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'Will support any non-BJP govt at Centre unconditionally'

GUWAHATI, April 23: The AIUDF on Tuesday asserted that after the first phase of Lok Sabha elections, it is sensing that the BJP will not be able to retain power, and vowed to extend unconditional support to any non-BJP government at the Centre.

The Badruddin Ajmal-led party released its election manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls, reaffirming its opposition to Citizenship (Amendment) Act and Uniform Civil Code.

Addressing a press conference after releasing the party's election manifesto, AIUDF legislator Hafiz Rafiqul Islam said, "After the first phase of polling, we are sensing that the BJP will not retain power. We want a non-BJP government in Delhi and we will support it unconditionally."

The party, in its manifesto, said it will pressurise the new government at the Centre to declare recurring Assam floods a national calamity, work for land rights of dwellers of riverine islands and called for equitable development of Barak Valley at par with Brahmaputra Valley. It has fielded its candidates in Dhubri, Nagaon (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ex-VP Naidu calls for strengthening anti-defection law

NEW DELHI, April 23: Former vice president M Venkaiah Naidu on Tuesday said parties should be discouraged from promising freebies without adequate resources to back their assurances and also called for strengthening the anti-defection law to check the "disturbing trend" of frequent party-hopping by leaders.

Speaking at a get-together function at his residence here after receiving the Padma award, Naidu said announcing "freebies" during elections without listing out funds mobilisation is an unhealthy trend which should be discouraged and people should question the leaders and parties making such lofty promises. He said that he felt humbled and gratified on being conferred Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian honour in India.

"This recognition of my humble contribution to the nation strengthens my resolve to serve society with renewed vigour," the former vice-president observed. Naidu was awarded Padma Vibhushan on Monday evening by President Droupadi Murmu at a function at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

"Defections are being encouraged. We should strengthen the anti-defection law," he asserted.

"Now, the worry is that there is a fall in the standards in public life. In politics, people often change their parties. The latest trend is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

No talks with Centre on relocating Chakma, Hajong refugees in Assam: CM Himanta pins Rijiju's remark, says no land available

GUWAHATI, April 23: The Central government has not discussed anything over the relocation of Chakma and Hajong refugees in Assam, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed on Tuesday.

His statement comes following Union minister Kiren Rijiju's remarks that there have been talks to relocate these refugees from Arunachal Pradesh to Assam after the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

"I don't know what Rijiju has said, but the government of India has not discussed these matters with us. Rijiju might have perhaps said something in view of the political situation in Arunachal Pradesh," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a poll campaign meeting. The CM also maintained that there is no land available to resettle the refugees and added, "No one from Chakma or Hajong communities has met me nor has the government of India discussed it with me. I will speak with Rijiju about the matter after the elections."

Sarma said Assamese people residing in Arunachal Pradesh, numbering about 6,000-7,000, will be given permanent resident certificates by the Assam government.

Rijiju, who is seeking re-election to the Lok Sabha from Arunachal Pradesh, had claimed at



a press conference in Itanagar last week that CAA has been a 'big blessing' as it has closed doors for citizenship to any foreigner or refugee in his state. He said the Chakma, Hajong

refugees have been requested to leave the state, with the government of India to facilitate their relocation.

"We have spoken to the Assam government, other people for relocation, but we do not want to discuss much about it before identification (of land for resettlement) is done. I can give this indication that we have talked to the Assam government," the Union minister said.

Rijiju added that he has spoken to Sarma in this regard, and also with Union home minister Amit Shah to relocate the refugees.

Chakmas, who are Buddhists, and Hajongs, who are Hindus, migrated to India between 1964 and 1966 from the Chittagong Hills Tract of then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to escape religious persecution, and were settled in the North East Frontier Agency, which is the present-day Arunachal Pradesh. More than 60,000 Chakma and Hajong refugees have resided in Arunachal Pradesh since the 1960s. Rijiju's statement has led to sharp reactions in Assam, with organisations leading the anti-CAA movement in the stand demanding clarification from the chief minister in this regard. Rajgor Dal president and MLA Akhil Gogoi said, "Sarma should clarify whether (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Mainstream media blacking out Cong, party using social network to connect with people: Shrinete



GUWAHATI, April 23: Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete claimed that social media has helped her party to connect with people as mainstream media is "blacking out" the grand old party.

Respecting India's diversity, the party has been creating content in as many regional languages as possible, said Shrinete who heads the Congress social media and digital platforms cell.

She claimed that her party has 'far higher' engagement rates as compared to its competitor the BJP.

"Engagement rates on social media for Congress vis-a-vis our main competitor BJP are far higher. Our reach is far higher despite the fact that our actual followers are still lower than BJP," Shrinete, said in an interview with PTI here. The fact that "mainstream media chooses to ignore us but people still know us, what we are doing works in Congress' favour", she added.

On how the Congress is utilising social media to

reach out to the masses, she said, "The strategy is simple. We mirror exactly what we do on the ground. I don't think social media and politics are two divorced things, they are complimentary to each other."

She said Congress's social media strategy is based broadly on four points "to come out with only the truth and not indulge in fake news, to be fast in reaching out, to keep the narrative decent and related to the issues on the ground, and create the content depending on the platform and audience, with videos taking a priority." Issues are chosen as per the region as relevance varies from place to place, with the party focussing on creating content in as many regional languages as possible, Shrinete claimed.

"We try and do a lot of stuff in vernacular languages. It comes from our deep appreciation of India's diversity," she said, adding "The essence here is that we represent the values we stand for and that we don't believe in imperialism of language or thought," Shrinete added. "Our leadership has a lot of visibility across social media, he (Rahul Gandhi) understands social media well, he speaks to them (people), he does a video from the car and this is relatable these are advantageous for us," Shrinete maintained.

On trolls used to discredit rival parties and leaders, she said, "Trolls are a menace. I wish our polity was mature, our political discourse was mature." Shrinete maintained that when taking over her responsibilities in the party's social media cell, she had decided to keep it a place for 'meaningful engagement and has held on to her end (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ASDC accuses APHLC of silence on voter list deletion issue

DIPHU, April 23: Daniel Teron, the publicity secretary of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), has criticised independent candidate JI Kathar, the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), for remaining silent on the deletion of non-schedule tribe communities from voter list of the KAAC.



Speaking at a press conference held at the ASDC central committee office in Diphu on Tuesday, Teron stated, "The deletion of names of voters from non-schedule tribe communities, framing of new rules for KAAC, and the call for re-election have been the primary concerns of the APHLC. Despite strong demands from Kathar and APHLC over the past two to three years, these issues have been kept silent during this election. APHLC is deceiving the people."

He further said that the APHLC had contested the 2022 KAAC election, stating it was conducted under the Panchayati Raj system and not according to the Sixth Schedule provision.

"They also claimed to have won the case in the Guwahati High Court, but Teron alleged that they have yet to provide evidence of their victory," Teron added.

Teron further pointed out that although the APHLC had been vocal about the deletion of names of non-schedule tribe voters, none of its leaders, including Kathar, Angtong Ingti Kathar, Bikram Hanse, Rajesh Tisso, or Rajen Tisso, have addressed the issue during this election.

"They have failed to bring these issues to the people during this election, despite claiming to be a regional party. However, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has rejected this claim. People should reject APHLC," Teron urged. It is worth mentioning that ASDC candidate Jotson Bey is contesting the Lok Sabha seat of 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency.

We are fighting for the protection of land of indigenous people: JI Kathar



DIPHU, April 23: All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) backed independent candidate JI Kathar on Tuesday said that this election is a war for the protection of the in-

igenous people and the land.

He said this while addressing a rally which was held at Diphu Government Boys HS School playground.

"Election is also a war and we are fighting for the protection of the land of indigenous people. We are for the indigenous Assamese and indigenous Adivasis. Everyone should come forward to support and protect our people," he added.

Kathar further said that the APHLC will fight against nepotism and cronyism, adding, "The party will not allow for a 'one man show' where all contract works are in one hand. Jobs will be created in five years". Commenting on the allegation of taking money from BJP, Kathar said, "There is allegation that I have taken ₹ 2 crore. I was not born to take money. These are just false allegations leveled at me."

Later, he urged Kathar for the protection of indigenous people. On the other hand, Daniel Langthasa, former Member of Autonomous Council (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Twenty out of the 22 observed glaciers showed continued mass loss Asia world's most disaster-prone region in 2023: WMO

NEW DELHI, April 23: Asia continued to bear the brunt of weather, climate and water-related hazards in 2023, making it the world's most disaster-hit region, according to a new report by the World Meteorological Organization.

Floods and storms led to the highest number of reported casualties and economic losses, and the impact of heat waves intensified, said the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) State of the Climate in Asia - 2023 report.

According to the report, sea-surface temperatures in the northwest Pacific Ocean hit record highs, and even the Arctic Ocean experienced a marine



heat wave.

"Many countries in the region experienced their hottest year on record in 2023, along with a barrage of extreme conditions, from droughts and heat waves to floods and storms. Climate change exacerbated the frequency and severity of such events, profoundly impacting societies, economies, and, most importantly, human lives and the environment that we live in," said WMO secretary-general Celeste Saulo.

Climate activist Harjeet Singh said the new report highlights the profound vulnerabilities of the region to the escalating threats of climate change. "These catastrophic

impacts, caused by increasing surface temperatures, glacier retreat and sea level rise, underscore the critical need for access to precise, projected climate information and tailored meteorological services. Such tools are indispensable for enhancing disaster preparedness and implementing effective adaptation strategies to safeguard lives and livelihoods.

"It is crucial to emphasise the need for robust climate finance mechanisms to scale up adaptation and address loss and damage. Developing countries in Asia bear the brunt of climate-related adversities without adequate means to combat foreseeable disasters and the worsening impacts of climate change, he said, adding that international solidarity and financial support from wealthier nations are imperative to empower these countries to build resilience and respond effectively to inequitable climate impacts. Citing the Emergency Events Database, the report said 79 disasters linked with hydro- (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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Ban on MDH, Everest masala

India seeks details from food regulators of Singapore, Hong Kong

NEW DELHI, April 23: India, the world's largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices, has sought details from food safety regulators of Singapore and Hong Kong, which has banned certain spices of Indian brands MDH and Everest due to quality concerns.



ministry official said. Technical details, analytical reports and the details of the exporters whose consignments have been rejected have been sought from Embassies at Singapore and Hong Kong, the official said.

that an industry consultation is also scheduled to discuss the issue of mandatory testing of ethylene oxide in spice shipments to Singapore and Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the Spices Board of India is looking into the ban imposed by Hong Kong and Singapore on the sale of four spice-mix products of Indian brands MDH and Everest.

Markets climb for 3rd day on firm global cues

NEW DELHI, April 23: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher for the third session in a row on Tuesday, following gains in telecom, tech and consumer durable shares amid a firm trend in the global markets.

Extreme weather may pose risk to inflation, says RBI Bulletin

MUMBAI, April 23: Extreme weather conditions may pose a risk to inflation, along with prolonged geopolitical tensions that could keep crude oil prices volatile, the Reserve Bank's April Bulletin said on Tuesday.

In the Bulletin further said global growth momentum has been sustained in the first quarter of 2024, and the outlook for world trade is turning positive.

However, rising global crude prices and renewed foreign capital outflows amid geopolitical tensions restricted the markets' appreciation bias, traders said.

Airtel introduces new International roaming packs

GUWAHATI, April 23: In a bid to cater to the needs of its global clientele, Bharti Airtel ('Airtel'), a leading telecommunications service provider in India, has launched affordable international roaming packs.

In a move to streamline user experience, Airtel has eliminated the hassle of subscribing to multiple packs for different destinations. Travelers to any of the 184 countries need only select the duration of their journey to enjoy uninterrupted connectivity worldwide.

Agri exports fall 9 pc to USD 43.7 bn during Apr-Feb 2024 due to global, domestic factors

NEW DELHI, April 23: The country's agriculture exports declined by 8.8 per cent to USD 43.7 billion during April-February period of 2023-24 fiscal due to factors like the Red Sea crisis, Russia-Ukraine war, and domestic restrictions imposed on critical items like rice, wheat, sugar and onion.

In a first, Uttar Pradesh real estate regulator penalises buyer for 'misuse of process of law'

NOIDA, April 23: In a first such case, the Uttar Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority (UP RERA) on Tuesday imposed a penalty on a buyer for "misusing the process of law".

The promoter had complied with this order and provided him possession with registered sub-lease deed and also paid approximately ₹ 2.68 lakh as interest for the delay, it said.

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I have Changed my name from Mohammed Tafazzul Hussain Chowdhury & Md Tafazzul Hussain Chowdhury to Tafazzul Hussain Chowdhury by swearing a notarial affidavit at Sankardevnagar Hojai. From today onwards I will be known as Tafazzul Hussain Chowdhury for all purpose. My old Passport No-M4870556.



According to the data of the commerce ministry, the exports stood at USD 47.9 billion in April-February 2022-23.

The exports of basmati rice have increased from USD 4.2 billion in April-February 2022-23 to USD 5.2 billion in April-February 2023-24 in value terms, registering a growth of 22 per cent.

Contd. from Page 1...

'Will support any non-BJP

and Karimganj seats that are going to polls in the second phase on April 26. "We are against the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act). Assam Accord, which has been accepted by all sections of people of the state, is in force here and the CAA practically negates it.

Ex-VP Naidu calls for strengthening

people are in one party in the morning and join another party in the evening and then they criticise your leader and say things left and right. Some of them are favoured with tickets also. "This is a very disturbing trend and people should avoid it.

Himanta pins Rijju's remark

he has received any such instructions from the government of India or Amit Shah. And if Rijju is lying, Sarma should force him to apologise publicly.

Mainstream media blacking

of the bargain'. The Congress spokesperson alleged that the BJP has weaponised fake news and uses social media to push propaganda.

We are fighting for the

(MAC) of Dima Hasao Autonomous Council said, "In 1969 we committed a great mistake. There was a chance of getting a hill state comprising North Cachar Hills and Mikir hills (Karbi Anglong), but that opportunity was missed and the hill state was given to Meghalaya".

Asia world's most disaster

meteorological hazards struck Asia in 2023, with floods and storms accounting for over 80 per cent of incidents, resulting in more than 2,000 fatalities and affecting nine million people.

EC not acting on complaints against PM, Cong exploring legal remedies: Shrinete



GUWAHATI, April 23: Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said the party is exploring legal remedies as the Election Commission is not acting on the complaint against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "redistribution of wealth" remarks.

Shrinete said institutions like the EC need to have complete faith of the people and they should work to restore that trust if it is shaken.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi made hate speeches in Rajasthan. My colleagues met the EC on Monday and we have pressed charges against him. As they are not acting upon our complaint, we are looking at legal remedies," she told PTT. The Congress on Monday moved the EC seeking "appropriate action" against Modi for his "redistribution of wealth" remarks at a poll rally in Rajasthan, alleg-

ing that the comments were "divisive", "malicious" and targeted a particular religious community.

On Sunday, the Prime Minister had triggered a political row by claiming that the Congress manifesto promised "redistribution" of wealth after conducting a survey.

"We hope that it will be a free and fair election. But we see little evidence of that," Shrinete said, asserting that the less said about the EC's actions against the BJP, the better.

On the proper functioning of EVMs, Shrinete said, "Even if one person says his or her vote didn't go where it was intended, it is the responsibility of institutions like the EC to restore people's faith."

She pointed out that opposition parties have been pressing for 100 per cent VVPAT counting, but the EC has not accepted it. (PTT)

General category people of Darrang-Udalguri seek 'simplified paperwork' for land rights

BTC agreement states those in possession of land prior to 2003, can show any document to prove it, will get its ownership

UDALGURI, April 23: As Darrang-Udalguri Lok Sabha seat of Assam goes to polls on April 26, the general category people of this constituency, half of which falls under the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), urged their elected leaders to resolve land ownership problems that they claim to have been facing for over two decades.

They maintained that though the agreements which led to the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), which governs BTR, and subsequent pacts have provisions for general caste residents to enjoy their land rights, these were being entangled in bureaucratic delays and procedural complexities.

The BTC leadership, however, refuted the allegation, claiming that all those who have applied for land ownership with proper documents, whether of Scheduled Tribes (ST) which enjoy reservation in BTR or general category, it has been given to them.

Darrang-Udalguri, which was formed out of previous Mangaldai constituency in the delimitation process carried out in the state last year, consists of 11 Assembly segments, of which six come under BTR.

The BJP is seeking to retain the seat with incumbent MP Dilip Saikia looking for a second consecutive term, even as he is likely to be locked in a three-cornered fight with Congress' Madhab Rajbonshi



and Bodoland People's Front's Durga Das Boro.

"The BTC agreement had clearly stated that those in possession of land prior to 2003 and can show any document to prove it, will get the ownership right. Though on paper it looks so simple, we face innumerable complexities when we submit our claims," Pranjal Patowary, advisor of Udalguri district All Assam Students' Union (AASU), claimed.

The AASU has been at the forefront, along with a few other organisations, in taking the initiative to resolve the land ownership tangles in the area.

"Also, the land ownership applications should be resolved at the circle office level. But it generally

ends up at the BTR headquarters Kokrajhar and people have to face hassles to commute over 200 km," he claimed.

Binoy Nath, a social worker in Kalaigaon, said they are aware of restrictions in tribal belts and blocks, but the other areas should not be unnecessarily bound by complicated paperwork.

"Before every election, we are assured that our land rights issue will be resolved. But nothing happens. A very limited number of non-ST people under BTR are being able to get the land registered in their own names in the last few years," he claimed.

"Before the 2020 BTR elections, we were assured of a permanent solution. Again during the 2021 As-

sembly polls, we were told that it will be resolved within 15 days. Nothing much has happened, still, we are hopeful since this is the land where we have lived for generations and have nowhere else to call home," Nath added.

A local farmer Mujahi Alam Sarkar claimed that due to the non-availability of land records in their names, they were not being able to take loans or certain government scheme benefits.

"We have got some benefits, like ration cards, solar panels and crop insurance. But as we don't have the land pattas, it is difficult to get loans," he said.

Sarkar also pointed out that 'khazana' (revenue) from non-registered land has not been accepted by the administration since 2019, which further deprives them of any form of government document to prove their claim over that plot of land.

Nilut Swargiary, an executive member (EM) of BTC, refuted the allegations, claiming that all people were being dealt with an equal hand.

"Be it general category people or ST, we are giving land pattas to all eligible people. But the applicants have to have proper papers," he claimed.

"Even in the case of land under tribal belts and blocks, it was being allotted as per inheritance to general category people also. But there can-

not be right to sell or transfer in those areas among unreserved category people," he added.

Swargiary also claimed that settlements were being fast-tracked under 'Mission Bwiswmuthi', an online service for BTR residents to apply for various land and revenue-related services.

It covers 12 services, like mutation by right of inheritance, mutation after deed registration, partition, area correction and name correction, at present, with more to be included in the second phase.

The EM claimed that two lakh applications have been received under the mission, of which over 1.5 lakh have been resolved and the rest were under process, with the data available on its website.

However, as per information on the official website at 9.30 am on April 23, applications received were 24,597 and disposed is 13,415.

On not accepting khazana for non-registered land, Swargiary said it was to ensure that the government does not validate the occupation of the land without proper verification.

"We cannot allow occupation of government land without due verification of claim over it. If we accept revenue from such occupied land, it will be confirming their right over it. We will verify the occupancy of all such land in due course and then pursue the issue accordingly," he added. (PTT)

Self-help groups take out rally in Morigaon

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, April 23: Members of self-help groups took out a rally for democracy in Morigaon on Tuesday to highlight the need to preserve democracy. The rally was carried out as part of spreading awareness and encouraging participation in the voting process in the LS polls under the Systematic Voter Education and Election Participation (SVEEP) initiative. The rally passed through villages, towns and cities, embracing the spirit of democracy with enthusiasm. Amidst chants of 'Amar Vote Amulya Vote' and 'Amar Vote Amar Adhikar' and with banners in hands the participants urged voters in Morigaon district to exercise their right to franchise. With the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections scheduled to take place on April 26, initiatives to improve the voting per centage is being carried out across the district. People from 85 gram panchayats and 11 wards joined the rally, with women actively participating to boost voter awareness. In a notable effort, 29 polling stations in Morigaon district will be exclusively manned by women, including six model polling stations. Among these one has been designated for women polling personnel with disabilities.

In the Morigaon district, a massive awareness campaign continues to attract voters, with several programmes being undertaken as part of the SVEEP campaign. Through the 'Sarathi Baideu' programme awareness is being created in villages, encouraging women folk to cast their valuable vote. At these help desks, women voters can identify and verify their names in the voters' list. These help desks are run by women self-help groups, which guide voters to use helpline number 1950 and the website, 'https://voters.eci.gov.in'.

Yusuf Hamied Chemistry camp gets underway at CSIR-NEIST

Bid to develop scientific temperament among school student

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 23: The Yusuf Hamied Chemistry residential camp for class IX school students began at the CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology (NEIST) campus in Jorhat on Tuesday.

The residential camp has been organised by the CSIR-NEIST along with the Royal Chemistry India Foundation (RCIF) to develop a scientific temperament among school students.

Altogether 76 students from government or government aided schools in and around Jorhat are participating in the three-day camp under the Dr Yusuf Hamied's Inspirational Science Programme.

The Camp will enable the students to participate in the fun of chemistry and motivate them to

develop awareness of and a long-term interest in the subject through an action-packed programme, which includes hands-on practical activities in the institute's laboratories, exciting chemical demonstrations and a chance to meet like-minded students. The students are staying in hostels of national research laboratory, and more importantly, the camp activities are being delivered in the local language in addition to English.

Monday's programme began with a welcome speech by Jatin Kalita, senior principal scientist of CSIR-NEIST and coordinator of the programme, where he elaborated about the various ongoing research works of the institute and emphasised on taking science as a career for making India self-reliant and a developed nation.

Melissa Mendonza, programme executive of the Bengaluru based Royal Society of Chemistry briefed about the programme and emphasised that this is an unique and a once in a lifetime opportunity for the students to participate in a chemistry camp at the prestigious institute.

Virendra M Tiwari, director of CSIR-NEIST in his inaugural address emphasised that learning science in vernacular language was always better and informed that majority of the Nobel Prize winners in the world studied in their own mother languages. He also highlighted that this particular programme would certainly help the students in demystifying science to develop both awareness and interest in science subjects. "There is a need to develop a

scientific temperament in children and develop moralistic practices to inculcate scientific temperament in order to create the scientists of tomorrow," the director said.

Mantu Bhuyan, senior principal scientist also addressed the students and emphasised on the importance of reading books. He explained the Indian heritage of reading books and maintaining libraries like the one at the ancient Nalanda University.

He suggested that the participating students should make a habit of reading books, which will certainly help the students in becoming successful in life. The inaugural programme concluded with a vote of thanks from Dipankar Neog, senior principal scientist of CSIR-NEIST.

Hanuman Mahotsav concludes in Demow

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, April 23: The Matri Shakti in association with the People of Demow Dehajan celebrated the Sri Sri Hanuman Jannotsav at the Sri Sri Chhalasar Hanuman Mandir situated in Demow.

Various religious rituals were organized during the three-day celebrations that began on April 21 and concluded on Tuesday. The prasad was also distributed among devotees on the concluding day of the celebrations.

Popular artistes performed Bhajan and the Matri Shakti Committee performed Diha Naam on Tuesday evening. On the other hand, Sri Sri Hanuman Jayanti Mahotsav was also organized in Demow Bibah Bhawan premises from Monday for two days. Various religious rituals were organized during these two days. Devotees also took out a colourful cultural procession in Demow on the occasion.

Section 144 imposed in Cachar ahead of LS polls

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 23: In anticipation of a law and order situation arising ahead of the second phase of Lok Sabha polls on April 26, the Cachar district administration has issued prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Indian penal code here on Tuesday.

These restrictions have been imposed to prevent disturbance of peace, disruption in the process of polling and to avoid any untoward incident, clashes or violence between groups affiliated to different political parties for smooth

conduct of parliamentary elections.

The order prohibits unlawful assembly of more than five persons and holding public meetings during the period of 48 hours ending with the hours fixed for the close of poll.

The order is effective from 5 pm of April 24 to 27 within the Silchar Lok Sabha constituency.

The prohibitory order aimed to ensure a safe and secured environment during the election period and also prevent any unlawful activities that may disrupt the electoral process.

Bordoloi is a 'Sahab' and eligible to participate from London: CM

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 23: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday campaigned on behalf of BJP candidate Suresh Bora at two separate places in the Nagaon parliamentary constituency.

While campaigning in the constituency, the chief minister also participated in two separate election rallies organized at minority dominated areas like Juria and Singia in Samaguri assembly constituency.

While addressing an election rally at Juria, Sarma claimed that the BJP candidate Suresh Bora will win this time

from the Nagaon parliamentary constituency.

"Once Congress tried to spread propaganda against Modi saying that if the Prime Minister is voted to power, 'namaj' and celebration of 'Eid' in the country would be stopped," Sarma said asking the gatherings whether it was exactly stopped or not.

Taking a dig at the Congress candidate and incumbent MP of the constituency Pradyut Bordoloi, Sarma said Bordoloi is a 'Sahab' while BJP candidate Suresh Bora is a man of the soil. Hence, the former is eligible to participate only from London in England.

Attempting to woo voters through electoral promises, the chief minister said that the BJP government if voted to power in the Centre, would provide land pattas to all who had lost their land in rampant erosions in the constituency and mentioned it as the guarantee of PM Modi as well as of 'Mama' referring to himself.

"Bordoloi may have thought that the people of the state have become insane and will purchase the mangoes that are sour. The people have tasted such mangoes several times and so this time they will taste the sweet ones," said Sarma. He also said that Bordoloi had con-

tacted him several times to seek ticket from BJP claiming that if he would be elected, he would join BJP right after the election. Therefore it is better to cast votes directly in favour of BJP.

Meanwhile, parliamentary affairs minister Pijush Hazarika participated in a huge road show taken out in favour of BJP candidate Suresh Bora throughout the town in the evening on Monday. The road show was taken out from the Nagaon Commerce College to Haibargaon. The minister was accompanied by local MLA Rupak Sarma, BJP candidate Suresh Bora and other members of the district BJP.

Sarbeswar Basumatary receives Padmashri Award

Basumatary honoured with Padmashri Award for his contributions to field of agriculture



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, April 23: Noted agriculturist Sarbeswar Basumatary of Chirang district was conferred the Padmashri Award at a programme held in New Delhi on Mon-

day. President of India, Droupadi Murmu presented the award to him during a ceremony held at the Rashtrapati Bhawan in New Delhi. Basumatary is an eminent

agriculturist of Bijnri in Chirang district of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). Basumatary's is a prominent farmer and has been rendering his valuable services towards improving and developing the

agricultural aspects in the region.

He is currently serving as the member of the advisory board of the fishery department of Chirang. He is also a member of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra and sericulture of Chirang district.

After receiving the Padmashri, Basumatary expressed his gratitude to the President of India, and government of India for conferring the honour amidst the presence of several senior citizens and Union ministers. He said that the award will further encourage him to contribute to the field of agriculture more.

The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro also extended his warm greetings to Sarbeswar Basumatary on being honoured with the third highest civilian award in the country.

"I am glad to extend my warm greetings to Sarbeswar Basumatary, who was conferred with the prestigious Padmashri award," Boro said.

Renowned actor George Baker conferred with Dr Bhupen Hazarika Award

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 23: The Beltola Bohagi Utsav Samiti has conferred the Dr Bhupen Hazarika Award on, renowned actor George Baker this year.

Renowned singer Samar Hazarika presented the award to Baker during the 45th Bohagi Utsav at Beltola in the city on April 21. The award included a cash prize of ₹ 2,00,000, a citation, a souvenir, a pat gamusa, a cheleng sador, a rhino memento, a phulam japi, and a bust of Dr Bhupen Hazarika among other items.

The Beltola Bohagi Utsav Samiti organized the 45th Bohagi Utsav with a three-day colourful programme from April 19 to 21 at the Beltola School Ground.

The Samity has been presenting awards to stalwarts of the literary and cultural world since 2012 in honour of Bharat Ratna Sudhakantha Dr Bhupen Hazarika. This year, renowned actor George Baker, a prominent figure in the Assamese film industry, was conferred with the award.

Upon receiving the award, Baker expressed his gratitude to the committee and acknowledged the contributions of individuals like Nirodh Chowdhury, Abdul Majid, and Bhupen Hazarika.

Baker fondly recalled an instance when Bhupen Hazarika invited him on stage and introduced him as his son.



Eminent social worker and renowned physician, Sushil Kumar Jain, who was selected for the Dr Bhupen Hazarika Award for the year 2021, received the award this year.

He graciously accepted the award and expressed his gratitude to the committee, pledging to continue his social service in the future.

Chief patrons of the Beltola Bohagi Utsav Samiti, Ratul Barua and Narayan Deka, along with general secretary Santay Goswami, cultural secretary Jayanta Gogoi, treasurer Pradip Das and other office bearers were present at the cere-

mony. The Patmdoi title for 2024 was awarded to Nirjuma Kakati of Nagaon, who received a cash prize of ₹ 2,00,000 along with a citation and a memento.

Similarly, the award for the best Bihu Husori team was won by the Rangman Anajori Bihu Husori team, which received a cash prize of ₹ 1,00,001.

The second prize was awarded to the Ranghar Bihu Hunchri Team, who received a cash prize of ₹ 51,001.

Singer Rupam Bhuyan was awarded the Manmath Baishya Memorial Award on April 19.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Every neighbouring state is an enemy and the enemy's enemy is a friend.- Kautilya

Muizzu's majority in Maldives' Majlis

In the wake of President Mohamed Muizzu's resounding victory in the Maldivian elections, a significant shift in the political landscape of the archipelago nation has emerged. With his party, the People's National Congress (PNC), securing a supermajority in the 93-member People's Majlis, Muizzu now commands unprecedented control over Maldives' governance. Muizzu's professional background as an accomplished engineering and management expert, coupled with his political acumen, underscores a new era in Maldivian leadership. His pragmatic approach, evident in his swift and decisive actions, signals a departure from traditional political rhetoric. Despite recent tensions, particularly with India, Muizzu's demeanour reflects a commitment to substantive diplomacy over mere posturing. The recent overtures towards China, exemplified by a significant water aid agreement, highlight a strategic realignment in Maldives' foreign relations. While India has historically played a crucial role in aiding the Maldives during times of crisis, Muizzu's administration appears inclined towards diversifying its international partnerships.

However, amidst geopolitical uncertainties, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia, India must reassess its approach towards its maritime neighbour. Muizzu's leadership presents an opportunity for India to adopt a fresh perspective, one that prioritizes mutual respect and collaboration. India's past assistance to the Maldives, notably during the 2014 water crisis, underscores a longstanding relationship based on shared interests and goodwill. Yet, as global dynamics evolve, India must adapt its diplomatic strategy to engage constructively with the changing dynamics in the Indian Ocean region. The Maldives, with its strategic location and growing significance, demands India's attention and proactive engagement. Rather than dwelling on past grievances or assumptions, India must embrace a forward-looking approach that acknowledges the sovereignty and aspirations of its island neighbor. A recalibration of India's foreign policy towards the Maldives requires a nuanced understanding of Muizzu's leadership style and the evolving geopolitical landscape. By prioritizing dialogue and cooperation, India can foster a relationship that is mutually beneficial and conducive to regional stability.

President Muizzu's ascendancy represents a pivotal moment in Maldivian politics and offers India an opportunity to redefine its strategic approach towards the archipelago nation. As both countries navigate the complexities of regional geopolitics, fostering a relationship built on trust, respect, and shared interests is paramount. India must seize this moment to cultivate a partnership that reflects the aspirations of both nations and contributes to peace and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region. Furthermore, as India reassesses its relationship with the Maldives under President Muizzu's leadership, it must recognize the significance of economic cooperation and development assistance. Beyond political overtures, economic partnerships can serve as a cornerstone for fostering long-term stability and prosperity in the region. India's expertise in infrastructure development, renewable energy, and tourism aligns with the Maldives' development priorities, presenting avenues for mutually beneficial collaboration.

Elections 2024: How the Indian Muslims would vote

The election festival in India has started yet again and with the first phase of the mammoth exercise starting off on 19 April, the political pundits are wondering once again, how the Indian Muslims are going to vote.

If we analyse the election results of the last two general elections, then we realise that at the national level, in the past two national elections Indian Muslims at many places voted strategically, yet a party with just 35% of the vote emerged victorious.

However, it should not dishearten the Indian Muslims, they should take courage from the fact that they are standing along with the 65% of the Indian population, which stands for India's secular credentials and values. Alas, this reality is not seen by the so-called Muslim parties, which often emerge as vote spoilers or dividers, by attracting a minuscule number of Muslims and giving an edge to anti-Muslim forces.

Data available at the Election Commission of India's website from the Lok Sabha polls in 2019, shows that the ruling BJP won narrowly on 40 seats in the country.

Of its 303 tally, it won by less than 50,000 votes in as many 40 seats in 2019. This is usually considered a reversible margin.

This means that if the margins had been reversed, it would have taken its tally down to 263. Of these 40 narrow victories, 11 were versus the Congress party, and six against the Bahujan Samaj Party, Samajwadi Party and Biju Janata Dal. Four were versus the Trinamool Congress, two versus the Rashtriya Lok Dal, and one each against the All India United Democratic Front, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Janata Dal (Secular) and an Independent.

Moreover, fourteen of these narrow seat victories were in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh. Machlishahar in U.P. has the dubious distinction of electing a BJP candidate by just 181 votes in the last elections. Overall, of its 303 seats, BJP won by less than one lakh votes on 77 seats.

In view of these facts, firstly, it should be the strategy of the secular political parties and particularly of the Muslim leaders to focus on these crucial seats and turn the tide against the anti-Muslim party. The irony is that even the parties, which were once relied upon as saviours of the Muslims like the Samajwadi and BSP, have also emerged as Muslims haters. In view of this the Muslims should vote strategically and vote for a lesser danger than the bigger danger.

Secondly, if we find our so-called leaders and parties lacking in these efforts, then the community's intellectuals and experts, who are robustly active on various social media platforms, should persuade the Muslim voters to cast their vote positively on the D-day.

The mention of the importance of social media in today's India, brings our attention to a recent report compiled by Al Jazeera on the medium's importance and how it is being used to spread mis- or dis-information and increasing Islamophobia among the electorate.

India has over 460 million YouTube users, making it the platform's largest market, with four out of five Internet users in India consuming its content. Increasingly, more and more Indians are getting their news from YouTube, now a days.

The report says that most often these YouTube channels



peddle mis- or dis-information in the garb of news. Some of these YouTube news channels increasingly offer a smattering of dis-information and Islamophobia, often cheerleading the ruling dispensation, while targeting its critics and opposition leaders. However, what makes these channels unique is that they claim to be 'news' channels, ostensibly claiming to present fact-based reporting.

These channels, though lesser known than mainstream news channels, have millions of viewers, giving them an outsized role in how the world's largest democracy is consuming news as India prepares for its national election. Most of these channels have followers running into millions, with over billion views, a staggering and fearsome figure indeed. With such a wide reach, concerns abound on how such 'news' outlets might shape perceptions and opinions, especially during the election season.

Studies have shown that Indians place greater trust in news they view on YouTube and WhatsApp, over news delivered by mainstream media outlets. Already, the World Economic

Forum's 2024 Global Risk Report has concluded that the most severe risk India faces is the fallout from the spread of false information.

The Al Jazeera report further quotes a study done by Narrative Research Lab, a New Delhi-based data lab that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to track print media and social media content, NRL analysed the content across six channels - NMF, Rajdharma, Headlines India, Shining India, Capital TV and O News Hindi - and found that on all these channels, coverage of India's opposition parties was muted and its leaders were rendered almost invisible. In contrast, PM Modi and the BJP loomed large, their coverage almost always glowing.

The lab analysed 2,747 videos published by these channels between December 22, 2023, and March 22, 2024. In their findings, the lab found that across all the channels, some of the most frequently used words in the titles were "Modi", "BJP" and "Yogi", while mentions of opposition parties and leaders were used scarcely.

A "sentiment analysis" by the lab found that while "Modi" was used commonly across videos

that had both negative and positive sentiments, references to India's opposition figures like Gandhi mostly emerged in negative phrases.

Routinely, these channels amplify Islamophobic sentiments and use anti-Muslim tropes. The Narrative Research Lab analysis also found that there was a spike in the number of videos these channels produced on events like the day the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act rules were announced on March 11.

Another issue, which haunts the journalists in this election season, is the extra vigil and precaution, which they have to exercise while covering the elections. Based on their past experiences, the journalist in a survey carried out by the US-based, CPJ - The Committee to Protect Journalists, which promotes press freedom worldwide, and defends the right of journalists to report the news safely and without fear of reprisal, said they were concerned about political violence, criminalisation of journalism, attacks by other journalists and online censorship, while covering the elections. Overall, these elections are crucial not just in face of the daunting task carried by journalists as listed above, but are also important for the minority community to vote strategically, unitedly, unwaveringly and certainly by ensuring their presence at the polling booths on the D-day, to ensure the safety of minorities in the country, besides safeguarding the country's constitutional and secular values.

Otherwise the foreboding messages, which currently abound on WhatsApp university may turn into a frightening reality. (The author is a Delhi-based senior political and international affairs commentator)

A desperate Modi is subverting electoral process in his favour

By: Arun Srivastava

The electorate turnout being down by 4 percent in the first phase of 2024 Lok Sabha election relative to phase 1 of 2019 has three distinct messages: first, voters have outright rejected Narendra Modi's constricted rhetoric on polarisation of Hindu votes; second, youths have lost faith in Modi's purple prose on soon-to-be-five-trillion-dollar-economy India; and third, registered their lack of faith in EVM ensuring a free and fair democratic mandate.

In 2019 the share of percentage had gone up by 8 percent on the previous mandate. Modi had used the Pulwama massacre of 40 soldiers and projected it as an attack on Indian nationalism to win the election. Indeed, it was shocking how a sitting Prime Minister could exploit the gruesome incident to arouse passion for pure electoral gains.

Five years since, the Indian voters have come see through the 2019 game. Hence, Modi's latest attempts to evoke nationalism have failed to yield the desired result. The increasing distrust towards Modi in the Indian people could also be made out from the fact that more people have voted this time than they had voted in 2014 to install Modi as the prime minister. Is the new percentage a reflection of a resolute determination to bring in a new face replacing Modi?

There's little trust in EVMs. Voters nurse the feeling that even if they push the button for some other political party, eventually it would go to the BJP tally. This has resulted in democratic disenchantment, thinking it is futile to take pains to go to the polling booth and cast one's vote.

Usually, the Lok Sabha elections are held during the hot and humid summer. This time too it is not exception. However, voters beat the heat and come out to register the democratic mandate. Blaming the hot summer for the 4 per cent people drop in phase one polling percentage is a poor excuse to hide the poor response and peoples' anger against Modi.

The first phase of voting in Lok Sabha elections usually sets the tone for subsequent phases. In 2019, phase 1 recorded the highest turnout, at 69.5 per cent. Similarly, the first phase of the nine-phase 2014 parliamentary polls was among the highest, at around 69 per cent. The vote percentage has sharply declined, that too in the backdrop of Modi projecting his so-called achievements and concern for the poor. Decline of the percentage of votes implies that people have refrained from endorsing his claims.

In the Assembly elections, voter turnouts have been high. In panchayat polls, it even reaches 95 percent. But in Lok Sabha elections, it went down to around 62 per cent. A senior EC official admits: "summer is not the sole factor." In Bihar, too, the State Electoral Officer H R Srinivas said: "We cannot narrow it down to one factor. There could be some latent reasons."

Was Modi unaware of the change in the mood of the people? For him, the basic issues, such as unemployment, poverty and inflation, did not matter. Though economists challenged the narrative of NITI Aayog on joblessness and poverty, PM Modi never bothered to take them seriously. His repeated shielding of the scam-tainted corporates and accepting all the anti-people corrupt politicians into the BJP-NDA fold has been disliked by the people, in popular parlance derided as "BJP washing machine". Regrettably, Modi continues to blame the Nehru-Gandhi family and Congress as the patrons of the corrupt politicians.

The RSS and BJP had claimed that demolition of

Babri Masjid and construction and consecration of Ram Mandir would enthuse the youths. But it has merely proved to be a mirage. While RSS had ten years to build a strong base of youth members, Mohan Bhagwat and his protégé Modi have been busy communalizing and poisoning the society, instead building a base of talented youths ready to take India into the future. At a time when youths are new looking for new education avenues, Modi and his Sanghi cronies are out to trample and finish off the education system, turning it into an American style profiteering and debt-generating machine. The scholarships for the underprivileged and minorities are being discontinued.

In the first phase of polling in 2019, the turnout was around 70 per cent. But this time the overall voter turnout in 102 constituencies in 21 states and Union Territories was recorded at 62.37 per cent till 9 pm, with the highest percentage in Tripura at 80.17 per cent. The downturn was around 7 per cent. In 2019, the voting percentage shift to 70 percent was only due to the active participation of the youths.

An insight into the present averseness would make it clear that they are no more willing to be treated as mere ballots, numerical voters by Modi, who trampled on both the education system as well as caused unprecedented 45-year-high unemployment crisis.

The worst victims of Modi's discrimination have been the Dalit and Muslim students and youths. Modi must do some introspection why are the youngest eligible voters remain hesitant to exercise their franchise? Election Commission has called upon the young people to get registered as voters. But ironically, only 38 per cent of the voters between the age of 18 and 19 have registered for the 2024 elections across the country.

It is usually said that participation in elections is a key freedom. Non-participation in the electoral process will create trouble as democracy will not realise its potential. Ironically, these young voters are witness to the trampling of democracy and its ethos by the RSS and BJP government led by Modi.

There is the need for sounding a word of caution at this stage. Modi is not the person to accept defeat lying down. Still six rounds are left and he would certainly like to mould the electoral proceedings in his favour. There is little doubt that he would go to any extent to subvert and rig the election.

Already, PM has turned the pitch divisive while addressing an election rally in Rajasthan, saying: "if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth of people to Muslims". To justify himself, he cited former PM Manmohan Singh's remark that the minority community had the first claim on the country's resources. Modi said: "This urban-naxal mindset, my mothers and sisters, they will not even leave your 'Mangalsutra'. They can go to that level."

In fact, Dr. Singh had said that the poor, OBCs, people from weaker section and minorities would have the first claim. Modi must know that Muslims are not only the minorities. There are Sikh, Christian, Parsis and others. Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera has also challenged Modi to withdraw his remark on Congress manifesto.

Modi had said: "The Congress manifesto says they will calculate the gold with mothers and sisters, get information about it and then distribute that property. They will distribute it to whom - Manmohan Singh's government had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets." Expectedly, Modi was trying to ignite communal passions, with an ever compliant Election Commission looking away. (IPA Service)

Artificial Intelligence has become a dominant tool of poll campaigning in 2024

By: Kalyani Shankar

Artificial Intelligence, a game-changer in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, has revolutionised traditional campaign strategies. The era of candidates' personally visiting voters' homes and engaging in conversations over tea, even after a five-year hiatus, has given way to a more technologically advanced approach.

In the 2014 election, social media played a pivotal role. However, the advent of AI and the potential use of deepfake videos in India's 2024 elections have imparted a new dimension. These videos, capable of blurring the lines between truth and falsehood, have the potential to significantly impact the trust and integrity of the electoral process.

Political parties and candidates have understood the power of AI in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. They use AI to analyse voter data, enabling them to develop effective campaign strategies. Additionally, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have been deployed to engage with voters on social media, providing real-time responses to their queries and concerns.

The use of AI technology can help with election processes in several ways: AI can predict election outcomes, AI chatbots and virtual assistants can communicate with virtual media, and AI can prevent election fraud and regulate political advertising campaign finance violations.

Political parties can now customise their calls to individual voters, potentially harming their opponents' reputations. In India, more than 50% of the population uses the internet, which may increase to 900 million by 2025. The upcoming election in India is expected to generate a market worth Rs 500 crore. Political parties are using AI to reach voters via social media. Congress and BJP

used AI in last year's state elections, the first time false videos and parodies were used in political campaigning. Parties like BJP, Congress, AAP, DMK, and AIADMK use AI technology to engage with their supporters. For example, the BJP uses AI to translate PM Modi's speeches into eight regional languages. However, some campaigners misuse AI-generated videos, including deepfakes, to spread misinformation. These videos are targeted at the 18-25 age groups and are being shared on platforms like WhatsApp.

Parties in India use various tools to influence voters. They share fake images and videos on social media platforms. For example, the Congress party shared a morphed photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At the same time, the BJP posted a false video of Rahul Gandhi on Instagram. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK and AIADMK parties used recordings of their deceased leaders for voter support in this election. One video shows Asaduddin Owaisi, the leader of the AIMIM party, singing Hindu devotional songs. Regional leaders like Akhilesh Yadav, Naveen Patnaik, and Mamata Banerjee also applied similar tools to influence voters.

The use of AI for malicious purposes is a significant concern. With advanced AI, it has become possible to impersonate anyone, including voters or candidates, which can lead to identity theft and manipulation of the electoral process. This underscores the need for clear regulations to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process, making the audience more aware of the potential risks and the importance of addressing them, fostering a sense of vigilance.

The use of AI in political campaigns raises valid concerns about privacy and the potential for unfair competition and misinformation. Governments must take the lead in regulating AI use to promote fairness. The IT

Minister has already issued warnings to social media companies, instilling confidence in the audience about the security and integrity of the electoral process.

The Election Commission must issue clear guidelines to regulate AI-generated information for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. These guidelines should address ethical AI use in campaigns and voter data analysis. Strict rules are necessary to maintain the integrity of the electoral process, protect voters' rights, and ensure fairness and transparency. Without these regulations, there could be doubts about the legitimacy of the election results.

While there are valid concerns about AI, it's crucial to recognise its potential for positive change. Certain AI-generated technologies have the power to revolutionise how we conduct free and fair elections. As these technologies gain wider acceptance, they could pave the way for e-elections, a future where elections are conducted online, ensuring a more transparent and accountable electoral process. This potential for positive change should inspire optimism and hope, reassuring the audience about the future of elections.

During the Bihar elections, the Election Commission used an AI-powered system to ensure transparency and prevent manipulation. The system detected and flagged misinformation and hate speech cases, expediting the counting process and curbing hate speech during the election. This demonstrates how AI can be used effectively and instils confidence in the electorate.

Presidents, prime ministers, or legislators could win or lose based mainly on the success or failure of their AI campaign. Gullible voters can be fooled easily. Technological advancements can bring about significant changes, and AI is no exception. (IPA Service)

POST BAG

Riyan Parag is a revelation of Assam's sports potential

Sir/Ma'am

The indomitable spirit, superlative performance in consecutive matches, stubborn confidence to stick to the crease in the face of hostile bowling at critical situations, and heartwarming appetite for scoring runs have made Riyan Parag one of the most talked about young cricketers in India now. With the dominant show, he is believed to be on the National selectors' radar also for the next World Cup. His achievements in the national cricket scenario clearly show that he is no longer the same Riyan Parag that cricket lovers used to see in his earlier essays in the IPL since 2019.

Riyan Parag has undergone a metamorphosis and in IPL 2024, he is more composed, confident, competitive, and very much a rated match winner for the franchise Rajasthan Royals. RR bought him for the season for Rs 20 lakhs from the India 2018 U-19 World Cup winner team and he be-

came the youngest player to score a half-century against Delhi Capitals. In IPL 2024, Riyan Parag is behind only of star batter Virat Kohli (316) in amassing 318 runs with an average of 63 runs in 7 matches at a strike rate of 161.4 and has hit 20 sixes so far. The cricket lovers hope that he will create more records in the remaining matches for the Orange Cap and would force the selectors to have a fresh appraisal of the top cricketers to represent the country. Riyan, speaking to the media recently, said that he had learned a lot from the invaluable tips from batting legend Virat Kohli, RR Coach Rahul Dravid and Sri Lankan great Kumar Sangakkara after the forgettable seasons 2021-22-23.

In the Vijay Hazare Trophy 2022-23, Riyan Parag scored a total of 552 runs at an average of 69 runs including three scintillating centuries. For Assam, Riyan scored an astounding 510 runs at a strike rate of 182.7 in Syed Mustaq Ali T 20 in 2023-24

with 7 back-to-back half-centuries exhibiting a rare consistency. In the 2023-24 Ranji Trophy, Riyan scored 378 runs in 6 innings with an average of 75.6 and strike-rate of 113.8 with the highest number of sixes (20) in the elite category. Riyan slammed 155 off 87 balls in the Ranji Trophy match against Chattisgarh in January 2024, the second fastest (56-ball) Ranji Trophy hundred after Rishav Pant (48-ball). All these, and many more, speak volumes of his incredible depth of cricketing instinct in all the formats - certainly a revelation of Assam's tremendous sports potential in different genres. We, the Assamese, are proud to have the brightest of the Spring Season gifts this year from none other than Riyan Parag. Let God bless him with more fire-power!

Manoj Kumar Borthakur
AT Road, Sivasagar
Ph: 9435056975
borthakurmanoj@gmail.com

Women not getting their due despite PM Narendra Modi's big talk

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

It is irrefutable fact that women are not getting their dues in India, though we have been hearing PM Narendra Modi's big talks of women welfare under his premiership. Now in a bid to attract women voters he has assuring a new chapter in rise of women power in his third term.

In all BJP's election campaigns, it is being claimed that there is a wave of women-led development. All the claims are deceptive since these conceal the reality. For example, they claimed women empowerment through MGNREGS and said that 56 per cent of participants in the scheme were women in FY23. It should be noted, that MGNREGS is a rural employment guarantee scheme under which people ask for work when they are not getting remunerative jobs anywhere else, and accept the meagre minimum wage fixed by the Union Government.

The lowest minimum Rs 221 was being paid in some states. Due to election, some increases have been announced by Modi government and now the minimum is only ₹ 237.

Therefore, this can't be termed as empowerment of workforce, but only a minimum help to make their poverty little tolerable. As for women are concerned their high level of asking for MGNREGS work, it is due to they are getting less work elsewhere compared to males.

One of the claims was that between 2015-2022, over 59 lakh women have been trained under the PM Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY) and 12.51 lakh women candidates gained employment. This is pittance, on account of total population of women in the country which is over 70 crore.

Many more claims are being made about women's welfare, and now BJP manifesto has included Modi's Guarantee for women which included - Expansion Lakhpati Didi self-help initiative for rural women; integrating women self-help groups into the service sector and enhance their market access; developing women hostels and crèches to boost their participation in the workforce, building more toilets for women in public places; expanding health services focused on prevention and reduction of breast cancer, cervical cancer; implementing the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam to ensure higher representation for women in Parliament and state legislatures; and expanding Shakti desks in police stations and strengthen emergency response systems.

It has been claimed that there is a wave of women led-development in the country under PM Narendra Modi, and it was claimed that female labour force participation was increased from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 37 per cent in 2022-23. PM Modi claims all sorts of things under "Sashakt Nari - Vikasit Bharat" programme, quoting the increased female participation rate in 2022-23.

Such claims conceal the reality that India's female labour force participation rate was declined from 39.7 per cent in 2004-05 to only about 23 per cent in 2017-18, under Modi government, and it is still lower as per latest PLFS government data, which is by and large suspected to be manipulated to show the better face of the government.

The condition of the working women is all the more difficult. Reports after reports, it has been revealed how government policies function as disincentive for women workers, which is the chief cause of their

participation in workforce and the development of the country.

Let us see an example of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA). They are key essential workers but several international reports had criticised India that does not even care for these key workers, and not even recognise as key workers.

The latest reference has been made by World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO) 2023 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and recorded their plight. It should be noted that the WHO in 2022 had awarded ASHA the title of Global Health Leaders, but India not even recognised them as employees. The WESO 2023 has said that the plight of ASHAs is of particular concern.

ASHAs perform important roles and have positive impact on communities and localities. Wherever they work, immunization rates are higher and mortality rates declines. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ASHA workers raised awareness about the virus and safety protocols, tracked positive cases and assisted with vaccinations in addition to their usual responsibilities of providing maternal care, immunization for children and community healthcare. It was due to this in 2022 WHO awarded them the title of Global Health Leaders.

It should be shocking to know that ASHAs were not given status of workers, though they are appointed and trained by National Rural Health Mission. Workers are selected among women in the community, aged 25-45, with completed secondary studies.

WESO 2023 made a sad commentary that even though ASHAs were appointed by the government they were not recognised as employees and were only paid "incentives" that were linked to achieving certain targets.

Following protests by these workers several states introduced a fixed wage component and the central government also increased the incentives that it contributes.

WESO 2023 said that many of the ASHAs reported that they sometimes paid for transportation costs of the patients they bring to hospitals. So even the little money they made, a share of that sometimes spent on job-related costs, the report said.

Furthermore, the report said, ASHA workers reported that they received their payments with delays. They face other occupational challenges besides low and delayed payments. One of them is a heavy work-load.

ASHA workers have been agitating across the country, but Modi government is yet to give them status of "Workers" with full benefits as per law. As recent as in February 2024, ASHA workers of Uttar Pradesh organised a three-day mega strike, alleging that they don't get more than ₹ 2000 per month since they don't get wages but only performance-based incentives.

How can these women run their household by so low an income? There are also differences in their earnings across the states. Maharashtra offers the highest compensation at ₹ 4,000/month, followed by Delhi at ₹ 3500, Haryana at ₹ 3000, and Bihar at ₹ 2000.

This is how Modi government is empowering women of this country in reality, though they have been claiming great works being done for women, and a wave of women-led development has come, and in their third term there would be rise of women power in India. PM Modi's big talks and his actual works for women are contradictory. (IPA Service)

Gender-based sexual violence against women in India

By: Kamrul Hoque

Gender-based violence against women is also referred to as sexual violence which according to the World Health Organization is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching and other non-contact forms."

According to a report published in 2019, every 16 minutes, a woman encounters sexual violence in India with a national average of 4.9 per 100000 population. This suggests a severe state of sexual violence against women in India, requiring an urgent analysis of the root causes.

Reasons behind the sexual violence against women in India:

1. Patriarchal nature of Indian Society: Patriarchy is a social norm that believes in a social hierarchy of men over women. Patriarchal values for centuries have immensely motivated the Indian social society that women are inferior to men and hence men are protectors of women and women should abide by them. Society often pursues violence against women only if it is done by unknown men.

However, the reality is contrasting. NCRB report suggests, that most of the violence against women is committed by near relatives or most of the time by their husbands. The inherent nature of patriarchy kills 50000 infant girls and fetuses in their prenatal stage each year, believing that women are the burden of the family and if they grow up they are required to give them marriage and dowry.

Otherwise looking, if a male is born, he will generate income for the family. The very nexus of patriarchal understanding of society made it possible that women are only a sexual asset and they are not entitled to go outside and should only raise babies inside the home and should work at home only.

2. Caste structure: One of the major underrated reasons behind the sexual violence committed against women is the caste system. Oftentimes, people from the dominant caste group attack women of lower caste groups with a preoccupation to teach them a lesson that they are inferior and should remain within the confined dikas of the caste system.

The infamous 2020 Hatras Gang rape case is one such case, where a perpetrator from the upper caste targets the women of other groups to teach a lesson to the entire lower caste community. NFHS data suggests that sexual violence against the STs at 7.8%, SCs at 7.3%, OBCs at 5.4 and General at 4.5%.

3. Poor economic conditions of women: The GBV is fundamentally associated with the income of the family. It is being reported that women from economically stable families face a lower rate of sexual or GBV against women compared to poor families.

Women in high-income families are mostly associated with some kind of work and are economically self-dependent unlike the women from poor families where women are assigned to housework and male members are entitled to earn for the family.

4. Lack of efficiency in policy and administrative system: The wide-scale prevalence of sexual and GBV against women is due to inefficient administrative and policy frameworks. A report from the Washington Post revealed that India has not only lacked female police officers in investigation but also lacked dedicated police officers in general to protect ordinary citizens. They often lack basic evidence-gathering skills and most of the times denies writing FIRs.

Further, if FIRs are filed then it takes a long

period of time to get justice from the court which often calls victims for compromise or resolution with perpetrators.

Laws to deter gender-based sexual violence against women:

There have been various initiatives or laws by the Government of India to reduce the number of sexual violence against women. Following are some laws that are intended to reduce sexual violence against women in India:

1. Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code: The section provides 'Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine'. The word cruelty refers to the conduct of the husband which forces the wife to take any path of suicide or self-harm or forces women to meet any unlawful demand of any property or value assets.

2. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: This section was incorporated into the Indian legal system in 1983. It provides safety and protection to the wife or female live-in-partner from the violence of their husband and their live-in-male-partner and gives legal remedies. The act is not only limited to the wife but also extends to the children of the family.

3. Prevention of sexual harassment at workplaces: Following the guidelines of the Vishaka judgement, the Government of India in 2013 introduced the POSH act to prevent sexual harassment at workplaces. The act aims to create a safe and conducive work environment for women and to give protection against sexual harassment.

The act defines the 'workplace' and went ahead to include space beyond traditional offices to include all kinds of organisations across sectors, even non-traditional workplaces (for example, telecommuting) and places visited by employees for work. To ensure that women are safe in their workplaces, the act provides the composition of an 'Internal Complaints Committee' to act on the prevention of sexual harassment.

Apart from the above laws, there have been other laws that also deal with the protection of women from gender-based and sexual violence. e.g. IPC Section 376, 363-373,303,304B, 354, 509,Sati Prevention Act, 1987, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986 etc.

Challenges and Gaps in the implementation of these laws:

As mentioned previously, the Government of India with a good intention introduced these laws to eradicate sexual, gender-based violence against women. However, there have been lapses in implementing these laws on the ground. Some of the major problems that challenge the implementations are as follows:

1. Lack of proper implementation framework: No wonder the Central Government has introduced laws like Section 498A and PWDVA act but when it comes to implementation, it is up to the state subject and here the problem arises. State police departments lack trained police officers who can investigate and gather evidence for sexual violence.

Further, according to a report by the Washington Post, India has the lowest number of

women police officers compared to its neighbouring South Asian countries. Many times, male police officers deny filing FIRs against the perpetrators.

Similarly, when it comes to the implementation of 'Internal Complaints Committee' in offices of the concerned organization, many organizations don't create such a committee. It is required to ensure that every organization implements the provisions to eradicate sexual violence.

2. Lack of awareness: Laws are the first step to eradicating ills from society and of course, laws like Section 498A, POSH Act and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act do the same. It creates a fear of imprisonment among the perpetrators and forbids them to do violence against women.

However, different reports highlight that the masses in India are still unaware of the rights and legal remedies that these laws provide. Therefore, it is required to spread awareness about the laws for the prevention of sexual violence against women.

3. Lengthy court procedure: Oftentimes, when cases are filed against gender-based, sexual violence, it takes a longer period of time to give justice to victims. Sometimes, judges are patriarchal and biased and they propose a compromise between the parties instead of delivering justice to the victim.

The conviction rate of rapists is very low that it stands at 25%. Further, India has only 15 judges against a 1 million population compared to China with 159 judges. Additionally, there is no special court system to address sexual and gender-based cases.

There are other gaps as well when addressing sexual violence. The non-reporting of cases by victims, and inadequate financial and

manpower support from legal and administrative systems made it complex for victims to get justice.

Measures to address gender-based sexual violence against women:

1. Sensitisation of the issue is the need of the hour. Often a times perpetrators unknowingly assault women for sexual

interests believing women with Western dresses are open for sexual interections. Further families with patriarchal norms constrained women to not report to the police to prevent the loss of honour in society. With sensitization of the issues number of the sexual violence could be reduced.

2. Education and awareness could reduce the GBV against women. It's a common belief that sexual violence is only committed by uneducated men but the reality is different. Often a time sexual violence against women occurs at workplaces where male seniors commit sexual assault against their women counterparts. Therefore, educating people through introducing gender sensitization in schools and colleges could reduce the numbers.

3. Laws are the first step towards eradicating evils and therefore reforms in legal and administrative systems are necessary. As written above India lacks the required number of female police officers in police departments and trained police officers. It is time to relook into the particular domain of interventions like an increase of dedicated female police to report sexual violence and reforms to introduce special court systems to deal with sexual violence to reduce the burden from the general courts. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)



Watermelon the super nutritious summer fruit

By: Shahnaz Husain

With a lip-smacking taste and having a distinct juicy, sweet and refreshing quality to it, watermelons are synonymous with summertime. Watermelons and Indian summers are made for each other. High in water content and low in calories, watermelon is a cool option on a scorching afternoon.

A slice of juicy watermelon is one of summer's most delicious seasonal treats. It's refreshing sweetness makes it a versatile ingredient for all kinds of dishes, from salads to salsas to smoothies. Nothing beats a big, juicy wedge of watermelon on a hot summer day, whether it's berries, mango, peaches, or litchi.

It is rich in salt, potassium, and electrolytes, all of which are essential for maintaining your body's strength. Watermelon is also loaded with the healthy vitamins A, B, and C, as well as the antioxidant lycopene.

Watermelon the 'summer's blessing' contains 90 % water by weight and is packed with vitamins and nutrients, especially lycopene, ascorbic acid, and citrulline. Watermelons are tasty, hydrating, and negative calorie food, which helps in burning calories.

When you're incredibly

thirsty and need to replenish fluids in your body, watermelon is the ideal summer go-to. Since 90 percent of watermelon is just water, it helps in nourishing the skin and makes it more radiant.

This luscious summer fruit is not only a delicious summer snack, but it also has several advantages for the skin.

From keeping you cool to maintaining your skin health, let us look at some of the benefits of consuming watermelons in summer.

Benefits of Watermelon for skin

Hydrates your skin
Whether you apply a watermelon face mask or consume a fresh slice, it has a huge influence on keeping your skin hydrated. From acne-prone to sensitive, dry to combination, it's a one-fruit-fits-all kind of thing.

If you have sensitive, acne-prone skin, the strong anti-inflammatory properties in watermelon can help calm skin irritation, redness, and inflammation. Vitamin A, B6, and Vitamin C in watermelon help in collagen production, which improves skin texture and suppleness, make the skin brighter, and fade spots and blemishes.

Lycopene content in watermelons has a sun-protection effect, so you are less likely to get sunburnt. The vitamin A in water-

melon keeps your eyes sparkly and healthy too and can prevent macular degeneration.

At home, you may make your own moisturizing facemask using watermelon and honey. Honey is a humectants that replenishes moisture and works quickly to give you smooth, bright skin. It hydrates and cures dry skin.

Combine two tablespoons of watermelon juice and one tablespoon of honey in a mixing dish. On your face, apply the mixture. Allow it to sit for 10-12 minutes before washing it off. For the best results, do this once a week. Additionally, watermelon juice helps to calm and lessen the redness of the skin that is prone to acne.

Prevent oily skin
Watermelon is an excellent skin component, particularly for individuals with oily skin. The delicious red fruit reduces pores and has unparalleled moisturizing effects. It treats oily skin by controlling the oil-producing glands called sebaceous glands, allowing your face to be free of oil and acne.

Watermelon is beneficial for eliminating excess oil from your skin.

Mix one tablespoon of watermelon pulp and one tablespoon of banana pulp in a bowl with a spatula and apply to the face and neck. Allow 20 to 25 minutes for

the face pack to dry. After that, wash it with warm water. This is the finest watermelon face mask for those who suffer from acne and pigmentation.

A mixture of mashed watermelon and tomato pulp can be used by those with oily skin to smoothen the skin. The malic acid in watermelon and lycopene in tomato act as natural exfoliators and soothe the skin.

A natural skin toner
Watermelon juice is a natural toner that is as good as rose water for your skin because of its natural extracts.

Vitamin C and antioxidants present in watermelon help regenerate skin cells and protect them from injury. These nutrients prevent free radical damage and also protect your skin from any further disruption.

To tone your skin, gently apply fresh watermelon juice to it and rinse it off. Watermelon seeds are a good source of magnesium which lowers cortisol levels that help reduce acne and also balances out your hormones. They also contain protein, fatty acids, and ceramides that help in locking the moisture in your skin.

Natural Exfoliator
The grainy particles present in the fruit helps gently exfoliate the skin. Watermelon is rich in vitamin C, which brightens your skin quickly. The gritty particles



in the fruit assist in gently exfoliating the skin while also moisturizing it. To naturally scrub off dead skin cells, apply a teaspoon of mashed watermelon to your skin.

To remove dead skin cells, rub watermelon and tomato pulp across the face or body in circular motions. The malic acid in watermelon and the enzymes in tomato help break down the glue that holds the dead skin cells together.

Combining mashed watermelon with yogurt and honey and then leaving the paste on the face for 10-15 minutes can be beneficial. The antioxidants in honey and watermelon can reduce inflammation, while yogurt can exfoliate the skin.

An Anti-Ager
Watermelons are enriched with antioxidants and vitamins, which all involve offering you glowing skin. Antioxidants help combat free radical damage and enhance suppleness, which reduces the appearance of fine

lines and wrinkles and makes skin appear tighter. Vitamins brighten dull skin and take off that layer that makes it look tired and overworked.

Mix watermelon pulp, milk, and honey. Make a paste and apply it to your face. Wash it with running or lukewarm water. Watermelon has potent antioxidants that fight free radicals to prevent premature aging. Milk, on the other hand, is a natural cleanser that deep cleanses the skin and removes dead skin cells.

Cure sunburn
Applying a watermelon and cucumber face pack to cure sunburn is recommended. Both watermelon and cucumber are excellent for your skin. Cucumber is a cooling substance that aids in the removal of tan. Watermelon has various aesthetic advantages, including moisturizing and soothing inflammation and itching. It also contains lycopene, protecting the skin from sunburn and skin cancer. It

blocks UV rays at least twice as well as an antioxidant.

Mix a spoonful of cucumber pulp with watermelon juice to make the face mask. Apply the pack evenly to your face and leave it on for 15-20 minutes before washing it off.

The best time to eat watermelons is in the morning between 10 am to 12 pm, as breakfast or between breakfast and lunch. You can also have it as an evening snack, before 5 pm. Do not consume it at night or with your meals.

It must be avoided by diabetics and everyone with digestive issues. Have it in moderation and never too much, otherwise, it sure can make you feel bloated, and gassy and even give you a stomach ache.

It's totally safe, to use it for skin care. The only people who can't use it are those who are allergic to watermelon. (The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)

The front line has changed little during a war of attrition, focused mostly on artillery, drones and trenches

Russian strike on Kharkiv's TV tower is part of an intimidation campaign, Zelenskyy says

KYIV, April 23: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said a Russian missile strike that smashed a television tower in Kharkiv was part of the Kremlin's ongoing effort to intimidate Ukraine's second-largest city, which in recent weeks has come under increasingly frequent attack. The strike sought to "make the terror visible to the whole city and to try to limit Kharkiv's connection and access to information," Zelenskyy said in a Monday evening address.

The northeastern Kharkiv region straddles the approximately 1,000-km (600-mile)-high TV tower, breaking it roughly in half and halting transmissions. A Washington think tank said Russia may be eyeing a ground assault on Kharkiv.

"The Kremlin is conducting a concerted air and information operation to destroy Kharkiv City, convince Ukrainians to flee, and internally displace millions of Ukrainians ahead of a possible future Russian offensive operation against the city or elsewhere in Ukraine," the Institute for the Study of War said in an assessment.

The expected arrival in Ukraine in coming weeks of new military aid from its Western partners possibly has prompted Russia to escalate its



attacks before the help arrives, the ISW said, adding that trying to capture Kharkiv would be "a significant challenge" for the Kremlin's forces.

Instead, the Russian military command "may attempt to destroy Kharkiv City with air, missile, and drone strikes and prompt a large-scale internal displacement of Ukrainian civilians," it said.

The US Senate was returning to Washington on Tuesday to vote on \$61 billion in war aid to Ukraine after months of delays. Zelenskyy said US President Joe Biden assured him the aid would include long-range and artillery capabilities.

"Four priorities are key: defense of the sky, modern artillery, long-range capacity, and to ensure that packages of American aid arrive as soon as possible," Zelenskyy said.

Also Tuesday, Britain pledged 500 million pounds (\$620 million, 580 million euros) in new military supplies for Ukraine, including 400 vehicles, 60 boats, 1,600 munitions and 4 million rounds of ammunition.

UK pledges \$620 million in new military aid for Ukraine

WARSAW, April 23: The U.K. on Tuesday pledged an additional \$620 million in new military supplies for Ukraine, including long-range missiles and four millions rounds of ammunition, at a time when Ukraine is struggling to hold off advancing Russian forces on the eastern front line of the war, now in its third year.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak spoke with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday morning to confirm the assistance and "assure him of the U.K.'s steadfast support for Ukraine's defense against Russia's brutal and expansionist ambitions," Sunak's office said.

Sunak was traveling to Warsaw later Tuesday to meet with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg for talks about further aid for Ukraine.

Ahead of the visit the U.K. government said Sunak would announce 500 million pounds (\$620 million, 580 million euros) in new British military supplies, including 400 vehicles, 60 boats, 1,600 munitions and 4 million rounds of ammunition. The shipment will include British Storm Shadow long-range

missiles, which have a range of some 150 miles and have proved effective at hitting Russian targets.

"President Zelenskyy thanked the Prime Minister for the U.K.'s continued support, saying the new military assistance would make a material difference to ordinary Ukrainians fighting on the front line to defend their country," Downing Street said.

The announcement comes three days after the U.S. House of Representatives approved \$61 billion in aid for Ukraine, as American lawmakers raced to deliver a fresh round of U.S. support to the war-torn ally.

However, Downing Street did not indicate whether the aid would be immediately available for delivery. Zelenskyy has repeatedly pleaded for greater international assistance, warning that his country will lose the war without it.

Ammunition shortages linked to the aid holdup over the past six months have led Ukrainian military commanders to ration shells, a disadvantage that Russia seized on this year — taking the city of Avdiivka and currently inching towards the town of Chasiv Yar, also in the eastern Donetsk region. (AP)

2 Malaysian military helicopters collide and crash while training, killing all 10 people on board

KUALA LUMPUR, April 23: Two Malaysian military helicopters collided midair and crashed during a training session on Tuesday, killing all 10 people on board, the navy said.

The helicopters were rehearsing at a naval base in northern Perak state for the navy's 90th anniversary celebration next month when the accident occurred, the navy said in a brief statement.

"All victims were confirmed dead on site," it said, adding that the remains have been sent to the hospital to be identified.

A video circulating on social media showed several helicopters flying low in a formation. One of the aircraft veered sideways and clipped the rotor of another helicopter, causing both to plunge and crash. A local police officer who declined to be named because he isn't authorised to speak to the media confirmed that the video footage is genuine. The choppers were mangled beyond recognition. Rescue workers sifted through the debris to find the bodies. The victims included three women and seven men, police said.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said the nation mourned over the "heart and soul-wrenching tragedy" and that the navy will immediately carry out an investigation to determine what caused the accident. Seven crew members were aboard the AW139 maritime operation helicopter, the navy said. That aircraft is produced by AgustaWestland, which is a subsidiary of the Italian defense contractor Leonardo. Three other crew members were on a Fenec lightweight helicopter, manufactured by European multinational defense conglomerate Airbus. Local media reported that the AW139 crashed at a sports complex at the naval base, while the Fenec hit a nearby swimming pool. (AP)

Outcome of election shows Maldivians want to preserve sovereignty & freedom: Prez Muizzu

MALE, April 23: Armed with a 'super majority' in the parliamentary polls, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has said the international community will now understand where the Maldivians stand, especially on the issue of sovereignty and freedom.

The pro-China Maldivian president's statement came at a celebratory event on Monday, a day after the People's National Congress (PNC), led by him, won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, re-

spectively, taking the total to more than two-thirds in the People's Majlis.

A majority in Parliament would mean that Muizzu's party has control not just over lawmaking but also over the legislature which ratifies the laws; which till now had two opposing coalitions and saw several instances of a conflict between the government and the legislature.

The PNC's "super majority" in parliamentary elections is being seen as a strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the strategi-

cally-located archipelago nation in the Indian Ocean. Muizzu, 45, rode to power last year on the 'India Out' plank and since assuming office in November 2023, has visited China and cemented Male's ties with Beijing, including in the defence sector.

Ahead of the parliamentary elections, the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by pro-India former president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih had advocated restoring ties with India. The MDP, however, won only 15 seats.

Muizzu, who has forced the repatriation of 88 Indian military personnel manning three aviation platforms gifted by India to the Maldives, two of the three batches have already left, said, "We are a proud nation that loves sovereignty and freedom, which we have

shown to the international community as well."

The parliamentary election result was also to prove that the Maldivians want "autonomy in choosing their future, without foreign coercion," President Muizzu said, without naming any country, according to the Sun.mv news portal.

"It has also become evident for those with other hidden agendas, what the Maldivians want. So, I urge them to let go of dissidence, now that the elections are over," the president said.

"To everyone outside of Maldives ... To everyone in the international community ... It must be clear now. That we want to decide our own matters by ourselves," he was quoted as saying by Adhadhu.com. (PTI)

Tensions between Beijing and Washington are the biggest worry for US companies in China, report says

BELJING, April 23: Simmering tensions between Beijing and Washington remain the top worry for American companies operating in China, according to a report by the American Chamber of Commerce in China released Tuesday.

The survey of US companies said inconsistent and unclear policies and enforcement, rising labour costs and data security issues were other top concerns. It also said that, despite the insistence of Chinese leaders that Beijing welcomes foreign businesses, many still are hindered from free competition.

"The Chinese government has stated that it encourages foreign direct investment, but many of our members continue to encounter barriers to investment and operations including policies that discriminate against them and public relations campaigns that create suspicion of foreigners," the report said.

The report welcomed an improvement in relations in 2023 that was capped by summit meetings of Chinese leader Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden, but said the US presidential election in November was "looming large" over the future business environment.

More recently, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited Beijing, where she raised concerns that potential overcapacity in Chinese industries — such as electric vehicles, steel making and solar panels — might crowd out US and other foreign manufacturers.

"We recognise that there are significant areas of contention in the US-China relationship, many of which have no easy or short-term prospects for resolution," it said.

The report said the Chamber saw high-level exchanges and communication between the two sides as a top priority. American companies operating in China saw improved profits last year, though slightly less than half expect to be profitable in 2024. Still, many members of the American Chamber said they were more optimistic about growth of China's own economy.

Among its many recommendations the report urged China to create and implement "transparent and practical economic policies which treat domestic and foreign entities equally." Referring to concerns over the risk of



being caught up in accusations they have violated China's national security, it also appealed to China's leaders to clarify and narrow the scope of the country's anti-espionage law to prevent it from interfering with normal business operations.

Such requests follow repeated raids on foreign companies that Chinese authorities say were conducted on national security grounds. The report also had recommendations for the US side, including providing clear visa policies for Chinese students to show they will be welcomed. Similarly, American students should be encouraged to study in China, the report said.

It also called on US officials to avoid resorting to unilateral controls that may be ineffective and fail to meet goals for national security and foreign policy. Washington should engage with Chinese companies to allow them to address export control concerns such as military use of civilian technologies before the companies are subjected to sanctions, it said.

The 617-page bilingual report provided hundreds of recommendations spanning a wide variety of industries, from sports and online streaming to occupational safety issues and rural traffic management.

American companies generally are not planning to move supply chains out of China given how large and important it is as a market of 1.4 billion people. But their willingness to increase investments there and make it their strategic focus has been decreasing as its advantages diminish, the report said. (AP)

USD 8 billion US military aid package to Taiwan will 'boost confidence' in region: president-elect

TAIPEI, April 23: A USD 8 billion defence package approved by the US House of Representatives over the weekend will "strengthen the deterrence against authoritarianism in the West Pacific ally chain," Taiwan's President-elect Lai Ching-te said on Tuesday, in a reference to key rival China.

The funding will also "help ensure peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and also boost confidence in the region" Lai, currently Taiwan's vice president, told visiting Michigan Representatives Lisa McClain, a Republican, and Democrat Dan Kildee at a meeting at the Presidential Office Building in the capital Taipei.

In the face of "authoritarian expansionism," Taiwan is "determined to safeguard democracy and also safeguard our homeland, Lai said."

Also known as William Lai, US-educated former medical researcher is depressed by Beijing for his opposition to political unification with the mainland. In recent elections, the pro-unification Nationalists won a narrow majority in the legislature, but their influence on foreign policy and other national issues remains limited.

The Senate will vote on Tuesday on USD 95 billion in war aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. The package covers a wide range of parts and services aimed at maintaining and upgrading Taiwan's military hardware. Separately, Taiwan has signed billions in contracts with the US for latest-generation F-16V fighter jets, M1 Abrams main battle tanks and the HIMARS rocket system, which the US has also supplied to Ukraine. Taiwan has also been expanding

its own defence industry, building submarines and trainer jets. Next month it plans to commission its third and fourth domestically designed and built stealth corvettes to counter the Chinese navy, as part of a strategy of asymmetrical warfare in which a smaller force counters its larger opponent by using cutting edge or nonconventional tactics and weaponry.

Lai, of the pro-independence ruling Democratic Progressive Party, won the January election handily and takes over next month from President Tsai Ing-wen, whom Beijing has sought to isolate for the past eight years.

China is determined to annex the island, which it considers its own territory, by force if necessary and has been advertising that threat

with daily incursions into waters and air space around Taiwan by navy ships and warplanes. It has also sought to pick away Taiwan's few remaining formal diplomatic partners.

While Washington and Taipei have no formal diplomatic ties in deference to Beijing, McClain emphasised the need for the entire world to observe the strength of the relationship.

"Peace is our goal. But to do that, we have to have relationships and we value your relationship. Not only militarily, but economically," she said.

Kildee said the timing of the visit was especially significant given the recent passage of the funding bill to "provide very important support to insure security in this region." "It's important for the people of Taiwan, it's important for the people in the United States, it's important for the entire world," Kildee said. (AP)

German EU lawmaker's aide is arrested on suspicion of spying for China

BERLIN, April 23: A man who works for a German lawmaker in the European Parliament has been arrested on suspicion of spying for China, German prosecutors said on Tuesday.

The detention came less than 24 hours after three people were arrested for spying for China in a separate German case. The suspect, identified only as Jian G in line with German privacy rules, was arrested Monday in the eastern German city of Dresden, federal prosecutors said in a statement. They said that he has worked for a German lawmaker in the European Union's legislature since 2019.

The statement didn't specify which lawmaker employed him, but German news agency dpa reported, citing unidentified security sources, that he works for Maximilian Krah of the far-right party Alternative for Germany. Other German media also linked the suspect to Krah, who is the party's top candidate in the European Parliament election in early June.

Jian G, a German national, is accused of working for a Chinese intelligence service and of repeatedly passing on information on negotiations and decisions in the European Parliament in January. Prosecutors allege that he also snooped on Chinese dissidents in Germany. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said the spying allegations were "extremely serious."

"If it is confirmed that there was spying for Chinese intelligence from inside the European Parliament, then that is an attack from inside on European democracy," Faeser said in a statement.

"Anyone who employs such a staff member also carries responsibility," she added. "This case must be cleared up precisely. ... All the connections and background must be illuminated." News of the arrest came a day after three Germans suspected of spying for China and arranging to transfer information on technology with potential military uses were arrested in a separate case. (AP)

Human rights groups condemn UK plan to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda after Parliament backs new law

LONDON, April 23: Britain's plans to send some asylum-seekers to Rwanda were swiftly condemned by international humanitarian organisations after Parliament approved legislation allowing the deportation flights to begin later this year.

Both the UN refugee agency and the Council of Europe on Tuesday called for the UK to rethink its plans because of concerns that the legislation undermines human rights protections and fears that it will damage international cooperation on tackling the global migrant crisis.

"The new legislation marks a further step away from the UK's long tradition of providing refuge to those in need, in breach of the Refugee Convention," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a statement. "Protecting refugees requires all countries — not just those neighbouring crisis zones — to uphold their obligations."

The statement came just hours after Britain's House of Lords dropped its at-



tempts to amend the legislation, paving the way for it to become law. On Monday, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said deportation flights to Rwanda would begin in 10-12 weeks.

Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights, criticised the legislation for preventing asylum-seekers from asking the courts to intervene when they are threatened with being sent back to the countries they are fleeing.

"The adoption of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill by the UK Parliament raises major issues about the human rights of asylum

seekers and the rule of law more generally," O'Flaherty said in a statement. "The United Kingdom government should refrain from removing people under the Rwanda policy and reverse the bill's effective infringement of judicial independence."

The reaction came as French media reported that at least five people died Tuesday when a boat carrying about 100 or more migrants got into trouble while trying to cross the English Channel.

Sunak's government says its deportation plans will help stop the tide of people entering Britain illegally because migrants won't make the risky crossing in leaky inflatable boats if they know there is a chance they will be sent on one-way ticket to Rwanda.

Small boat crossings are a potent political issue in Britain, where they are seen as evidence of the government's failure to control immigration.

Sunak has made his plan to "stop the boats" a key campaign promise with his

Conservative Party trailing badly in opinion polls ahead of a general election later this year.

The number of migrants arriving in Britain on small boats soared to 45,774 in 2022 from just 299 four years earlier as people fleeing war, famine and economic hardship paid criminal gangs thousands of pounds to ferry them across the channel.

Small boat arrivals dropped to 29,437 last year as the government cracked down on people smugglers and reached an agreement to return Albanians to their home country.

Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson first proposed the Rwanda plan more than two years ago, when he reached an agreement with the East African nation to accept some asylum-seekers in return for millions of pounds (dollars) in aid. Implementation has been held up by a series of court challenges and opposition from migrant advocates who say it violates international law. (AP)

South Korean sentenced to 14 months in jail for killing 76 cats

SEOUL, April 23: A South Korean man has been sentenced to 14 months in prison for killing 76 cats in one of the country's most gruesome cases of animal cruelty in recent years.

The man, who is in his 20s, was convicted of violating South Korea's animal protection law last week, the Changwon District Court in southeastern South Korea said on Tuesday. The court did not identify the man.

The man went on a cat-killing spree between December 2022 and September 2023 due to a deep hatred of the animal that he began harboring after other cats scratched his car, according to a court verdict seen by The Associated Press.

He had caught stray cats and

adopted others from online sites before strangling some to death and killing others with scissors, the court order said. He killed one cat by running it over with a car, the court said.

The court ruled that the prison sentence was unavoidable because he repeatedly committed "indiscribably cruel" crimes in a premeditated manner.

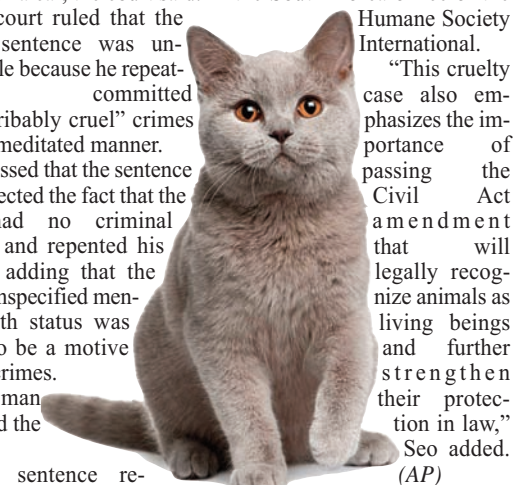
It stressed that the sentence still reflected the fact that the man had no criminal records and repented his crimes, adding that the man's unspecified mental health status was found to be a motive for his crimes.

The man appealed the ruling. "The sentence re-

flects Korean society's increasing concern for animal welfare and intolerance for senseless cruelty such as this," said Borami Seo, a director of the South Korea office of the Humane Society International.

"This cruelty case also emphasizes the importance of passing the Civil Act amendment that will legally recognize animals as living beings and further strengthen their protection in law," Seo added.

(AP)



Leader of opposition writes letter to CEC



HT Bureau
GUAHATI, April 23: Leader of Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury wrote a letter to chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Monday, justifying the reason behind the INDI bloc Tripura unit demanding a re-poll to prevent the undermining of the people's mandate and to protect the sanctity of democracy.

In the letter, Chaudhury highlighted discrepancies in the polled votes in two assembly segments.

For example, in the 10-Majlispur Assembly, the total polled votes were 574, with 566 in the polling station, three postal votes, five votes from the aged home, and five EDC votes, while the total number of voters is 545.

Similarly, in the 5-Kayerpur Assembly, the total polled votes were 1292, with 1279 in the polling station, 4 postal votes, 1 aged home vote, 3 PWD votes, and 5 EDC votes, while the total number of voters is 1290.

Chaudhury further stated that these records unequivocally indicate that the elections for the 1-Tripura East Parliamentary Constituency and the bye-election for the 7-Ramnagar Assembly Constituency, which is a part of the same parliamentary constituency, were not conducted in a free, fair, and normal manner.

"Such discrepancies in polling percentages may only occur when the booths are captured and completely rigged in an organized manner. These discrepancies justify the demand of the Left Front as well as the INDI Bloc to countermand both of the above elections and arrange a fresh poll to prevent the undermining of the people's mandate and to protect the sanctity of democracy," he added.

Poll-related violence has tarnished the good image of Manipur
INDIA Bloc, Manipur unit condemns rampant violence during first phase poll in Manipur



IMPHAL, April 23: Leaders of the Manipur unit of INDIA Bloc on Tuesday condemned the "rampant violence" during the first phase (April 19) polls while calling for putting for all available resources on the part of the concerned authorities to ensure vi-

olent free poll in the second phase on April 26.

The second phase of voting in 13 Assembly segments falling under the Outer Manipur (ST) Parliamentary constituency will be held on April 26.

Addressing the reporters at Con-

gress Bhavan here, leaders of the bloc accused the "ruling party and its supporters" behind the violence reported during the first phase poll on April 19.

They alleged that behind the threats, intimidations and proxy voting, there was the BJP. The

block further accused the ruling party of sending out armed youths to indulge in prejudicial activities as they feared of losing the party's candidate in the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency.

The poll-related violence has tarnished the good image of Manipur not only in the country but across the globe which is very unfortunate, the Manipur unit of INDIA Bloc convener Ksh Santa said.

At the same time, he lauded the manner in which the re-poll in 11 polling stations was held on April 22 which concluded peacefully with high voter turnout of 81.60%.

Besides being peaceful at the polling stations, Santa observed that the voters cast their votes in a free and fearless manner even though workers and supporters of the candidates of the "ruling classes" attempted to lure them with money ahead of casting their votes. (NNN)

Human rights report highlights 'significant abuses' in Manipur

HT Bureau
GUAHATI, April 23: In its yearly human rights evaluation report, the United States' state department asserted that there were "significant abuses" occurring in Manipur.

According to its report, the US state department indicated that over 60,000 individuals were displaced in Manipur from May to November last year.

Furthermore, it noted that over 200 individuals lost their lives in "fierce fighting" between the tribal Kuki-Zo and the predominant Meitei communities in Manipur following a court ruling proposing the extension of ST privileges to the majority Meiteis.

Furthermore, the US state department report on human rights evaluation highlighted 'attacks' on minorities, journalists and dissenting voices across India.

The US state department report also alleged that there were "numerous instances" where the government and its supporters purportedly exerted pressure or subjected media outlets critical of

the government to harassment. In its assessment, the US further asserted that "religious minorities" in India have reported instances of discrimination, including calls for violence and the dissemination of misinformation.

Senior US official Robert S Gilchrist emphasizes the importance of upholding human rights obligations, urging the Indian government to engage with civil society representatives and address their concerns effectively.

"We strongly encourage, urge India to uphold its human rights obligations and commitments," stated Robert S Gilchrist, senior official from the US bureau of democracy, human rights and labour.

Gilchrist added: "We also regularly meet with civil society representatives both in the US and India to hear their perspectives, and those sorts of perspectives inform the human rights report, and we encourage the government of India to consult and meet regularly with civil society organisations representing a diversity of people."

Heroin worth ₹ 5 crore seized from two smugglers in Manipur

HT Bureau
GUAHATI, April 23: Two suspected drug traffickers including a female were arrested along with 2.5 kg of heroin worth around ₹ 5 crore in the regional black markets during an operation, the police said on Tuesday.

The Anti Drug squad of the Manipur police in its drive including women police conducted a raid and arrested two alleged smugglers later identified as N. Alexander (47 yrs) and Peering Anal, 45, (female).

Both the smugglers are the residents of the Chandel district of Manipur bordering Myanmar on the south.

The arrests and seizures were made based on specific input received from across the border regarding clandestine operations of contraband items on NH-102 connecting Imphal — More border town.

The police established a temporary vehicle check post at a loca-



tion in Manipur's Thoubal district and during the search operation, the drugs stated to be smuggling into Manipur from Myanmar were found in several soap cases made in Myanmar. The police report stated that these drug smugglers were arrested on April 21.

Two Mobile Phones, one vehicle, and other identity documents were also recovered from their possession. The arrested persons were booked under the NDPS Act 1985 and are now in Thoubal police station for further action, the police added.

VPP condemns government 'inaction' on Them Lew Mawlong relocation

HT Bureau
GUAHATI, April 23: Voice of People Party (VPP) MLA Adelbert Nongrum has lambasted the National People's Party (NPP)-led Meghalaya government for its "failure to relocate" residents of Them Lew Mawlong. Nongrum expressed his concern about the government's unfulfilled promise to relocate the residents for over five years. He stated that the residents of the area are in unhealthy living conditions with potential health hazards. Nongrum further criticized the presence of a slum in the heart of the city stating of an inconvenience caused to the general public by the barricade blocking vehicle entry on the road leading to Them Lew Mawlong.

Arambai Tengol members voice 'commitment' to safeguard territorial integrity of state

HT Bureau
GUAHATI, April 23: Thousands of members of the Arambai Tengol, a Meitei radical organisation in Manipur, clad in black attire, gathered to renew their "commitment to safeguarding and preserving" the territorial integrity of the Northeast state.

Korounganba Khuman, the commander-in-chief of the Arambai Tengol, led the ceremony, where thousands of followers re-affirmed their vows on the occasion of the 133rd anniversary of the Khongjom War, Manipur's final battle for independence.

Arambai Tengol activists paid tributes to the brave souls who sacrificed their lives in Manipur's last war of independence, known as the "Khongjom War", fought against the British in 1891 to uphold freedom. The historic battle took place at Khebaching in Thoubal district of Manipur.

The Arambai Tengol commander-in-chief emphasized that the organization refrains from commenting on the elections to the Manipur Lok Sabha seats.

While the first phase of elections for the Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat concluded, the second phase for the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat, reserved for scheduled tribes, is scheduled for April 26 in the state.

Dimapur traders' body calls for indefinite shutter down against NPGs' 'harassment'

HT Bureau
GUAHATI, April 23: The Dimapur Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) has issued a call for an indefinite shutter down protest in Dimapur city of Nagaland starting from April 26, in protest against what it describes as "unabated multiple taxation, intimidation and summonses" by Naga Political Groups (NPGs).

The trade body has announced that all shops and business establishments will remain closed from April 26 onwards until the grievances of the business community in Dimapur city of Nagaland are addressed.

The DCCI alleged that NPGs have resorted to various tactics to extort from the business community, including bringing their own Maximum Retail Price (MRP) sticker machines to implicate shop owners and planting illegal substances in shops to tarnish their reputations.

The DCCI claims that NPGs then summon



shopkeepers, penalize them with hefty fines, and confiscate CCTV/DVR installations to conceal their actions.

Expressing frustration over "harassment by NPGs", the DCCI highlighted a recent incident where a businessman was brutally assaulted

during an abduction attempt and extorted for money.

The trade body laments that the hostile business environment in Dimapur city of Nagaland led many businesses to relocate to neighbouring towns in Assam where operating costs are lower.

The DCCI called on the Nagaland government and law enforcement agencies to intervene promptly to protect the business community from further harm, emphasizing that the situation cannot be ignored any longer.

It also advised business owners not to entertain any calls or summonses from NPGs without the DCCI's knowledge and urges them to refrain from storing customers' belongings for safety reasons.

DCCI further appealed to civil society organizations and the public to support the indefinite shutter down call.



A procession was taken in Shillong from a temple in Garikhana to Anjalee Petrol Pump and back to Garikhana on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti on Tuesday. UB Photos

Workshop on 'Introductory Biotechnology and Bioinformatics'

SHILLONG, April 23: A one day workshop on "Introductory Biotechnology and Bioinformatics" jointly organized by the Department of Botany, Sankardev College, Department of Biotechnology & Bioinformatics, North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong, and Department of Basic Sciences and Social Sciences, NEHU, Shillong was held on April 22.

The inaugural session was held in the Department of Biotechnology & Bioinformatics, NEHU.

Dr Hiranjit Choudhury, Associate Professor, Department of Basic Sciences, NEHU highlighted that the aim of the workshop was to sensitize the Under Graduate students pursuing higher studies in Biotechnology and Bioinformatics.

The first lecture was given by Dr Atanu Bhattacharjee, Head and Associate Professor, Department of Biotechnology & Bioinformatics, NEHU, who spoke on the topic Introduction to Bioinformatics.

He deliberated on data mining, application of Biotechnology in animals, genome/gene sequencing, molecular medicines, personalized medicine, gene therapy,

Artificial intelligence, microbial genome application, evolutionary studies, and antibiotic resistance from the perspective of Bioinformatics.

The second lecture was given by Dr Hiranjit Choudhury, Associate Professor, Department of Basic Sciences NEHU, who spoke on the topic Basics of Biotechnology.

He elaborated on the application of Biotechnology — red, green, blue, white/grey, environmental Biotechnology, transgenic plants like Bt cotton, Golden rice, Flavr savr tomato, mass production of rare and economically important plants through tissue culture and Bio refineries.

There were two hands-on training sessions for the students. The first session was on Bioinformatics — PDB data banking, assisted by the respective faculty and research scholars of the Department of Biotechnology & Bioinformatics, NEHU. This was followed by a second hands-on training on Plant tissue culture and Molecular Biology assisted by the Faculty and Research Scholars of the Department of Basic Sciences and Social Sciences, NEHU. (NNN)

State entrepreneur award is a celebration of entrepreneurial excellence and innovation
Felicitation programme for Nagaland State Entrepreneur 2023 held

KOHIMA, APRIL 23: Felicitation programme for Nagaland State Entrepreneur 2023 and Nagaland State Handicraft Award 2023-24 was held at Conference Hall, directorate of industries & commerce in Kohima on Tuesday.

Commissioner & secretary, industries & commerce, Kekhrievor Kevichusa said that it was very encouraging for the department to see such a variety and creativity of Naga craftsmen from different fields. He asked the awardees and the department officials to maintain a good relationship so that the department will know what type of assistance is required for the benefit of the people. He congratulated all the winners and informed them that the doors of the department are always open for any information and assistance in future.

Director industries & commerce, A.Temjen Jamir in his keynote address said that the award for entrepreneurs was initiated by the department with the administrative approval of the Government of Nagaland in the year 2022. He informed that the state entrepreneur award is a celebration of entrepreneurial excellence and innovation and recognition of outstanding achievements in the entrepreneurial world. Jamir added that the award aims to encourage and promote the culture of entrepreneurship by acknowledging the entrepreneurship spirit, innova-



tion and significant accomplishment of individuals and companies and at the same time serves as a platform for honouring the remarkable contribution and innovations of entrepreneurs across the state.

The recipient of State Entrepreneur Award 2023 are Peihauding of M/s Ngurie company from Peren district for his innovative Bio-enhancer an organic composition that addresses key challenges faced by flower growers and for contributing to Agricultural sustainable and resilient ecosystem, Mu-

lungnenla Pogen of M/s ISTI Natural Dimapur for her commitment in crafting herbal skin care solutions using indigenous herbs, Nengneithem Hengna of M/s Runway India Dimapur for integrating Nagaland indigenous inspired Jewellery into mainstream fashion and promoting tribal art.

The recipient of state Handicraft award 2023 are: Vekuvolu Dozo, (Textiles Loin Loom); Shirme Ruivavao, (wood carving); Intiyala Handicraft crocheted craft; Cenam Wangcha (Handicraft Beats work); Vikheli

H. Ayemi (textiles Loin Loom); Kekuweu Lomi (textiles Loin Loom) and Intisenla (Handicraft Jewellery).

Under One District One Product (ODOP), 10 chilli farmers and other 10 farmers cultivating pineapple, coffee, kiwi, plum, avocado, tomatoes, basmati rice, from the district of Kohima, Chumoukedima, Mokokchung, Mon, Peren, and Phek were given organic certification as per National Program for Organic Production (NPOP) standard. (NNN)

Kejriwal given insulin in Tihar after spike in sugar level; AAP gives credit to Lord Hanuman



NEW DELHI, April 23: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was administered a "low dose" of insulin after his blood sugar level spiked, officials of Tihar jail said on Tuesday, with the AAP commenting that it was because of the blessings of Lord Hanuman.

Tuesday is being celebrated as Hanuman Janmotsav, the Lord's birthday.

According to a Tihar official, Kejriwal was given two units of low dose insulin on Monday evening on the advice of the AIIMS doctors.

His blood sugar level reading was found to be 217 around 7 pm, following which the doctors at the Tihar looking after him decided to give him the insulin dose, the official said.

The AIIMS specialists, during a video conference with the chief minister on April 20, had advised the Tihar doctors that insulin could be given to him if his sugar level crosses a certain level, he added.

Delhi Cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj participated in an event in his constituency to celebrate Hanuman Jayanti. A person dressed as Lord Hanuman was carrying vials of insulin with Bharadwaj carrying a mace ('gadaa') as they travelled in the area atop a vehicle. Vials of insulin were stuck on the mace.

"Hanumanji has given insulin to his devotee Arvind Kejriwal. The court passed the order, the jail denied, but due to Hanumanji, Kejriwal got the insulin. We pray for his good health, long life, and may he soon be released," he told PTI Videos.

Earlier in the day, Bharadwaj alleged that the officials were deliberately not giving insulin to Kejriwal.

"Today it became clear that the chief minister was right. He needed insulin but the officials under the BJP-led Centre were de-

liberately not treating him. Tell me BJP people! If there was no need for insulin, why are they giving it now? Because the whole world is cursing them," he said in a post on X in Hindi.

Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal visited the temple to offer prayers on the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti.

"May Hanuman Baba give wisdom and prosperity to all. May Hanuman Baba take away everyone's trouble and mine too. I will come back with sir (Kejriwal) soon," she told reporters.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh echoed similar views and said it was due to the blessings of Lord Hanuman that the chief minister was given insulin after nearly 23 days of being lodged in jail. He alleged ill-treatment with the party's national convener.

"It is due to the blessings of Lord Hanuman that Kejriwal was given insulin after 23 days. We had been saying that he needs to be given insulin but he was given insulin only now. The people of Delhi were worried about him but their struggle bore fruit," Singh said.

Welcoming the development, Delhi Cabinet minister Atishi said in a post on X in Hindi, "Jai Bajrang Bali! Good news received on Hanuman Jayanti. Tihar administration finally gave insulin to Arvind Kejriwal ji.

"This is the result of the blessings of Hanuman ji and the struggle of the people of Delhi. Even in this time of struggle, the blessings of Bajrang Bali remain on all of us," she said.

The Delhi chief minister was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy. He is lodged in the Tihar jail since April 1. (PTI)

BSP playing role of BJP's B-team, its leadership moved away from original ideology: Danish Ali

'BJP or Narendra Modi do not have a patent on Bharat Mata'

NEW DELHI/AMROHA, April 23: Congress leader Danish Ali on Tuesday accused the BSP of playing the role of the "BJP's B-team" in the Lok Sabha polls and claimed the Mayawati-led outfit's candidates have been decided by the ruling party.

Ali, who is contesting from Uttar Pradesh's Amroha on a Congress ticket after switching over from the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), claimed that Narendra Modi's criticism of him at a poll rally in Amroha last week showed the prime minister's "frustration".

"This attack shows the prime minister's frustration. It is his frustration over my work in the last five years to expose the government on the floor of the House. They (the BJP) don't want a parliamentarian like me to return to the House and that is why they have put in their whole strength against me in the polls," Ali told PTI in an interview. "Chief minister (Yogi Adityanath) is visiting Amroha for the fourth time in the last two weeks. A whole battery of BJP leaders are camping in Amroha. I take it as a challenge," he said.

Hitting out at the Congress candidate, Modi at the poll rally in Amroha last week alleged that Ali has objections in saying "Bharat Mata ki jai".

"Will a person who cannot accept Bharat Mata ki jai look good



in the Indian Parliament? Should such a person be allowed entry into the Indian Parliament?" he had asked the gathering.

Hitting back at the prime minister, Ali said the BJP or Narendra Modi do not have a patent on "Bharat Mata" and those people who did not raise the tricolour at their ideological headquarters for over 50 years after Independence should refrain from making such comments.

Asked about his former party and its chief Mayawati attacking him, he said people know that the BSP and the BJP are both hand in glove to defeat the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) and particularly Danish Ali.

He claimed that the BSP leadership has moved away from the party's ideology.

"The party (BSP) has moved away from the basis on which it was formed. Today, it is a question of saving the Constitution. BJP leaders are saying that they will change the Constitution. None other than six-term MP Anant Kumar Hegde said so. BSP stayed away from the INDIA bloc and its candidates were decided by the BJP," the Congress leader alleged.

He claimed that "100 per cent BSP is playing the role of the BJP's B-team".

Ali, however, added that now the workers of the BSP and Scheduled Caste organizations are coming out in support of the INDIA bloc be-

cause they know the danger is too much. "If they make a mistake, it would be a disaster for the country and for their reservation," he added.

His remarks come days after BSP chief Mayawati accused Ali of "betraying" the people of the constituency and the party.

Ali asserted that by joining the Congress, he has reached the "ultimate destination of his political and ideological journey" which will last for a lifetime.

"The Congress is the only party in the country which is the champion of social justice. Today's Congress under the leadership of party chief Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi has a clear ideological stand. I have reached the ultimate destination of my political and ideological journey. This will last for my whole life," he asserted.

Asked about the row over BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri making derogatory remarks against him in Parliament and whether people's vote would be a verdict on that, Ali said, "I am getting the support of all communities, of all those people who are against this ideology of hate."

While Ali is contesting polls from Amroha again, Ramesh Bidhuri was dropped by the BJP and the ticket for that constituency was given to Ramvir Singh Bidhuri.

On Ramesh Bidhuri not being

given a ticket by the BJP and some others also being dropped by the party, Ali said there is a lot of difference in words and actions of the BJP and the prime minister.

"They say one thing and do something else. On one hand, they talk about denying tickets and on the other hand the PM himself is making a hate speech," he alleged.

"Look at his speech in Rajasthan. This is the problem with the BJP. He (Modi) can do his best but this time the country is not going to be polarized on religious lines," Ali said.

Addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara on Sunday, the prime minister said the Congress plans to give people's hard-earned money and values to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children".

He had said, "Earlier, when they (Congress) government was in power, they had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets. This means to whom will this property be distributed? It will be distributed among those who have more children".

Ali exuded confidence that he will win by a bigger majority than last time in Amroha.

He also claimed that last week's rally of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has made a big impact and marked the turning point in the election in the seat. (PTI)

Former student leader Kang to try his luck from Punjab's Anandpur Sahib on AAP ticket

CHANDIGARH, April 23: Having started his political career as a student leader, AAP's Malvinder Singh Kang has now thrown his hat in the Lok Sabha election ring from the Anandpur Sahib constituency in Punjab.

A former BJP leader, he quit the party over the now-repealed farm laws and is pinning his hopes on the Bhagwant Mann government's "pro-people" initiatives to clinch the seat.

Congress leader Manish Tewari is the sitting MP from Anandpur Sahib, but this time he is contesting from the Chandigarh parliamentary constituency. The Anandpur Sahib seat was bagged by Congress' Raveet Singh Bittu in the 2009 polls and Shiromani Akali Dal's Prem Singh Chandumajra in 2014.

"We are going to the people with a positive agenda. We are telling them about the work done by the AAP government in the last two years," Kang, who joined the AAP in 2021 after quitting the BJP, told PTI. Listing out the "achievements" of the Mann government, Kang said more than 42,000 government jobs have been given on a merit basis and free electricity is being given to people, which is leading to a saving of ₹ 4,000 to ₹ 5,000 per household, he said. "More than 800 Mohalla Clinics have been opened in the state and around 1.50 crore people availed medical treatment in these clinics," he said, highlighting that the AAP government has put a special focus on the education sector.

Kang began his political career as a student leader and was elected twice as the president of the Punjab University Student Council. He joined the AAP in July 2021 after quitting the BJP in October 2020 over the now-repealed farm laws. Kang was the state general secretary of the Punjab BJP and a

prominent Sikh face in the party's core committee.

"My fight is for the future generations of Punjab," said Kang as he lashed out at his political opponents for "doing nothing" for the people of the constituency.

"One who can raise his voice in Parliament in an effective manner to protect the rights of the people of Punjab should be given a chance," said Kang as he appealed to the people to vote for him in the coming polls. Those who have already been "tested" in this constituency, do not have any moral right to get another chance, he said, attacking his rivals.

Kang, who is the chief spokesperson of the Aam Aadmi Party's Punjab unit, asserted that Anandpur Sahib -- a pilgrimage site for Sikhs worldwide -- has "immense" tourism potential and the Punjab government has prepared a blueprint for its promotion. (PTI)

BJP will stop TMC's corruption and cut money culture: Shah

KARANDIGHI (WB), April 23: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on the TMC-led West Bengal government over the issues of corruption and infiltration, and asserted that only the BJP can end the misrule of the Trinamool Congress in the state.

Addressing a rally at Karandighi in Raiganj constituency, Shah said the party has set a target of winning 35 Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal.

"The Calcutta High Court yesterday gave a judgment cancelling thousands of appointments (made through the 2016 teacher recruitment test). It is a matter of shame that jobs were sold for lakhs of rupees. This cut-money culture and corruption must end in West Bengal. The TMC can never stop it, only the BJP can stop it," he said.

Hitting out at the Congress over remarks by its leaders that the CAA would be repealed if they are voted to power, Shah said, "Neither Congress nor Mamata

Banerjee can dare to touch the CAA."

The Congress and Mamata Banerjee are against the CAA as they want to help the infiltrators, he alleged.

"They are opposing the law since it will help Hindu refugees get citizenship," the senior BJP leader said.

The Centre last month implemented the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, notifying the rules four years after the law was passed by Parliament to fast-track citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

Referring to the recent incidents in Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas, where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders have emerged, Shah said it is a matter of shame that "Mamata Banerjee, despite being a woman chief minister, tried to protect the culprits." (PTI)

INDIA bloc a platform against BJP: Vijayan

KANNUR (KERALA), April 23: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday said the INDIA bloc was not a front, but a system of opposition political parties that has come up as a platform against the ruling BJP at the Centre. The statement by Vijayan comes amidst an intense fight between the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress-led UDF -- both INDIA bloc partners -- in Kerala ahead of the Lok Sabha polls in the state on April 26. He said, during a press meet here, that during the LS polls, alliances were being formed in various states as part of the platform and its result was that the BJP was being largely isolated. "There is also a strong public sentiment against the BJP in the country," he added.

A final decision would be taken regarding the bloc's next step only after the polls after analysing the prevailing situation, the Marxist veteran said in



response to a query as to whether the partners in the INDIA bloc were moving towards the goal for which the front was created. On being asked whether Rahul Gandhi was the Prime Ministerial candidate of the bloc, Vijayan said that the Congress has not made any decision about it yet.

He said that in the last LS polls in 2019, the Congress had sought votes

by projecting Gandhi as the PM candidate. "Since people in Kerala have had the experience of that, I do not think they will do that again this time," he said. Vijayan said as far as the Left front was concerned, after all the parties against the BJP win in the polls, at that time a decision would be taken on who would be the leader of the INDIA bloc. (PTI)

ED seeks EC action against K'taka Congress MLA on ₹ 42 crore funds during 2023 polls

NEW DELHI/BENGALURU, April 23: The ED has written to the Election Commission seeking action against a Karnataka Congress MLA for "mobilising" about ₹ 42 crore funds for unlawful transactions, including alleged bribing of voters, during the 2023 assembly elections in the state, official sources said.

The Enforcement Directorate has also made a similar communication to the Karnataka Lokayukta establishment under section 66(2) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act asking the latter to go through the evidence collected by it against Nara Bharath Reddy, the legislator from the Bellary City seat, and register a case.

The ED had raided the premises of Reddy and some others linked to him in Karnataka and neighbouring Andhra Pradesh on February 10 as part of a money laundering investigation linked to charges of alleged illegal mining and some "fraud" land deals. Three days later, it issued a press statement saying "crucial evidence was seized along with unaccounted cash of ₹ 31 lakh, establishing involvement of Bharath Reddy, his personal assistant Rathna Babu and others in mobilising substantial

amounts of cash for illegal payments."

"According to the incriminating evidence, Bharath Reddy mobilised approximately ₹ 42 crore in cash over a few months, just before the assembly elections, utilising the funds for unlawful transactions," the ED had claimed.

The agency, sources told PTI, recently wrote to the EC stating that out of the ₹ 42.07 crore fund, a "significant portion" was allocated for cash distribution to voters and other election-related expenses, including alleged payments made for securing party tickets.

It shared details with the Commission stating that documents seized during the searches show a "detailed account of cash collection for distribution to voters in exchange for their votes, implicating Nara Bharath Reddy in a scheme aimed at influencing voters during the 2023 Karnataka legislative assembly elections."

An email sent to Nara Bharath Reddy did not elicit a response on these charges made against him. The ED informed the poll panel claiming that the 34-year-old MLA has "failed to disclose his election-related expenditure to the Election Com-

mission and failed to account for the source of the substantial funds expended during the elections."

The agency has sought action against the legislator from the poll panel, saying these alleged actions constitute a "violation" of the Representation of the People Act, including bribery, corrupt practices, and failure to disclose election expenses.

The agency said it recovered handwritten records of cash transactions during the February raids at a total of 14 premises in the two states which indicate disbursements orchestrated by Reddy and his brother-in-law, Rajvardhan Reddy, during the 2023 elections. It has claimed in its communication to the EC that the personal assistant of Nara Bharath Reddy "admitted" to drafting these documents as per his instructions.

The ED's searches were part of a money laundering case filed against the MLA, an alleged linked person Surya Narayana Reddy and others after taking cognisance of an FIR filed by the Gandhi Nagar police station to probe charges of illegal granite mining and some land deals by allegedly misusing general power of attorney (GPA). (PTI)

Karnataka, Gujarat lead India's clean energy transition race: Report

NEW DELHI, April 23: Karnataka and Gujarat continue to lead the race to clean energy transition, but states like Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh need to step up efforts, according to a new report released on Tuesday.

The joint report by research organisation, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), and clean energy think tank Ember evaluates the clean electricity transition preparedness at the sub-national level.

The report's authors said Karnataka and Gujarat continue their strong performance across dimensions, effectively integrating renewable energy sources into their power sectors, making strong strides in decarbonisation.

But states like Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh need to improve. While these states are in the early stages of their transition, they now need to focus on increasing renewable energy deployment, enhancing short term market participation and

strengthening their distribution companies.

The report launch coincides with a spell of intense heat wave sweeping parts of India, leading to the Ministry of Power preparing for a projected peak power demand of 260 gigawatts. Harsh summers also offer the chance to utilise more clean energy like solar power. Although, this requires preparedness of states to transition to clean sources of electricity.

"Cyclical weather conditions coupled with faster economic activity is pushing India's peak electricity demand higher every year. While the central government is taking steps to integrate more renewable energy into the grid, states, too, need to be prepared to do so. Gauging sub-national progress now requires constant monitoring of several parameters at the state level. A purely national overview can often overshadow subtle intricacies at the state level, which may stymie the country's electricity transition," the report's contributing author, Vibhuti Garg,



Director, South Asia, IEEFA, said.

While the national-level progress towards electricity transition is progressing well, it is far more uneven at the state level.

"Some states have developed progressive steps, such as boosting decentralised renewable energy deployment, promoting solar pumps for agricultural needs, and enhancing storage solutions to ensure more renewable energy in their electricity systems. But, the

transition to clean electricity is still in its infancy in many states.

"These states should look to accelerate efforts to access benefits of a transition to clean electricity and to ensure they are not left too far behind the better-performing states," the report's contributing author, Aditya Lolla, Asia Programme Director, Ember, said.

One of the striking findings from the analysis for the 2024 report is that several states are ex-

hibiting preparedness to embrace electricity transition. They perform well in the "Readiness and Performance of the Power Ecosystem" and "Market Enablers" dimensions but need to improve in the "Decarbonisation" dimension.

"Delhi's power system is well-prepared for decarbonisation, while Odisha has robust market enablers to support decarbonisation in the power sector. However, their actual decarbonisation progress so far does not match their strengths in these aspects, highlighting the importance of performing well in both dimensions to effectively achieve decarbonisation goals," co-author Neshwin Rodrigues, Electricity Policy Analyst, Ember, said.

The report also notes that state-level decarbonisation can be further accelerated by strengthening the power ecosystem and having right enablers. Some states that are decarbonising well also lack the right market enablers, others struggle with the readiness of their power ecosystems.

Kerala, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Maharashtra all exhibited considerable progress in certain aspects but also lower performance in other aspects.

For example, Kerala and Punjab need to improve when it comes to market enablers for decarbonisation, while Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra need to focus on the readiness of their power ecosystems, according to co-author Tanya Rana, Energy Analyst, IEEFA.

"Despite achieving relative success in decarbonising the sector thus far, states must address deficiencies in readiness and market enablers to sustain their momentum," says Saloni Sachdeva Michael, Energy Specialist, India Clean Energy Transition, IEEFA. The report recognises the considerable efforts that states are making towards transitioning to clean electricity and recommends some key steps to accelerate the pace of transition.

"We recommend the strengthening of state-level regulatory

ecosystems. This not only ensures compliance but also promotes growth, data tracking and monitoring, and a conducive environment for business," Michael said.

"India has formulated many central and state-level policy schemes to reinforce its goal of energy independence by supporting various reforms and regulatory interventions across the value chain. However, actual implementation has not been adequate and transparent," she added.

The report also calls for a need to shift focus from national-level to state-level studies to understand the nuances of the electricity transition in India fully.

"Each state faces unique challenges in decarbonising its power system, necessitating tailored policy interventions. By tracking decarbonisation progress, assessing the power system's readiness for transition, and monitoring the advancement of market enablers, state-specific challenges and potential interventions can be better understood," Rodrigues said. (PTI)

School jobs scam: HC asks Bengal to decide on granting sanction to prosecute accused by May 2



KOLKATA, April 23: The Calcutta High Court on Tuesday directed the West Bengal chief secretary to decide by May 2 on grant of sanction for prosecution of former public servants arrested by CBI in the 2016 school jobs case, which saw the cancellation of over 25,500 appointments the day before.

A division bench said that in the event the chief secretary fails to comply with this order, the court will be constrained to initiate appropriate proceedings against him.

Another division bench of the high court on Monday cancelled 25,753 appointments of teaching and non-teaching staff in West Bengal government-sponsored and -aided schools, declaring null and void the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test (SLST) 2016 by the School Service Commission.

Noting that the application by CBI for sanction of prosecution of these persons has been pending since 2022, a division bench presided by Justice Joymalaya Bagchi directed the chief secretary to decide on sanction of prosecution of the accused persons, who were arrested two years back, by May two.

Maintaining that grant of sanction is a stepping stone to the commencement of trial, the court said that it is the requirement of law that the sanctioning authority ought to take a prompt decision in the matter.

"While taking a decision, he should not be overawed or influenced by the position, authority or power of the accused persons and take an independent decision on the matter," the division bench, also comprising Justice Gaurang Kanth, said.

The court made the order during the hearing of bail prayers by the accused persons, who include Partha Chatterjee, a former education minister of the state.

Stating that they have been in custody for almost two years but the case could not progress due to absence of sanction for prosecution of some of the then public servants, their lawyers prayed that they be released on bail owing to the delay.

The CBI had stated before the court during the previous hearing of the matter that the governor of West Bengal had granted sanction to prosecute Chatterjee.

The division bench was hearing the bail prayers of Chatterjee, former secretary of West Bengal School Service Commission Ashok Saha, ex-SSC chairman Subires Bhattacharyya and former chairman of SSC's advisory committee Santi Prasad Sinha, who are in custody for about two years in connection with the case.

The court questioned whether these accused persons are so important that they can stall the sanction process for one and half years.

The bench on April 9 also expressed its displeasure over the delay in grant of sanction and directed the chief secretary to take a decision by April 23.

On Monday, a division bench presided by Justice Debassu Basak, in its judgement on the school jobs matters had noted the delay in granting sanction for prosecution of the accused persons.

The bench had said that it was refraining from issuing any directions to the chief secretary in this regard since a coordinate bench had issued orders for the expeditious disposal of the application for sanction. (PTI)

India fourth largest military spender globally in 2023: SIPRI report

'World military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year in 2023, reaching a total of USD 2443 billion'

NEW DELHI, April 23: India was the fourth largest military spender globally in 2023 with an expenditure of USD 83.6 billion, behind the US, China and Russia, according to a report by an independent international think-tank.

The report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) shared on its website in April also said the "rise" in global military spending last year can be attributed "primarily to the ongoing war in Ukraine and escalating geopolitical tensions in Asia and Oceania and the Middle East".

The military expenditure went up in all five geographical regions, with major spending increases recorded in Europe, Asia and Oceania and the Middle East, it said. The report comes amid ongoing conflicts in various parts of the world such as the ones involving Israel-Hamas, Iran-Israel, Russian-Ukraine besides volatility in the Red Sea region.

"World military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year in 2023, reaching a total of USD 2443 billion. The 6.8 per cent increase in 2023 was the steepest year-on-year rise since 2009 and pushed global spending to the highest level SIPRI has ever recorded," according to the report.

The world military burden -- defined as military spending as a percentage of global gross domestic product (GDP) -- increased to 2.3 per cent in 2023. Average military expenditure as a share of government expenditure rose by 0.4 percentage points to 6.9 per cent in 2023 and world military spending per person was the highest since 1990 at USD 306, it added. With military expenditure of USD 83.6



billion in 2023, India was the "fourth largest spender globally".

Indian spending was up by 4.2 per cent from 2022 and by 44 per cent from 2014. The increase in India's military spending was "mainly a result of growing personnel and operations costs" which made up almost 80 per cent of the total military budget in 2023, the SIPRI report claimed.

"This aligns with the government's priority to strengthen the operational readiness of the armed forces amid ongoing tensions with China and Pakistan. In comparison, capital outlays to fund military procurement remained relatively stable at around 22 per cent of the budget in 2023," it said. A total of 75 per cent of these outlays went towards equipments produced domestically, which was the highest level ever and up from 68 per cent in the previous year. The continued shift towards domestic procurement re-

flects India's goal of becoming self-reliant in arms development and production, the think-tank said in its report fact sheet shared on its website.

The Indian Army has maintained that deployment of its troops and other elements along the LAC is "extremely robust" and "balanced".

The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong Lake area. The ties between India and China nose-dived significantly following the clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Established in 1966, it provides data, analysis and recommendations based on open sources to policymakers,

researchers, media and the interested public.

The Stockholm-based think-tank monitors developments in military expenditure worldwide and maintains the most comprehensive, consistent and extensive publicly available data source on military expenditure, according to its online portal. The US military spending was USD 916 billion in 2023, which was 2.3 per cent more than in 2022 and 9.9 per cent more than in 2014, the report said.

The US remained by far the largest spender in the world, allocating 3.1 times more to the military than the second largest spender China. "The biggest percentage increase among all US military spending categories in 2023 was for 'research, development, test and evaluation (RDT&E)'".

The Stockholm-based think-tank also said in its report that Ukraine was the "eighth largest spender" in 2023 after a spending surge of 51 per cent to reach USD 64.8 billion. This gave Ukraine "a military burden of 37 per cent and represented 58 per cent of total government spending".

"Ukraine's military spending in 2023 was 59 per cent the size of Russia's. However, Ukraine also received at least USD 35 billion in military aid during the year, including USD 25.4 billion from the US. Combined, this aid and Ukraine's own military spending were equivalent to about 91 per cent of Russian spending," the report claimed.

According to the report, Russia's military spending increased by 24 per cent to an estimated USD 109 billion in 2023. (PTI)

Special train between Katihar and Anand Vihar Terminal to clear summer rush

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 23: For the convenience of the passengers during the summer rush, N. F. Railway has decided to operate summer special trains between Katihar and Anand Vihar Terminal. The summer special train bearing no. 05721/05722 (Katihar - Anand Vihar Terminal - Katihar) will operate for ten trips each in both directions. Wait listed passengers of other trains travelling in this route can avail the opportunity to travel with comfort during this summer in this special train.

Special train no. 05721 (Katihar - Anand Vihar Terminal) will depart from Katihar at 17:25 hours from 24rd April to 26th June, 2024 on every Wednesday to reach Anand Vihar Terminal, at 18:50 hours on Thursday. In the return direction, train no. 05722 (Anand Vihar Terminal - Katihar) will depart from Anand Vihar Terminal at 23:25 hours from 25th April to 27th June, 2024 on every Thursday to reach Katihar at 01:30 hours on Saturday.

The special trains will consist of AC 3-tier, Sleeper Class & General Seating Coaches for the convenience of passengers. During its both ways journey, the special train will run via Naugachia, Barauni Jn, Chhapra, Gorakhpur Jn, Gonda Jn, Chandausi Jn and Hapur Jn etc. Tickets are available.

Safdarjung Hospital organises free screening, awareness camp for breast cancer

NEW DELHI, April 23: Aimed at combating breast cancer, a free screening and awareness camp was held here by the Centre-run Safdarjung Hospital in collaboration with an NGO. Roli Singh, additional secretary, of the Union Health Ministry who graced the event held on Monday stated that breast cancer remains a significant public health concern in India.

"Through initiatives like this camp, we aim to empower women with knowledge and provide them with accessible screening facilities. Early detection is crucial in improving treatment outcomes and saving precious lives.

Regular screening and awareness are key weapons in our fight against breast cancer."

"Camps like this play a vital role in demystifying the disease and encouraging women to prioritize their health without financial barriers,"

Singh said.

Dr Manish Choudhary, General Secretary of the NGO, Respect India, said, "Our collaboration with VMMC and Safdarjung Hospital underscores our shared commitment to supporting women's health and well-being. We look forward to further strengthening our partnership and expanding the reach of such initiatives."

Organized under the leadership of Dr Vandana Talwar, medical superintendent of VMMC and Safdarjung Hospital, this collaborative effort aimed to raise awareness about breast cancer and provide free screening facilities for early detection.

"Breast cancer is one of the most prevalent forms of cancer among women in India," said Dr Vandana Talwar.

Early detection through regular screening can make a profound dif-

ference in saving countless lives. "We encouraged all women to seize this opportunity and prioritize their health by participating in this camp," she said.

Respect India, a dedicated NGO at the forefront of the battle against breast cancer, has been working towards raising awareness, providing support, and promoting regular screening. The free breast cancer screening and awareness camp offered clinical breast examinations at no cost to the attendees.

Respect India also provides educational resources and counselling services to empower women with knowledge and support. No prior registration was required, and the camp was open to all women.

About 200 women from across Delhi and neighbouring areas arrived early to avail themselves of the free screening services offered at the camp, Dr Talwar said. (PTI)

UGC warns against '10-day MBA' programme

NEW DELHI, April 23: The University Grants Commission has warned the public against fake online programmes with abbreviations similar to recognised degree nomenclature, officials said, flagging a particular "10-day MBA" course.

"Some individuals or organisations are offering online programmes and courses with abbreviated forms similar to the higher education system's recognised degree programmes. One such programme to which the attention of the commission has been drawn is a '10 Days MBA'," University Grants Commission (UGC) Secretary Manish Joshi said.

"The nomenclature of a degree, including its abbreviated form, duration and entry qualification, is specified by the UGC, with the previous approval of the central government, through the publication of a noti-

fication in the official gazette," he added.

The UGC secretary clarified that only a university, established or incorporated by or under a central act, provincial act or state act, or an institution deemed to be a university or an institution specifically empowered by an act of Parliament, has the right to confer a degree.

"Higher education institutions are also required to obtain approval from the UGC to offer any online degree programme in terms of the UGC regulations. A list of recognised HEIs (higher education institutions) to offer online programmes and of permitted online programmes is available on deb.ugc.ac.in," Joshi said.

"Stakeholders are, therefore, advised to ascertain the validity of an online programme before applying or taking admission to any online programme," he said. (PTI)

You are freeloader, not students: JNUSU slams VC



NEW DELHI, April 23: The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) has hit out at Vice-Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit over her "freeloaders on campus" remark and accused her of failing to address "slanderous narratives" of certain films targeting the varsity.

In an open letter to the VC, the union accused her of "conveniently" ignoring the "lavish perks enjoyed by certain politically favoured groups on campus" and said she was a "freeloader", and not the students.

"Who's the real freeloader here? Is it the students and faculty striving for academic excellence, or perhaps it is you who is occupying the VC's office, earning a salary from the taxpayers' dime while failing to fulfil your responsibilities to the university community?" the open letter released Monday late night read.

Pandit in an interview with PTI had said the Jawaharlal Nehru Uni-

versity (JNU) has a problem of "freeloaders" -- both overstaying students and illegal guests -- and the administration is now tightening the noose on them.

The vice-chancellor had also said that with the appearance of rival political outfits, the Left dispensation in the Jawaharlal Nehru University has weakened and is forced to join hands since it struggles to win elections independently. The JNUSU urged the VC to introspect and reconsider her statement on the characterisation of students as "freeloaders".

The union also accused Pandit of favouritism and allowing RSS-backed events on campus.

"It is concerning that while you accuse students of being freeloaders, RSS-affiliated events enjoy unrestricted access to campus facilities, including classrooms, auditoriums, convention centre, lawns without so much as a penny exchanged. This double standard is glaring, especially when students

have to protest merely to access basic resources, only to get issued proctorial notices," the letter read.

"Our VC proudly claims to be an alumni of JNU, and she finds no shame in speaking to the media about certain 'freeloaders' in the campus who are wasting taxpayer's money. She conveniently ignores the lavish perks enjoyed by certain politically favoured groups on campus," the union retorted.

"The taxpayers' money should indeed be utilised for education and research, not for propagating ideological agendas under the guise of academic activities," it added.

The JNUSU further accused Pandit of recruiting substandard faculty and asserted, "We are not freeloaders. You are wasting taxpayers' money by recruiting substandard faculty and not ensuring a conducive environment for us (students) to study."

It also criticised Pandit for being "silent" on defamatory films targeting JNU students such as 'Bastar' and 'Jahangir National University' which allegedly show the varsity in negative light.

"It is shameful that you, being an alumni of this university yourself, have allowed the screening of Bastar on campus; a film that openly calls for killing JNU students in full public sight. These films not only misrepresent our community but also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and prejudices. As the custodian of our university's reputation, you have failed to address such slanderous narratives," the students' body said in the letter. (PTI)

Women train drivers raise safety concern as Jhansi division asks them to do night shift

NEW DELHI, April 23: More than 100 women train drivers have raised concern for their safety and highlighted lack of facilities after the Jhansi Rail Division recently issued an order directing them to do all work shifts "on a par with male drivers".

Before this direction, female drivers were assigned train duty in such a way that they used to either complete their trip and come home or reach the destination station before 10 at night and rest in 'running rooms'. The latest order by the Jhansi division was issued on April 16 this year.

A section of the women drivers have sent a written complaint to the divisional railway manager (DRM), Jhansi, in this regard.

"Now as per the new direction, we have been asked to be ready for work round-the-clock. We have requested the Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) to reconsider the decision. We will face a huge safety issue as the Railways doesn't provide any additional facilities to female drivers," a woman driver said.

When contacted, a senior railway official from the Jhansi division said the decision was taken due to intense work pressure.

"Till a few years ago, there were about a dozen girls in our division but now their numbers have gone

up to over 100. As trains run round-the-clock, we can't ask their male counterparts to compensate for their absence all the time. This increases work pressure on male drivers which is not good for safe train operations," the official said.

He added, "I fully admit that females have a lot of challenges driving trains late at night but we cannot offer facilities in the want of any guideline from the Railway Board. I think the Board should come out with a comprehensive guideline in this regard."

Female drivers said that Jhansi rail yard is deserted in the late evening and it is not safe for them to visit late at night to board the engine.

"I request the chairperson of the Railway Board to visit the Yard once and see how safe it is at night. Being a woman, I hope she understands our problem," another female loco pilot said.

Sanjay Pandhi, the working president of the Indian Railway Loco Runningmen Organisation, while supporting the cause of the female drivers, said, "Railway authorities are violating the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act while issuing such an order. According to the Act, the employer is duty bound to ensure safe working conditions for all

women workers. However, female loco pilots don't get pick-up and drop facilities."

Female drivers also said that the official order doesn't talk about any pick-up and drop facilities for late night work.

"This April 16 order is causing huge stress and depression for many drivers which is not safe for train operations either. We are not shying away from our jobs but at least the Railways should ensure basic facilities for our safety and convenience," the female driver said.

Recently, women train drivers urged the Railway Board to either improve their "pitiable" working conditions or allow them to shift to other departments.

A group of female loco pilots, who are members of the All India Railwaymen Federation, recently gave a representation to the Railway Board chairperson Jaya Varma Sinha, highlighting their plight and demanding "a one-time cadre change" option.

Lack of toilet facilities in engines, inability to change menstruation pads, mandatory provision to get out of the engine to attend to any technical glitch even at night and no pick-up and drop facility for late-night duties are some of the problems cited by the women train drivers. (PTI)

SERA, Blue Origin join hands to send ordinary citizens on space mission

NEW DELHI, April 23: US-based Space Exploration and Research Agency (SERA) on Tuesday announced a partnership with Blue Origin to develop a human spaceflight programme for citizens of nations historically lacked access to space.

The programme, which seeks to provide the opportunity for common citizens from around the world to become astronauts, will have its inaugural flight on a future New Shepard mission, Blue Origin's space tourism initiative.

All six seats on the flight have been reserved for the partnership with SERA.

"Nearly 150 countries have never had an astronaut. We created this programme to change this," said Joshua Skurla, Co-founder of SERA.

Skurla said Brazilian civil engineer Victor Hespanha, who was selected at random from the SERA community, became the second Brazilian national to travel to space in 2022 onboard Blue Origin's fifth crewed flight.

"Victor's flight showed us how one person can inspire and excite an entire nation about the potential of space and we want to repeat that on a much larger scale," Skurla said.

"Our future life in space must



reflect the rich diversity here on Earth," said Phil Joyce, Senior Vice President, New Shepard Business Unit, Blue Origin, which is promoted by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

In line with the mission's objective to make space more accessible, five of the seats will be allocated to five partner nations who have either never had an astronaut or very few, while the sixth seat will be open to a person from any nation.

SERA is collaborating with na-

tional space agencies and regional research institutions to support the mission and develop the science experiment payloads onboard the flight.

Both the final astronaut selection and science experiments will be determined by the community. Partner nations will be announced over the coming months.

SERA said its mission was to create a space agency for everyone and accelerate global participation in the space sector.

"Despite the trillions spent by

governments, there have usually been only a handful of people in space at any given time over the last three decades," said Sam Hutchison, Co-founder of SERA.

"The unimaginably rich material and energy resources of the solar system remain entirely untapped. With launch costs coming down, this is all about to change, and SERA wants to make sure that everyone on Earth has the chance to participate in the growth of the offworld economy," Hutchison said. (PTI)

SRK praises Mohanlal for performance on 'Jawan' song, superstars plan to meet over a meal

NEW DELHI, April 23: Superstars Shah Rukh Khan and Mohanlal engaged in a fun banter on Tuesday which began with the two showering praises on each other and ended with them planning to break bread together.

After a video of Malayalam star Mohanlal dancing to Shah Rukh's song "Zinda Banda" from his 2023 hit "Jawan" at an event went viral on social media, the Bollywood star reposted the clip on X and invited the "Drishyam" alum over to his home for dinner.

"Thank you @Mohanlal Sir for making this song the most special for me now. Wish I had done it half as good as you. Love you sir and waiting for dinner at home, as and when. You are the OG Zinda Banda," Shah Rukh, 58, wrote.

In his response, Mohanlal praised the actor for being the "original" "Zinda Banda" and in turn asked Shah Rukh to join him for both breakfast

and dinner.

"Dear @iamsrk, nobody can do it like you! You are and always will be the OG Zinda Banda in your classic, inimitable style. Thanks for your kind words. Also, just dinner? Why not groove to some Zinda Banda over breakfast, too?" the 63-year-old said.

To this, Shah Rukh replied: "Done sir. Your place or mine?"

Mohanlal came back with an answer and said, "Would love to host you at mine."

"Jawan", headlined by Shah Rukh, marked the Hindi directorial debut of Atlee, known for superhit Tamil films such as "Bigil", "Mersal", and "Theri". The 2023 action thriller also starred Nayanthara, Vijay Sethupathi, Deepika Padukone, Priyamani and Sanya Malhotra.

While Shah Rukh is yet to announce a new project, Mohanlal will next be seen in Malayalam fantasy film "Barroz". (PTI)



RAJINIKANTH'S 171ST MOVIE IS TITLED 'COOLIE'



MUMBAI, April 23: Superstar Rajinikanth's upcoming film with Lokesh Kanagaraj has been titled "Coolie", the director has announced. The movie, which is backed by Chennai-based production house Sun Pictures, is the 171st film of Rajinikanth's career. "We love you Thalaiva @rajinikanth #Coolie," Kanagaraj posted on social media platform X on Monday evening alongside a teaser of the much-awaited movie. The director is best known for delivering Tamil hits like "Master", "Kaithi", "Vikram" and "Leo". Anirudh Ravichander will compose music for the upcoming film which will have stunts by action choreographer duo Anbumani and Arivumani, popularly known as "Anbariv". Rajinikanth was most recently seen in "Lal Salaam", directed by his daughter Aishwarya Rajinikanth. His upcoming movie is T J Gnanavel's "Vettaiyan", co-starring Amitabh Bachchan, Fahadh Faasil, Rana Daggubati and Manju Warrier. (PTI)

'The Legend of Hanuman' to return with season four on Disney+ Hotstar



MUMBAI, April 23: Streaming service Disney+ Hotstar on Tuesday announced the fourth season of animated series "The Legend of Hanuman".

Narrated by actor Sharad Kelkar, the series is billed as the story of a superhero, the protector and the ultimate guardian.

It follows Hanuman's journey of self discovery, the story of a humble vaanara who forgot about his divinity, and how the people around him helped him discover the god within him.

According to the streamer, the new chapter will chronicle the "legendary battle between the good and evil as the mighty Hanuman along with mythical legends Sugreev and Angad prepares to front it once again".

"We are thrilled to once again partner with Disney+ Hotstar to continue 'The Legend of

Hanuman' with this new season. The heroism of Lord Hanuman means so much to the world and it has been our personal mission to share that strength in our portrayal of this timeless legend loved by millions," Sharad Devarajan, creator and executive producer, said in a statement.

"He has inspired generations for thousands of years and his morals, lessons and universal truths of righteousness remain more relevant today than ever before. I am grateful to the millions of fans who have supported the series and excited to share this new action-packed season with the world," he added.

Produced by Graphic India, Devarajan and Jeevan J Kang, "The Legend of Hanuman" also features the voice of actor Daman Baggan. (PTI)

I'll always want to do more 'Spider-Man' films, says Tom Holland

LOS ANGELES, April 23: British star Tom Holland says he owes his career to the "Spider-Man" trilogy and he will always be up for more movies as the webslinger in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU).

Holland made his MCU debut as Peter Parker/superhero Spider-Man in 2016's "Captain America: Civil War".

He then led three stand-alone films: "Spider-Man: Homecoming" (2017), "Spider-Man: Far from Home" (2019) and "Spider-Man: No Way Home". He also played the character in "Avengers: Infinity War" (2018) and its 2019 sequel, "Avengers: Endgame".

The 27-year-old actor weighed in on the future of the "Spider-Man" film franchise at a golf tournament he participated in during the third annual Sands International Film Festival in St Andrews, Scotland.

I owe my life and career to Spider-Man. So the simple answer is yes. I'll always want to do more," he told Deadline.

Holland also gave a more "complicated answer" to the question of a potential fourth film after "Spider-Man: No Way Home", which he described as so special in so many ways that we need to make sure we do the right thing.

We have the best in the business working toward whatever the story might be. But until we've cracked it, we have a legacy to protect... This is the first time in this process that I've been part of the creative (team) so early.

It's just a process where I'm watching and learning. It's just a really fun stage for me. Like I said, everyone wants it to happen. But we want to make sure we're not overdoing the same things," he added.

Since his last turn as Spider-Man, Holland has starred in 2022's "Uncharted" alongside Mark Wahlberg and last year's thriller miniseries "The Crowded Room". (PTI)



INDIAN EARTHQUAKE IN TORONTO Gukesh's win tectonic shift in world chess order: Kasparov



NEW DELHI, April 23: It's "the Indian earthquake in Toronto", said Russian chess legend Garry Kasparov as he lauded teen Grandmaster D Gukesh for becoming the youngest ever challenger for the world title, a triumph which marks the "shifting tectonic plates" in the game's global order.

The 17-year-old Gukesh bettered the record created by none

other than Kasparov 40 years ago. The Russian was 22 when he qualified in 1984 to clash with compatriot Anatoly Karpov, making him the youngest challenger of that time.

"Congratulations! The Indian earthquake in Toronto is the culmination of the shifting tectonic plates in the chess world as the 17 year old Gukesh D will face the Chinese champion Ding

Liren for the highest title," wrote Kasparov on 'X', obliquely referring to the Russian domination of the past.

Gukesh played out an easy draw with American Hikaru Nakamura in the 14th and final round to finish with nine out of a possible 14 points in the tournament that is held to decide the challenger to the world champion.

The triumph entitles Gukesh a clash against reigning world champion Ding Liren of China in the last quarter of the year.

India's five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand has spawned a chess culture in India and the country is reaping the rewards of the Grandmaster's success with thousands of youngsters, mostly in their teens, taking up chess.

Kasparov acknowledged Anand's contribution to Indian chess, saying, "The 'children' of Vishy Anand are on the loose!"

Kasparov was responding to a congratulatory tweet by Grand Chess Tour following Gukesh's success here.

"Congratulations to Gukesh D for his victory in the FIDE Candidates, securing his place as a challenger in the World Championship Match! We eagerly anticipate his participation in our grand chess tour events!," wrote Grand Chess Tour on 'X'.

In another social media post Kasparov highlighted the shift in power centre of chess, saying, "Look at the names of many of the top junior players in the USA and England to see that the Chinese and Indian diaspora are just as passionate to achieve at chess."

"The Kasparov Chess Foundation has watched this wave rise and Gukesh's success will raise it further," Kasparov, the undisputed world champion from 1985 till 1993, wrote on 'X'.

Kasparov, following a dispute with the international chess federation (FIDE) set up a rival organisation, the Professional Chess Association. He was ranked world No. 1 for a record 255 months overall, from 1984 until his retirement from regular competitive chess in 2005. (PTI)

Indian athletes ready to showcase their potential in Asian U-20 meet

DUBAI, April 23: Promising thrower Siddharth Choudhary and middle distance runner Laxita Sandilea will look to defend their shot put and 1500m titles in men and women's group, respectively, in the Asian U-20 Athletics Championships starting here from Wednesday.

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has shortlisted a 60-member team, including 31 male to compete at the Asian U-20 meet that will also act as a qualifying event for the August 27-31 World U-20 Athletics Championship in Lima, Peru.

At the 2023 edition of Asian U-20 meet in Yecheon, Korea, the Indian contingent claimed 19 medals, six of them gold.

The Indian team also won seven silver and six bronze medals to finish third behind Japan and China.

N Ramesh, chief junior athletics coach, was confident of improving the overall medal tally in this edition of the tournament.

"Last year the men's 4x100m relay team won bronze while the 4x400m squad claimed silver," the coach said.

"This time we have good chances of winning gold medals in both the relays."

Team:

Men: Abiram Pramod (400, 4x400m relay), Aman Choudhary (4x400m relay), Anurag Singh Kaler (shot put), Bapi Hansda (400m, 4x400m relay), Dev Kumar Meena (pole vault), Dipanshu Sharma (javelin throw), Mrutyam Jayaram Donapati (200m, 4x400m relay), Gaurav Bhaskar Bhosale (3,000m, 5,000m), Harshit Kumar (hammer throw), Himanshu (10,000m race walk), Hima Teja Vallipi (4x100m relay).

Karthikeyan Soundararajan (4x100m relay), Kuldeep Kumar (pole vault), Mahendra Santa (4x100m relay), Mohd

Atta Sazid (long jump), Navpreet Singh (4x400m relay), Nikhil Suhas Dhake (4x400m relay), Prateek (hammer throw), Priyanshu (1500m), Rahul Sarnaliya (1500m), Ranvir Ajay Singh (3,000m steeplechase), Ritik (discus throw), Rohan Ghosh (4x100m relay), Rohan Yadav (javelin throw), Sachin (10,000m race walk), Sahil Malik (4x400m relay), Shahnavaz Khan (long jump), Sharuk Khan (3,000m steeplechase), Siddharth Choudhary (shot put), Vikas Kumar Bind (3,000m), Vinod Singh (5,000m).

Women: Aarti (10,000m race walk), Abinaya Rajarajan (4x100m relay), Amanat Kamboj (discus throw), Anushka Yadav (hammer throw), Anushka Dattatray Kumbhar (400m, 4x400m relay), SAI Sangeetha Dodla (400m, 4x400m relay), Ekta Dey (3,000m steeplechase, 5,000m), Jayavindhya Jegadish (400m hurdles, 4x400m relay), Kanista Teena Maria Deva Shekhar (4x400m relay), Laxita Vinod Sandilea (800m, 1,500m), Mishthi Kajla (4x400m relay), Nandini (hammer throw), Neole Anna Cornelio (4x100m relay), Nikita Kumari (discus throw).

Pavana Nagaraj (long jump, heptathlon), Prachi Ankush Devkar (3,000m), Prathiksha Yamuna Ashok Kumar (long jump), Rishika Awasthi (triple jump), Rujula Amol Bhonsle (4x100m relay), Sabita Toppo (100m hurdles, 4x100m relay), Sakshi Champalal Chavan (4x100m relay), Sandramol Sabu (4x100m relay), Shilpa-ben Veljibhai Dihora (3,000m), Shreeya Rajesh (400m hurdles), Siya Abhijit Sawant (4x100m relay), Sunita Devi (5,000m), Tanvi Malik (800m), Unnathi Aiyappa Bolland (100m hurdles). (PTI)

Serie A title, second star and derby: Inter takes it all with win over Milan

MILAN, April 23: Winning the derby ended up being the cherry on top of a special night for Inter Milan.

Holding off AC Milan 2-1 on Monday clinched for Inter the Serie A title that had been sign-posted for weeks, and earned a coveted second star on its jersey for winning a 20th Italian league title, breaking a tie with its fierce city rival.

"I told the guys, we find ourselves in a situation that's never happened before," Inter captain Lautaro Martinez said. "We needed to take advantage of this opportu-

nity, because look around, the entire stadium is ours now."

Not even the pouring rain could dampen the spirits of the Nerazzurri and their fans.

Francesco Acerbi and Marcus Thuram scored and, although Fikayo Tomori's late goal for AC Milan threatened to delay the celebrations, Inter held on for the win that stretched its lead to an insurmountable 17 points over second-placed Milan, with five rounds remaining.

At the final whistle, a beaming Lautaro and teammate Federico Dimarco climbed

onto the top of the goal frame at San Siro.

Flares and fireworks were set off in the stands, and the Inter players danced raucously in front of their fans. A banner was unfurled saying in Italian: "Repeat it to the Madonnina, who are the champions and who the crybabies."

The Madonnina is the statue on top of Milan cathedral that overlooks the city, and which the derby is named after.

After winning eight other trophies, Simone Inzaghi claimed his first league title as a coach.

"Winning the league with five matches left — more or less won with nine matches left, today making it mathematically certain — in a derby, with Milan the home team, that is something that will remain with us," Inzaghi said.

"Everyone gave their very valuable contribution so that we could reach goals like this."

A star is awarded for every 10 Serie A titles. Only Juventus has won more, with a record 36 and thus three stars on its jersey. (AP)

Shotgun shooter permitted to compete in national trials despite not meeting criteria

NEW DELHI, April 23: The national shooting federation, which is fighting a court battle to uphold its selection criteria in the ongoing trials for Paris Olympics, seems to have bent the rules for one marksman recently, allowing him to participate despite lower-than-requisite scores.

Trap marksman Karan missed the National Rifles Association of India's (NRAI) criteria for shotgun selection trials by two points but was allowed to compete, while several others, who shot identical scores during last year's National Championships, were not considered.

A letter issued by NRAI in November announcing "Selection Trials as per Shotgun Selection Criteria 2024 & Olympic Selection Criteria 2024 for Shotgun event" states that shooters with a score of 110 in senior men's trap during the 66th National Championship (October-November, 2023) were eligible for the exercise held between December, 2023 and March 2024.

Karan, an Army marksman, shot 108 in the National Championships but his was the only recommendation accepted by the NRAI, while the same exception was not made for a dozen more shooters, who shot identical scores.

The shooter competed in a series of four selection trials and is currently ranked 15th, thus failing to make the national squad.

NRAI secretary Rajiv Bhatia told PTI that since Karan is a "budding" shooter and his "recommendation had come from the Army", an exception was

made for him.

"We did give an exception as he is a budding, good shooter. There was a difference of just two points and he has been shooting good scores. That's why we introduced him in the trials for selecting the teams for World Cups, World Championships, everything (including Olympics)," said Bhatia.

"We cannot simply go by the rule book (lakeer ke fakeer nahin ban sakte). There was a recommendation from the Army to allow him (for national trials) because he had shot very well at the National Games (in Goa).

Karan, representing Services Sports Control Board, was the first to be eliminated in the trap finals at the National Games in Goa, finishing sixth.

The NRAI, ironically, is locked in a legal battle with some Olympic aspirants in the Delhi High Court, where it is insisting that no more than top five shooters in rifle and pistol would be allowed in the ongoing trials.

The process has come under criticism from no less than former national coach and legendary pistol shooter Jaspal Rana, who has said that the federation is not following international norms.

Asked why the trials were not opened for marksmen who shot identical scores at the Nationals, Bhatia said, "I think we allowed him under a special criteria because of his previous scores."

Bhatia added that giving an exception in trials didn't mean he was selected in the national squad for international competitions like the World Cups and World Championships. (PTI)

You need big heart when bowling at the death: Sandeep

JAIPUR, April 23: You have to have a big heart when bowling at the death while trying to execute your plans, insisted Rajasthan Royals medium pacer Sandeep Sharma after recording the ongoing IPL season's best bowling performance.

Bowling after a three-week injury layoff, the 30-year-old Sharma wreaked havoc in the Mumbai Indians camp with a splendid 5 for 18 on Monday.

"In this year's IPL, batters are going big and with the impact player rule, there is an extra batter so the games are high-scoring. You have to have a big heart while bowling at the

death and try to execute your plans and bowl good balls," he said after RR's nine-wicket win over MI.

Sharma, who started off as a new-ball exponent in the IPL, has been tasked to bowl the death overs by the Royals in the three games that he has played this season.

"Even today you ask me where I feel comfortable, I'll say it's with the new ball. With the old ball, you have to adapt and evolve as a bowler," he said.

Sharma returned to the RR playing XI after recuperating from a side strain that kept him out for close to a month.

"I was working hard towards my fitness for the last three weeks. I had two practice sessions before the game, my main focus was to execute the variations that I did tonight."

Against MI, Sharma's scalps included the dangerous Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, the big hitting Tim David, Ishan Kishan and Gerald Coetzee.

He took three wickets in the final over, restricting MI to 179 despite a 99-run stand between Varma and Nehal Wadhera.

"If you're bowling at the death, it can go both ways. Sometimes, you go for runs, and when you're lucky enough you end up getting

a wicket. When we started, the wicket was low and slow. My plan was to keep bowling those cutters and it came off nicely tonight," he said.

Mumbai Indians fell to their fifth loss of the season but young batter Nehal Wadhera remained optimistic about the five-time champions' chances of qualifying for the playoffs.

"MI need to win all their games from here and we need to tighten our socks. We need to raise our game and figure out where we have been going wrong or where we have been going right so that we can rectify our mistakes whenever we re-

turn," Wadhera said after the match.

The 23-year-old, who smashed a splendid 24-ball 49, pointed out that MI aren't new to being involved in a mid-table muddle, having risen from the proverbial ashes time and again.

"We have been in such a situation in earlier seasons as well, and we have, you know, upped our game from there and qualified."

"So, we are optimistic even right now. We will continue the process we are following and win the games for the team. We win as a team, and we lose as a team," Wadhera added. (PTI)

Jaiswal batted with maturity against MI, played cricketing shots: Lara

NEW DELHI, April 23: Impressed with the maturity shown by Yashasvi Jaiswal, West Indies cricket legend Brian Lara said the youngster's knock against Mumbai Indians was well put together as he perfectly balanced taking his time with shots while still maintaining a high strike-rate.

Jaiswal ended a barren run by his lofty standards with his first ton of this IPL to power Rajasthan Royals to a nine-wicket win over MI here.

"Yeah, beautiful. But the fact of the matter is, he's taking his time, looking at the ball right from up at the back, and he's playing cricketing shots. He's got all the stuff, he doesn't have to worry about it," Lara said on Star Sports Cricket Live.

Jaiswal struck nine fours and seven sixes to make an unbeaten 104 from only 60 balls, a knock which was replete with powerful shots on the leg side and crispy drives.

"And when you do get on top

of the bowlers, that's when you take it back, because that's what I love about Yashasvi.

"It was well put together, great cricketing shots, he's managed throughout the innings, and anyone knows, if you're chasing such a good total, at Jaipur and you bounce through the innings, you're soon as going to get there."

"So he's shown a lot of responsibility, a lot of maturity, and I'm very happy to have him back."

Medium pacer Sandeep Sharma starred with the ball of RR. He wreaked havoc in the MI camp with the ongoing IPL season's best bowling performance -- 5 for 18.

"Very, very big impact, and also mentioned the fact that he went unsold a couple of years ago, and came in as a replacement player, and this man is cherishing every moment he has out in the middle."

Sharma had gone unsold at the auction two years ago. RR signed him as a replacement for



Prasidh Krishna and the 30-year-old is repaying the faith.

"Every cricketer in India

wants to play in the IPL, and they want to play continuously, and that disappointment of not

Pant's captaincy under lens as DC eye improved bowling effort against GT

NEW DELHI, April 23: Rishabh Pant's leadership skills will be under scrutiny as a struggling Delhi Capitals would seek a much-improved performance from their bowlers when they take on an inconsistent Gujarat Titans in the IPL here on Wednesday.

It was not an ideal homecoming for Pant as after two consecutive wins, DC slumped to a 67-run loss against a marauding Sunrisers Hyderabad at home on Saturday.

The loss saw DC slip to the eighth position with three wins and five defeats. They very well know they can't afford to falter if they want to keep their play-off hopes alive.

Against SRH, Pant erred in his decisions a few times, starting from the toss as he misjudged the dew factor at the Arun Jaitley Stadium and decided to bowl first.

Pant's decision to hand the second over to Lalit Yadav, was even more contentious as SRH were off to a blazing start, scoring a record 125 for no loss in the powerplay.

On the personal front, Pant wasn't in his element as he struggled for timing en route a painstaking 44 off 35 balls while chasing a mammoth score.

To chase a target of 267, a team needs its openers to fire from ball one but Prithvi Shaw and David Warner haven't been too successful.

Young Jake Fraser-McGurk smashed 65 off just 18 balls to keep DC in the hunt but he lacked support from the other end, even though Abhishek Porel (42 off 22) tried his best.

DC bowlers were taken to the cleaners by SRH and they need to pull up their socks.

Left-arm seamer Khaleel Ahmed's, whose career has been dogged by inconsistency, decision to employ short stuff in the opening over completely backfired.

With short boundaries at the Kotla, DC bowlers need to pitch it up.

Pace spearhead Anrich Nortje has been completely off-colour this season and DC would be desperately hoping veteran Ishant Sharma returns after missing the last game due to a back spasm.

Kuldeep Yadav has been DC's best bowler in the season so far with 10 wickets from five games at an economy rate of 7.60. But he didn't have a very good outing against SRH.

Even though he had the highest number of dot balls (8) among DC bowlers, he also conceded the maximum numbers of sixes -- 7.

GT have also been equally inconsistent under new skipper Shubman Gill. But the three-wicket win over Punjab Kings in their last game has helped the former champions move up slightly in



the pecking order at sixth spot from four wins and as many losses.

They would be hoping to continue the winning momentum to

scale up the leaderboard and be in contention for a play-off berth.

The onus would be on Gill to lead from the front.

The likes of Sai Sudharsan, David Miller and Azmatullah Omarzai also need to let their willow do the talking while Rahul Tewatia would look to continue his pyrotechnics towards the end stage of their innings.

On the bowling front, the likes of veteran Mohit Sharma, Noor Ahmad and Rashid Khan will be expected to deliver the goods.

Teams :

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c&wk), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra (wk), Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.

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.

Match starts at 7.30 PM. (PTI)

Sreeja surpasses Manika as India No.1 TT player

NEW DELHI, April 23: CWG mixed doubles champion Sreeja Akula on Tuesday became the top-ranked Indian woman table tennis player after rising to career-high rank of 38 in latest ITTF Chart, replacing Manika Batra. Sreeja climbed a spot while Manika who had been India's number one TT player for a while now, slipped two places to 39 in the latest update.

The 25-year-old Sreeja has enjoyed a good run this year, winning the WTT Feeder Corpus Christi and WTT Feeder Beirut titles in January and March respectively besides reaching the quarterfinal of the WTT Star Contender in Goa.

Sreeja had won the mixed doubles gold medal at the 2022 Commonwealth Games alongside veteran Sharath Kamal.

Yashaswini Ghoshal and Archana Kamath held on to their 99th and 100th spot in the rankings. Sharath continues to be the top-ranked male player, occupying the 37 spot in the rankings while G Sathiyam and Manav Thakar have interchanged places to be 60th and 61st respectively.

National champion Harneet Desai's, who was the top ranked Indian a couple of months ago, descent continues as he dropped to the 64th spot. (PTI)

Winning Worlds in Olympic category was huge, feel stronger in 75kg: Lovlina

NEW DELHI, April 23: Lovlina Borgohain is aware that fierce competition awaits her at the Paris Olympics but the ace Indian boxer is quietly confident of snaring a second successive Games medal, having found considerable success in her new category, which is also closer to her natural body weight.

Following her bronze medal-winning feat at the Tokyo Olympics, Borgohain endured a tumultuous period when she made early exits from the World Championships and Commonwealth Games.

She eventually moved up to 75kg as her original 69kg category was scrapped from the Paris program.

Since then, the ace Indian boxer has claimed gold at the 2022 Asian Championship and the 2023 World Championships, along with a silver medal at the Asian Games last year.

"My performance overall after changing the weight has been good. Winning the World Championship in the Olympic category was huge. I had to control weight before (for 69kg) but now I am set in this weight. I have participated in competitions and done well," Borgohain told PTI in an interview.



One of the reasons for her good run in the higher weight class is that the Assam boxer, who weighs between 70kg to 75kg even out of competition, doesn't have to shed much before a tournament, a painstaking process that may also sometimes lead to loss of strength.

"Yes, the opponents (in 75kg) are strong but I fit well in this category. I am more comfortable in this category than 69kg because I can eat properly, so the energy level is high. I feel stronger and I am able to train better, with strength and conditioning. I can increase muscle and power," she added.

The 75kg category has been on the Olympic roster since the inclusion of women's boxing in the 2012 London Games and the 26-year-old will have her task cut out as she faces boxers who have been plying their trade in the weight class much before her.

"75kg is no doubt challenging because it has always been an Olympic category. 69kg was new but there are a lot of old, good boxers already competing in it.

"So, that is one challenge. But I am confident because I have had good performances and I feel comfortable in 75kg," Borgohain, who is managed by IOS Sports, said.

While the three-time world medalist is working on her power, she counts agility and speed as one of her strengths.

"I am tall for a 69kg category boxer and I had to control my weight. When I had to control weight I had to stop eating. I didn't feel that strong then. But in 75kg, I feel stronger. The speed which I already had helps."

Having competed in a few marquee tournaments in the 75kg weight class, Borgohain now has a fair idea of the pugilists she will encounter in Paris. She also tweaked her strategy during the recent one-week camp on Turkey.

"I have changed my technique a bit. I can't say what but it has helped me. Earlier I had a more defensive game but now I go ahead and attack," she said.

As the pressure mounts ahead of the Games, Borgohain said she derives strength from praying and meditating.

"I always try to be calm even when I am at ringside. I meditate, do breathing exercises and I pray. That makes me feel strong. I like reading motivational books. If I have a bout in the evening and I read a little in the morning, I feel really good," she added. (PTI)

Once we got Hasaranga that meant we could not go for Yuzi: Mike Hesson



NEW DELHI, April 23: Letting go of Yuzvendra Chahal is something Royal Challengers Bengaluru could regret for the longest time and the franchise's former director of cricket, Mike Hesson on Tuesday insisted they failed to retain the leg-spinner due to a miscalculation at the last IPL auction.

On Monday, Chahal scripted history by becoming the first player in IPL to have taken 200 wickets.

"Yuzi is one I will be frustrated with until I have finished my career and probably beyond. He is an outstanding bowler. I guess when it comes to every cycle, you have got to decide who you are going to retain.

"It was one of those things where if you only retain three players, you give yourself an extra 4 crore in the auction. That potentially gave us the chance to get both Harshal and Yuzi," Hesson told former India batter Robin Uthappa on Jio Cinema.

Hesson said Chahal's name came pretty late in the auction and by that time, the franchise had already bought ace Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga.

"... Then the order of the auction came up and Yuzvendra Chahal was at no. 65. Because we had retained that many players we were going to get bullied. After Yuzi there was no other spinner we were interested in.

"We were obviously interested in Hasaranga as another option if we did not get Yuzi. So we bid for

him upfront and then once we got Hasaranga that meant we could not go for Yuzi," he added.

In 153 matches, Chahal has taken 200 wickets at an average of 21.60, with the best figures of 5/40. He has taken six four-wicket hauls and a five-wicket haul in his IPL career.

Chahal reached the milestone during the match against Mumbai Indians in Jaipur on Monday.

Hesson served as the franchise's director of cricket from 2019-2023.

Meanwhile, former Australia pacer Brett Lee praised RR seamer Sandeep Sharma for returning excellent figures of 5/18 against MI and said picking a five-for in a T20 match is equivalent to scoring 120 runs with the bat.

"They say a 4-fer is worth 100 runs in a T20, so a 5-fer for a bowler is definitely worth 120 for a batter, it's quality bowling... To pick up 5/18 in his comeback game, just makes you feel like you are part of the team again.

"It will do a lot for his confidence. You can see in the list of TATA IPL 2024's best figures and he's sitting pretty on it." Lee on lavished praise on Chahal for picking his 200th IPL wicket.

"What a very special moment. You think about all the hard work... A great way to bring in your 200th dismissal in the TATA IPL, a catch off your own bowling, very special, well done. I have a feeling, gentleman, there's many more to come." Lee said. (PTI)

Pitches will be slower in T20 WC, so don't expect too many high-scoring games: Miller



NEW DELHI, April 23: South Africa and Gujarat Titans' middle-order batter David Miller doesn't expect too many high-scoring matches in the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Americas as he feels the pitches there will be on the slower side.

Favourable conditions and the much-debated 'Impact Player' rule have helped batters rule the roost in the ongoing IPL, with teams such as Sunrisers Hyderabad piling up scores in excess of 260 on three occasions.

But Miller feels it won't be the same in the T20 World Cup, to be held in the United States and West Indies from June 2.

"It would be hard to say whether the World Cup will produce high-scoring games because the conditions will be very different. The Caribbean might be on the slower side compared to Indian wickets. It's all about assessing the conditions on the day and playing accordingly," Miller

said on the eve of their match against Delhi Capitals here.

"We are not concerned about that (crossing 200-run mark). We played Sunrisers, we beat them. I think it's different conditions for different grounds. At the end of the day we have 4 wins from 8, so we are very much there.

"We don't want to get caught up in what other teams are doing. We are sticking to our strength," he added.

India captain Rohit Sharma has made it clear that he is not a big fan of the 'Impact Player' rule as it is hampering the growth of all-rounders. A few other top players, including Miller, have also voiced their opposition to the rule.

The 'Impact Player' rule, introduced in 2023, allows all IPL teams to substitute a player -- batter or bowler -- during their respective innings as per the demands of the match.

"Everyone has got their opinions about it but for me I am not a massive fan of

rule. The game of cricket has 11 players and it would be nice to stick to that. Rohit said that international cricket is not like that and I feel it's better to keep it the same as international cricket.

"It's creating 6 bowlers and 8 batters, taking all-rounders out of contention. At the end of the rule is there so we have to play according to the rule," he said.

With four wins and four defeats from eight games, GT are currently placed sixth in the standings, and remain in the mix for a play-off berth.

While skipper Shubman Gill has been in fine form at the top of the order, the middle-order remains a concern for GT, something which Miller denied.

"I don't think there is any issue with the middle-order. Obviously, you have got the impact player which makes a big difference. I think we have done what we needed to do.

"I was injured for few games, came back but haven't really scored much in the last game, but that's part of the game," he said.

"As a team there have been some close games that we won and also one or two close games that we lost. I think it's just about getting back to basics, feeding off each other, getting good partnerships. We just need a little bit more fight.

"We win the next few games and we are really in the mix, so it's very important."

Miller also had words of appreciation for Gill the leader.

"Shubman is young and an incredible player and I'm really looking forward to see how his career unfolds. I really enjoyed what he has added to the team as captain. I feel each player has their unique way of leading.

"He has performed really well with the bat. It's been nice to have someone performing and leading from that sense. It's been really a nice transition," he said. (PTI)

Olympiakos wins first European title for Greek clubs in UEFA Youth League final

NYON (SWITZERLAND), April 23: A three-goal spree in six second-half minutes lifted Olympiakos to a first European title for Greek soccer clubs on Monday after beating AC Milan 3-0 in the UEFA Youth League final.

The senior Olympiakos team can quickly make it two UEFA titles in the Europa Conference League next month. Olympiakos plays Aston Villa in the semifinals.

Victory for Olympiakos was a triumph for owner Evangelos Marinakis one day after his relegation-threatened club in England, Nottingham Forest, challenged the integrity of the video review match official in a Premier League game it lost at Everton.

On Monday, VAR helped Olympiakos take the lead. A penalty was awarded only after a video review spotted a handball by Milan's Polish midfielder Dariusz Stalmach.

Christos Mouzakis scored in the 60th minute with a perfect left-footed spot kick sent low beyond Milan goalkeeper Noah Ravvere diving to his left.

Less than two minutes later, Antonios Papkanelos beat Ravvere with a shot from a tight angle. (AP)

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