents as allies once they call off the marriage of convenience with the BJP. Telugu Desam of Andhra Pradesh, BJD of Orissa, BSP and JD(U) are some of the major political outfits whose secularist credentials depend on their ties

The press meeting addressed by A K Antony, the Bheeshma Pitamah of the Congress on 9 April 2024 at Thiruvananthapuram was an indicator of how political marriages take place in Kerala. While Antony was cursing his son Anil Antony who is contesting from Pathanamthitta as a BJP candidate and asking the electorate to ensure the defeat of his son, he was waxing eloquence on Anto Antony, the Congress candidate who is pitted against Anil. The former defence minister lambasted the BJP as anti-nationals, communalists and dictators. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Both Sunak and Keir Starmer are failing voters before national elections

ritain is drifting towards a general election later b a general election and this year that is increasingly resembling a slow bicycle race. Opinion Poll released on April 18 shows satisfaction with both Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer falling - both have far more voters dissatisfied with them than happy. This is scarcely surprising. Britain's social problems are piling up and the country is drifting into escalating international conflict, yet neither offers any solutions.

Nor do they even disagree with each other. Commons exchanges about Liz Truss's book and Angela Rayner's tax affairs cannot mask the fact that the two front benches are singing, from the same sheet, a hymn without words or a discernible tune.

For sure, that leaves the present advantage with the Labour Party. The Tories have been in government for the last 14 years. They bear the direct responsibility for the present crises, for the underfunding of the NHS, the pollution in our rivers, collapsing local authorities and endorsement of Israel's Gaza genocide, supported by British arms. The Tories also have to answer for both Boris Johnson's corruption and mendacity in office, not to mention his fatal blundering during the pandemic. as well as for Truss's madcap

economic mismanagement. And, as when the last prolonged period of Conservative government drew towards a close in the 1990s, the party is engulfed in one scandal after another, as today's allegations against Mark Menzies under-

most Conservative Even

backbenchers appear to realise that they are politically doomed. Those not planning to abandon politics for more lucrative pastimes are already manoeuvring for the post-election reckoning. For example, SuellaBraverman has declared that she does not want Sunak to commit in the Tory election manifesto to withdrawing from the European Convention on Human Rights.

That is why Starmer's leadership of Labour is such a danger. He has abandoned every policy that might make a difference to people's lives, that could shift Britain in a new direction. Instead, he offers Sunakism without Sunak: the same tax rates, same spending limits, same foreign policy. With this non-programme, whatever relief the electorate feels at the eviction of the Tories will surely soon evaporate. It will become clear that

But by this time the two parties will no longer be as closely aligned as they are at present. The choice will be between floundering centrist liberalism and aggressive right-wing freemarket populism. (IPA Service)

India's faltering neighborhood diplomacy: Challenges and setbacks

placed foreign policy at the forefront of its election agenda, with Prime Minister Modi emphasizing a shift towards prioritizing relations with neighboring countries over the Act East policy. Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar has been actively campaigning, highlighting India's enhanced global image and influence within the G20 framework. However, the focus on attaining a seat at the High Table has overshadowed the Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP), which was introduced in 2008 but has faced challenges in implementation due to both internal and external fac-

Despite assurances from Jaishankar that sentiments towards India remain positive among the populace in neighboring nations, the reality paints a different picture, with anti-India sentiments prevalent in many countries. Moreover, initiatives such as Act East have not lived up to expectations, despite various supplementary efforts such as "sab ka saath sab ka vikas," SAGAR, Vishva Mitra, and First Security Responder.

In his book "Defending India," former Minister Jaswant Singh reflects on India's strategic challenges, highlighting the constraints posed by geographical boundaries such as the Macmahon Line, Durand Line, Line of Actual Control (LAC), and Line of Control (LoC). Despite being a former regional hegemon, India faces complex dynamics with its neighbors, particularly Pakistan and China, which limit its connectivity and influence in the

scape of political ideolo-

scape of ponucai rucorogies, the concept of Ram

Rajya stands out as a beacon of

pure democratic governance, em-

bodying ideals of inclusivity, jus-

tice, and welfare for all citizens.

Rooted in ancient Indian philoso-

phy and perpetuated through con-

temporary political discourse,

Ram Rajya transcends religious

and political boundaries, offering

a holistic framework for societal

transformation. In this article, we

aim to explore the multifaceted

dimensions of Ram Rajya, merg-

ing historical insights with con-

temporary perspectives to

elucidate its significance in shap-

ing the Indian socio-political

The notion of Ram Rajya finds

its origins in ancient Indian texts

and philosophical musings,

where it symbolizes an idyllic

state governed by righteousness

and compassion. Unlike Western

paradigms of governance, which

often prioritize the interests of the

powerful, Ram Rajya embraces

an ethos akin to the survival of

the weakest, emphasizing inclu-

sivity and uplifting those at the

bottom of the socio-economic

pyramid. This distinctive ap-

proach to governance aligns

seamlessly with democratic prin-

ciples, where the welfare of every

individual takes precedence over

Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle

of non-violence and the torch-

bearer of India's freedom strug-

gle, espoused Ram Rajva as the

epitome of Swaraj, or self-rule.

For Gandhi, Ram Rajya was not

merely a theological construct but

passion, and welfare formed the

cornerstone of governance, tran-

scending religious boundaries.

Gandhi's interpretation of Ram

Rajya, therefore, stood in stark

contrast to the communal narra-

tives propagated by certain fac-

tions during India's tumultuous

Central to understanding Ram

Rajya is its commitment to social

justice and inclusivity. Unlike

systems that perpetuate inequal-

ity, this vision of governance

seeks to bridge the gap between

the privileged and the underpriv-

ileged, ensuring that opportuni-

ties are accessible to every

citizen. This commitment res-

onates with the essence of

democracy, where the voice of

the weakest is as significant as

that of the strongest, fostering a

society where every individual

feels a sense of security and be-

longing.Moreover, Ram Rajya

recognizes the interconnected-

journey towards independence.

societal hierarchies.

practical

blueprint for

societal trans-

formation. He

envisaged a

state where

justice, com-

icy (NFP) aimed to reshape India's relationships with its neighbors, extending its reach to countries like Mauritius, Iran, and Myanmar. Key objectives included fostering friendly regimes, promoting economic ties, and addressing neighbors' genuine concerns without politicizing diplomacy.

However, the rise of an aspirational India and China's assertive tactics, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and aggressive diplomacy, have posed unforeseen challenges to India's strategic goals.

Amidst the fluctuations of regional politics, the dynamics of regional rivalries have remained ever-present. Scholars from Nepal were among the first to observe and articulate these shifts. Referencing the wisdom of their founding father, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, who likened Nepal to a yam between two boulders-China and Indiathese scholars amended the analogy to include a third boulder: the United States. Until recently, the Maldives staunchly adhered to an "India First" policy, publicly declaring their allegiance as the sole country to do so.

The political landscape in the Maldives has shifted dramatically, with President Muizzu now advocating for an "India Out" stance, demanding the removal of 88 Indian soldiers ahead of next month's elections. Muizzu's remarks suggest a strained relationship with Delhi, hinting at perceived attempts by India to exert undue influence.

Given its strategic importance

Ram Rajya: Ancient Wisdom

for Modern Politics

has become a focal point for geopolitical maneuvering. While currently aligning with China, India's approach could have been more tactful towards its smallest neighbor. Stirring up the Kachhatheevu issue, despite its resolution in 2015, seems to have backfired, with both Modi and Jaishankar's intentions to politically challenge the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu and INC resulting in ire from Sri Lankan media and citizens, particularly among the fishing communities comprising both Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils.

Donald Lu, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia and Central Asia, has hailed Sri Lanka's economic resurgence as

remarkable success story, attributing it to concessional loans from India

and assistance from USAID. However, any disruption to this progress could reignite anti-India sentiments and potentially push Sri Lanka further towards China, given its substantial debt of USD 10 billion to Beijing.

Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has initiated an "India Out" campaign, signaling a shift in political dynamics. China's significant investments in projects such as a submarine port near Cox's Bazar, capable of accommodating 8 to 10 submarines, underscore its expanding influence in the region.

Additionally, Bhutan narrowly avoided a contentious land swap with China under the previous government, a move that could have jeopardized the Siliguri Corridor and exacerbated the India-Bhutan-China trijunction dispute. The new government led by Lotay Tshering may opt to postpone any decisions regarding the

In Myanmar, the military's grip on power is slipping amidst a fierce civil conflict with Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and the National Unity Government (NUG). Recent developments have seen the military lose control of key border areas with China, Bangladesh, India, and Thailand to EAO forces. Of particular concern to India is the Sittwe Port, which holds strategic importance for the Kaladan project and the trilateral highway connecting India, Myanmar, and

Thailand. Reports from **DEGREE OF THOUGHT** Reuters suggest Dipak Kurmi that nearby junta troops have re-

treated, raising concerns of an imminent attack on Sittwe. However, Sohel Kazan, executive director of Bharat Freight, provided reassurance last week, stating that a deal between the junta and the Rakhine state government will ensure the safety of Sittwe. If accurate, this development would be a positive outcome amidst the ongoing turmoil in Myanmar.

The Kaladan project, initiated back in 2008, remains far from completion, significantly impacting India's flagship Act East initiatives. This delay underscores the need for Delhi to reassess its relationship with Myanmar's

Meanwhile, there's a growing regional consensus on the revival of SAARC, yet India's steadfast policy of refraining from engaging with Pakistan until it addresses terrorism concerns has been further complicated by the revocation of Article 370.

Despite the World Bank estimating a substantial trade potential of USD 15 to 20 billion between India and Pakistan. strained relations persist. India's Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP) has faltered, partly due to its expanding global ambitions, which have diverted attention from regional engagements.

Additionally, India's competition with China, despite geographical advantages, remains a challenge. The focus on maritime endeavors under NFP and Act East has led to neglect of inland connectivity, highlighting the need for a more balanced approach.

While the government touts the shining progress in the North East, the reality in Manipur paints a different picture, highlighting the challenges in the region. Despite aspirations for connectivity within the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) framework and initiatives like the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor, little tangible progress has been made. India's attention to its neighborhood has wavered, resulting in a failure to effectively secure its pe-

Some diplomats suggest that India should establish clear red lines to navigate these complex dynamics. Winning the trust and cooperation of neighboring countries has become an increasingly daunting task in light of these challenges. (The writer can be

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Special on Mahavir Jayanti

Mahavira: Not only worshiped, also to be imbibed in life

By: Lalit Garg

The entire life of Mahavira is a living inspiration for the rise of self and others. He has illuminated millions and millions of people with his aura of positivity. Therefore becoming a Mahavir is a symbol of the meaning of life. To become a Mahavir means to lead a healthy life. to develop immunity, to illuminate the soul and become a person who is self-reliant. Every year we celebrate the birth aning community's unwavering niversary of Lord Mahavir, but this year the birth anniversary has to be purposeful, not mere planning. For this, every person should do spiritual practice to look within himself, Mahavir is not only worshiped, but should be imbibed in life. It is necessary that we inculcate the teachings given by Mahavira in our life and

Every person prepares to become a Mahavir, then only one can get rid of problems. Mahavir can only become a person who is completely devoted to the goal, whose lifestyle is restrained and disciplined, who has the capacity to bear the sufferings. One who can maintain equanimity, restraint and balance even in adverse circumstances, who is ready to practice silence and heat the body. In whose mind there is a feeling of coexistence towards the whole being. One who not only knows how to change his destiny through effort, but also wishes for a bright future for the entire humanity.

Mahavir was born centuries ago, but his life and teachings are more effective and relevant in today's time of crisis and many diseases. Mahavir is a wave of health-evolution, a smokeless crest of healthy life-light. There is an unnamed river of courage and restraint. There was a hint of eternity in his dialogues. His lifestyle was so dominant that he would have been bound by a once-living. There was such a brilliance in his eyes that the one who saw

him once could not forget. There was such an invitation in his call for a healthy life that it could not be ignored. His guidance was so perfect that the one who found him could never go astray. His presence was so inspiring that one would get transformed. He said 'appana illuminated the way, but also crethe reasons that remind us of Ma-

Mahavira believed in a healthy life. They lived on their own. He also taught others to live in himself. They were healthy. No disease could touch him. He gave many sources of health.

One of them was the formula -Kayotsarga. Kayotsarga means purification of the body, maintenance of the body, purity and restraint towards the body. Kayotsarga is also the starting point of sadhana and it is also the final point. This is the first understanding of health and the final conclusion. It is the shield for emergency situations involving the body. It is the use of stress-immersion and is free from all sor-

Mahavira's sadhana period lasted twelve and a half years. In it he repeatedly used kayotsarga. The wearer of protective armor or bulletproof jacket does not have the fear of being shot, similarly after going into deep Kayotsarga. the effect of adverse conditions of major diseases and deadly and life-threatening attacks is attenuated. Like Mahavira, one who practices Kayotsarga becomes healthy-hearted, becomes light and can lead a happy life by being absorbed in expansive medita-

The person who wants to get rid of various kinds of diseases, wants to become healthy and has to take medicine in the form of Kayotsarga. Mahavira had the science of medicine whose constituent elements are not mentioned in medical science, he gave such an unfading system of health, which is as easy as it is difficult. Kayotsarga is a type of penance. In which physical restlessness and anger etc. have to be immersed. The focus has to be on the breath. Is the mind fickle or the restlessness of the mind is the mind. On the basis of this concept, it seems difficult to stop the restlessness of the mind.

In the practice of Kayotsarga, words like relaxation, shavasana or relaxation for the body are used. Kayotsarga is such a door, from where one can get a glimpse of the soul, a feeling of existence apart from the gross body. In Kayotsarga, the body and mind get complete relaxation. There are many misconceptions about Jainism in the public. Jainism is a religion that hurts the body. Mahavira talks of giving rest to the body. How can the principle of suffering be valid in such a situation? Any austerity or penance does not mean to cause pain to the body, but to cultivate the body. The mind cannot be controlled without the body. Therefore, through yogic processes, a way has been made to cultivate

Kayotsarga has a special signif-

icance in the field of spirituality. Its usefulness in medical science is also undeniable. Kayotsarga also plays a big role in various investigations done by the modern equipment of medical science. In every medical examination, it is advised to leave the body a little loose and slow down the breathing, it is said to leave the mouth loose even during the extraction of teeth. In case of high blood pressure, it can be balanced by kayotsarga. Unbalanced lifestyle and stress are the major problems of this time.

Small and big, rich and poor, everyone is surrounded by this tension. This is a problem for which doctors do not even have a cure. Kayotsarga can be a permanent solution to the problem of stress and fear. If Kayotsarga is done regularly, then there will be no leave for tension and fear to arise. Through Kayotsarga, both body and mind can be kept healthy. Kayotsarga is a mantra for self-meditation, in the same way, health is also a mantra for spiritual practice.

In modern life, the practice of silence, mantra cultivation and restraint is very useful. Silence gives rest, happiness comes. But the glory of silence that is accompanied by Kayotsarga is different. Be it silence, meditation, fasting or any other restraint ritual. all have a useful place in getting rid of diseases. Those who want physical, mental and spiritual health, want to avoid epidemics and diseases, they should use this great mantra Kayotsarga of Mahavira. Kayotsarga is medicine and highway to health. Anyone following this can lead a healthy

Lord Mahavira is truly a shining beam of light and the founder of universal religion. He is the savior of the human mind of this creation. Mahavir had given maximum emphasis on fasting, restraint and character. Mahavir's entire life is the culmination of austerity and meditation, so he is self-motivated. The teachings of the Lord are life-giving in which the solution of life's problems is contained. Lord Mahavira is Chinmaya Deepak (a lamp that has the never lasting illumination light) The lamp removes the darkness, but the usefulness of the Chinmaya lamp to defeat the darkness of ignorance is undeniable. In fact, Mahavira's discourses and teachings are millions of beams of light. In order to be flooded with the rays of knowledge, it is necessary to immerse in them, only then we will be able to move towards a healthy life. (The author is a journalist, columnist who can be lalitgarg11@gmail.com)

By: Ben Chacko

That is not because she does not support such a withdrawal. It is that she knows the Tories are going down to defeat and does not want her pet project compromised by being included within that rejection.

It is clear that it is the Bravermans and Trusses who will be making the running if the Tories are in opposition. They will point to the surging support for Nigel Farage's Reform party as a reason to shift the party decisively to the right, embracing both authoritarianism on social questions and market liberalism on the economy.

Labour offers no alternative.

ness of various segments of society, understanding that a nation's true strength lies in the well-being of all its citizens. By prioritizing the needs of the weakest, it ensures that the entire social fabric remains robust and resilient, fostering sustainable development that benefits entire populations. In this model, economic growth serves as a means to uplift every stratum of the population, fostering a more equitable and compassionate society. The construction of the Ram

Mandir in Ayodhya stands as a poignant symbol of a peace-lovcommitment to resolving a longstanding religious issue through democratic means. The journey toward the realization of the Ram Mandir reflects not just a physical construction but a metaphorical edifice built on the principles of dialogue, reconciliation, and adherence to the democratic process. By opting for legal channels and engaging in constructive dialogue, the Bharatiya nation society involved in the Ram Mandir issue exemplifies a commitment to democratic tools as a means of resolution, fostering a precedent for peaceful conflict resolution that extends beyond religious boundaries. In contemporary discourse, the concept of Ram Rajya continues to evoke diverse interpretations and debates. While some view it through a nostalgic lens, harkening back to a mythical golden age, others envisage it as a template for modern governance, infused with principles of equity and social justice. The legacy of Ram Rajya, therefore,

persists as a beacon of hope amidst the tumult of EPIC AFFAIRS
SHASHANKA DAS contemporary politics, re-

minding us of

cal divides. As India navigates the offers a holistic framework for governance that has the potential to contribute significantly to making the world a happier and more harmonious place to live. (The

the Indian psyche.In conclusion, the concept of Ram Rajya occupies a hallowed place in Indian political thought, embodying the aspirations of a just and harmonious society. Its resonance with Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Swaraj underscores its relevance in contemporary times, transcending religious and ideologicomplexities of the 21st century, the principles embodied in Ram Rajya serve as a guiding light, illuminating the path towards a more equitable and compassionate society. Through inclusive policies and a commitment to the welfare of all citizens, Ram Raiva

the timeless ideals that animate

sacchameseja' - find the truth vourself. He did not make anvone run with the help of crutches. If you have the ability to walk on your feet, then you can walk whenever you want and reach wherever you want. He not only ated the inner light. These are all

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Space colonisation Vs Earth's liveability, what should be our priority?



is moot as to why India did not join

the International Space Station pro-

gramme if it was also committed to

The debates in the West mainly

revolve around the point that the

survival of humanity depends on ex-

panding beyond the confines of our

planet, which Jeff Bezos repeats in

response to Obama's critique. The

celebrated physicist the late Steven

Weinberg, also a well-known sci-

ence communicator in his book,

Third Thoughts (2018), is dismis-

spectator sport, which can be excit-

ing for spectators, but this is not the

sort of excitement that seems to lead

to anything serious." Rather than

from human space flights. Much of

the breakthroughs on the origin and

evolution of the universe have all

been derived from data generated by

space-based observatories like the

Cosmic Background Explorer and

the Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe. The newly con-

structed Simons Observatory in the

Atacama desert in Chile will now

add more observations on the early

The Hubble space telescope be-

longs in this league, as the most sig-

nificant space-based observatory,

now succeeded by the James Webb

Space Telescope. Robotic missions

- like the Curiosity rover on Mars,

the Yutu rover on the Moon, JUNO

around Jupiter, and the Hayabusa 2

probe at the Ryugu asteroid – are

expanding our horizons. After a

seven-year round trip, NASA's

OSIRIS-REx brought rock samples

to Earth on 24 September 2023 from

an asteroid named Bennu-billions

Lori Garver, a former deputy ad-

ministrator of NASA, wrote a piece

titled "Forget New Crewed Mis-

sions in Space. NASA Should Focus

on Saving Earth" in The Washing-

ton Post dated 18 July 2019:

"NASA remains one of the most

revered and valuable brands in the

world, and the agency is at its best

the purpose of spending massive

amounts of money to send a few as-

tronauts to the moon or Mars. Are

we in another race, and if so, is this

the most valuable display of our sci-

entific and technological leader-

ship? If science is the rationale, we

can send robots for pennies on the

Consider the US National Acad-

emy of Sciences' decadal strategy

for Earth Science and Applications

from Space (ESAS). For example,

ESAS 2017 declared that NASA

should prioritise the study of the

global hydrological cycle; the distri-

bution and movement of mass be-

tween oceans, ice sheets.

groundwater and the atmosphere;

and changes in surface biology and

Since its humble beginnings in

Thumba, a small hamlet near Thiru-

vananthapuram, in 1963, ISRO has

also made commendable contribu-

tions, including achievements in

communications and remote sens-

ing. We must also ask what the fu-

ture priorities of our publicly funded

space science and technology initia-

to develop comprehensive Earth ob-

servation systems and build link-

ages to higher education centres in

the country that could then conduct

research based on the data obtained

from Earth and planetary observa-

an overarching vision to save our

future will end up as a mere flag-

waving show. The space surround-

ing the Earth is now becoming a

junkyard with defunct satellites and

metal debris posing a threat to

newly launched space vehicles.

Barack Obama's caveat needs to be

discussed at a global level in the

backdrop of the failure to manage

outer space as a commons. 'Cosmo-

naut Rakesh Sharma, the first Indian

to make a trip to space said in a re-

cent interview, "Let us not build hell

on far-off planet". (Courtesy: The

Sending humans to space without

tion systems.

The wish list can include targets

tives are and the science thereof.

But the public doesn't understand

of kilometres from Earth.

when given a purpose.

He says, "Manned spaceflight is a

sive of such arguments.

an 'Indian in space' programme.

By: C.P. Rajendran

ormer US President Barack Obama had a message for the likes of Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, the super-rich of the world. Speaking at a renewable energy conference during the recent 2024 POwR. Earth Summit in Paris, Obama criticised Silicon Valley tycoons who are building spaceships for engaging in costly and ambitious plans to colonise the solar system while we are staring at a bleak future for the Earth due to degrading living space.

Elon Musk, for example, is reported to have launched his aerospace company, SpaceX with an investment of around \$100 million. And Jeff Bezos may have invested between \$7.5 billion and \$20 billion in his aerospace company, Blue Origin. Unlike Elon Musk, who is targeting the human colonisation of Mars, Bezos wants to explore the potential of space stations that can be converted into large space stations near Earth. He visualise "a trillion humans living in the solar system", who could opt to visit the Earth on holiday.

The former US president in the Paris meeting said, "But when I hear some of the people talk about the plan to colonise Mars because the earth's environment may become so degraded that it becomes unlivable, I look at them like, what are you talking about?" He continued, "I would rather us invest in taking care of this planet here". He said that space exploration should be pursued for gathering knowledge and discovery rather than creating new living space for humanity. "We were designed for this place, and it would be good if we kept this place in a way that's liveable," he concluded.

It is also appropriate here to point out that Barack Obama should also have been critical of the political class to which he belongs. The fact is that many rich countries' political leadership is equally megalomaniacal in promoting human spaceflight programmes. Politicians who typically baulk when asked to invest in climate-change mitigation or fundamental research jump at the chance to release the purse strings for spaceflight – even if they are of du-

bious relevance. A case in point: the 'space command', which the US, China, and India, are currently engaged in setting up. As a result of such showmanship, we are militarising space in earnest. If taken to its logical conclusion, this will further damage a world already divided along reli-

gious, racial, class and caste lines. Remembering that India has been an active votary of the peaceful use of outer space is beneficial. Back in 1968, Vikram Sarabhai, then chairman of The Indian National Committee of Space Research, was the scientific chairman of the first UN Conference on the peaceful use of outer space.

The Government of India invested more than Rs 10,000 crore for the country's first human spaceflight programme, to be possibly fulfilled in July 2024. Called Gaganyaan, the project is part of India's efforts to portray itself as a global space power or at least place itself on par with China. Under this project, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) plans to send three Indian astronauts to low-Earth orbit for a little less than a week and

When such space initiatives are announced, the fundamental question should revolve around their overall rationale and expected scientific outcome. One such question is of priorities: is it worth investing in a programme that may not be able to produce any concrete scientific

return them safely.

Like the Mars Orbital and Chandrayaan missions, besides the technology development, what do we hope to achieve in terms of new insights other than being a flag-wav-

ing exercise? As pointed out by Arup Dasgupta, former deputy director of the Space Applications Centre, ISRO, in an article in The Wire of March 2019, it Invasion triggers evolution

nvasive species are considered one of the most press-Ling threats to wildlife. Displaced to a new habitat, often as a result of human actions, these species spread aggressively in their new home, competing with native species for resources and altering the ecosystem. However, the situation for native species might not be as hopeless as thought, at least when it comes to competition between closely related species, as a small lizard native to the US has shown. About 15 cm in length, Ano-

lis carolinensis, also called green anole, can typically be found across the southeastern region of the country, an area that has recently been invaded by the Cuban brown anole. Anolis sagrei. One effect of this invasion has been competition over habitat and food between the two. Both species live on tree perches, and the invasion of brown anoles has forced green anoles, which normally occupy space from ground to tree crown, to shift to higher perches. The lizard seems to be at a disadvantage here, as the higher perches are smooth and narrow, and harder to grip than the lower

However, a study by researchers led by Yoel E Stuart from the University of Texas at Austin, US, shows that the lizards can evolve to adapt to their new habitat in a matter of years. The study was published on October 24 in Science.

The experiment was conducted on spoil-dredge islands in Mosquito Lagoon, Florida, US. Dredge islands are humanmade structures, created from dredge during the digging of a waterway in the 1950s. These islands have varying degrees of vegetation and have been naturally colonised by A carolinensis. The team introduced Asagrei specimen to three of



six such islands in May 1995. It was predicted that the competition presented by the invading species would force green anoles to move to higher perches, which proved to be true. In August 1995, three months after brown anoles were introduced, an increase in the perching height of green anoleswas observed. On uninvaded islands, or ones that had not been colonised by brown anoles, no such change was

A second prediction said that the move would drive the evolution of the toepads and lamellae of the lizard to better adapt it to higher branches. Lamellae cover the bottom of the toepads, helping them gain traction. A greater number of lamellae and a larger toepad would help the lizards in manoeuvring at higher branches.

In 2010, researchers studied the toepads and lamellae of brown anoles and found the prediction to be true. The lizards were found to possess larger toepads and more lamellae on islands where the two species were in competition for tree space than the ones where the brown anole was absent. Most surprisingly, this change took only 20 generations of lizards to occur, a time

invasive species to the islands and this study. "We did predict that we

would see a change, but the degree and quickness with which they evolved was surprising," said Stuart. "To put this shift in perspective, if human height were evolving as fast as these lizards' toes, the height of an average American man would increase from about 5 feet 9 inches (175 cm) today to about 6 feet 4 inches (193 cm) within 20 generations...Although humans live longer than lizards, this rate of change would still be rapid in evolutionary

Before arriving at conclusions, the team had to be sure that the evolution had actually occurred due to the presence of closely related invasive species, and not due to some other process. To test this, they set up a garden experiment where eggs from both invaded and uninvaded islands were collected, and the hatchlings raised in identical environments. The fact that the characteristics of these lizards remained as they would have been on their respective islands suggested that the changes were, indeed, genetic. Other factors that could have caused the changes in the

ability of the brown anole to

by big-toed lizards, were also systematically discounted. Evolution as a result of interaction between two closely related species is termed "character displacement". Simply put, it is an evolution in the traits or characteristics of these species to reduce competition between them, as has been observed in this study. Well-documented cases of character displacement are rare, even though the phenomenon is considered to be widespread (see 'Evolving to urvive')

only colonise islands inhabited

Evolving to survive Species that have evolved

due to competition: **FINCH:** Species of finches on the Galapagos Islands have developed different beaks. Finches that eat small fruits have narrower beaks.

INDIAN MONGOOSE: The small Indian mongoose has smaller canines and eats smaller prey when it coexists with larger mongoose species

who eat larger prey.

GIANT RHINOCEROS

BEETLE: Two species of the Giant Rhinoceros Beetle from south east Asia are identical in size except in areas where they occur together.

 $UC) = h(8) + h(C) f = \{(x,y) \in x^{\dagger} \times R | x = 0^{\frac{1}{2}},$

University, Sydney, who heads his own lizard lab where he studies their behaviour, ecology and evolution, explains the importance of the study: "Character displacement, a common term in ecological literature, has not previously been tested in real time.

The authors use an old work-horse, the Cuban brown anole, to test if its introduction in south-east US will elicit evolutionary change from the sole resident, the green anole." Whiting was not part of this "The authors were able to

discount a series of competing hypotheses that might explain their results by the impressively comprehensive and multifaceted approach they took. This study will likely feature in future student textbooks as a robust example of how character displacement through negative interactions, such as competition, can drive divergence between closely related species, particularly in a modern world where humans increasingly alter the environment and shift species distributions.'

The study is of great relevance to our understanding of invasive species and how they affect native ecology. Native species may be able to survive the onslaught of invaders by evolving in response to the competition presented by them, although the extent to which this can occur between unrelated species is unknown.

Stuart says, "I think we most often think of character displacement happening between closely related species because we consider that closely related species are the most likely to overlap in niche space. However, I think that any two species that compete for the same set of limited resources could experience character displacement, even if period of about 15 years be-tween the introduction of the lizards, such as a response to tween the introduction of the lizards, such as a response to environmental changes or the lizards, such as a response to professor at the Macquarie (Courtesy: Down To Earth) they are not closely related.

Navigating the pitfalls of AI: balancing education with technology

By: Rahul Pokhariya

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in education has sparked a lot of debate in recent years. Though these technologies have many advantages, there are reasons to continue with cautious, especially when it comes to kids using AI for assignments. In this piece, we'll examine some of the main issues with this practice and make the case for why it might not be the most effective way to support a child's holistic growth. We will also take the example of Ankur.

One big worry is being independent in your thinking. Assignments are not just tasks; they help kids develop thinking skills and have a more nuanced understanding of subjects. If kids use AI for answers, they miss out on important learning from challenges and from their flaws.

Take Ankur, a bright 14-year-old kid of 8th grade and having an interest for science. For his science assignments, using an AI programme seemed like a time-saving choice. But unintentionally, it caused his critical thinking to slow down.

Instead of dealing with scientific concepts, Ankur was confined to asking questions about the AI tool and repeating back the answers. He became less independent mentally, and his enthusiasm for learning was replaced with a feeling of disengagement from the subject.

Also, relying on AI for homework every time might make kids take shortcuts. Learning is a journey, not just reaching the right answer. Kids using AI may focus more on speed than understanding. This can harm qualities like patience and perseverance, crucial for success in ed-

Ankur's story clearly shows us this issue. The AI shortcut seemed good, but it made him less patient and eager to finish quickly instead of really getting into the a lot of data and may unknowingly make kids copy from them. Kids might not understand this and end up with work that doesn't seem unique or doesn't reflect on their

Ankur didn't know about plagiarism and unintentionally copied from the AI tool. His assignments, once showing his thoughts, now looked like a mix of information from the AI tool. Plagiarism doesn't just affect the authenticity of a child's work, it also stops them from developing research and analytical skills.

Another worry is becoming too dependent on technology. If kids rely technology. If kids rely too much on AI, they may lose the ability to research, analyse, and express their thoughts independently.

A good education

should give students var-

ious skills, including finding reliable information and expressing their ideas well. overdepen-Ankur's dence on the AI tool had 2 = 30 2x + 2y = 1

a bigger effect. He struggled with new topics or cm & questions beyond the tool's scope. His growth in broader skills needed for education and personal development was blocked out by a

dependence on technology. The social and emotional parts of learning are also at risk. Collaborating with peers and teachers is vital, but AI lacks the human touch. While efficient, AI tools miss the personal guidance that helps a child's social and

Ankur's story continues as he realises its impact on his social interactions. Depending on the AI tool, he was isolated from collaborative learning.

Discussions with classmates decreased and the joy of shared exploration disappeared. Teamwork and effective communication became less important than individual interaction with technology.

That's why countries like Italy temporarily banned ChatGPT, France is investigating whether it is violating privacy regulations. Italy is reviewing AI platforms and

employing researchers for possible violations, such as the temporary prohibition of ChatGPT

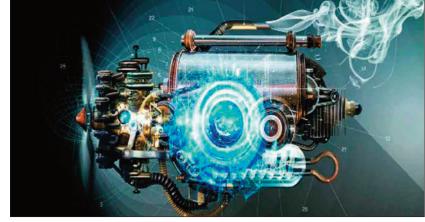
in March. In conclusion, while AI tools are efficient and have good access to information, we need to take caution when introducing them to a child's

education. Ankur's shows potential pitfalls a slowdown in critical thinking, a culture of shortcuts, a risk of plagiarism, overreliance on

technology, and a com-

promise on social and emotional development. Maintaining a balance is crucial to keeping the essence of learning and supporting the holistic development of our future generations. As we are combining technology with education, let Ankur's story remind us that the journey of learning is as important as the destination, and for next few decades, the human touch in ed-

There's also a risk of plagiarism. AI systems analyse ucation. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz) emotional intelligence grow. The new age of quantum technology



By: Biju Dharmapalan

The world of science is on the cusp of a transformative era driven by the burgeoning field of quantum technology. Quantum science is founded on several key principles that underpin the behaviour of particles and systems at the quantum scale.

The term "quantum scale" refers to the realm of physics that deals with phenomena occurring at very small scales, typically at the level of atoms, subatomic particles and fundamental particles. It encompasses the principles of quantum mechanics, which govern the behaviour of particles and systems at these tiny dimen-

At the heart of quantum technology lies the principles of quantum mechanics. a branch of physics that describes the behaviour of particles at the smallest scales. Quantum mechanics introduces uncertainty and the notion of superposition, where particles can exist in multiple States simultaneously.

Furthermore, entanglement, another fundamental quantum phenomenon, links the properties of particles regardless of distance, enabling instantaneous communication between them. These counterintuitive phenomena, once relegated to the realm of theory, are now being harnessed to create groundbreaking technologies with the potential to revolutionise numerous fields. India has a long and rich history in quantum science.

Pioneering work by Satyendra Nath Bose on quantum statistics laid the groundwork for many modern quantum technologies, including Bose-Einstein condensation, quantum superconductivity and quantum information theory.

Over the past few decades, advancements in quantum science have surged, laying the groundwork for a new era characterised by unparalleled computational power, secure communication and transformative applications across various sectors. One of the most captivating applications of quantum mechanics is the development of quantum computers. These machines leverage the power of superposition to perform calculations exponentially faster than traditional com-

By manipulating qubits (quantum bits) that can be 0, 1, or both simultaneously, quantum computers can explore a vast array of possibilities concurrently. This unparalleled processing power holds immense promise for drug discovery, where simulating complex molecules can accelerate the development of life-saving med-

Another revolutionary application of quantum technology is in secure communication. Quantum key distribution (OKD) utilises the principles of quantum

mechanics to establish secure crypto graphic keys between parties. By encoding information into the quantum States of particles and leveraging entanglement properties, QKD ensures that any attempt to intercept or eavesdrop on the communication would disturb the quantum State, thereby alerting the parties involved.

Quantum cryptography safeguards sensitive information in critical areas like financial transactions, national security communications and protecting intellectual property.

By exploiting the extreme sensitivity of quantum systems to minute changes, scientists are developing sensors capable of detecting the subtlest variations in magnetic fields, gravity and temperature. This has profound implications for medical imaging, where ultra-high-resolution MRIs can provide detailed analyses of tissues and organs, aiding in early disease detection and personalised medicine.

In navigation, quantum sensors can lead to more precise GPS and navigation systems, which are crucial for autonomous vehicles and various scientific endeavours. The Government of India. under the Department of Science and Technology, has initiated the National Quantum Mission (NQM), which aims to harness the transformative potential of quantum technology to address national challenges and foster innovation. (Courtesy: the Pioneer)

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Israeli airstrike in southern Gaza city of Rafah kills at least 9 Palestinians, including 6 children

The war was sparked by an un-

precedented raid into southern Is-

rael by Hamas and other militant

groups on Oct. 7 that left about

1.200 people dead, the vast major-

ity of them civilians, and saw

about 250 people kidnapped and

Israel says about 130 hostages

remain in Gaza, although more

than 30 have been confirmed to

now be dead, either killed on Oct.

Saturday the bodies of 37 people

killed by Israeli strikes were

brought to hospitals in Gaza over

the past 24 hours. Hospitals also

The latest figures bring the

overall Palestinian death toll from

the Israel-Hamas war to at least

34.049, and the number of

wounded to 76,901, the ministry

received 68 wounded, it said.

The Gaza Health Ministry said

7 or having died in captivity.

airstrike on a house in Gaza's southernmost city killed at least nine people, six of them children, hospital authorities said on Saturday, as Israel pursued its nearly seven-month offensive in the besieged Palestinian territory.

6 THE HILLS TIMES

Israel's war against the Islamic militant group Hamas has led to a dramatic escalation of tensions in an already volatile Middle East.

The strike late on Friday hit a residential building in the western Tel Sultan neighborhood of the city of Rafah, according to Gaza's civil defense.

The bodies of the six children, two women and a man were taken to Rafah's Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital, the hospital's records showed.

At the hospital, relatives cried and hugged the bodies of the children, wrapped in white shrouds, as others comforted them.

The fatalities included Abdel-Fattah Sobhi Radwan, his wife Nailaa Ahmed Aweidah and their three children, his brother-in-law Ahmed Barhoum said. Barhoum also lost his wife, Rawan Radwan, and their 5-year-old daughter

"This is a world devoid of all human values and morals," Barhoum told The Associated Press Saturday morning, crying as he cradled and gently rocked the body of Alaa in his arms. "They bombed a house full of displaced



the city.

taken into Gaza.

people, women and children. There were no martyrs but women and children

No victims were registered from a second overnight strike in the city.

Rafah, which lies on the border with Egypt, currently hosts more than half of Gaza's total population of about 2.3 million people, the vast majority of whom have been displaced by fighting further

north in the territory. Despite calls for restraint from the international community, including Israel's staunchest ally, the United States, the Israeli government has insisted for months that it intends to push a ground offensive into the city, where it says many of the remaining Hamas

militants are holed up. Such a ground operation has not materialized so far, but the Israeli military has repeatedly car-

The war has sent regional tensions spiraling, leading to a dramatic eruption of violence between Israel and its archenemy Iran that threatened to escalate into a full-blown war.

authorities do not differentiate be-

tween combatants and civilians in

their count, they say at least two

thirds have been children and

On Friday, both Iran and Israel played down an apparent Israeli airstrike near a major air base and nuclear site in central Iran, indicating the two sides were pulling back from what could have become an all-out conflict.

Over the past several weeks, an alleged Israeli strike killed two Iranian generals at an Iranian consulate in Syria and was followed by an unprecedented Iranian missile barrage on Israel.

Israel has also faced off with the Hezbollah militant group, an Iranian proxy operating from Lebanon, with the two sides there frequently trading rocket and drone attacks across the Lebanese-Israeli border.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have also joined the fray, launching strikes against merchant ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in what they say is a campaign of solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza.

Tension has also been high in the occupied West Bank, where an

Nur Shams refugee camp killed at least four Palestinians, including three militants, according to the Israeli military, Palestinian health officials and a militant group.

Palestinian health authorities said one of those killed was a 15vear-old boy shot dead by Israeli fire. The Islamic Jihad militant group confirmed the deaths of three members, including one who it said was a local military commander. The Israeli military said four Israeli soldiers were slightly wounded in the operation.

Saraya al-Quds, the military arm of Islamic Jihad, said its fighters had engaged in heavy gun battles on Saturday morning with Israeli forces in the town of Tulkarem, adjacent to Nur Shams. No further details were immediately available.

Residents in Tulkarem went went on a general strike Saturday to protest the attack on Nur Shams, with shops, restaurants and government offices all closed.

Since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, more than 460 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank, Palestinian health officials say. Israel stages frequent raids into towns and cities in the volatile territory. The dead have included militants, but also stone-throwers and bystanders. Some have also been killed in attacks by Israeli

Moscow says 50 Ukrainian drones shot down as attacks spark fires at Russian power stations

launched a barrage of drones across Russia overnight, the Defense Ministry in Moscow said on Saturday, in attacks that appeared to target the country's energy infrastructure.

Fifty drones were shot down by air defences over eight Russian regions, including 26 over the country's western Belgorod region close to the Ukrainian border. Two people — a woman with a broken leg and the man caring for her — died during the barrage, after explosions sparked a blaze that set their home alight, Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov wrote on social media.

Drones were also reportedly destroyed over the Bryansk, Kursk, Tula, Smolensk, Ryazan, Kaluga regions across Russia's west and south, as well as in the Moscow region.

Ukrainian officials normally decline comment about attacks on Russian soil. However, many of the drone strikes appeared to be directed toward Russia's energy infrastructure.

The head of the Kaluga region, Vladislav Shapsha, said Saturday that a drone strike had sparked a blaze at an electrical substation, while Bryansk Gov. Alexander Bogomaz and Smolensk Gov. Vasily Anokhin also reported fires at fuel and energy complexes.

In recent months, Russian refineries and oil terminals have become priority targets of Ukrainian drone attacks, part of stepped-up assaults on Russian territory.

Ukrainian drone developers have been extending the weapons' range for months, as Kyiv attempts to compensate for its battlefield disadvantage in weapons and troops. The unmanned aerial vehicles are also an affordable option while Ukraine waits for more U.S. military aid.

Meanwhile, Russia attacked Ukraine overnight with seven missiles, and air defences downed two missiles and three reconnaissance drones, the Ukrainian air force said Saturday.

Gov. Oleh Kiper, head of Ukraine's Odesa region, said that ballistic missiles had damaged infrastructure overnight, but did not provide further details. Previous attacks on the Black Sea city on Friday damaged port infrastructure, including two food export terminals, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

Russian shelling also killed a 50-year-old man in the city of Vovchansk, said Gov. Oleh Syniehubov, head of Ukraine's Kharkiv region.

A 60-year-old woman was also injured after shelling struck a nine-story apartment block, he

Man who set himself on fire outside Trump trial dies of injuries, police say

NEW YORK, April 20: A any security checkpoints to acman who doused himself in an accelerant and set himself on fire outside the courthouse where former President Donald Trump is on trial is on trial has died, police said.

The New York City Police Department told The Associated Press early on Saturday that the man was declared dead by staff at an area hospital.

The man was in Collect Pond Park around 1:30 p.m. Friday when he took out pamphlets espousing conspiracy theories, tossed them around, then doused himself in an accelerant and set himself on fire, officials and witnesses said. A large number of police officers were nearby when it happened. Some officers and bystanders rushed to the aid of the man, who was hospitalized in critical condition.

The man, who police said recently traveled from Florida to New York, had not breached

cess the park. The park outside the courthouse has been a gathering spot for protesters, journalists and gawkers throughout Trump's trial, which began with jury selection Monday.

Through Friday, the streets and sidewalks in the area around the courthouse were generally wide open and crowds have been small and largely orderly.

Authorities said they were also reviewing the security protocols, including whether to restrict access to the park. The side street where Trump enters and leaves the building is off

"We may have to shut this area down," New York City Police Department Deputy Commissioner Kaz Daughtry said at a news conference outside the courthouse Friday. adding that officials would discuss the security plan soon.

Pak PM set to visit Saudi to advance investment talks

ISLAMABAD, April 20: Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is expected to visit Saudi Arabia soon, his second trip this month to the friendly Gulf kingdom, to advance investment talks as his cash-strapped government has presented lucrative returns on Saudi investment.

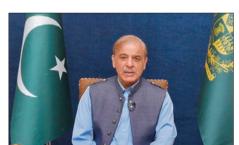
According to The Express Tribune, in addition to the enticing prospects of harvesting rich dividends on investment, Pakistan has assured priority in profits to Saudi investors without any hindrances. Sharif's government has presented returns ranging from an appealing 14 per cent to an astounding 50 per cent on Saudi investment, the report said.

According to government sources involved in these discussions, the indicated returns on Saudi investment are expected to allow the Kingdom to recoup its invested capital within three to nine years, depending on the nature of the project.

Pakistan aims to advance the Saudi Arabia investment initiative during the April 27-28 visit of Sharif, who will be accompanied by a team from the Special Investment Facilitation Council

Prime Minister Sharif was in Jeddah earlier this month to perform Umrah and met Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and discussed a planned USD 5 billion Saudi investment package for Pakistan, according to the joint statement issued by both countries. The visit to Saudi Arabia was the first foreign visit by Sharif since he assumed office in March.

During their recent visit to Pakistan, a highlevel Saudi delegation asked maximum ques-



tions about projects in agriculture, mining and the Diamer Basha dam, the report said.

These are the areas where the government has indicated maximum returns on the investment. Although initially eying on a USD 25 billion bonanza, Pakistan has adjusted its expectations to a USD 5 billion investment by June 2025.

One of the concerns of Saudi Arabia was that Pakistan was withholding the repatriation of profits due to external sector liquidity constraints. However, Pakistan assured that Saudi investors would get priority in the repatriation of profits, said the sources. Sharif has already instructed the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to give Saudi Arabian companies preference in repatriation of the profits. Pakistan allowed USD 694 million repatriation of the profits during the first eight months of this fiscal year, which was more than double compared to the previous fiscal year but it was still USD 900 million less than the pre-crisis period.

Despite a liberal and attractive investment

regime, Pakistan's annual foreign direct investment has remained in the range of USD 1.5 billion to USD 2 billion

It had earlier offered special incentives to Beijing under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that resulted in a total of USD 25 billion in Chinese inflow, mostly in the shape of loans and a component of investment.

Bilal Azhar Kayani, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) party's National Assembly member, said the indicated Internal Rate of Returns (IRR) is based on the assumption of the potential investments. He said that these indicative numbers should not be construed as offers as the actual returns on the investments would be decided during the technical negotiations.

The maximum 50 per cent return on the investment has been indicated for the Greenfield Mine Development project in Balochistan's Khuzdar, which is said to be the third largest mining project after Reko Diq and Thar coal, according to the sources.

The government has estimated an initial investment of USD 154 million and with the 50 per cent IRR, the payback period is projected at five years. Pakistan has also indicated higher returns on investment in the agriculture sector. It has offered Saudi Arabia to set up a cattle farm in Punjab for 30,000 animals with an annual production of six thousand tons of meat

The initial indicated investment size is over USD 25 million and the payback period is just three years with a 34 per cent return on the in-

US sanctions 3 Chinese firms and one from Belarus

WASHINGTON, April 20: The US has imposed sanctions on three China-based companies and one from Belarus for supplying missile-applicable items for Pakstan's ballistic missile programme, including its long-range missile programme, the State Department has said. The name of the companies are Xi'an Longde Technology Development, Tianjin Creative Source International Trade and Granpect Co. Ltd from China and Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant from Belarus.

These entities "have engaged in activities or transactions that have materially contributed to, or pose a risk of materially contributing to, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their means of delivery, including any efforts to manufacture, acquire, possess, develop, transport, transfer or use such items, by Pakistan," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Fridav.

Miller said the US is committed to strengthening the global nonproliferation regime by taking action to disrupt procurement networks supporting proliferation activities of concern.

China, an all-weather ally of Pakistan has been the main supplier of arms and defence equipment to Islamabad's military modernisation programme.

Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant supplied special vehicle chassis to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme.

Such chassis are used as launch support equipment for ballistic missiles by Pakistan's National Development Complex (NDC), which is responsible for the development of Missile Technology Control Regime Category (MTCR) I ballistic missiles, according to a State Department Fact-

Such chassis are used as launch support equipment for ballistic missiles by Pakistan's National Development Complex (NDC), which is responsible for the development of Missile Technology Control Regime Category (MTCR) I ballistic missiles, according to a State Department Fact-

Xi'an Longde Technology Development Company Limited, supplied missile-related equipment, including a filament winding machine, to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme that we assess was des-

tined for NDC. Filament winding machines can be used to produce rocket motor cases. (PTI)

About 1,300 people from Myanmar flee into Thailand after clashes broke out in a key border town

BANGKOK, April 20: About 1,300 people have fled from eastern Myanmar into Thailand, officials said on Saturday, as fresh fighting erupted at a border town that has recently been captured by ethnic guerillas.

Fighters from the Karen ethnic minority last week captured the last of the Myanmar army's outposts in and around Myawaddy. which is connected to Thailand by two bridges across the Moei River. The latest clashes were triggered

in the morning when the Karen guerillas launched an atagainst Myanmar troops who hiding were near the 2nd Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge, a major crossing point

for trade with

Thailand, said police chief Pittayakorn Phetcharat in Thailand's Mae Sot district. He estimated about 1,300 people fled into Thailand.

Thai officials reported people had started crossing since Friday following clashes in several areas of Myawaddy. The fall of Myawaddy is a major setback for the military that seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021. Myanmar's once-mighty armed forces have suffered a series of unprecedented defeats since last October, losing swathes of territory including border posts to both ethnic fighters, who have been fighting for greater autonomy for decades, and prodemocracy guerrilla units that took up arms after the military takeover. The clashes, involving drone attacks from the Karen forces and airstrikes by the Myanmar military, had subsided by noon Saturday compared to the morning, but Mae Sot police chief Pittayakorn Phetcharat said he could still hear sporadic gunshots. He said Thai authorities would move people fleeing into a safer area.

Footage from the Thai border showed Thai soldiers maintaining guard near the bridge with sounds of explosions and gunshots in the background. People with children waded across the river with their

belongings and were received by Thai officials on the river bank. Several are seen taking shelter in buildings along the river bank on Myanmar side

Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin wrote on the social media platform X on Saturday that he was closely

monitoring the situation at the bor-"I do not desire to see any such clashes have any impact on the territorial integrity of Thailand and we are ready to protect our borders and the safety of our people. At the same time, we are also ready to

provide humanitarian assistance if

necessary," he wrote. In March, Thailand delivered its first batch of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar for about 20,000 displaced people.

Nikorndej Balangura, spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told reporters on Friday that Thailand is currently working to expand its aid initiative. (AP)

North Korea says it tested 'super-large' cruise missile warhead and new anti-aircraft missile

SEOUL, April 20: North Korea said on Saturday it tested a "super-large" cruise missile warhead and a new anti-aircraft missile in a western coastal area as it expands military capabilities in the face of deepening tensions with the United States and South Korea.

North Korean state media said the country's missile administration on Friday conducted a "power test" for the warhead designed for the Hwasal-1 Ra-3 strategic cruise missile and a test-launch of the Pyoljji-1-2 anti-aircraft missile. It said the tests attained an unspecified "certain goal."

Indonesian police arrest

8 suspected militants

PALU, April 20: Indonesia's elite counterterror-

ism police arrested eight suspected militants in

recent days believed to be part of a new cell

linked to Jemaah Islamiyah, an al-Qaida-linked

Police conducted raids in Central Sulawesi

province between Tuesday and Thursday, said

Agus Nugroho, the provincial police chief,

adding that five suspects were arrested in the city

of Palu, two in Sigi, and one in Poso which is a

Two laptops, several cellular phones and doc-

uments, including jihadist books were seized and

suspects were being interrogated, Nugroho said.

Wisnu Andiko said the arrests were the result of

information obtained from 59 suspected militants

"(The eight) all actively participate in organi-

zation activities, particularly in military-style

training and collecting funds for alleged plans of

terror acts," Andiko told reporters at the National

Police headquarters in the capital, Jakarta. He

added that convicted leaders of the group and

veteran fighters in Afghanistan were recruiting

and training new members. (AP)

National Police spokesperson Trunoyudo

group, authorities said on Saturday.

known extremist hotbed.

detained in Oct. 2023.

North's official Korean Central News Agency showed at least two missiles being fired off launcher trucks at a runway.

North Korea conducted a similar set of tests Feb. 2, but at the time did not specify the names of the cruise missile or the antiaircraft missile, indicating it was possibly seeing technological progress after testing the same system over weeks.

KCNA insisted Friday's tests were part of the North's regular military development activities and had nothing to do with the "surrounding situation."

Tensions on the Korean

vears, with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un dialing up his weapons demonstrations, which have included more powerful missiles aimed at the U.S. mainland and U.S. targets in the Pa-

cific. The United States, South Korea and Japan have responded by expanding their combined military training and sharpening their deterrence strategies built around strategic U.S. assets.

Cruise missiles are among a growing collection of North Korean weapons designed to overregional missile

North's vast lineup of ballistic missiles, including intercontinental ballistic missiles aimed at the continental United States. Analysts say anti-aircraft missile technology is an area where

North Korea could benefit from its deepening military cooperation with Russia, as the two countries align in the face of their separate, intensifying confrontations with the U.S.

The United States and South Korea have accused North Korea of providing artillery shells and other equipment to Russia to help extend its warfighting in Ukraine. (AP)

Thai plastics firm will pay \$20 million to settle with US over Iran sanctions violations

WASHINGTON, April 20: A Bangkok -based plastics firm has agreed to pay \$20 million to settle with the U.S. over 467 "egregious" violations of Iran sanctions, the U.S. Treasury announced on Friday.

SCG Plastics Co. used U.S. banks to process \$291 million in sales of Iranian high-density polyethylene resin from 2017 to 2018, according to the signed settlement agreement between the firm and Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets

The resin, used for product bottles and industrial items, was manufactured by an Iranian joint venture owned in part, by SCG Plastics' parent company, SCG Chemicals and the National Petrochemical Company of Iran, which is a government entity.

The settlement states that SCG Plastics used "shipping and documentation practices that obfuscated the product's Iranian origin and Iranian parties' involvement," which caused banks to unknowingly process transfers in violation of OFAC's sanctions on Iran.

"As a result of these transactions, significant economic benefits were conferred to Iran's petrochemical sector, a major source of revenue generation for the Iranian regime," Treasury says. OFAC determined that the 467 violations of Iran sanctions were "egregious" and fined the company \$20 million, which is to be paid within 90 days.

While SCG Plastics is no longer in operation, a signed



from any liability related to the sanctions violations.

The fines come as U.S. administration officials have announced plans to impose more sanctions on Iran after Tehran launched an unprecedented attack on Israel that could fuel a wider war in the Middle East.

On Thursday, the U.S. and U.K. imposed a new round of sanctions on Iranian people and firms associated with drone production. "We will continue to deploy our sanctions authority to counter Iran with further actions in the days and weeks ahead," Treasury Secretary

Janet Yellen said. "We have also vigorously enforced our sanctions, including by levying historic fines and exposing sanctions evasion schemes and networks. Our actions make it harder and costlier at every turn for Iran to continue its destabilizing behaviour." (AP)



recorded, he said.

independent.

didates. (PTI)

constituency stood at 81.37 per

cent, whereas in the Shillong seat, 73.78 per cent polling was

The turnout in the 2019 polls was

Chief minister Conrad K

Sangma's younger sister Agatha

Sangma is seeking re-election from

the Tura seat, contesting against

Saleng A Sangma of the Congress,

TMC's Zenith M Sangma and an

In Shillong, three-time MP and

state Congress chief Vincent H

Pala is seeking another term, and

is pitted against Voice of the Peo-

ple's Party candidate Ricky A J

Syngkon, NPP's Ampareen Lyn-

gdoh, Robertjune Kharjahrin of

the Regional Democratic Alliance

(RDA) and two independent can-

MPCC president

alleges of

booth rigging

IMPHAL, April 20: Manipur president

Meghachandra came out with a

strong allegation of rampant booth

rigging and other electoral malprac-

tices in several police stations across

Thanga constituency in Bishnupur

district, Heingang, Kiyamgei and

Andro assembly constituency in Im-

On the other hand, BJP Manipur

Pradesh has filed complaints with

the ECI, CEO Manipur and con-

cerned ROs against INC candidate

Dr Angomcha Bimol Akoijam while

alleging of violating the election

model code of conduct and discour-

aging conduct of free and fair elec-

phal East district.

71.23 per cent, Tiwari said.

79.77 per cent voter turnout in Sikkim Assembly elections

Himalayan state has 4.64 lakh voters



GANGTOK, April 20: The Sikkim Assembly elections recorded a voter turnout of 79.77 per cent while the polling figure for the lone Lok Sabha seat in the Himalayan state was 80.03, offi-

repoll in 47 polling

cials said on Saturday. Congress demands

ments and the lone Lok Sabha seat in the Himalayan state was held on Friday. The election officials had given a voter turnout figure of 67.95 per cent after 5 pm on Fri-

The final voter turnout figure for

state has 4.64 lakh voters. Yoksom-Tashiding assembly constituency registered the highest

79.77 per cent which was an im-

provement by one per cent from

78.63 per cent in 2019 assembly

polls, they said. The Himalayan

while Gangtok (BL) assembly constituency witnessed the lowest turnout at 63.66 per cent.

As many as 20 assembly constituencies recorded voter turnout at 80 per cent or more, while 10 other assembly constituencies saw polling between 70 and 79 per cent. The voter turnout for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Sikkim was 80.03 per cent which is a shade lower than 81.41 per cent in 2019, officials added.

A total of 146 candidates, including chief minister Prem Singh Tamang, his predecessor Pawan Kumar Chamling, former India Football captain Bhaichung Bhutia, and Tamang's wife Krishna Kumari Rai are in the fray for 32 assembly constituencies.

Tamang and Chamling are contesting from two assembly constituencies each.

The counting of votes for the Sikkim Assembly elections will be taken up on June 2 and that for the Lok Sabha election on June 4.

cent in the two Lok Sabha constituencies that went to polls on Fri-Mukul Sangma confident of TMC win in Tura Lok Sabha seat



HT Bureau

SHILLONG, April 20: Meghalaya

recorded a voter turnout of 76.6 per

GUWAHATI, April 20: Senior TMC leader from the Northeast state of Meghalaya and former chief minister Mukul Sangma expressed optimism regarding his party's prospects

in the Tura parliamentary seat. He said that the people of Tura Lok Sabha constituency in Meghalaya desire for change.

Mukul Sangma, after casting his vote in support of TMC candidate from Tura, Zenith M Sangma, coneyed confidence in their victory based on "current indications".

"The significant voter turnout reflects the fervour with which people are participating, signalling a strong desire for change," Sangma said.

Acknowledging the anticipated

triangular contest in Tura, Sangma highlighted the contest as more merely between political parties.

the INDIA bloc in Meghalaya, Mukul Sangma attributed it to a purported conspiracy orchestrated be-

field a candidate for the Shillong seat, Sangma clarified that it aligned with the bloc's commitment to presenting single candidates.

about the incumbent rather than Addressing the alleged failure of

Meghalaya records 76.6 pc turnout

in polls to 2 LS constituencies

day, chief electoral officer BDR Ti-

wari said. The northeastern state has

collusion with the BJP and other op-

tween the Congress, NPP and Regarding TMC's decision not to

Sangma admitted to the failure of the INDIA bloc in the Northeast region, attributing it to the manipulation by the Congress leadership in

In the complaints, the BJP alleged that the INC candidate forcibly entered different polling stations along with his large number of supporters and disrupted the election atmosphere while compromising free and

fair conduct of voting. In the meantime, amid the allegations of armed miscreants indulging in unlawful activities at various polling stations were members of the group, Arambai Tenggol today clarified that it has not given any instructions to indulge in this kind of activities by using its name during

the Lok Sabha elections. The clarification was made while reacting to various viral videos accusing the members of the group in-

volved in the gun violence incidents. The Arambai Tenggol said it could be the handiwork of the workers of MLAs or the candidates contesting the polls as Arambai Tenggol has nothing to do with the incidents.

The Arambai Tengol said police must arrest those responsible for perpetrating such activities and take actions against them under the due process of law, while adding that Arambai Tenggol is doing its utmost best to find out those who are misusing its name. (NNN)

IMD warns to brace for hot and humid days in Tripura



GUWAHATI, April 20: The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) in Tripura has issued a warning of hot and humid days in the state due to the prevailing partly cloudy sky.

In a press release, the MeT department said that due to prevailing partly cloudy sky conditions and high solar insolation, day temperature is very likely to be 36°C and above at many places over the districts of Tripura and likely to be above normal by 3 to 4°C at some places over the districts of Tripura during next 3 days.

"Moreover, moisture incursion is likely to increase in some districts of Tripura due to the South/southwesterly wind during this period. The Hot and humid day will continue till April 21," it reads.

The weather department has also instructed the public to avoid going out in the sun, especially between 12.00 noon and 3.00 pm, to drink sufficient water and as often as possible, even if not thirsty to wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose,

ENPO responds to Nagaland CEO's 'undue influence' show-cause notice



IMPHAL, April 20: The Congress has demanded repoll in 47 polling stations in Manipur alleging that booths were captured and elections to two Lok Sabha constituencies in

the northeastern state were rigged. Incidents of firing, intimidation, destruction of EVMs at some polling booths and allegations of booth capturing were reported from conflict-hit Manipur that recorded a turnout of over 68 per cent in the two Lok Sabha constituencies -Inner Manipur and Outer Manipur -

on Friday. Manipur Congress president K Meghachandra said the party has lodged a complaint with Manipur Chief Electoral Officer demanding repoll in 36 polling stations in Inner Manipur constituency and 11 in

Outer Manipur constituency. Speaking to reporters on Friday night, K Meghachandra said "Unidentified armed miscreants have been threatening Congress candidate Angomcha Bimol Akoijam and party election agents for

"We have lodged a complaint with the CEO Manipur for repoil in 36 polling stations in Inner Manipur and 11 polling stations in Outer Ma-

nipur." he said The demand for repoll included three polling stations under Chief Minister N Biren Singh's Assembly constituency of Heingang. (PTI)

<u>HT Bureau</u> GUWAHATI, April 20: The Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) has responded to the show-cause notice issued by the office of the Nagaland

chief electoral officer (CEO). The notice issued by the Nagaland CEO sought justification from ENPO as to why action should not be taken against the organisation under sub-section (1) of section 171C of the Indian

Penal Code (IPC). The show-cause notice was issued to the ENPO by the Nagaland CEO after the organisation announced an indefinite shutdown in Eastern Nagaland from 6pm of April 18, just hours before polling for the first phase of Lok Sabha

GUWAHATI, April 20: Following reports of

violence, re-polling has been ordered for four

Of these four polling stations in Arunachal

Pradesh, where re-polling have been ordered,

one is located in Kurung Kumey and three in

Upper Siang. This was informed by Arunachal

Pradesh chief electoral officer (CEO) Pawan

Kumar Sain. Sain stated that re-polling will

occur at Langte Loth in the Nyapin assembly

constituency of Kurung Kumey district, as

well as Bogia-Siyum, Dingser and Lengi

under the Nacho assembly constituency in

Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh.

machine (EVM) destruction were reported at

Instances of attempted electronic voting

polling stations in Arunachal Pradesh.

In its response, the ENPO clarified that the primary objective of the public notice announcing shutdown was to mitigate potential disturbances in the Eastern Nagaland region and deter antisocial elements from inciting law

and order issues. The organisation stressed that Eastern Nagaland is currently under a state of "public emergency", and the shutdown was a measure initiated by the residents to maintain peace and security.

Furthermore, the ENPO highlighted that it had previously communicated its decision to the people of Eastern Nagaland to abstain from participating in the Lok Sabha elections to the election commission of India (ECI) in a letter dated April 01.

all four polling stations.

"We have identified the individuals respon-

sible for attempting to damage or seize the

EVMs. Appropriate action has been taken

against them," the Arunachal Pradesh CEO

This decision, according to ENPO, was made in consideration of the prevailing circumstances and the sentiments of the people of Eastern Nagaland.

Regarding the allegations of "undue influence" in elections, the ENPO asserted that section 171C (1) is not applicable in this context, as no offense related to undue influence has been committed by the organisation

The ENPO clarified that the shutdown was voluntary, with no coercion or enforcement involved, as the organisation lacks mechanisms to enforce its resolutions or orders. The ENPO further stated that it regrets any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of its actions and assured full cooperation

Arunachal Pradesh: Re-polling ordered MSU demands revoking appointment of Mizoram for four polling stations after violence state commission for women chairperson

GUWAHATI, April 20: Alleging nepotism, Mizo Students' Union (MSU), one of the influential student bodies in Mizoram, on Thursday (April 19), urged the state government to revoke the appointment order of Mizoram State Commission for Women chairnerson C Lalchhandami for allegedly violating the eligibility criteria.

Lalchhandami, a sitting corporator of Aizawl Municipal Council (AMC) belonging to the ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), was appointed as the chairperson of Mizoram State Commission for Women on March 8. MSU president Samuel Zoramthanpuia told a press conference in Aizawl that Lalchhandami has already surpassed the age limit required for the chairperson when her appointment order was issued on March 8.

According to the appointment order, a chairperson can either hold the post for 3 years since her appointment or until she attain 65, he said. As per an information sought from the state Planning and Programme Implementation department under the Right to Information act, Lalchhandami has retired from government service on superannuation

on March 31, 2016, he said. Lalchhandami has crossed 68 years if her age is counted from the date of her retirement from government service, Samuel said.

In the bio-data she submitted for the appointment of the commission's chairperson, alchhandami indicated her age as 64 he said. Samuel further said that the age of Lalchhandami, if counted from the one she indicated in the pamphlets at the time of the

AMC polls in February 2021, is 66 by now. He said that the student organisation is of the firm opinion that the government gave undue favour to Lalchhandami and thus demanded to revoke the appointment order at the earliest.

Meanwhile, opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) backed the MSU in its demand to withdraw the appointment order.

A statement issued by the youth wing of MNF accused the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government in Mizoram headed by chief minister Lalduhoma of showing nepotism in the appointment of Lalchhandami as chairperson for Mizoram women commis-

Railways succeeds in mining tunnel in sandy soil below NH-10, averting cave-in risk

NEW DELHI, April 20: The Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project, which will Train to Sikkim Sikkim to the railway network for the first time, has got a major boost with the completion of an 855-metre-long

emergency exit tunnel. A 20-metre section of the tunnel runs under National Highway-10, along the Teesta river, and according to officials, mining through its soft and loose soil was the most challenging part of the whole project as there was a high risk that it might cave in, snapping Sikkim's road connectivity with the rest of the country.

"NH-10 is the only road network that connects Sikkim with other parts of the country. It was a huge challenge for us to mine a tunnel 18 metres below the highway, because the soil is very soft and loose, just like the river sand bed (fine to coarse-grained), with alternate bands of pebble, cobble and boulders," an official from Ircon International, which is

constructing the project, said. "Mining for only that 20metre distance, which is the width of NH-10 including the impact areas on both sides along the highway, has been the most challenging moment of the project so far. We completed it successfully, without causing a single millimetre of deformation to the highway,' he added.

Railway officials said they used the secant-piling method, rarely used in tunnel mining.



After getting it proof-checked by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ircon officials prepared a case study, explaining the ingenuity of the mining

The study says, "To provide fool-proof safety to NH-10, it was suggested to prepare a secant pile wall. Secant piles are designed by constructing reinforced concrete piles that interlock with each other and are reinforced with steel rebar. Typically, primary piles are cast in situ, leaving space in between them, and this is followed by secondary piles cut into the primary piles to form a

continuous wall of piles." The Sivok-Rangpo Rail

Project (SRRP), covering a total length of 44.96 km be-

tween Sivok in West Bengal and Ranpo in Sikkim), has 14 tunnels

The most demand-TRAIN TO SIKKIM ing aspect of the major, nine minor) and five railway stations -- Sivok, Riyang, Teesta Bazar, Melli

and Rangpo A railway official told PTI that of the 14 tunnels, mining work has been completed in 10 and of these 10, the lining work has been finished in four. The longest tunnel of the project is 5.3 km and the shortest 538

metres. "Of the 13 major bridges, 12

are ready with the substructure. The maximum height of the pier (of Bridge-17) is 85 metres, constructing which was itself an uphill task.

project is that 86 per cent of the total rail line passes through tunnels and 5 per cent over bridges," the official said, adding that only 9 per cent of the project is on the

ground. The Indian Railway has set a new deadline of August 2025 to finish the SRRP that will connect Sikkim with the rest of the country through the rail network for the first time.

Oil tanker drivers stage demonstration

IMPHAL, April 20: Oil tanker drivers staged a demonstration on Saturday in front of the government oil depot at Malom in Imphal West district against the recent attack on tankers by suspected militants.

While alleging security lapses behind the attack, the drivers announced an indefinite cease work strike with effect from today it-

At least two drivers were injured after they were hit by bullets that rained on a fleet of Imphal-bound oil tankers escorted by CRPF personnel heading Imphal along NH-37 (Imphal-Jiribam section) at a place between Kaiimai and Tollen Kuki village on April 16.

Since then, the drivers have been abstaining from moving on this section of the highway while demanding adequate security to protect them.

Drawing the attention of the concerned authorities, the oil tanker drivers staged today's demonstration under the aegis of All Manipur Petroleum Product Drivers Association (AMPPDA).

Many oil tanker drivers took part in the demonstration staged at the gate of Oil Depot, Malom that started from around 9.30 am. "SoO expired, we demand shoot at sight," read one of the placards displayed by the

drivers during the protest. Other placards read as "We demand ROP in practice and not as paper works only", 'Steering down until and unless our demands are met", "Regular sanitize of NH 37 through ROP before security escorts arrive", etc.

Talking to reporters at the protest site, AMPPDA secretary Pukhrambam Tomba announced that the drivers will launch an indefinite "steering down" strike from today while condemning the alleged negligence on the



part of the authorities to take up concrete steps for the safety of the drivers of oil

He said that the drivers were carrying out their duties amid the crisis so as to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities in the state.

Their service is not for a particular community but for all the communities living together in the state, he also said. Acknowledging the service of the drivers, the concerned authorities must put in place dedicated security protection for them while moving on the highways, he added.

The Manipur Drivers' Association (MDA) also demanded the setting up of a dedicated security force for the protection of the national highways and also deployment of ambulances and recovery vans on the highways.

Talking to the reporters during a visit to injured driver Tularam who is being treated at a private hospital in Imphal, MDA president Saikhom Babudon said the government must address the demands while considering the plights of the drivers of the vehicles servicing along the national highways. (NNN)

and porous cotton clothes.

They have also requested the public to keep animals in the shade and give them plenty of water to drink.

Sarath Reddy

gave ₹60 crore

Like Amethi, Congress' 'sahabzade' will also lose Wayanad LS seat: PM Modi's swipe at Rahul

Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the Congress has accepted its defeat even before the Lok Sabha poll results are out, and took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi, saying that just as he lost from Amethi in 2019, the "Congress' sahabzade" will lose the Wayanad parliamentary seat this

Addressing an election rally at Nanded in Maharashtra for the candidates of Nanded and Hingoli Lok Sabha seats, Modi accused the Congress of being a barrier in the path of development and that it cannot be trusted to work for the country's

Apparently targeting former president Sonia Gandhi, Modi said some INDIA bloc leaders who have been members of the Lok Sabha for several years, have left the Lower House of Parliament and found a seat in the Rajya Sabha as they have no confidence to contest elections.

Referring to Rahul Gandhi, he said, "The Congress' sahabzade sees a problem in Wayanad. He is waiting for the voting on April 26, after which he and his gang will look for a safe seat because after Amethi, he will have to leave Wayanad as well."

"Will any voter waste their vote for such people? They will instead vote for 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India). Congress has been a barrier in development of



farmers, poor and women...Can't trust the party will work for the country's progress," he said.

Modi referred to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's recent remarks against Rahul Gandhi, saying, "Even I can't make such comments.'

The agriculture crisis and farmers' problems did not arise in one day. They happened because of the Congress' flawed policies. But the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government is committed to work for their welfare, he said, adding that he has been fixing the problems created under the Congress regimes earlier in the last 10 years.

"Now, we have to work even harder," he said

"Congress survives on one family. But now the family can't vote for the party candidate. For the first time, the family will have to vote for a non-Congress

The INDIA bloc parties are contesting the Lok Sabha polls against each other in 25 per cent

"Can you trust such people?"

he asked people at the rally. "After June 4, an all-out fight will break out among the INDIA bloc members. You need to teach them a lesson in elections," Modi said. The prime minister thanked voters for coming out in large numbers to exercise their voting right in the first phase of elec-

Next 25 years will be years of India's greatness in the world, he

"I want to congratulate and thank people, especially the firsttime voters. As per the information I have received, voting has been one-sided in favour of the NDA. I thank you with a bowed head," he said.

Modi urged people to step out to vote in large numbers although there is heat, farmers are busy and the wedding season is on.

"Soldiers always do their duty of protecting the country's borders irrespective of any season. By voting, you are not doing anybody a favour but securing the country's future," he said.

In a sarcastic comment, Modi said he wanted to boost the morale of the opposition party workers as 0they should also encourage voters to come out to

Kejriwal being pushed towards 'slow death' by

denying insulin, doctor's consultations: AAP



NEW DELHI, April 20: The Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday alleged that Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is being pushed towards a "slow death" inside Tihar jail by denying him insulin and consultations with his doctor.

Kejriwal, who has Type-2 diabetes, has been asking for insulin and a video conferencing with his family doctor but his requests are being denied by the jail administration, party spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj said in a press conference.

"I want to say with full responsibility that a conspiracy is underway for the slow death of Kejriwal," Bharadwaj claimed citing blood sugar readings of the chief minister

He also slammed the Tihar administration, BJP, Centre and Delhi LG for allegedly denying insulin to Keiriwal and said the Delhi chief minister had been suffering from diabetes for the last 20-22 years.

On Friday, the chief minister council Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi said Kejriwal has not been administered insulin to control his sugar levels since his arrest, terming it "shocking" and "alarming"

The ED had on Thursday claimed before the court that Kejriwal was eating food high in sugar like mangoes and sweets every day, despite having Type-2 diabetes, to create grounds for medical bail.

Kejriwal, however, refuted the ED's claims by asserting before a court that the food he consumed was in conformity with the diet chart prepared by his doctor.

"Out of 48 meals sent from home, only three times mangoes were there...," Singhvi told the court.

Bharadwaj said Kejriwal was allowed by the court to use a machine in the jail to monitor his daily blood sugar levels.

"Overall, it was a conspiracy to finish Keiriwal so his multiple organ damage and when he comes out of jail after 2-4 months he goes for treatment of kidney, heart and other organs," said Bharadwaj, who holds the portfolio of health in Delhi govern-

to BJP, ED took no action: AAP NEW DELHI, April 20: AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Saturday assailed the BJP, alleging that it took ₹ 60 crore from an ac-

cused in the "so-called" liquor scam case but the Enforcement Directorate took no action in the matter. At a press conference here, Singh said Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, including Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and himself, were arrested in the

dence. "Sarath Reddy, whom the ED in its charge sheet termed the kingpin of the liquor scam, gave ₹ 60 crore through electoral bonds. But the agency took no action against anyone in this matter," Singh alleged.

liquor scam case without any evi-

There was no immediate reaction from Reddy or the BJP on this.

Singh claimed that after his arrest in the liquor scam case, Reddy gave ₹ 5 crore to the BJP on November 15, 2022, as a donation. After six months in jail, Reddy got bail on May 8, 2023, and within the next few days, he gave ₹ 50 crore to the BJP through electoral bonds, the AAP MP added.

Singh also claimed that before his arrest, Reddy donated Rs 5 crore to the BJP in parts in 2022.

He alleged that soon after the details of the electoral bonds became public on March 21 and it was revealed that the BJP took money from Reddy, the ED raided Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal's residence. (PTI)

bloc comes to power: TMC



NEW DELHI, April 20: The Trinamool Congress's (TMC) manifesto for the ongoing Lok Sabha polls is nationally focused and the party will implement its promises when the INDIA bloc's government comes to power, senior party leader Amit Mitra said on Satur-

Released recently, the TMC's manifesto has a major focus on welfare schemes. It also talks about economy and employment, with promises for sectors such as micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) and gig economy as well as the unorganised sector.

Noting that several key announcements in the manifesto are "nationally focused", Mitra said schemes that have been successful in West Bengal will be taken to the national level.

"It is a nationally-focused manifesto. The schemes which have already been delivered in West Bengal will be taken to the national level," the former finance minister of the state said.

"We will work with our partners in the INDI alliance after the election to roll out these schemes nationally," he added.

Mitra said good programmes of other states ruled by the constituents of the INDIA bloc will also be taken to the national level.

"There may be other initiatives that our alliance partners may have successfully implemented in their states, those too would be taken to a national scale when the INDIA bloc comes to power," he said.

The TMC leader cited examples like breakfast being served in government schools in DMK-ruled Tamil Nadu and the concession on electricity provided by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Delhi. Mitra, who is the special advisor on finance to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, also highlighted the TMC's promises on a commission for the workers in the unorganised sector, a new national policy for MSMEs and social security for gig econ-

omy workers. The TMC manifesto has a forward-looking suggestion, which, when we come to power through the INDIA grouping, will be implemented. The time has come for a commission for the unorganised workforce is employed by them. They were destroyed by the demonetisation of the BJP-led Centre and were again hurt by the (Covid-19) lockdown," he said.

Mitra said West Bengal has 90 lakh MSME units that employ 1.3 crore people. The TMC has promised a new national policy for the MSME sector.

The party led by Banerjee has also promised de-linking the railway budget from the general budget.

"Since the BJP came to power, 710 railway accidents have happened. Why? Fifty per cent of track-safety inspections never happened. Why? Because 1.7 lakh posts of safety inspectors are vacant," Mitra said.

The TMC, which has said it continues to be a part of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) even though its seat-sharing talks with the Congress for the ongoing polls have failed, faces the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Left-Congress alliance in West Bengal in the electoral contest.

Its manifesto, however, makes it clear that it is looking at the BJP, which emerged as the secondlargest party in the state in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls with 17 per cent votes and 18 seats, as its main

competitor. The TMC won 22 seats in the 2019 polls and secured around 40 per cent votes.

Prominent amongst the party's charges against the BJP-led Centre are "puppeteering" of the West Bengal governor and deactivating Aadhaar cards. Its manifesto also mentions the unprecedented arrests of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren.

The manifesto has also promised scrapping the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC), and given an assurance against the implementation of a Uniform Civil

Code (UCC) in the country. The TMC has also promised that it will implement the Sachar committee report and expressed commitment to working with the queer and transgender communi-

Manifesto nationally focused, Modi govt cares only for super rich, will be implemented if INDIA posing threat to Constitution: Rahul

BHAGALPUR (BIHAR), April 20: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday charged the BJP-RSS combine and a handful of billionaires with posing a threat to democracy and the country's Constitution, to which "Dalits, tribals and the poor owe all that they Addressing an election rally at Bhagalpur,

candidate in the constituency

where they live because they

don't have a candidate," Modi

Describing the INDIA bloc a

grouping of selfish parties that

have come together to protect

their corrupt practices, he said the

alliance has been rejected by vot-

The INDI alliance does not

have a face to project whom the

people see to entrust the coun-

the reality is that Congress lead-

ers have accepted defeat even be-

fore announcement of polls, he

Without naming Sonia Gandhi,

Modi said, "Some INDI alliance

leaders have left the Lok Sabha

and entered the Rajya Sabha as

they don't have the courage and

confidence to contest elections.

They are not even campaigning.

They may claim anything, but

ers in the first phase.

try's future to, he said.

his first in Bihar, Gandhi also drew a contrast with the previous UPA government headed by his party, claiming the amount of debt written off under the Narendra Modi regime was "25 times the farmers' loans we had waived". "I would like to give you some startling statistics. The country has 22 individuals who

of 70 crore people. There are 70 crore people in the country who are surviving on less than Rs 100 a day," claimed Gandhi. The former Congress president claimed that "Modi has waived debts, of not more

own wealth that is equivalent to the holdings

than 25 people, which amounts to about Rs 16 lakh crore". 'Do you realiSe of farmers' loans we had waived? It may also be seen as equivalent to 25 years' outlay for

MGNREGA," he said.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MGNREGA) is aimed at enhancing the livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year.

The INDIA bloc, led by the Congress, is committed to "distributing the wealth among the poor people", Gandhi said.



He also said, if voted to power, the Congress would help the poor through schemes like 'Mahalaxmi' which proposes an annual dole of Rs one lakh, through direct cash transfer, to one female member of every poor fam-

The money will be remitted into the bank account of one person but will be utilised for the entire family", he said.

Addressing the election rally, the Congress eader alleged, "Modi does not want the people to focus on the situation prevailing around them. He tries to distract you all through some

"In any part of the country, you can see youngsters idling away hours on their smartphones, glued to social media sites. The reason is India has turned into a centre of unemployment. Demonetisation and faulty implementation of GST has hit job creation,

Gandhi claimed that his party would tackle the problem of unemployment by guarantee-

ing a "right to apprenticeship" which would "generate trained manpower in the country, in the private sector as well as the public sec-

He also said the Congress would do away with the 'Agnipath' scheme of employment in the armed forces which provides for contractual jobs for four years, claiming that "the people of the country despise this system. There cannot be two different categories of

Recalling the farmers' protests that "compelled Narendra Modi to withdraw the contentious farm bills", the Congress leader promised "waiver of farmers' loans and legal guarantee for minimum support price" Gandhi, who spoke for barely 15 minutes, said in his opening remark, "INDIA bloc is treating the elections as a fight to save democracy and the Constitution. All that the country's poor, Dalits and tribals have got, is because of the Constitution. But the Constitution is under threat, from the BJP-RSS combine and their favoured four or five

billionaires.' "If they succeed in scrapping the Constitution, all that the poor and the downtrodden have, whatever progress they have made so far, will come to an end," the Congress leader

He, however, mocked the BJP's claims that it will win more than 370 seats on its own and with allies achieve a 400-plus tally. "They make outlandish claims but let me tell you they are not going to cross 150 seats," Gandhi

Two Punjab Congress leaders join BJP

including its national secretary Tajinder Pal Singh Bittu, joined the BJP here on Saturday as the ruling party at the Centre bolsters its ranks in the state ahead of the Lok Sabha polls there

Bittu announced his resignation from the Congress hours before joining the BJP.

He and Karamjit Kaur Chaudhary, the wife of late Congress veteran Santokh Singh Chaudhary, joined the BJP in the presence of Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and its national general secretary Vinod Tawde. Chaudhary had last year unsuccessfully contested the

Lok Sabha bypoll in Jalandhar following the death of her husband, who was the sitting MP. At a press conference, Tawde said their induction into

the BJP will boost the party, especially in Punjab where the polls are scheduled for June 1. Bittu told reporters that he had been feeling "suffo-

cated" in the Congress after being with the party for over 35 years. 'Three-four power centres work in the Congress and

all of them seek to function independently without having any coordination," he claimed. Tawde also targeted the Congress over the murder of a girl by a man on a college campus in Karnataka's

and alleged that its government in the state does not seem to be taking appropriate action as it is protecting its vote bank and not women The victim, Neha Hiremath, daughter of a Congress

councillor, was allegedly stabbed to death by Fayaz Khondunaikin, who was subsequently arrested.

Local BJP leaders have called it a case of "love jihad", a claim dismissed by the Congress.

Tawde said a similar attitude was displayed by the TMC government in West Bengal over the Sandeshkhali issue as it allegedly worked to protect the accused Shajahan Sheikh and not the women who were

Ramadas Prinisivanandan (30), who is pursuing his doctorate in Development Studies, has also been debarred from entering the TISS campuses in Mumbai, Tuljapur, Hyderabad and Guwahati

TISS suspends PhD student for 'activities not in interest of nation'; he says will appeal



MUMBAI, April 20: The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) has suspended a PhD student for two years for indulging in activities which are "not in the interest of the nation" and referred to instances like him participating in a protest in Delhi under the PSF-TISS banner.

Ramadas Prinisivanandan (30), who is pursuing his doctorate in Development Studies, has also been debarred from entering the TISS campuses in Mumbai, Tuljapur, Hyderabad and Guwahati.

In a notice sent to Prinisivanan-

dan dated March 7, TISS referred

to instances like the screening of documentaries like 'Ram Ke Naam' ahead of January 26 as a "mark of dishonour and protest" against the Ram Mandir consecration in Avodhva.

He has also been accused of screening a banned BBC documentary on the TISS campus last January and also organising the Bhagat Singh Memorial Lecture (BSML) by inviting "controversial guest speakers"

It said that these issues are "very serious and it is discernible that you are intentionally and deliberately indulging in such unlawful

of speech and expression." "Your activities are not in the interest of the nation. Being a public institution, TISS cannot permit or tolerate its students indulging in such activities which are anti-national and bring a bad name to the nation. Hence all such activities fall under the category of serious

criminal offence. "The committee recommended your suspension from the institute i.e. Tata Institute of Social Sciences for the period of two years and your entry shall be debarred across all campuses of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, which is accepted by the competent authority," the TISS notice dated April

18 reads. Prinisivanandan, who hails from Kerala, said he will appeal against the suspension.

The Progressive Student Forum. a Left-leaning student body Prinisivanandan is associated with, said the march referred to by the TISS was related to "anti-student policies in the form of the National Education Policy

It also said BSML has had the distinction of inviting well-known academics, scholars and human rights activists, including two Ramon Magsaysay awardees.

EC chalked out sevenphase polls to assist BJP campaigning: Mamata

MALDA (WB), April 20: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday alleged that the Election Commission of India chalked out seven-phase polls to enable Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his cabinet colleagues to carry out extensive campaigning using the nation's resources. Addressing a public meeting at Gajol in Malda district in support of Maldaha Uttar TMC candidate Prasun Banerjee, a former IPS officer, Mamata Banerjee, the party supremo, said polls have been scheduled from April 19 to June 1 so that Modi and his cabinet colleagues can travel on special planes across the country before every phase to "overwhelm the Opposition".

"On earlier occasions, elections used to be over by May but this year, it has been extended till June 1 to enable Modi to visit various places on military planes, while we are made to arrange for our own transport, including helicopters, which are also being booked by BJP leaders so that we get little space," she alleged.

"People are greatly inconvenienced by the scorching heat but Modi is unperturbed as they (BJP leaders) are campaigning in VVIP comfort with all facilities at hand," she added.

Banerjee alleged that though the Union council of ministers led by Narendra Modi is a caretaker cabinet after the announcement of elections and the EC is in charge of running the administrative machinery, the poll body is "toeing the line dictated by Modi and his party colleagues".

Attacking the BJP and Congress MPs from West Bengal, Banerjee alleged that despite being elected from the state in 2019, none of them took up the state's cause regarding the release of MGNREGA funds by the Centre or building houses for the poor under PM Awas Yojana.

"On the other hand, our (TMC) MPs were manhandled and arrested when they went to Delhi in November last year to demand the release of MGNREGA funds," she said. "But what have the Congress and BJP MPs done for the poor? What

has (Maldaha Uttar) BJP MP Khagen Murmu done for job card holders of the state?" she questioned. Banerjee accused the CPI (M) and Congress of bolstering the BJP in the state and urged people not to cast votes for any non-TMC candidate.

"I had coined the name of INDIA bloc. But INDIA bloc does not exist in Bengal. For us, it exists outside the state," she said. "Our MP Mahua Moitra was expelled from Parliament for unmasking the misdeeds of the Modi government and its proximity to big business houses. TMC MPs were targeted by this vindictive government," she

CJI Chandrachud urges voters not to

Left weakening in JNU, outfits struggling to win elections independently: JNU VC

NEW DELHI, April 20: With the emergence of rival political outfits, the Left in the Jawaharlal Nehru University has weakened and is forced to join hands since it struggles to win elections independently, varsity Vice-Chancellor Santishree D Pandit said.

Pandit, a former JNU student, said she used to contest against the Left as part of the Free Thinkers group – a "neutral" students' body not affiliated to any political party.

In an interview with PTI editors at the agency's headquarters, Pandit said nearly 1,500 NOTA votes were cast in the recently held JNU Students Union elections, an act that shows students are interested in neither the Left nor the Right.

Pandit, who did her MPhil and then PhD in International Politics from JNU, said with time more political outfits like the RSS-affiliated ABVP and Congress-backed NSUI, as well as RJD, have made their presence on campus, which once used to be solely dominated by the Left out-

The United Left panel comprising All India Students Association (AISA), Democratic Students' Federation (DSF), Students' Federation of India (SFI) and the All India Students' Federation (AISF) in March swept in the JNUSU election jointly with



BAPSA for the first time in history, defeating its nearest rival the Akhil Bharativa Vidvarthi Parishad.

The Left had fought the elections together and had to support the BAPSA candidate at the last moment to prevent the ABVP from coming to

"There is a weakening of the Left on campus. Earlier SFI, AISF stood independently. They didn't need any alliance to win elections. They could defeat any grouping. I was a Free Thinker at that time. We didn't have both ABVP and NSUI on campus.

"Now their presence, including RJD's, has come up and the Left

needs to have unity of 10-12 groups to win," Pandit said.

"The general secretary in the JNUSU was not a Left candidate. She was from BAPSA. The left supported her to stop ABVP from coming in power. She doesn't listen to them, she says they supported me out of their own interest. This shows there is weakening of the Left on campus,"

Pandit also said that the number of students represented from different states in JNU has significantly changed and those coming from the South have considerably gone down.

"Although the number of students

brought the highest QS rankings to Pandit denied there has been any

has gone up, we were only 3,000 at

that time, now we are 10,000. Earlier

all states were better represented.

Now the highest comes from Bihar,

followed by Odisha and UP. Students

from Rajasthan and Haryana have

also increased. However, the number

of students from the South has gone

Asked if it is hard being objective

in the Left-dominated campus given

her RSS affiliation, Pandit said she

has better leftist credentials than those

"I think everybody can have per-

sonal leanings and we can agree to

disagree. That's the beauty of India.

Also that way if you see I was born in

Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg). I

think I have a better DNA than the

left. My god parents were CPI stal-

Asked if she is liked and accepted

as a "Sanghi VC" in the Left bastion,

Pandit claimed "Yes, because they

think people like me can also be there

in the Sangh who have a broader,

She added, "I think the Left likes

you when you are honest. I have

never hidden my affiliation with the

RSS. Lam a proud Sanghi VC who

more flexible and inclusive view."

down considerably," she said.

on campus.

warts ...," she said.

the university since she took over.

fits) on campus now," she said.

thought imposing stringent measures to curb protests on campus was re-

"When you are studying on the

decline in the democratic culture of "I don't agree that there's a decline

in freedom on campus. If that was so I wouldn't have conducted elections. We even held teachers' union elections. I think the ecosystem (Left dominance) that was there earlier is being contested by other arrangements (presence of new political out-

Responding to why the varsity NEW DELHI, April 20: Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud has urged citizens not to miss the opportunity to vote in the general quired, Pandit said the move was elections, saying that it is one of the aimed at maintaining discipline. "foremost duties" in a constitutional

taxpayers' money, the taxpayers are going to question what type of products I am bringing out. So students have to be critical but factually critical. You can just brand and bring down anybody. We have set the areas of discipline. They can still protest on the Sabarmati lawns," she said.

Recalling her student days, Pandit said, "During my period the top Left leaders were nationalists. We are just telling students to be responsible. You can't say anything and everything. JNU creates two illusions - that everything is free and talk whatever you want and there is no consequence - both of which do not exist outside

tutional democracy," he said. "I will request every one of you please do not miss this opportunity

In a video message for the Elec-

tion Commission's 'My Vote My

Voice' mission for the 2024 Lok

Sabha polls, Justice Chandrachud

said. "We are citizens of the world's

largest democracy, which is our

titude of rights as citizens but it also

expects that each of us performs the

duty, which is cast upon us. And

one of the foremost duties of citi-

zenship is to cast a vote in a consti-

"The Constitution gives us a mul-

miss voting in 2024 general elections our great motherland. Five minutes, every five years for our nation. It's doable, isn't it? Let's vote with pride. My vote, my voice," the CJI

> Justice Chandrachud said the citizens have a participatory role in electing the government and that is why it is said that "this government is a government of the people, by the people and for the people".

> He recalled his excitement as the first time voter and queuing up at the polling booth to exercise the

> "The ink on the finger when I vote allows tremendous feelings of patriotism and association with the nation...." he said.

"So our Constitution and our law provides for one citizen, one vote and one value. I think that's the great tenacity and the power of our nation as a constitutional democracy," he said.

The CJI said he never missed that duty to cast his vote when he was a lawyer and had to run around for

The Lok Sabha elections will be held from April 19 to June 1, 2024 to elect the 543 members of the 18th Lok Sabha.

The elections will be held in seven phases and the results will be announced on June 4. 2024. (PTI)

loss due to hailstorm: Haryana CM



CHANDIGARH, April 20: Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini on Saturday said a 'girdawari' has been ordered to assess the crop damage caused by hailstorm in order to compensate the affected farmers.

Rains accompanied by hailstorm and strong winds lashed many places in Punjab and Haryana on Friday.

The chief minister on Saturday took stock of crops damaged by hailstorm at Indri in Karnal. "Instructions have been given to officers and

all 'patwaris' to take stock of crops and get 'girdawari' done immediately for whatever damage has occurred so that compensation can be given to farmers as soon as possible," said Saini in a

Meanwhile, Haryana Chief Secretary TVSN Prasad directed the deputy commissioners to promptly survey crops damaged by hailstorm to ensure timely compensation for the affected

He emphasised that farmers' satisfaction is

The chief secretary was reviewing the ongoing procurement activities during the Rabi marketing season in Haryana with the DCs, officers from the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs department, representatives from the Food Corporation of India and various other agencies, according to an official release.

Prasad stressed the need to expedite the lifting of stocks from the mandis insisting that at least 50 per cent of the stocks be promptly transferred to the godowns by Sunday evening. He directed the DCs to facilitate dialogue be-

tween the commission agents and farmers, urging the farmers to refrain from bringing their crops to the mandis to clear space for wheat arrivals.

The chief secretary also said the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs department has also authorised the district authorities to utilize vehicles owned by commission agents (Arhatis) for transporting crops from the mandis to ware-

'Girdawari' ordered to assess crop In village of dreaded Maoist leader in Bastar LS seat, residents stay away from voting



stronghold in Sukma district bordering Bijapur district, is the home village of dreaded Naxalite leader Hidma, who is believed to be the mastermind of several deadly attacks on security forces in Bastar region. Polling was held in the Bastar Lok Sabha seat on Friday and a voter turnout of 67.56 per cent was

"No voters from Puvarti village exercised



he said.

their voting right during polling on Friday," Booth Level Officer (BLO) of Puvarti polling booth Java Patel told PTI.

Some officials said the villagers did not cast their vote out of fear. The Puvarti polling booth (No. 4), meant for voters of three villages - Puvarti, Tekalgudiyam and Jonaguda - was set up in Silger village, around 20-25 kms away from Puvarti. The number of voters

Puvarti is 332. Tekalgudiyam 158 and Jonaguda 157 - which comes to a total of 547 voters for Puvarti booth,

Total 31 voters cast

their votes at Puvarti polling booth, but none of them was from Puvarti village and were from Tekalgudiyam and Jonaguda, he said. In Bastar Lok Sabha

seat, Konta assembly constituency which cov-Sukma district recorded 54.31 per cent turnout.

Jagargunda area committee of Maoists had put

Notably, Puvarti is the adjoining villages appealing people to boycott home village of former commander of Maoists' In February this year, PLGA (people's liberathe Chhattisgarh police tion guerilla army) battalset up its camp in Puvarti ion number 1 Hidma and incumbent commander and the move was termed

as a major achievement

for security forces in the

fight against Left Wing

Extremism. Located in a

dense forest around 150

km away from Sukma

district headquarter, Pu-

varti has been deprived of

basic facilities due to the

Naxal menace and geo-

graphical circumstances.

Setting up of security

Naxal-affected

camps in remote and

areas like Puvarti will

help thousands of vil-

lagers to get rid of the

Maoist menace and get

benefited with develop-

ment works and welfare

schemes of the govern-

ment, they had added.

officials had said.

highly

development works and

Barse Deva. Maoists' Peoples' Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA) battalion no. 1 formation has been instrumental in carrying out several deadly attacks in south Bastar.

Ahead of setting up a camp in Puvarti, security forces had set up their camp in Tekalgudem, a few kms away from Puvarti, in January, during which an encounter broke out between security personnel and Naxalites. Three CRPF personnel, including two commandos of its elite jungle warfare unit CoBRA, were killed and 17 others injured in that incident.

Encourage girls to sports, they will bring smile on faces: Sachin Tendulkar RANCHI, April 20: Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar on Saturday

urged parents to encourage and support their girls in sports and said that they will bring smiles on their faces.

Tendulkar and his wife Anjali were in Ranchi to encourage girl football players of Yuwa Foundation at Ormanjhi block of the district. Yuwa and the Sachin Tendulkar Foundation work together here to train and promote girl footballers. Tendulkar and his wife interacted with girl football players of Yuwa Foundation at their school located near Rukka Dam of the state capital and termed the day as

"Children's energy is infectious. I saw them working hard and enjoying themselves. I recalled my childhood," Tendulkar said while speaking to media persons.

"I got inspiration from many children because this journey is not easy for them. There are several difficulties in their lives even from home. They go to play football, which sometimes is not liked by parents. I would like to tell them to encourage children and support them. These children will bring smiles on their faces," Tendulkar said. Speaking about the Sachin Tendulkar Foundation, he said that it works in three verticals—education, sports and health.

"Education is because my father was a professor, health because my wife is a doctor and sport because I am into it. If three are put together, it can shape the future of the country," he said.

Praising the Yuwa foundation, Tendulkar said that he found sincerity, honesty and commitment in it. "Its team is honing the skills of girls, changing their lives, giving direction to their lives... The girls will go on to shine as bright as they possibly can," he said.

Tendulkar said that spending time with the players made him feel extremely happy. "The reason behind me coming here is the children. If we get a chance to smile because of them, then there can't be anything bigger than that. I will come here again soon," he said. (PTI)

J'khand logs above 40 degree Celsius in several districts, school timings changed

wave-like conditions prevailing across Jharkhand, the state government has announced a change in school timings from April 22 until further notice, an official said on Saturday. Under the new schedule, students from kindergarten to class 8 will attend schools from 7 am to 11.30 am, while senior pupils from class 9 to 12 will continue classes till noon, an order by the education department said. This adjustment applies to all categories of government, non-government aided, unaided, and private schools in the state.

The order explicitly prohibits prayer meetings or sports activities conducted under the sun during this period, although mid-day meals will continue to be served. Additionally,

RANCHI, April 20: Amidst heat a separate decision will be made and communicated regarding compensation for any educational losses incurred during this period.

"Prayer meetings and sports will not be held under the sun during this period, but mid-day meals will continue," the order said.

The Meteorological department has already issued a heat wave alert for 15 districts from April 20 to April 22, with temperatures soaring above 40 degrees Celsius in most parts of the state. Baharagora in East Singhbhum district recorded the state's highest maximum temperature at 46.4 degrees Celsius on Saturday, while several other districts experienced high temperatures ranging from 42.4 to 45.4 degrees Celsius. Daltonganj simmered at 43.6,

Jamshedpur 44.5, Godda 43.9, Chaibasa 42.6, Garhwa 42.4, Deoghar 43.4 and Bokaro (Thermal) degree Celsius on Saturday. Jharkhand's capital Ranchi recorded maximum temperature at 39.4 degree Celsius. The Ranchi Meteorological Centre has identified several districts likely to be affected by the heat wave, emphasising that there is a minimal possibility of a decline in maximum temperature over the next

"There is negligible possibility of decline in maximum temperature for next two days. Thereafter, it may decline by two-three degree Celsius in southern and central parts of Jharkhand," said Abhishek Anand, incharge of Ranchi Meteorological

Odisha boat capsize toll rises to 8, govt ends search operation BHUBANESWAR, April 20: The toll in the Mahanadi river boat capsize in Odisha's Jharsuguda district rose

to eight with the recovery of six more bodies on Saturday, an official said on Saturday.

The search operation, which had been ongoing since Friday evening, came to an end after the recovery of a male child's body from Hirakud reservoir in the Mahanadi river, the official said, adding that among the victims were five women and three children. The deceased, all hailing from Anjoripali village of Kharsia in Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh, were identified as Radhika Nishad (40), Teras Bai Rathia (60), Radhika Rathia (35), Ghasneen Bai Rathia (40), and Lacchinin Bai Rathia (40), while the children were identified as Kunal Rathia (9), Nabin Rathia (7), and Tikeswar Rathia (7).

Personnel of the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force and Fire Services, who launched a search operation immediately after the boat capsized on Friday, recovered six more bodies from the Mahanadi river by engaging five scuba divers, an official said. "Five scuba divers fitted with underwater cameras in their headgear joined the search operation and spotted the bodies," the official

Revenue division commissioner (RDC) Srikanta Prusty, Jharsuguda district collector Aboli S Naravane and SP Smit P Parmar were camping by the river bank to supervise the search operation.

The incident occurred on Friday afternoon when around 50 passengers were returning in the boat after visiting a temple in Patharseni Kuda in Odisha's Bargarh district. The boat capsized as it was about to reach Sarada Ghat in Rengali area in Jharsuguda, a police officer said. Rajkumar Gavel, an official from Chhattisgarh government, said around 50 people were returning after a picnic from other side of the river when the mishap took place. Loknath Meher, the Motor Vehicle Inspector (MVI) of Jharsuguda district, said, "The boat lacked registration and was deemed unfit to operate. Additionally, it did not have any life jackets onboard. Despite being designed to accommodate only 20 people, it carried 50 people, ultimately resulting in the

Hubballi murder: Accused's mother demands strict punishment for son

HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA), April 20: The mother of 23-year-old Fayaz, who killed daughter of a Congress councillor inside a college campus in Hubballi, apologised to the victim Neha's family for her son's act and demanded strict punishment for him.

There have been protests in several parts of the state demanding capital punishment for Fayaz, who has been arrested in connection with the incident that occurred on April 18. With folded arms and tears in eyes, the accused's

mother Mamtaz, a teacher said, "I apologise to the peo-

ple of Karnataka as well as Neha's family for what my son has done. It is a great injustice to Neha and her "What my son has done is completely wrong and we hang our heads in shame. What he did is a big mis-

the law of the land," she said. Speaking to reporters in Dharwad, she said that her son and Neha were not just friends but that they were

take and he should be given strict punishment as per

in love and wanted to marry. Recalling Neha as a good girl, Mamtaz said she came to know about their relationship a year ago.

"It was Neha who made the first move and took his phone number. My son did tell me about Neha and that he was in love with her and they wanted to get married. But I had suggested that he first focus on his career.

'My son was very brilliant and always secured above 90 percent marks since LKG and UKG days. He wanted to become an IAS officer and was also a University Blue (bodybuilding competition) champion,"

Meanwhile, former Karnataka Chief Minister Ja-

gadish Shettar on Saturday visited the victim's family and offered condolences

Condemning the incident, he said, "It was an inhumane act. The way Fayaz murdered Neha, it was inhumane. It is a condemnable act and I insist that the state government, Chief Minister and Home Minister conduct an impartial and speedy inquiry into the matter." The murder of the daughter of the city corporation councillor on the campus of her college here has sparked widespread condemnation and protests.

The issue has snowballed into a political slugfest between the ruling Congress and opposition BJP in Karnataka. While the ruling party has tried to project it as an "incident with a personal angle", the saffron party suspects "love jihad" and said that it points to the "deterioration of law and order" in the state.

Neha (23), the daughter of Congress Councillor of Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation Niranjan Hiremath, was stabbed to death on the campus of BVB College on Thursday. The accused Fayaz Khondunaik, who fled the scene, was arrested by police subsequently. Neha was a first-year MCA student and Fayaz was her former classmate.

According to a senior police officer, Fayaz stabbed her multiple times. During interrogation, he claimed that the two had been in a relationship but she had been avoiding him of late. "It needs to be corroborated and verified, but he was

arrested immediately," the officer said. In Munavalli, Fayaz's hometown in Belagavi district, the incident sparked outrage and demonstrations have been held by various organisations condemning the murder. (PTI)

Govt forms task force on brain healthcare



NEW DELHI, April 20: The Union Health Ministry has constituted a 'National Task Force on Brain Health' to improve accessibility and quality of brain healthcare at primary, secondary and ter-

According to an office memorandum issued on Saturday, brain health is an emerging and growing concept that encompasses preventive, promotive and rehabilitative domains to provide and ensure brain health for all as part of universal health coverage and to accomplish SDGs.

Disorders of the nervous system are the leading cause of disability adjusted life years (DALYs) and the second leading cause of death globally, accounting for 9 million deaths per year, the memo-

In the past three decades, most studies in India have shown a high disease burden for specific diseases including stroke, epilepsy, headache, Parkinson's disease, and dementia, mostly reported for the urban Indian population.

Despite progress in improving access to national

health care, disparities persist based on socioeconomic status, age, geography, and gender.

A pragmatic approach for effective strategies on surveillance, prevention, acute care and rehabilitation is needed urgently to provide easily accessible services for promotion, protection and recovery of neurological health and care in India,

'Accordingly, it has been proposed to constitute a 'National Task Force on Brain Health' with technical experts in the field of neurological care and science, and concerned ministries to review the

gaps in depth and make recommendations," it said. According to the terms of reference of the task force, it will recommend pathways to improve accessibility and quality of brain health at primary, secondary and tertiary health care level.

It will also recommend specific action to be taken for strengthening and creating a robust, structured system to provide effective, timely diagnosis, treatment and care to patients with neurological disorders and formulate strategies for promotion, management and prevention of neuroogical disorders in Ayushman Aarogya Mandirs.

The task force will recommend ways to create systems for supportive rehabilitation infrastructure, equipped to provide services and interventions aimed at enhancing overall well-being and functioning for individuals living with Neurological conditions.

The task force will submit its report by July 15.

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MUMBAI, April 20: Filmmaker Gurinder Chadha on Friday officially announced her new film "Christmas Karma", a contemporary Bollywood musical, inspired by Charles Dickens' classic "A

10 THE HILLS TIMES

Christmas Carol" "The Big Bang Theory" alum Kunal Nayyar will portray the lead role of Scrooge in the movie, which also feature a starstudded cast of Eva Longoria, Billy Porter, Hugh Bonneville, Boy George, Leo Suter, Charithra Chandran, Pixie Lott, Danny Dyer, Bilal Hasna, Allan Corduner, Tracy-Ann Oberman, Rufus Jones, Eve and Nitin

Chadha, best known "Bhaji on the Beach", "Bend It Like Beck-ham", "Bride and Prejudice", "Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging", "It's a Wonderful Afterlife" and "Viceroy's House", is also producing and writing the new movie, which will feature music written by acclaimed British singer-songwriter Gary Barlow, Shaznay Lewis and Nitin Sawhney.

With "Christmas Karma", Chadha said, the aim is to create a festive classic for "our times and for generations to come"

"By adapting one of history's greatest novels - Charles Dickens' 'Christmas Carol' - I am making a British film from my unique,

out these days.

MUMBAI, April 20: Popular TV star Divyanka Tripathi, best known for daily

soaps like "Banoo Main Teri Dulhann"

and "Yeh Hai Mohabbatein", said she

refrains working on the small screen

as the characters are not well-etched

"For me, a character is very im-

portant. If the character is well-

written, then there's a joy in

the TV shows that I've been

offered have no clarity

show for a month. Then

about the plot of the

cause they

(makers)

had clar-

playing it. The problem is that

original point of view but one that resonates with Dickens' masterful statement on the human condition.

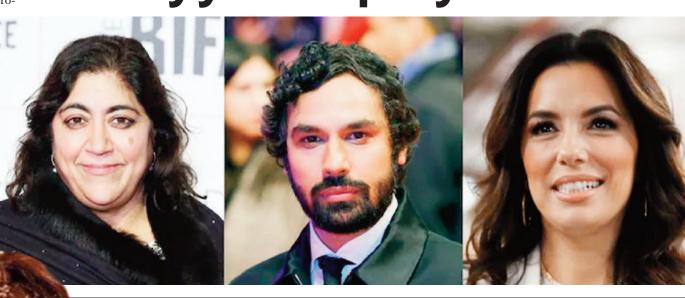
"I am blessed with such a great diverse cast and eclectic music team - the soundtrack will be banging, influenced by Gospel, Bhangra, Carols and classic pop songs. You will not be able to sit still," the 64-year-old director said in a statement.

"Christmas Karma" is backed by True Brit Entertainment, Bend It Films, Maven Screen Media and Civic Studios. Chadha, Celine Rattray, Trudie Styler and Amory Leader will serve as pro-

The executive producers include Zygi Kamasa, Anushka Shah, Paul Mayeda Berges, Sophia Pedlow and Hannah Leader.

Published in 1843, "A Christmas Carol" recounts the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, an elderly miser who is visited by the ghost of his former business partner Jacob Marley and the spirits of Christmas Past. Present and Yet to Come. In the process, Scrooge is transformed into a kinder, gentler man.





CHARACTERS ARE NOT WELL-WRITTEN TODAY ON INDIAN TV, SAYS DIVYANKA TRIPATHI

it is susceptible to sudden changes, and in that case you can't chew on the idea," the love to do TV," she added. actor told PTI in an Tripathi, who started her interview. "However, career as an anchor on All I've worked with India Radio (AIR), said some good people television has played a like Sandeep Sikand, on 'Yeh huge part in her professional life. Hai Mohabbatein'. My job was easy be-

"It has given birth to my career and taught me acting. There's no acting school better than TV," the actor said.

She currently features in the espionage thriller series, "Adrishyam - The Invisible Heroes".

revealed

The actor

that she was initially in two minds about taking up the offer which came after she underwent a ligament surgery in August

"I'm always seeking an opportunity to explore new characters, do something that I haven't done before. This role is completely different from what I've done. So, I was excited when they offered it,"

"However, I was in a dilemma whether I'll be able to do it or not, will I recover post the surgery on time? So, there were certain timelines and they were waiting to begin the project. I had two months' time to recover, I worked hard a lot to make sure that we commenced shooting on time," she said.

Also starring Eijaz Khan, the SonyLIV show follows the life of two undercover intelligence

officers who neutralise terror risks while posing as regular employees of the meteorological department. Tripathi plays the role of Parvati, while Khan

The actor said she is grateful that she got the opportunity to try her hands on action with the series.

"On television, I was never approached for such a character, they don't write such characters for women. There are some characters like that but they didn't get that kind of reception. On OTT, we are seeing a variety of characters (for women) and the concept of (women) undercover agents is new in this web space," she added.

"Adrishyam - The Invisible Heroes" is developed by Anshuman Sinha and Sachin Pandey for Sony LIV. (PTI)

'Undekhi' season three to release on SonyLIV in May



MUMBAI, April 20: Streaming platform SonyLIV has announced that the third season of their popular show "Undekhi" will premiere on May 10.

The thriller series features Harsh Chhaya, Dibyendu Bhattacharya, Varun Badola and Shivangi Singh, among others. It is directed by Ashish R

The streamer on Friday unveiled the trailer of "Undekhi" and announced the release date of the upcoming season.

Set in Manali, "Undekhi" revolves around a horrid crime that takes place one fateful night, and the cat and mouse chase that ensues post that between the perpetrators and the ones seeking justice.

Bhattacharya plays the role of the police officer and Chhaya as a man who will do anything to hamper the investigation.

"As the Atwal family un-leashes chaos, grappling with family politics and confronting their concealed past becomes a massive challenge. Thrilling encounters, a battle for ultimate supremacy, and long-buried mysteries resurfacing to haunt them, this season promises to showcase an electrifying fight for power amidst a relentless force of revenge," read the official synopsis.

Produced by Applause Entertainment, in association with Banijay Asia, "Undekhi" also stars Surya Sharma, Ankur Rathee, Anchal Singh and Ayn Zoya.

Sequel to Malayalam hit 'Premalu' in the works from Bhavana **Studios**

MUMBAI, April 20: Production house Bhavana Studios has announced a sequel to its latest Malayalam hit "Premalu"

Girish AD, who helmed the romantic comedy that released in theatres in February this year to positive reviews, will return as the director for the follow-up.

The studio announced the movie in a post on Instagram on Friday evening and said it will be released in 2025. "The Biggest Rom-Com blockbuster ever in Malayalam Cinema will be back in 2025! Let's 'Premalu2'," Bhavana Studios wrote alongside the film's poster. "Premalu" starred Naslen and Mamitha Baiju in lead roles, alongside Sangeeth Prathap, Shyam Mohan, Meenakshi Raveendran, Akhila Bhargavan and Althaf Salim

Co-written by Girish and Kiran Josy, the story followed the budding romance between Sachin (Naslen) and Reenu, played by Baiju. According to the reports, the movie had earned over Rs 135 crore at the global box office. "Premalu 2" will be produced by Malayalam star Fahadh Faasil, writerdirector Dileesh Pothan and writer Shyam Pushkaran under the banner of Bhavana Studios. (PTI)

I've not gone under the knife, only had touch up done with fillers years ago: Rajkummar Rao

MUMBAI, April 20: Rajkummar Rao on Friday denied rumours that has undergone plastic surgery after his photos from a recent event sparked social media debate about the actor's changed

about

mv char-

acter. Today,

I don't see this

TV shows) if I get that

and if the character is

well-written. I would

Rao, who is currently promoting his upcoming biographical drama "Srikanth", had posed for shutterbugs at a concert here and many on social media commented how he looked

"I've not gone under the knife. I have not done any kind of plastic surgery. That picture, if you see it again, how is it possible in 14 years, there's one picture and no other picture like that. It's certainly a touched-up picture because my skin is looking so flawless. Even I was amazed how it's so flawless without any

makeup and after shooting the whole day," Rao told PTI. The actor said he has faced comments about his looks right from his struggle days but he is still the same person.

"When I was looking for work and when I started working, people commented on my looks and everything. So, eight-nine years back, I did a little touch up on my chin with fillers, which is like a half an hour job, because I wanted to feel more confident, which I

"I feel I look much better. But has it changed me as a person? Has it changed me as an artist? Not at all," the 39-year-old actor

Directed by Tushar Hiranandani, "Srikanth" is a biographical drama of a visually impaired industrialist "Srikanth Bolla" who fights against odds to become an entrepreneur. The film is slated to release on May 10. (PTI)

Sequel to Malayalam hit 'Premalu' in the works from **Bhavana Studios**



MUMBAI, April 20: Production house Bhavana Studios has announced a sequel to its latest Malayalam hit "Premalu". Girish AD, who helmed the romantic comedy that released in theatres in February this year to positive reviews, will return as the director for the follow-up.

The studio announced the movie in a post on Instagram on Friday evening and said it will be released in 2025.

"The Biggest RomCom blockbuster ever in Malayalam Cinema will be back in 2025! Let's 'Premalu2'," Bhavana Studios wrote alongside the film's poster.

"Premalu" starred Naslen and Mamitha Baiju in lead roles, alongside Sangeeth Prathap, Shyam Mohan, Meenakshi Raveendran, Akhila Bhargavan and Althaf Salim.

Co-written by Girish and Kiran Josy, the story followed the budding romance between Sachin (Naslen) and Reenu, played by Baiju. According to the reports, the movie had earned over Rs 135 crore at the global box office.

"Premalu 2" will be produced by Malayalam star Fahadh Faasil, writer-director Dileesh Pothan and writer Shyam Pushkaran under the banner of Bhavana Studios. (PTI)

I KNEW NARINE WOULD BE A T20 LEGEND: GAMBHIR

KOLKATA, April 20: Former India cricketer Gautam Gambhir says Sunil Narine is perhaps the greatest bowler in IPL and he had an inkling that the West Indian will develop into a legend of T20 cricket when he made his ODI debut against India way back in

The former Kolkata Knight Riders skipper and now team mentor has revealed that he decided to rope Narine for the IPL after seeing the West Indian during his debut series in 2011.

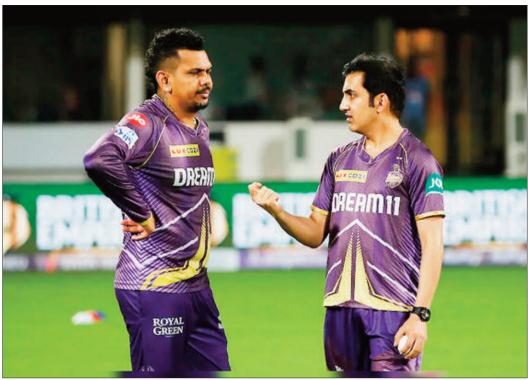
"I must have faced seven or eight deliveries and I thought this is the guy who is going to go out there and become the legend of the game, especially in T20 cricket," Gambhir said in KKR Knights Dugout Podcast.

"See where is Sunil Narine now? Probably the greatest bowler in IPL history," he said.

Narine has taken 170 wickets in his IPL career and has also scored 1322 runs so far, including a century, from 168 matches he has played in the League.

He made his ODI debut against India in the third ODI in Ahmedabad in December 2011 where he returned with figures of 2/34, dismissing Virat Kohli and Ravichandran Ashwin.

But it was only during the fourth ODI in Indore that Gamb- tery bowler for KKR, claiming



hir faced Narine for the first time. Narine returned wicket-less with 0/46 from his six overs but Gambhir had made up his mind that the Trinidadian would become his go-to bowler in the IPL 2012. Narine emerged as a mys-

24 wickets in 2012, the secondhighest behind Morne Morkel's 25, to help KKR clinch their maiden IPL crown in 2012.

In 2014 too when they won their second title, Narine was their second highest wicket-taker finishing with 21 scalps.

Gambhir then tapped into Narine's batting potential and promoted him to open for KKR.

hugely successful with the bat while maintaining his stranglehold with the ball as well.

Back as a mentor of the side

This time around, he has been

after playing a similar role with Lucknow Super Giants in the last two seasons, Gambhir said his mantra for KKR this season is to be "courageous"

"I'm a strong believer that it's not the most talented team that goes on to win big tournaments. It's the most courageous team that's willing to fight till the last drop of blood, will go on to win the IPL. The mantra for the season is we need to be courageous.

We should have the courage to be positive all the time. and if you walk that path, I'm very, very bullish about the kind of talent in our dressing room. If we fight, if we are courageous and fight for everyone in the dressing room, fight for every fan who has stuck with us, if we do that I think we will be in a good position," he added. Gambhir further recalled how team owner Shah Rukh Khan backed him during his poor run in 2014 and told him "you are not going to drop yourself till you're here". It served him as a motivation to do well and win the title in 2014.

"I couldn't score one run in four games. I've said it a numerous number of times I think he is the best owner I've worked with. It's not because I'm now part of KKR or I was part of KKR. (PTI)

Vinesh, Reetika, Mansi & Anshu inch closer to Paris Oly qualification

TAN), April 20: Looking as dominant as ever, Vinesh Phogat made full use of an easy draw to demolish her opponents, placing herself one win away from securing a Paris Olympics quota, while Anshu Malik and U23 world champion Reetika too made it to the semifinals at the Asian Olympic Qualifier, here Saturday.

Vinesh, as is her wont, looked for that one opportunity to subdue her Korean rival and grabbed it after measuring Miran Cheon for about 30 seconds in her open-

Once she grabbed Cheon and pushed her down for a take down, the bout ended in a jiffy, in one minute and 39 seconds.

It was difficult to wriggle out of Vinesh's strong hold. The Indian employed gut wrench move thrice and mixed that with one expose' to finish the bout.

The next bout lasted a mere 67 seconds. Cambodia's Smanang Dit was an easy prey. Vinesh pinned her in no time to move to the women's 50kg semifinal.

Vinesh is competing in 50kg category after winning the selection trials. Even if she misses the chance, she can later be in contention for a berth in 53kg where Antim Panghal has already secured a quota. Antim may be asked to appear in one final trial to prove her worth.

The finalists at this competition will win quota for their re-

spective countries. The 2021 World Championship silver medallist Anshu Malik got a direct entry into the quarterfinals and she had no problem whatsoever to put it across Kyrgyzstan's Kalmira Bilimbekova by technical superiority. U23 world champion Reetika (76kg) did not have to break much sweat in outclassing Eunju Hwang. She won the first round by technical superiority as the

(KYRGYZS- Korean had no answer to Reetika's class and got a similar win under belt against Mongolia's Davaanasan Enkh Amar.

In the final group bout against China's Juang Wang, Reetika raced to a 8-0 lead but the Chinese fought back and logged six straight points. She effected another move at the dying moments but much to the relief of Indian camp, that point was not awarded because it came at the end of stipulated time on clock.

Mansi Ahlawat (62kg) also made it to last-four as she needed to win just one bout. Up against Kazakhstan's Irina Kuznetsova, she emerged a 6-4 winner.

The only Indian wrestler who could not reach the semifinals was Nisha Dahiya (68kg).

Nisha had to work hard for her opening win against Sol Gum Pak from North Korea. The Indian had raced to a 5-0 lead and maintained that till the first period, but the Korean put the pressure back on her rival with a strong resistance.

Immediately at the start of the second period, Pak successfully got a take-down move to get on the scoreboard. However, Nisha kept pushing Pak out to extend her lead and eventually won 8-3.

Already exhausted, Nisha was outclassed by local favourite Meerim Zhumanazarova in round 2, in which she suffered a heavy defeat. After falling behind 1-9, she was pinned by Meerim. She could hardly employ any attacking move, and was mostly involved in standing wrestling.

In the must-win round 3, Nisha overpowered Kazakhstan's Yelena Shalygina but with Meerim losing her final group bout, Nisha did not have enough points to stay in top-four.

The last chance to win Paris Games quota will be at World Qualifiers in Turkey from May 9.

Gukesh to clash with Alireza on what promises to be a photo finish

Verstappen of Red Bull has completed a Formula 1 double, taking the pole Saturday for the Chinese Grand Prix just hours after winning the first F1 sprint of the sea-

Verstappen takes pole for

Chinese GP to extend F1

Teammate Sergio Perez will start alongside Verstappen on Sunday on the front row with Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin and Lando Norris of McLaren on the second row. Verstappen turned 1 minute 33.660 seconds on his fastest lap, 0.322 ahead of Perez.

Superlatives fail. The threetime defending F1 champion is unassailable — the sport's best driver in the quickest car. The Dutchman has won 22 of the last 26 GPs and three of the first four this season. Only a brake failure in Melbourne, Australia,

Look for more of the same on Sunday.

probably kept

from sweeping all

"If the car is even only half as good as what it was in the sprint then I think we'll be all right," Verstappen

This season he's won every pole, and his start from that spot on Sunday will be the 37th of his career — it's the 100th pole for Red Bull as a team — as he chases his 58th victory

"Of course, that's an incredible achievement for the whole team," Verstappen said.

"From my side, it's been a really good start to the year." he added in understatement. "I feel very confident in qualifying compared to last year. Just a shame of course that we retired in Melbourne, otherwise I think we could have had already a very strong lead."

Alonso, who won season titles in 2005 and 2006, is still going

SHANGHAI, April 20: Max strong. He turns 43 this summer, just signed a contract extension with Aston Martin and remains one of F1's quickest drivers.

"These kind of laps and moments are very encouraging for the future," the Spaniard said. He said on race day he's likely to finish "seven, eight or nine" — but no matter.

"We are qualifying extremely well this year and we'll take it."

Verstappen leads the F1 season standings with 85 points, 15 clear of teammate Perez and 21 clear of

Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes, who dominated the sport before Verstap-

> 49 races — the last in 2021. He will start 18th on the grid after finishing second in the sprint.

The track. located about 40 kilometers (25 miles) northwest of central Shanghai, has been a mystery for teams to

solve. This is the first F1 race in China in five years, scratched from the calendar by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The biggest unknown is the racing surface, which has had a thin "seal coating" applied — described as liquid asphalt. Tire supplier Pirelli said it had not been fully aware of the changes. In steady rain on Friday, Verstappen said driving in those conditions was like "driving on ice."

Adding to the intrigue, two small grass fires broke out on at the edge of the track in Friday practice. The circuit was built on a marshy area, and a methane gas leak is suspected. (AP)

dominance; Hamilton 18th

TORONTO, April 20: Teenaged Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh will have his task cut out against Firouzja Alireza of France in the penultimate round of the Candidates' chess tournament, on what promises to be a

Qualifying was run under dry conditions with similar weather expected for Sunday.

Charles Leclerc of Ferrari.

Hikaru Nakamura of the United States and Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia. pen, is without a win in Just two rounds are remaining in the biggest event of the year.

The most important clash of the penultimate round will be between Nepomniachtchi and Nakamura. The latter has been displaying top form having won three in a row while Nepomniachtchi is the only player in the tournament who has remained undefeated after 12 gruelling

photo-finish here.

Gukesh, with his last white

game, will improve his chances

greatly in the tournament if he

can get past Alireza, who has

With 7.5 points in his bag,

Gukesh shares the lead with

clearly been struggling.

Apart from these three, Fabiano Caruana is the only player who has a chance to win the

With seven points, thus far, the American will have to tackle a tough opposition in R Praggnanandhaa of India and finally Nepomniachtchi in the last

Even Gukesh has a tough opponent to deal with in Nakamura in the final round and much will depend on how he does against the world number

Praggnanandhaa had shown signs of a podium finish midway through the tournament but could not quite end up where he



played great promise and it is only a matter of time before he can be in the top five of the world ranking or even more. Currently Praggnanandhaa has

six points. Another Indian Vidit Gujrathi had a promising start and his two victories against Nakamura in the tournament stand out as his best efforts.

Nerves, however, played some part along with time pressure on certain occasions and the Indian will have to wait for another chance. It has been a tough call for

Alireza, who has just 4.5 points while Abasov, on three points, is at the bottom of the table. In the women's section, Zhongyi Tan is in the front on

eight points and her nearest contender is compatriot Tingjie Lei, who is a half point behind. The two leaders are followed

Goryachkina and Kateryna Lagno along with India's Koneru Humpy on six points

R Vaishali on 5.5 points comes in next, a full point ahead of Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine and Nurgyul Salimovaa of Bul-

Pairings of round 13 (Indians unless specified): Vidit Gujrathi (5) vs Nijat Abasov (AZE, 3); D Gukesh (7.5) vs Firouzja Alireza (FRA, 4.5); R Praggnanandhaa (6) vs Fabiano Caruana (USA, 7); Ian Nepomniachthi (FID, 7.5) vs Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 7.5).

Women: Zhongyi Tan (CHN, 8) vs Aleksandra Gorvachkina (FID, 6); Koneru Humpy (6) vs Anna Muzychuk (UKR, 4.5); R Vaishali (5.5) vs Tingjie Lei (CHN, 7.5); Nurgyuaal Salimova (BUL, 4.5) vs Kateryna Lagno (FID, 6). (PTI)

Simply owing that space, says Fleming of Dhoni

hendra Singh Dhoni cannot be promoted in the batting order as his recovery from a knee injury has restricted his ability to wield the willow for long periods, Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming has said.

Called CSK's "heartbeat" by Fleming, Dhoni, 42, gave his team the much-needed impetus with a nine-ball 28 against Lucknow Super Giants here on Friday, one of the few entertaining cameos he has played this season. The few balls that Dhoni is getting to face in this IPL season, Fleming said he is simply "owing that space". Hailing Dhoni, Fleming said, "It's inspirational, isn't it? His batting this year even in training has been very crisp. The team isn't surprised with what he is doing because his skill level during the pre-season was very high. "Other years he has obviously had problems with his knee and he is sort of recovering from that which is why there is only a certain amount of balls he can function well." Further opening up on Dhoni's role, Fleming pointed out his 'twothree over' approach.

LUCKNOW, April 20: His bril- "I think everyone wants to see liant form notwithstanding, Mahim for longer as we do but that amount of time is about right. We need him for the tournament and that 2-3 over cameo he is owning that space. "It's up to the rest of the batting unit to get us to a good position where he can push us over the top. He is doing that pretty much every time at the moment which is great to watch," Fleming said at the post-match press conference. The long-time CSK coach said former skipper Dhoni, who guided the team to five IPL titles, remains the franchise's heartbeat and that they are "enjoying every minute" of his presence as the fans shower him with love and adulation across venues. "What an amazing atmosphere when he comes out and does play and entertain, it's exhilarating," Fleming observed.

"We are incredibly proud of what he has achieved. We marvel at the amount of love that he gets. It's no surprise with what he has done with Indian cricket and with CSK with us. We are incredibly proud that he is a part of our side and is pretty much the heartbeat of the side. We thoroughly enjoy it.

A Nigerian chess champion plays the royal game for 60 hours - a new global chess record

NEW YORK, April 20: A Flatebø and Sjur Ferkingstad. Nigerian chess champion and child education advocate played chess nonstop for 60 hours in New York City's Times Square to break the Guinness World Record for

the longest chess marathon. Tunde Onakoya, 29, hopes to raise \$1 million for children's education across Africa through the record attempt that

began on Wednesday. He had set out to play the royal game for 58 hours but continued until he reached 60 hours at about 12:40 a.m. Saturday, surpassing the current chess marathon record of 56 hours, 9 minutes and 37 seconds, achieved in 2018 by

The Guinness World Record organization has yet to publicly comment about Onakoya's attempt. It sometimes takes weeks for the organization to confirm any new record.

Onakoya played against Shawn Martinez, an American chess champion, in line with Guinness World Record guidelines that any attempt to break the record must be made by two players who would play continuously for the entire du-

Support had been growing online and at the scene, where a blend of African music kept onlookers and supporters en-Norwegians Hallvard Haug tertained amid cheers and ap-

plause. Among the dozens who cheered Onakoya on at the scene was Nigerian music star Davido.

The record attempt is "for the dreams of millions of children across Africa without access to education," said Onakoya, who founded Chess in Slums Africa in 2018.

The organization wants to support the education of at least 1 million children in slums across the continent.

"My energy is at 100% right now because my people are here supporting me with music," Onakoya said Thursday evening after the players crossed the 24-hour mark.

On Onakoya's menu: Lots of water and jollof rice, one of



West Africa's best-known

For every hour of game played, Onakoya and his opponent got only five minutes'

The breaks were sometimes grouped together, and Onakoya used them to catch up with Nigerians and New Yorkers cheering him on. He even joined in with their dancing

A total of \$22,000 was raised within the first 20 hours of the attempt, said Taiwo Adeyemi, Onakoya's manager.

The support has been overwhelming from Nigerians in the U.S., global leaders, celebrities and hundreds of passersby," he said.

Onakoya's attempt was closely followed in Nigeria, where he regularly organizes chess competitions for young people living on the streets.

More than 10 million school-age children are not in school in the West African country — one of the world's highest rates.

Among those who have publicly supported him are celebrities and public office holders, including Nigeria's former Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, who wrote to Onakoya on the social media platform X, "Remember your own powerful words: 'It is possible to do great things from a small place." (AP)

Little room for error as struggling RCB face dominant KKR

KOLKATA, April 20: Aware that they cannot afford any more slip-ups, Royal Challengers Bengaluru will have their task cut out when they face dominant hosts Kolkata Knight Riders in a tricky Indian Premier League match here on Sunday. RCB's pursuit of a maiden IPL title has once again hit a roadblock following six losses in seven

With five consecutive defeats, the bottomranked RCB now confront the daunting task of winning their remaining seven games to keep their playoff prospects alive.

For a side that has been severely let down by their bowlers and relies heavily on the batting prowess of Virat Kohli, Faf du Plessis and veteran Dinesh Karthik, facing KKR presents a signifi-

"From a bowling perspective, we don't have as many weapons. So, unfortunately, it comes down to the batters to make sure that we use our form and our confidence. The scores that we put on the board are probably going to be the only way we are going to get into the competition," their skipper Du Plessis has admitted earlier.

The fact that they are coming after conceding the IPL's record total of 287/3 by Sunrisers Hyderabad in their last match will undoubtedly linger in the minds of their bowlers.

It would not be a bad idea to bring back their most expensive (Rs 11.5-crore) buy this season, Alzarri Joseph, to go alongside Mohammed Siraj,



who was not picked against SRH.

Joseph has bagged a solitary wicket in three appearances for RCB while also getting hammered at 11.89 runs per over. Glenn Maxwell's spin also could have been a nice option, but the struggling Australian all-rounder, who pulled out of the game against SRH citing "mental fatigue", is also battling a hip strain that may keep him out of ac-

tion for some more time.

Their batting has centred around the two openers -- Kohli and Du Plessis -- and Karthik, while the rest of the players have failed miserably.

Kohli is once again leading the run chart with 361 runs at 72.20, though his middle over strike rate of 135 has been a cause of concern. The star Indian batter more often than not was seen to have

PBKS, GT look

to resurrect campaigns

slowed down against the spinners in the crucial 7-15th over phase after getting a start in the power play. Du Plessis has been their next best batter with 232 runs, but it's seasoned wicketkeeper-batter Karthik, who has been phenomenal in his final

The veteran has amassed 226 runs at a strikerate of 205-plus and in the monstrous chase against SRH, it was his 35-ball 83 that gave them hope of scripting an improbable win before they fell short by 25 runs.

The trio will again have to play a key role against the likes of Sunil Narine, Mitchell Starc and Harshit Rana. The home side will also be coming on the back of a defeat to Rajasthan Royals in a last-ball finish. So KKR, who have played one match less then

RCB, will also eye a return to winning ways and inch closer to playoffs by taking their tally to 10 points at the midway stage. The biggest threat for RCB will be Narine, not

just with the ball but also with the bat at the top of the order.

Narine, who scored his maiden T20 century in their last match against RR, is KKR's leading rungetter this season with 276 runs at an incredible strike rate of over 187.

The next best KKR batter is his opening partner Phil Salt, who has struck at a rate of 151-plus. The pair's splendid form means that the likes of Rinku Singh, Andre Russell have got limited

With a maiden fifty to his name, youngster Angkrish Raghuvanshi has impressed with his

RCB will have to target the KKR top-three to expose their batting and give themselves some

With the city in the grip of an extreme heat wave, the temperature is expected to soar to 41degree Centigrade come Sunday.

Teams (from):

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain and Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh and

Match starts at 3.30pm. (PTI)

I'm 100 per cent ready to play T20I WC: Karthik



very, very stable, honest people

who are at the helm to decide

what should be the best Indian

team for the World Cup -- Rahul

Dravid, Rohit Sharma and Ajit

them. I respect any decision that

they take. But all I can say is

I'm 100 per cent ready, and I'll

do everything I can to be on that

the importance of understanding

his strengths as a player, focus-

ing on precision rather than

power-hitting like an Andre

He said he analyses bowlers'

patterns to strategise his shots, visualising scenarios during

practice to enhance his batting

need to understand your

strengths. I'm not a Russell or a

Pollard who can just mishit a

ball and get a six for it, rather,"

The other day Karthik

smashed seven sixes and five

fours in his 35-ball 83 in pursuit

of a record 288 but eventually

RCB fell short by just 25 runs.

"So, I need to understand how

can beat gaps, what sort of

balls I can hit for boundaries.

And I realised there was a cer-

tain pattern in which bowlers

were bowling to me, so I needed

to try and work out a solution

"Hence, when I practice, I try

and understand, okay, if this is

what they're going to bowl at

me, how am I going to get a

boundary, visualising a field

that is going to be in place for

worked backwards, and that

helped me, you know, really

learn a couple of shots more, at

the back end. It's been great to go

out there and express myself, and

it's been thoroughly enjoyable to

do what I'm doing for RCB as a

finisher," he added. (PTI)

"So, I worked like that, and I

"These days as a player, you

Russell or Kieron Pollard.

Karthik further emphasised

flight to the World Cup."

"And I'm completely with

Agarkar.

repertoire.

said Karthik.

for that.

wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik, who has been in phenomenal form in this IPL, has not given up on his dream to play for India again and would do "everything he can to be in that flight" to the T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies next month.

Karthik, who will turn 39 by the time the World Cup kickstarts on June 1, was also part of the last edition of the T20I World Cup in Australia in 2022, which was also his last appearance for Team India.

Since then he has become an off-the-field cricket expert, involved in commentary stints.

Returning to IPL this season, he has taken his batting to a new level and displayed some astonishing power-hitting to strike at a rate of 205-plus.

He is also the third leading run-getter for RCB with 226 runs, behind Virat Kohli (361) and skipper Faf du Plessis (232).

"At this stage in my life, it would be the greatest feeling for me to represent India. I'm very, very keen to do so. There is nothing bigger in my life other than representing India in this T20 World Cup," the RCB wicketkeeper-batters said ahead of clash against KKR.

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With Karthik's also emerging as a contender, the wicketkeeper slot will be a hotly-contested one for which the Team India think tank may pick two at the

Making a comeback from a near-fatal accident, Rishabh Pant has also showed positive intent while captaining Delhi Capitals, and Sanju Samson (Rajasthan Royals), Ishan Kishan (Mumbai Indians), KL Rahul (Lucknow Super Giants) are also in the fray.

Karthik said he would respect whatever the Big Three -- coach Rahul Dravid, captain Rohit Sharma and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar -- decide.

MULLANPUR (PUN-JAB), April 20: Their campaigns wobbling after a string of defeats, bottomrung teams Punjab Kings and Gujarat Titans will be desperate to arrest the slide and get back to winning ways in their Indian Premier League match here on Sunday. Former champi-

ons GT have slipped to eighth position in the pecking order after an embarrassing loss to Delhi Capitals at home, where they were bowled out for 89 to suffer their third defeat in four matches.

PBKS are struggling in the ninth place following a nine-run loss to Mumbai Indians away on Thursday night, the margin of defeat made respectable by an incredible rearguard act by the in-form young duo of Ashutosh Sharma and Shashank Singh after the team was tottering at 14/4 in a chase of 193.

Five losses and two wins in seven outings hardly inspire confidence and irrespective of the fact that their upcoming opponents are also struggling to get their act right, PBKS will have their task cut out in front of their fans, who had little to cheer about so far this season at the newly-inaugurated home venue.

The absence of their influential skipper Shikhar Dhawan in the last few matches has hit PBKS hard and doubts remain over the southpaw's availability for Sunday's fixture.

Dhawan has been undergoing rehabilitation since picking up a shoulder injury during the home fixture against Sunrisers Hyderabad on April 9, resulting in England all-

rounder Sam Curran to fill in as the skipper.

While Dhawan hasn't had a great time with the bat in IPL 2024, scoring 152 runs from five innings at a strike rate of 125.61, his presence at the top of the order as well as in the field matters for a side that seems to have forgotten how to win matches.

Having finished eighth in the last edition following eight losses and six victories, the story hasn't changed for PBKS, whose biggest concern has been the failure of their specialist batters. The likes of Prabhsimran Singh, Liam Livingstone and Rilee Rossouw have failed to live up to the expectations, something that has affected the team badly.

The only silver lining for PBKS this season has been resolute displays from their unsung Indian players Shashank and Ashutosh, who both bat lower in the order and have had to make up for the shortcomings at the top on more than one occasion, including their heroics that gave

MI a massive scare the other night.

PBKS' opponents GT, who have so far registered three wins while suffering four defeats, will need to pull up their socks after the horror show with the bat against Delhi Capitals. With quality players such as skipper Shubman

Gill, Sai Sudharsan, David Miller and Rashid Khan in their ranks, complemented by a handy support cast comprising people like Rahul Tewatia, Mohit Sharma, Wriddhiman Saha and Noor Ahmad, GT would hope the show against DC was a mere blip. As far as bowling is concerned, the absence of Mohammad Shami has hurt them badly while Umesh Yadav has leaked plenty of runs though he has also taken seven wick-

Star spinner Rashid has been doing as well as he could in his primary role and is also chipping in with more than handy contributions with the bat.

Teams (from): Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Wriddhiman Saha, Sai Sudharsan, Shahrukh Khan, Matthew Wade, Kane Williamson, Azmatullah Omarzai, Abhinav

Manohar, Rashid Khan, Vijay Shankar, Rahul Tewatia, Spencer Johnson, Kartik Tyagi, Joshua Little, Darshan Nalkande, Noor Ahmad, Ravisrinivasan Sai Kishore, Mohit Sharma, Jayant Yadav, Umesh Yadav, Sushant Mishra, Sandeep Warrier, Sharath BR, Manav Suthar. Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (c), Matthew

Short, Prabhsimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw. Match starts at 7.30 PM. (PTI)

Won't be surprised to see 300 breached very soon: Karthik

KOLKATA, April 20: Veteran wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik on Saturday said the 300-frontier will be breached in the IPL sooner rather than later, highlighting the evolving standard of batting in the league over the past 17 years.

Sunrisers Hyderabad's total of 287/3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru stands as the highest total in the IPL right now, while the total of 300 was achieved only once in the history of the shortest format.

Nepal made 314 for three against Mongolia in the Hangzhou Asian Games last year.

"I think the ceiling is constantly getting reworked and they're pushing it much higher," Karthik said ahead of RCB's clash against the Kolkata Knight Riders here on Sunday.

The number of 250s in the first 32 matches of the tournament has been the highest ever in the history of any tournament that's played across the world in this format.

"It tells you that people are a lot more fearless, people take on the boundaries a lot more. I wouldn't be surprised if 300 is crossed very, very soon or in this year (of IPL) itself," he added. Karthik said the obvious reason was the impact player rule that has bolstered teams' batting.

"You're batting much deeper, which puts that much more pressure on the bowlers. The freedom to keep playing shots has liberated a lot of the young boys who are out there and they're all playing some phenomenal shots.

The standard of batting if you take in the last 17 years this tournament has existed, it is unreal how well it's grown," added the cricketer-turned-commentator.

Having won just one out of seven matches, RCB's playoff hopes have diminished as they have to win all their remaining matches to stand a chance to finish inside the top four.

Karthik, however, said if their batters find form then "sky is the limit" for them.

"The belief is definitely there. If there's no belief there is no point playing a tournament like IPL. Every year there will be a couple of teams at this stage trying to find their feet and there have been so many instances when they picked up and won "We believe that if we can do something special we could get

that momentum and use that to our confidence.

You need a lot of characters and players who are consist tently doing well and the players who have not started doing well to find form. And when you get a few players firing then the sky is the limit for you," he added.

RCB's string of defeats has not brought their confidence down and Karthik said they remain a close-knit unit.

"The team is very closely knit as a unit. I think that's something that Andy Flower and Faf Du Plessis have tried really

"The best part about it is that Virat is such a good leader that he's doing all that he can to propel the team, keep it in good spirits, be it having a laugh and a joke or be it to speak to players and try and get their mood up a little bit.

"We're trying our best, it's something that we can definitely tell and I think all our fans who are watching are aware that we're doing everything we can. That's the sport, not everything goes in your way always," he said. (PTI)

The question has to be asked would you like to bat higher? Lara on Dhoni

LUCKNOW, April 20: The fans are clamouring for MS Dhoni to move up the batting order. In an ideal world, the team management would also like it that way, and Brian Lara too feels the talisman should be asked, 'would you like to bat higher?"

But the West Indies great knows that the 42-year-old, whose ability to bat for extended periods has been restricted by a chronic knee problem, "won't" consider a promotion in the batting order. Besides the knee issue, Dhoni is also at a

stage where he is looking to give the youngsters a chance to prove their mettle. "It's just brilliant. The question has to be

asked would you like to bat higher? Because I can see he's making valuable contributions. But there are a couple of losing causes as well. So, I think that should be a consideration," Lara told Star Sports.

The Chennai Super Kings legend gave his team the much-needed impetus with a nineball 28 against Lucknow Super Giants here on Friday, one of the few entertaining cameos he has played this IPL season. CSK, though, lost the game by eight wickets after being stopped at 176/6.

Lara added, "At 42, he's most likely thinking from the teams point of view, that the young guys got to do the job. But I think the middle of the innings told a little bit too much about CSK batting. And it created the fact that even though he exploded at the end and he did that Dhoni thing at the end and it still was not enough.



"So, I think they will have to go back to the drawing room. And realise that they need to be a little bit more aggressive throughout the innings. Because at the back

end, you've got the man to come. "And if he gets two three overs, as he did against Mumbai Indians. And propelled them above 200. They need to think about that all the time.

Against LSG, Dhoni slammed a four and a six off Mohsin Khan before smashing ished the innings with two more fours as 19 came off the last over.

Lara shared his thoughts on moments when Dhoni comes out to bat and the loud cheers it generates across venues.

"That's the terrific part of the game. I've said it over and over again, when you have a guy aged 42, a legend, an icon in the game, someone who has played in the IPL for so many years and you don't know when

he's going to say, hey, that's it. "He comes out to bat and I think it's just

a moment to sayour and everyone is just going to feel amazing about this. It's going to be a lot of emotions, but then he walks out and does the business," Lara said.

"He may not have to look and say, 'listen, I may have to go up the order because I may need a little bit more runs'. He has batted five, six times now and remained unbeaten. So, any team strategising would say, 'well, obviously you have to go up'. But I don't think he will."

CSK head coach Stephen Fleming had earlier claimed that the team isn't surprised by what the former skipper has done with the bat this season, saying his skill level during pre-season was very high.

When the discussion turned to Dhoni's fitness and running between the wickets, Lara said, "He's still doing it today and let's make sure that he's on the park for all the matches in this IPL for CSK.

"But yeah, running between the wickets where he is aware of the situation and aware of that the matchup for him is just the correct matchup.

"And it just looked like when you look at the counter, there's two umpires, 11 fielders, and a bowler, and then there's these fans, and they all just look like spectators when he's striking the ball. "Fielders diving to his left, he can't get it, fielders looking his head, he can't get it. It's just his show. He's just scripted it so well." (PTI)

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