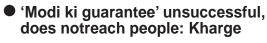
Taiwan's strongest earthquake in nearly 25 years damages buildings

Biden and Trump win presidential primaries in four more states



INDIA bloc alliance of dynastic parties: BJP chief Nadda



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The Congress leader criticises BJP for politicising Lord Ram

Gaurav attacks govt for snatching right to protest against CAA



MAJULI, April 3: Senior Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday accused the BJP of politicising Lord Ram, saying he belongs to all and seeking votes in his name is a "disgusting act"

In an interview with PTI Video, the Congress' deputy leader in the outgoing Lok Sabha said politicising Lord Ram is an insult to him.

Asked about the BJP raising the issue of the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya in the run-up to the polls and criticising the Congress over it, Gogoi said, "Lord Ram belongs to everyone, Lord Ram doesn't belong to any particular party ... Politicisation of Lord Ram is an injustice to him and an insult to him."

"Seeking votes in the name of Lord Ram is a disgusting act," he said. Talking about the issue of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National

Register of Citizens (NRC), Gogoi said the people of Assam view the two separately.

"At present, people are very restless about the CAA and want to protest against it democratically. However, Assam's BJP government has even snatched the right to protest," he alleged. "If a student wants to protest, he or she is sent to jail, if a press person asks a question then that person's job is lost. If people cannot even protest peacefully, then where is democracy?," Gogoi said, hitting out at the BJP. Gogoi has filed his

nomination as the Congress candidate from Jorhat. The Congress leader -- the MP from the Kaliabor seat, which was renamed Kaziranga during the delimitation exercise -- shifted to Jorhat that was once represented by his late father and former chief minister

AGP has kept regional, secular images intact: Atul

GUWAHATI, April 3: The AGP, which ruled Assam for several years and is now a part of the BJP-led coalition, has kept its regional and secular images intact even after years of alliance with the saffron party, its president and state minister Atul Bora said.

He also claimed that delimitation of constituencies will have a favourable impact on the party's poll fortune in the coming Lok Sabha elections and exuded confidence in winning the two seats in which the Asom Gana Parishad is contesting as an ally of the saffron camp.

Bora also said development is the USP of the ruling alliance and a "disintegrated opposition" will help the BJP-led NDA win the electoral battle in the northeastern state.

"When the AGP was in power in the state in 1996, we came closer with the BJP and since then we have been working together...The BJP is our old friend and we are moving together in a very friendly manner. We are happy," Bora said in an interview with PTI.

The AGP was formed in the aftermath of the six-year-long agitation against illegal migrants, which ended with the signing of the Assam Accord in August 1985.

The state agriculture minister said that the "changed demography post-delimitation will help the AGP in winning both the seats"

The AGP is contesting from Dhubri and Barpeta constituencies, with the BJP fielding its nominees in 11 seats and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in one.

Assam sends 14 MPs to the Lok Sabha. Bora said though the AGP, as an ally of the BJP, had unsuccessfully contested from Barpeta in the 2019 general elections, the demographic structure of the constituency has changed due to delimitation, and the party is expecting to win the seat this time.

He also sounded optimistic about winning in Dhubri, though chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has been expressing doubts about

the NDA candidate emerging victorious there. "Population structure is somewhat different in Dhubri, it is mostly a Muslim-majority area. Perhaps, his (Sarma's) observation stems from that angle," Bora said, in an apparent reference to the BJP's limited influence in Muslim areas.

"But these days, our party workers are moving around. Not only AGP, the BJP and UPPL are also working together. We are expecting



very positive results in Dhubri," he added. The regional party formed its first government in the state in 1985 and returned to

power, with help of other parties, in 1996. Since 2001, it was in the opposition until 2016, when it returned to power as part of a coalition led by (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sarbananda Sonowal woos voters with 'Jatiyotabad' theory

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 3: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal stated on Wednesday that "Jatiyotabad" prioritizes indigenous rights over the destruction of public

He made these remarks while addressing the public during meetings at Amguri, Naharani, and Kenduguri under the Jaipur mandal as the campaigning for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections gains momentum.

indigenous rights over the destruction of public assets. In this democratic festival, we must uphold truth, facts, the rule of law, and commitment to nation-building as fundamental principles to reinforce 'Jatiyotabad'.

He further asserted that 'Jatiyotabad' is a crucial concept that must be empowered with truth, facts, ideas, and action to achieve its objectives.

"It is a potent democratic tool - a strong voice of the people - that champions indigenous rights against the

Sonowal justified his statement by recalling the Congress' enactment of the anti-people, anti-Assamese

govt notification to sell

100 pc tea through auction

IMDT Act. He highlighted the approach taken by his government to secure legal (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

apply to a mini tea factory.

'The basic principle of our ob-

jection is that since the government

cannot guarantee the price realisa-

tion and the time taken for sale

through auction, it should not in-

tervene but leave it to producers to

sell their produce in whatever way

they feel comfortable," Barkakoty

said. Tea producers have a "huge

risk and responsibility of paying

wages to workers on time and also

to small tea growers who sell their

huge burden on producers. Any

disruption or uncertainty in cash

flow may invite social unrest and

employed directly in the tea indus-

try of Assam and 1,25,484 small

tea growers who produce 48 per

Tea producers use three different

public auction, directly from the

factory through a one-to-one deal

to sell 100 per cent of their produce

"Public auctioning of tea is more

There are about 10 lakh workers

violence", he added.

produced in the state.

"Managing the cash flow is a

green leaf to factories", he said.

Police asked to take action against candidate for threatening CM

IMPHAL, April 3: Imphal east deputy commissioner Khumanthem Diana has asked police to take "legal action" against Independent candidate for Inner Manipur Lok Sabha constituency Moirangthem Totomsana for his alleged derogatory statement and threat to harm

chief minister N Biren Singh. The Imphal East Deputy Commissioner who is also the district election officer in a letter to the superintendent of police, Imphal West on Tuesday said Totamsana made derogatory statement against the CM violating the model code of conduct.

"I am to bring to your notice the live telecast show on April 2 wherein a candidate namely Moirangthem Totomsana made derogatory statement against chief minister Manipur by violating the provisions of the Model code of conduct. He even threatened the chief minister with physical harm by telling that he will kill him whenever he gets a chance, which amounts to an attack on the personal life of a person," the DC said in the letter to the SP. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam can't survive without secularism: Borah

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 3: Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah has claimed that the people will choose his party this time as Assam "cannot survive" without secularism.

Borah claimed that people of the state were "very angry" with the BJP for not fulfilling the promises it

"India is a secular country and Assam cannot survive without secularism and socialism. The only way Assam can work for progress is by being united. The CM is planning to polarise the state," he said in an interview with PTI.

"If Assam wants peace and progress, it has to take the path of Congress and Gandhian philosophy," he added. Borah alleged that the BJP was fighting the Lok Sabha elections "on four wheels" --"money power, individual beneficiary scheme, communalism or polarisation, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The senior BJP leader emphasized the need for a destruction of public assets," he added. healthy democratic environment for the country's growth and development. Sonowal was quoted in an official statement as saving, "The true essence of 'Jatiyotabad' lies in prioritising BJP candidates file nomination for Planters' body in NE opposes

Cash seized DIBRUGARH: The flying

squad has played an active role in preventing illegal transaction of money, free circulation of liquor etc. during the period when the Model Code of Conduct is in force. The Static Surveillance teams, flying squads and video surveillance teams deployed in all the assembly constituencies of Dibrugarh electoral district are working round the clock to conduct a round-the-clock routine search operation as well as prevent incidents of violation of model code of conduct. On Wednesday morning, a team of static surveillance seized Rs 3,51,240 in cash from a vehicle at Shalmari Chariali.

HTBRIEFS

Trade fair

HOWRAGHAT: A trade fair is held at Langhin which was organised by Langhin Srimanta Shankardev Sangha's Salabor Regional Branch. The trade fair was inaugurated by Srimanta Shankardev Sangha Karbi Anglong District Salabor Regional Branch president Kumar Kanta Bora. Earlier, a nam kirtan was held in the local namphar. The trade fair will be from April 3 to 20.

Pistol recovered

BOKAJAN: A pistol was recovered in a tea garden by NH 36 under Khatkhati Police Station in Karbi Anglong. Acting on secret information the police launched an operation on the evening of April 02 at Lahorijan Nirmal Kumar Tea Estate.

two Barak Valley constituencies

SILCHAR/KARIMGANJ, April 3: BJP candidates Parimal Suklabaidya and Kripanath Malla, filed their nomination papers for the two Barak Valley Lok Sabha constituencies of - Silchar (SC) and Karimganj - respectively on Wednesday in the presence of Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

ister Parimal Suklabaidya filed his papers for the Silchar (SC) constituency which has been reserved as scheduled caste following the delimitation exercise in the state.

Kripanath Malla sitting BJP MP filed his papers for the Karimganj constitueny which was earlier a scheduled caste constituency but became a general seat following delimitation. Elections for the two seats will be held in the second

The chief minister said the party is committed to deliver Prime Minfor development' and both the candidates in the Barak Valley will win by huge majority.

'The election this time is only focussed on ensuring Prime Minister Modi's return to Parliament for the third successive term and the candidates are only a face of him', Sarma said. He said the saffron wave in the also and the region will become one of the best in the country in the years ister Narendra Modi's 'guarantee to come. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GUWAHATI, April 3: An association of tea planters in the northeast region has opposed the central government's directive to sell 100 per cent of dust tea and 50 per cent of other grades produced in a calendar vear through auction as it will be "detrimental" to the sur-

vival of the industry. In a liberalised and globalised economy, there is "no need for the government to issue a notification to compulsorily sell a certain percentage of tea through a public auction". North East Tea Association advisor Bidyanand Barkakoty said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The government should not try to regulate one particular segment of the trade, and in this case, tea producers have no control over the market forces. We earnestly request that the notification should be withdrawn in the best interests

A gazette notification, Tea (Mar-Order, 2024, issued on February per cent of the total tea manufactured in a calendar year and 100 per cent of dust grades tea manufactured in a calendar year in units located in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal must be sold through public tea auctions but it does not

cent of the total green tea leaves of the tea industry", he said. keting) Control (Amendment) channels to sell their produce -26, directed that not less than 50 and export or through merchant exporters. than 150 years old but it has never ever been able to attract producers through public auctioning. The main reason for many producers not routing their produce through

Key meeting in Diphu assesses election preparedness

HT Bureau

public (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

DIPHU, April 3: A pivotal meeting was convened today in Diphu, bringing together general observers, expenditure observer, poobserver, district lice commissioners, superintendent of police, and other key officers to

evaluate the readiness for the forthcoming General Election 2024. Chaired by district commissioner Madhumita Bhagawati of Karbi Anglong, the meeting commenced with a warm welcome to

all observers for their diligent oversight of the electoral process in Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao districts. Representatives from the three

districts presented detailed plans regarding poll preparedness, encompassing district population statistics, polling station distribution, and officer deployment for election

In his concluding remarks, general observer IAS Jaydip Mukhopadhay stressed the critical importance of upholding the integrity of the electoral process.

He also emphasised the necessity of secure strong rooms, effective functioning of Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) systems, and strict adherence to the guidelines set by the Election Commission of India.

Concurrently, police observer IPS T Uniel Kichu Ao reiterated the paramount significance of robust security measures to safeguard the electoral process. Additionally, expenditure observer IRS Shankar Lal Verma underscored the necessity of transparency (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Bhabendra Nath Deka padadhikar of Srimanta Sankardev Sangha releasing Brindabani Bastra in Guwahati. UB photos

The minster advised senior officials to meet with states for better coordination and understanding

Continuous efforts necessary to generate awareness for better heatwave management: Mandaviya

NEW DELHI, April 3: Continuous efforts towards generating awareness is necessary for better management of heat waves. Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Wednesday and added effective addressing leads to effective management.

Mandaviya, who chaired a meeting to review public health preparedness for the management of heat-related illnesses, highlighted the importance of timely action as soon as India Meteorological Department (IMD) alerts are received in the states.

"Timely, advance and wide awareness among the people on the preventive measures will hugely support in reducing the severe im-



pact of such heat waves," he said. Highlighting the lack of accurate data from the ground, Mandaviya noted the importance of creating a central database with inputs from states to share field-level information on heat waves, including deaths and cases, so that a realistic assess-

ment of the situation can be made. He also advised senior officials to meet with states for better coordination and understanding, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts in the efficient management of heat-related illnesses.

Union minister of state for health Bharati Pravin Pawar stressed on the formation of state- and districtlevel committees for information and awareness campaigns.

She also highlighted the importance of equipping Ayushman Arogya Mandirs with water coolers, ice packs and other basic necessities.

She emphasised the need for states to accelerate field-level implementation of state action plans for addressing the effects of heat

waves. A granular status and analysis of overall heatstroke forecasting, pattern, climatology and vulnerable zones in India and areas most prone to increased heat waves was made by IMD officials, covering the trajectory of rainfall patterns, humidity and forecast of transition from El Nino to El Nino-Southern Oscillation. It was pointed out that heat action plans have been updated in 23 states while around 100 districts have campaigns on heatwave awareness generation.

An advisory was issued on February 29 by the Union health secretary to all chief secretaries, requesting compliance of states with the national action plan on heat-related (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

World Bank projects Indian economy to grow at 7.5% in 2024

Indian economy is projected to grow at 7.5 per cent in 2024, the World Bank has said, revising its earlier projections for the same period by 1.2 per cent.

THE HILLS TIMES

Overall, growth in South Asia is expected to be strong at 6.0 per cent in 2024, driven mainly by robust growth in India and recoveries in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the World Bank said in its latest South Asia Development Update on Tuesday.

According to the report, South Asia is expected to remain the fastest-growing region in the world for the next two years, with growth projected to be 6.1% in 2025.

"In India, which accounts for the bulk of the region's economy, output growth is expected to reach 7.5% in FY23/24 before returning to 6.6% over the medium term. with activity in services and industry expected to remain robust," the bank said in its report. In Bangladesh, output is expected to rise by 5.7% in FY24/25, with high inflation and restrictions on trade and foreign exchange constraining economic activity.

Following the contraction in FY22/23, Pakistan's economy is expected to grow by 2.3% in FY24/25 as business confidence improves. In Sri Lanka, output growth is expected to strengthen to 2.5% in 2025, with modest recoveries in reserves, remittances, and tourism. "South Asia's growth prospects remain bright in the short run, but fragile fiscal positions and increasing climate strong performance," it said.

Fevikwik Expands

Product Line to

Elevate Consumer

Repair Experience

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 3: Fevikwik, a flagship

brand renowned for its instant adhesive solutions

under Pidilite Industries Limited, has unveiled a

series of innovative products aimed at revolution-

izing the repair landscape. The latest additions,

Fevikwik Precision Pro, Fevikwik Gel, Fevikwik

Advanced, and Fevikwik Craft, signify a strategic

move to cater to diverse consumer needs across

Sudhanshu Vats, Managing Director Designate

of Pidilite Industries Ltd., emphasized the brand's

commitment to meeting evolving consumer de-

mands while setting new industry standards. He

remarked, "Fevikwik has long been synonymous

with excellence in instant adhesives. Our latest

variants, crafted through meticulous research and

development, are tailored to specific requirements,

promising enhanced performance and an unparal-

The newly introduced range is meticulously de-

signed to offer superior functionality and conven ience across different usage categories. Fevikwik

Precision Pro caters to precise applications, while

Fevikwik Gel ensures spill-free repairs and the

flexibility to rectify errors. Fevikwik Advanced

boasts waterproof and shockproof properties, ad-

dressing durability concerns, whereas Fevikwik

Craft targets crafting enthusiasts with its special-

In addition to product innovation, Fevikwik has

prioritized accessibility and availability by expanding its distribution channels and centers

across India. The brand has introduced versatile

packaging options to meet the preferences of

urban consumers, ensuring readiness for emergen-

cies and reinforcing its commitment to consumer

various repair scenarios.

leled repair experience.'

ized formulation.

satisfaction.



shocks are dark clouds on the horizon," said Martin Raiser, World Bank Vice President for South Asia. "To make growth more resilient, countries need to adopt policies to boost private investment and strengthen employment

16% higher, Ohnsorge said.

In India, the World Bank said, economic activity surprised on the upside in 2023Q4, with growth of 8.4 per cent from a year ago. "The expansion was supported by rapid increases in investment and government consumption. More recent survey data point to continued

about 11 per cent.

Regulatory capital totalled 17 per cent of bank assets in the second quarter of 2023, surpassing both regulatory requirements and peer averages. FDI as a share of GDP fell in 2023, but a rebound in foreign portfolio investment inflows in FY2023/24 contributed to foreign reserves rising 8 percent in the year to January 2024, reaching a level sufficient to cover about 11 months of imports, the World Bank report said.

"In India, output growth is projected to reach 7.5 percent in FY2023/24 on the back of robust growth in Q3 of FY2023/24. Growth is expected to moderate to 6.6 percent in FY2024/25 before picking up in subsequent years as a decade of robust public investment yields growth dividends," the

The expected slowdown in growth between FY2023/24 and FY2024/25 mainly reflects a deceleration in investment from its elevated pace in the previous year, it said. "Growth in services and industry is expected to remain robust, the latter aided by strong construction and real estate activity. Inflationary pressures are expected to subside, creating more policy space for easing financial conditions," it said.

"Over the medium term, the fiscal deficit and government debt are projected to decline, supported by robust output growth and consoli-

Sensex, Nifty close lower amid profit-booking, mixed global cues

MUMBAI, April 3: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty settled lower for the second straight session on Wednesday due to profit-booking in select banking and auto stocks amid mixed trends from the global markets and outflow of foreign funds.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 27.09 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 73,876.82 in a volatile trade. During the day, the index oscillated between the high of 74,151.21 and the low of 73,757.23. The broader NSE Nifty declined 18.65 points or 0.08 per cent to 22,434.65, with 30 components of the 50-share benchmark ending with losses.

"Nifty remained volatile throughout the day after an initial weak start due to negative global cues," said

Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst, LKP Securities. He further said that the index may trend towards 22,650. "Support is positioned at 22,350 on the lower

Among the Sensex constituents, as many as 16 stocks closed with losses with Nestle India, Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserve, Titan and JSW Steel being the major laggards. Index major Reliance, Hindustan Unilever, Maruti and Tata Steel also declined due to selling pressure.

In contrast, NTPC, TCS, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finance bucked the trend and ended the day in green. Axis Bank, Bharti Airtel, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors also defied the trend. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

AGP has kept regional

the BJP, along with other regional groups. The AGP and BJP had seat-sharing arrangements for several assembly and Lok Sabha elections in the state since 2001, though the alliance took a proper shape since the 2016 assembly polls. Bora maintained that the "AGP has been able to keep its regional image intact though it has a national outlook" and stressed that "without the support of the Centre, some important activities are not possible". He also pointed out that the Union home ministry is the nodal agency for implementing the clauses of the Assam Accord. Claiming that regionalism is "still relevant" in the state, Bora said, "We have all sections of people, from all castes, communities and religions. The AGP is a secular party, we believe in secularism. All people feel happy under the umbrella of AGP.

When asked about the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019, Bora said it was a sub-judice matter.

He said development will be the key issue for the ruling alliance in the coming elections and added, "The Congress was in power for a long time after Independence, but did not do anything. Since Modi ji came to power there has been a lot of development."

He also said, "The opposition is very weak and disunited. People want a stable government and how can they expect it from the Congress? People believe that only Modi can give a stable government at the Centre. In Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma's leadership is also there.

On AGP's decreasing number of seats in the assembly polls, as it managed to win only nine in the 2021 elections in the House of 126 members, the party chief said, "Unfavourable demography was a major reason".

"In 2021, the BJP gave us 28 seats to contest and we won nine. The population structure of the constituencies where we lost was not in favour of the AGP. That was one reason," he added. Assam will go to Lok Sabha polls in three phases on April 19, 16 and May 7. The BJP has nine MPs in the outgoing Lok Sabha, Congress three

and one each is held by AIUDF and an Independent. (PTI) Sarbananda Sonowal woos

rights over landholdings for indigenous people, mentioning the allocation of land rights to over 3,60,000 indigenous families since 2016. Discussing governance, Sonowal likened PM Narendra Modi's leadership to the governance model of Swargadeo Chaolung Sukapha, emphasising inclusivity and development for all communities. Addressing criticism from the opposition, Sonowal emphasized the importance of informed dialogue and respectful consideration of people's concerns. He condemned attempts to provoke society with falsehoods and called for a focus on positive engagement within the democratic spirit of the nation. He concluded by paying homage to the martyrs of the Assam agitation and acknowledging the contributions of forefathers and freedom fighters from the region.

Police asked to take

"You are requested to take legal action against Moirangthem Totomsana under the provisions of IPC," the letter said, adding that "Action taken report in this regard shall be furnished latest by April 5". Totomsana during a discussion of Inner Manipur Lok Sabha candidates had said "Biren should resign. If he doesn't... I want to kill him...' The statement was criticised by the organisers who later asked Totamsana to withdraw the statement. Meanwhile, BJP Manipur on Wednesday strongly condemned the threat to kill chief minister N Biren Singh made by Independent candidate Moirangthem Totomsana during a media discussion.

BJP vice president Ch Chidananda Singh told PTI "We strongly condemn the verbal threat made by one Independent candidate for upcoming Lok Sabha elections and want legal measures to be taken up against him." Elections to the Inner Lok Sabha constituency will be held on April 19. (PTI)

BJP candidates file nomination

Both the constituencies were won by the BJP in 2019 with Malla renominated for the second time but sitting Silchar MP Rajdeep Roy was replaced by Suklabaidya due to the reservation. In Karimganj so far five candidates have filed their papers with AIUDF's Sahabul Alam Choudhury, SUCI(C)'s Prajwal Sudip Dev and independents Binoy Krishna Roy and Dilip Kumar having submitted their papers earlier. The constituency was likely to witness a triangular contest between BJP, Congress and AIUDF. The Congress candidate for the seat is prominent advocate

In Silchar (SC), too, five candidates have filed their nominations so far with former MP and Trinamool Congress candidate Radhey Shyam Biswas, SUCI(C)'s Provas Chandra Sarkar, Bangali Nabonirma Sena's Barindra Kumar Das and independent Raju Das having submitted their papers earlier. Silchar (SC) was also likely to witness a triangular contest between BJP, Congress and Trinamool Congress.

Altogether 16 candidates have filed their nominations so far for the second phase polls to the five constituencies

of Karimganj, Silchar, Nagaon, Diphu(ST) and Darrang-Udalguri. The last date for filing of nomination is April 4, scrutiny on April 5 and the last date for withdrawal of nominations is April 8. In the first phase polls on April 19, 35 candidates are in the fray for the Kaziranga, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur

and Lakhimpur constituencies. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one from the state. (PTI)

Continuous efforts necessary

illnesses for effective preparedness of facilities to address heat impact and management of cases. The states were also advised to review health facility preparedness in terms of essential medicines, intravenous fluids, ice-packs, ORS and drinking water for the public. It was also informed that the National Centre for Disease Control has issued the dos and don'ts to be followed by the general public as well as vulnerable people during the summer months. (PTI)

Key meeting in Diphu

in financial matters and urged prompt submission of daily expenditure reports. An earnest appeal was extended to the public to actively participate in upholding the principles of free and fair elections.

Citizens were encouraged to reach out to the respective observers for any election-related queries at the following contact numbers: general observer (6900570986), expenditure observer (6900570681), and police observer (6900571167).

Planters' body in NE

auctioning is that it is a very inefficient, time-consuming and expensive mode of selling process," Barkakoty said. As there are a "limited number of buyers in the public auctioning system, many producers do not get fair prices" for their produce while "commission agents operate for several buyers thereby restricting competition, resulting in lower price realisation", he claimed.

The auction process is much slower as compared to direct sales and much more expensive, and "any rule which forces producers to sell through auctions will cause a working capital and cash flow crisis for the industry", he pointed out. There is a huge expense for selling through auction centres which at times is as high as the margin for a manufacturing unit, he added.

"Almost all the tea producers have borrowings from banks in the form of term loans and cash credit limits with 100 per cent auctions negatively impacting cash flows and profitability and this could also lead to the industry becoming unviable," he said. The present e-auction system needs to be redesigned with the help of experts and a robust system will automatically attract a large number of manufacturers to sell their produce through public auctioning, Barkakoty added. (PTI)

Assam can't survive without

and by trying to control a section of the press". He claimed that despite this, people are supporting the Congress, which is getting a good response on the ground. "They made a lot of promises to the people of Assam, like 'BJP ayega, videshi jayega' (BJP will come, foreigners will go), price rise will be controlled, employment opportunities will be created, ST status will be given to six communities and wage of tea garden workers will be increased. But not a single promise has been fulfilled," Borah alleged.

On Congress leaders quitting the party, he said there was a "little bit of resentment" due to ticket distribution. "It is happening in the BJP as well. In the BJP, one Union minister has been denied a ticket and he has now gone silent. Sitting MPs of Sonitpur and Guwahati were denied tickets, and they are now silent," he said. Giving an instance, Borah said there were three aspirants for Congress nomination from the Guwahati seat, and the party nom-

inated the best person among them, and "even people of the city will testify to it". "In other constituencies also, if you ask the people they will say that Congress list is the best list," he claimed. The Congress is contesting 13 seats in the state, leaving the Dibrugarh constituency for the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP). Borah alleged that the delimitation exercise was done according to the "wish of the RSS and BJP". "It is a double-edged sword, it is the same for the BJP as well. It is not a very big factor in this election. The factors are price rise, jobs, flood and erosion, and implementing the Assam Accord," he asserted. Claiming that the Congress is in a good position in all the seats, Borah said there is a "little bit of trust deficit" among the people, which has

"Some senior leaders are dancing to the tune of the CM. They are joining the BJP without thinking about the state or what the people are thinking. I am hopeful that under my leadership, we will be able to convince the people that few may join the BJP but there are leaders who will not leave the Congress," he said. (With inputs from PTI)

growth," he said

"South Asia is failing right now to fully capitalize on its demographic dividend. This is a missed opportunity," said Franziska Ohnsorge, World Bank Chief Economist for South Asia. If the region employed as large a share of the working-age population as other emerging markets and developing economies, its output could be

In February, India's composite purchasing managers index (PMI) stood at 60.6, well above the global average of 52.1 (a value above 50 indicates expansion). Growth in FY2023/24 is estimated to have exceeded earlier forecasts.

According to the report, in India,

inflation has remained within the

Reserve Bank of India's 2-6 per cent target range since a spike in mid-2023, and the policy rate has remained unchanged since February 2023. Food price inflation has been elevated, partly reflecting a weak harvest due to El Niño, it said. Financial conditions in India have remained accommodative. Domestic credit issuance to the commercial sector (including public and private borrowers) grew by 14 per cent (year-on-year) in December 2023, the fastest pace since 2013. Financial soundness indicators continued to improve. The nonperforming-loan ratio fell to 3.2 per cent last year, well below

Gold jumps ₹ 830 to reach new peak of ₹ 69,200 per 10 grams

NEW DELHI, April 3: Gold prices jumped by ₹830 to reach a new peak of ₹69,200 per 10 grams on Wednesday amid a rally in precious metal rates in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. This is the second time that yellow metal prices have hit an alltime high in this week. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at ₹ 68,370 per

Silver prices also surged by ₹ 1,700 to ₹ 80,700 per kg. It had finished at ₹ 79,000 per kg in the previous close.

'Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 69,200 per 10 grams, up by ₹830, taking a bullish trend in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at

COMEX was trading at USD 2,275 per ounce, up by USD 20 from the previous close.

"Gold up at yet another all-time high with prices breaching past USD 2,300 per ounce in early trade, while futures on MCX rose close to all-time around ₹ 69,500, as demand for safe-haven metal continues to grow, amid possibility of escalation in the Middle-East tensions. "Further, uncertainty over the timing of interest rate cuts by the US Fed after recent stronger-than-expected economic readings, which also pushed the bullion prices trade higher," Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG -Commodity & Currency Research at JM Financial Services Ltd. said.

Additionally, silver was also trading higher at USD 26.25 per ounce. In the previous session, it had settled at USD 25.55 per ounce. (PTI)

Aviva Life Insurance clinches top spot again, maintains trust streak

GUWAHATI, April 3: Aviva Life Insurance reaffirmed its position as the leading private life insurance provider in India by securing the coveted title of 'India's Most Trusted Private Life Insurance Brand' for the sixth consecutive year. The accolade comes courtesy of the esteemed TRA's Brand Trust Report 2024, underscoring the company's unwavering commitment to customer-centricity and innovation.

Head of Marketing at Aviva Life Insurance, Mr. Vinit Kapahi, attributed this milestone to the company's steadfast dedication to placing customers at the forefront of its operations. He emphasized Aviva's customer-centric approach, stating that every product is meticulously crafted to address the evolving needs and aspirations of its clientele.

Renowned for its comprehensive suite of life insurance products catering to diverse financial requirements, Aviva offers a range of solutions including guaranteed saving plans, term plans, child plans, investments, and retirement plans. The company's latest addition, the Aviva Signature Monthly Income Plan, stands as a testament to its commitment to empowering customers by providing guaranteed monthly income and lifelong financial security.

Commenting on Aviva's achievement, CEO of TRA Research, MN Chandramouli, lauded the company's remarkable feat, emphasizing the significance of consumer trust in brand success.

NAME CORRECTION

Jebunisha Chowdhury, W/O-Bazrul Islam, R/O- Maroi, P.O.- PS.- Sipajhar, in the District-Darrang (Assam), That I am a citizen of India by birth and a per- manent resident of above mentioned address. That my actual and correct date of birth is 31-12-1967. That my date of birth has been wrongly recorded in my Passport vide Passport No. Y8312930, date of issue 05/09/2023 as 26-01-1965 in place of 31-12-1967. Sd/- Jebunisha Chowdhury

NAME CORRECTION

I, Safidur Rahman do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of the below mentioned address and citizen of India by birth. That my name has been recorded in all my educational documents as Mahammad Safidur Rahman and Md. Safidur Rahman in place of Safidur Rahman. That Safidur Rahman, Mahammad Safidur Rahman and Md Safidur Rahman are the same and one person. That this Affidavit is required to be produced before the authority concerned as a piece of document.

Safidur Rahman, S/O Abdur Rashid

RO- Bahabari, PO- Kharupetia, Dist- Darrang, Assam

Airtel Emerges as the Leading 5G Network in NE

GUWAHATI, April 3: Open Signal, a renowned global authority on network and subscriber insights, has bestowed Bharti Airtel with the title of the most awarded 5G network in the North-East telecom circle. In a comprehensive evaluation, Airtel clinched an impressive five out of six awards, solidifying its position as the top player in the region's 5G landscape.

As the benchmark for analyzing mobile experience, OpenSignal's latest consumer report underscores Airtel's dominance across various metrics, reaffirming its commitment to delivering unparalleled customer satisfaction. Airtel excelled in key areas such as 5G video streaming, both live and on-demand, ensuring users enjoy uninterrupted viewing experiences. Additionally, the company leads the pack in voice app perform-

ance, facilitating seamless connectivity for multiplayer gaming and over-the-top voice services on mobile platforms. Airtel's prowess extends beyond entertainment and gaming, as it emerges as the undisputed leader in 5G upload speeds nationwide, boasting an impressive average speed of 25.1Mbps. Notably, Airtel was the first service provider to roll out 5G in the North-East telecom circle, further solidifying its position as an industry trailblazer.

With over 2.5 million unique 5G customers already on its network, Airtel's 5G Plus service spans across districts throughout the state, with plans to extend coverage to the entire country by March 2024. This milestone underscores Airtel's unwavering commitment to innovation and delivering superior network experiences to its valued customers.

Inflation has slid again in Europe; What that means for interest rates

FRANKFURT (GERMANY), April 2: The inflation that has squeezed European shoppers fell more than expected in March to 2.4 per cent, as cost spikes in the grocery aisle eased and overall price rises headed down in the two biggest economies, Germany

The annual figure for the 20 countries that use the Euro currency came in below the 2.5 per cent predicted by financial markets and brings the European Central Bank ever closer to its inflation goal of 2 per cent. But analysts say the decline from 2.6 per cent in February, though welcome, would likely not be enough to move up the first interest rate cut from the

The bank meets April 11 but the first reduction in borrowing costs is not expected until June despite an economy that's failing to grow, several analysts said. Food inflation fell to 2.7 per cent from 3.9 per cent,

and energy prices dropped by 1.8 per cent, according to Eurostat, the European Union's statistics agency. Meanwhile, core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy costs, eased to 2.9 per cent from 3.1 per cent in February.

Inflation fell to 2.3 per cent in Germany from 2.7

per cent the month before and to 2.4 per cent in France from 3.2 per cent. The data from Germany the eurozone's largest economy brings some relief for the ECB said Carsten Brzeski, global head of macro at

But prices for services, which include everything from movie tickets to medical care, are still high.

The ECB will also want to see the latest numbers on wage increases, meaning that as long as the economy doesn't fall off a cliff, the ECB will sit tight next week, waiting for more data and the June meeting, he said. The US Federal Reserve also is expected to cut rates later this year. Fed officials have penciled in three rate cuts, even as the decline in inflation there has slowed.

In Europe, inflation spiked to a record high of 10.6 per cent in October 2022 after Russia cut off most of its natural gas to the continent over the war in Ukraine, sending energy prices skyrocketing and driving a costof-living crisis.

Along with losing that affordable supply of gas needed to heat homes, generate electricity and power factories, the rebound from the pandemic also strained supply chains, helping push up inflation. (PTI)

Ajanta Neog rallies support for BJP candidates in Jorhat

Gaurav Gogoi tours Majuli LAC, expresses confidence in people's mandate

HT Correspondent JORHAT, April 3: Ajanta Neog, the minister of Finance, Women

and Child Development, and the guardian minister of Jorhat district, addressed a series of poll rallies across the Jorhat Assembly segment of the parliamentary constituency on Wednesday.

The two main contestants in the fray are the sitting Lok Sabha MPs - Topon Kumar Gogoi (Jorhat) and Gaurav Gogoi (Kaliabor, now renamed Kaziranga). They have been campaigning across the Lok Sabha constituency since their names were announced by the respective parties, holding a series of rallies, including motorbike rallies, processions, visiting cultural and religious places, and holding inter-

During her addresses, Neog em-



phasised the national sentiment rallying behind Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a third term to continue the journey of development and progress initiated under his leadership in 2014. She highlighted the significant transforma-

including Assam's progress under the BJP-led government, signaling strong support for BJP candidates

tions witnessed across the country,

Neog also mentioned that her

Jorhat parliamentary constituency indicated a substantial victory for Topon Gogoi.

Meanwhile, Gaurav Gogoi visited Majuli river island on Wednesday and toured across the Brahmaputra island LAC for the second time following his earlier visit about a fortnight ago.

After the delimitation of constituencies exercise carried out last year by the Election Commission of India, the Majuli LAC, which was earlier a part of Lakhimpur Lok Sabha seat, has been included as a segment of the Jorhat parliamentary constituency.

Gaurav Gogoi expressed optimism about getting the mandate of the people, noting the visible excitement and the outpouring of

ASDC and Cong candidates file nominations

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 3: The candidates of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and Congress from the 6 - Diphu (ST) parliamentary constituency filed their nomination papers before the returning officer for the second phase of the ensuing parliamentary elections in Assam, where voting is to take place on

This time, the Congress and CPI (ML) Liberation, as part of the INDI Alliance, have placed a common candidate, Joyram Engleng. The CPI (ML) Liberation will support Engleng in the election.

In the morning, the ASDC candidate Jotson Bev, accompanied by party president Chandra Kanta Terang, vice president Dhoniram Tisso, secretaries Daniel Teron and Sanjay Killing, and others, reached the DC office to file his nomination papers before the returning officer and DC, Madhumita Bhagawati.

After filing his nomination papers, Bey told media persons that a close contest will be with the BJP and not with the Congress and APHLC. When asked about Hemsing Tisso joining the Congress, Bey said that Tisso left ASDC two years back and has no relation with the party. Bey emphasised that Tisso's joining the Congress will not affect the ASDC.

Bey is the general secretary of ASDC and former chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

In the afternoon, around 12:00, the Congress candidate Joyram Engleng, accompanied by Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) member Bhu-



pen Kumar Borah, Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (KADCC) vice presidents Bidyasing Rongpi and Raton Engti, West Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee member Sing Teron, Dima Hasao District Congress Committee president Nirmal Langthasa, and CPI(ML)- HPC secretary Robi Kumar Phangcho, reached the DC office and filed his nomination papers before the returning officer and DC, Madhumita Bhagawati.

From the Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee office, a procession was taken out to the DC office, with a large number of Congress workers and

After filing the nomination papers, Engleng told media persons that the BJP had insisted on him not to

Govt initiates mustard seed procurement at MSP in Sonitpur



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 3: The state government and the state's Agriculture Department have initiated special measures to procure mustard seeds from farmers at reasonable prices. In view of the steps taken by the government, Sonitpur district Agriculture Department has set a target of procuring 1500 metric tonnes of mustard seeds with the help of Assam State Agricultural Marketing Board (ASAMB) and Assam Food and Civil Supplies Corporation Limited (AFCSCL) at the minimum support price of ₹ 5,650 per quintal.

To accelerate the process of procuring mustard seeds from the farmers, a program was organised at Dhekiajuli Mustard Seed Procurement Centre under Assam State Agricultural Marketing Board. During the program, district agriculture officer Pranjal Sarma inaugurated the process of mustard seed procurement on Tuesday at the Dhekiajuli Mustard Seed Procureture officer Jakir Hussain, Pranab Bora, senior agricultural development officer Indu Pranjal Bora, district media expert of agriculture Bitopan Saikia, incharge secretary of the office of the Assam State Agricultural Marketing Board, Dhekiajuli Dwijen Das, manager of Tezpur Warehouse Jugal Saikia, and other department officials.

It is to be mentioned here that Assam State Agricultural Marketing Board and the Assam Food and Civil Supplies Corporation Limited have been assigned to procure mustard seeds from the farmers in the district of Sonitpur at the minimum support price of ₹ 5650 per quintal fixed by the government for the year 2024 at Dhekiajuli and Tezpur Warehouse, 18 Mile. The department urged the farmers not to be provoked by brokers and to sell their product directly only to the government-approved agencies at the fixed minimum support price of ₹ 5650 per quintal.

Sonitpur district Agriculture Department has informed that for selling their produce at the minimum support price, farmers in Sonitpur district are required to obtain certificates from the local agricultural development officer or the Office of District Agriculture Department. The farmers should have to submit a farmer's certificate, Aadhaar card, copy of bank passbook, and their mobile number to the concerned authority for execution of selling their product. The department also asked the farmers to pay attention to the fact that the moisture content of the mustard seeds

Morigaon DC takes action against substandard food

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, April 3: Morigaon district election officer and district commissioner, Devashis Sarma, has initiated action against the provision of poor-quality food in the name of lunch to the officers and employees of the Morigaon District Commissioner's Office. More than 50 officers and employees in various cells of the election have lodged written complaints regarding substandard and unclean food with the concerned departments

Meanwhile, district election officer and district commissioner, Devashis Sarma, visited the place where food was being distributed to the officers and employees involved in the election works. The commissioner directed the food suppliers to replace all previously used materials with fresh and good-quality materials. He also inspected the cleanliness of the kitchens and dining areas.

Implicitly acknowledging the issue of substandard food provision, the district commissioner directed the relevant parties to rectify the situation promptly. He emphasised the importance of maintaining food quality standards to prevent any compromise in the future.

24 hour control room for LS election complaints

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, April 3: The Income Tax Department's Control Room is active 24 hours a day for filing complaints of suspicious transactions, cash, or goods during the Lok Sabha elections in Morigaon constituency district. Anyone with such a complaint can contact the Income Tax Department's Rapid Response Team. The contact number of the district nodal officer of this Rapid Response Team in Morigaon district is 9401991559. The toll-free number for filing complaints is 18003453596, and the state-level WhatsApp number is 9531460373. Complainants can also submit their complaints by email to assamls@gmail.com.

HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, April 3: The Lok Sabha electioneering environment has seen an upsurge in the state, inconstituencies in the state of Assam, including Kokrajhar Lok cluding Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) districts, with rallies Sabha constituency, and is hopeful and campaign programs as people of winning over 12 seats in the

NDA organises bike rallies

in Kokrajhar-Chirang

Leaders express confidence in electoral success

from various communities eagerly await to exercise their democratic voting rights in scheduled phases. In Kokrajhar, a grand bike rally

of the National Democratic Alliance (UPPL, BJP, AGP) in support of NDA alliance candidate Joyanta Basumatary for No 1 Kokrajhar Lok Sabha Constituency was conducted in Kokrajhar LAC on Wednesday. State cabinet minister and UPPL founder president Urkhao Gwra Brahma flagged off the rally in the presence of Kokrajhar East LAC Lawrence Islary, AGP senior leader Karna Mohan Roy, MCLA (BTR) Rajib Kumar Brahma, leaders from NDA alliance partners AGP, BJP, UPPL parties, and office bearers of Kokrajhar LAC election steering committee.

Thousands of participants from NDA alliance partners holding banners participated in the event, which started from Adabari playground in Kokrajhar and traversed through New Flyover, Khargaon, Titaguri, JD Road, Karigaon, Bishmuri, Jharbari, Patgaon, Sijouguri, Simbargaon, and concluded at

Titaguri Janagaon playground. Notably, the NDA alliance is contesting in all 14 Lok Sabha state. Accordingly, the rally has shown the significant momentum of the NDA alliance in Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency as well as across the state of Assam. Minister Brahma expressed that

the NDA alliance is fully prepared to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, with necessary preparations and arrangements already in place. He mentioned that people from different communities are coming forward to extend support to the NDA alliance candidates across the region. He expressed hope that NDA candidates, including those in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, will win the elections with majority support. Brahma stated that the NDA alliance, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is projected to win 400 seats across the country, resulting in Modi's consecutive third term as the Prime Minister of India. Regarding the BPF party, Brahma remarked that it has become irrelevant among citizens across the region. He noted that people are now supporting the NDA alliance due to the failure of

the BPF party to address grievances during its 17-year rule in the Bodoland Territorial Region. Brahma predicted a severe defeat for the BPF party in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, as the common masses are avoiding extending support to the party and its candidates. Brahma expressed his pleasure in participating in a grand bike rally held in Kokrajhar LAC, where over a thousand enthusiastic supporters and voters organised by the NDA showed their support for Joyanta Basumatary, the candidate for the No 1 Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency

In Chirang, Rajya Sabha MP and UPPL working president Rwngwra Narzary, along with BTR executive member Ranjit Basumatary, flagged off the grand NDA bike rally held at Kajalgaon in Chirang under Sidli LAC in support of NDA alliance candidate Joyanta Basumatary. Hundreds of party workers and members of UPPL, BJP, and AGP parties, under the leadership of the NDA alliance, participated in the rally, covering nearly a hundred kilometers in the Sidli constituency. MP Narzary expressed confidence that NDA alliance candidates will receive majority support in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, including those in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha

Udali College unveils new administrative building

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 3: The newly constructed administrative building of Udali College was ceremonially inaugurated at a function recently Amalendu Chakraborty, vice chancellor of Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai. Dr Arun Bora, principal of the college, chaired the program. A research book published by the college publications cell titled 'Anneshan' was also released by Dr

Sagar Baruah, the retired principal of Khagarijan College, Nagaon, and the president of the college management committee. The book was jointly edited by Rashna Baruah, Salma Akhtara, and Mustak Ahmed. Additionally, the college's souvenir was ceremonially released by Dr Amarjeet Singh Bhui, principal of Lanka Mahavidyalaya. Following the inaugural session, a lecture program was organised on The Role of Higher Education in Building a Society', in which Amalendu Chakraborty, vice chancellor of Rabindranath Tagore University, delivered the keynote speech on the subject, as asserted in a press note here.

Two more candidates enter race for Nagaon LS seat

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 3: Two candi-

dates, one from AIUDF and the other from Joi Prakash Janata Dal, filed nomination papers for the Naon Wednesday here. As per an official press note, Aminul Islam from the AIUDF party filed one nomination paper while Anupam Baruah from Joi Prakash Janata Dal filed three nomination papers for the Nagaon parliamentary constituency. Including these, till date, five candidates have filed their nominations in the Nagaon LS seat for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls slated to be held in the second phase on April 26.

National School of Drama hosts book release HT Correspondent Nandi, chairman of Documentation Center of Sangeet

NAGAON, April 3: Two books penned and translated by Gourab Kumar Hazarika and Murchana Mahanta respectively were ceremonially released at the 'Diksharambh Parva' recently held at the National School of Drama, Theater in Education Wing, Tripura. Chittaranjan Tripathi, director of the National School of Drama, New Delhi, Dr Prasanna Gogoi, chairman of the North-East Zone Cultural Centre, Subrata Chakraborty, vice chairman of the Cultural Advisory Committee of the Tripura Government, Sarbani Natak Academy, Tripura, Biplob Borkakoti, director of National School of Drama, Theater in Education Wing, Tripura, theater personalities Manish Saini, Jyoti Narayan Nath, and many well-known theater activists were present at the ceremonial initiation. On the occasion, the new batch of National School of Drama, Theatre in Education Wing, were welcomed with the initiation ceremony. Over 20 trainees selected every year from all over India are given training in Theater in Education subject for one year as a residential course.

Field based training for forest staff on hoolock gibbon conservation concludes

GUWAHATI, April 3: The research-driven biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak successfully completed a week-long training program on hoolock gibbon conservation in Assam

The field-based training, which was initiated on March 28 at the Gibbon Conservation Centre of the Hoollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Jorhat, was organised in collaboration with the Jorhat Forest Division of Assam Forest Department, with support from The Habitats Trust, IUCN

SSC Primate Specialists Group, and IUCN Primate section of The objective of the training is to carry out research, training, and

conservation activities in northeast India for the conservation of the threatened hoolock gibbon. Notably, the western hoolock gibbon (hoolock hoolock) is the only ape of India. It is an endangered species and distributed in north-east

seven states of north-east India on the southern bank of the Dibang-Brahmaputra river system. This training course, which was organised for 30 forest guards, foresters, and range officers, was weeklong and residential. A wide range of related topics was covered, including biodiversity in north-east India and conservation, Primate Conservation in north-east India with special reference to hoolock gibbon, gibbon census or population estimation, gibbon data collection, maintaining & reporting, techniques of floristic study, gibbon habitat characteristic and restoration,

India only. Their distribution in India is limited to the

"Unfortunately, habitat fragmentation and hunting are the major threats to gibbons in India. Added to this situation is the lack of basic information and poor conservation awareness about the species in different sec-

population and habitat monitoring, gibbon rescue and

rehabilitation, global positioning system & use in the

field, and legal orientation (wildlife laws and its ap-

tions of the people including the frontline staff, which is yet another major hindrance in the conservation of the species," says conservation scientist in Aaranyak Dr Dilip Chetry.

"This course had provided participants with an initial understanding of the basic principles of primatology, experience with the methods and techniques used in field research. The course consists of daily lectures and field exercises," Dr Chetry added.

The training program was inaugurated by Nandha Kumar, IFS, divisional forest officer of Jorhat Forest Division. Dr Dilip Chetry, head of the Primate Research Conservation Division of

Aaranyak, made a request to the trainees to make use of this training to enhance their knowledge of the conservation of hoolock gibbon in particular and biodiversity in general. The inauguration session was also

addressed by Animesh Medhi, range officer of Mariani. During the training, Dr IC Baruah from Assam Agricultural University, Dr Prabal Sarkar from the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya, Ajoy Kumar Das, of Guwahati High Court, Gunin Saikia, former deputy conservator of Forest, Nandha Kumar, IFS, divisional forest officer, Jorhat Division, Animesh Medhi, forest range officer, Mariani Forest Range, Mridu Paban Phukan from Wildlife Conservation & Study Centre, and Aaranyak's Arup Kumar Das, Akshay Upadhyaya, Simanta Medhi, and Dr Dilip Chetry trained the forest officials.

On Tuesday, the convocation of the training was held. The chief guest of this occasion was Nandha Kumar, IFS, DFO, Jorhat Forest Division. Kumar thanked Aaranyak for conducting the training at a much-needed time. He also requested Aaranyak to assist Assam Forest Department in primate conservation initiatives through various measures. The training manuals, books, posters, certificates, and stickers and other study material were distributed among the

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER P.W.D. (B&NH) DIPHU BUILDING CIRCLE, DIPHU

No. SE(B)/CS/10/LSE/2024-25/03

Dated Diphu the 3rd April '2024

PRESS NOTICE

The Superintending Engineer, P.W.D, (B&NH) Diphu Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites bids from Govt. registered eligible Contractors having experience in similar nature of works for the following works.

Details of bid may be seen at e-procurement portal www.assamtenders.gov.in The bidders must be enrolled in www.assamtenders.gov.in

Name of Work SI. LSE Bid District Bid Comple Cost of Approx No Security value of tion Security Bid drawn in work (Bid Period (in Rs.) favour of value in Lakh) 2 % of Bid 14 Lok E.E, Karbi Rs. 2500 Construction of temporary Karbi Rs. 20 (twenty) Sabha 120.80879 value for sheds for materials distribution Anglong Anglong General & receipt cells, counters, Days Territorial category, reserve shed, dining hall, District transport cell, preparation of Building 1% of Bid counting hall, strong rooms, Division, value for Reserved sentry sheds, barricade, toilets Diphu. category and urinal etc. for Lok Sabha Election'2024 at ISBT, Chutianala in Karbi Anglong District.

Value of work may vary according to the detail NIT.

2. The Press Notice will form a part of the Bidding Document.

Sd/-Superintending Engineer, P.W.D. (B&NH), Diphu Building Circle, Diphu

No. SE(B)/CS/10/LSE/2024-25/03-A Dated Diphu the 3rd April '2024

THE HILLS TIMES

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Excellence is not a skill, it's an attitude.
- Ralph Marston

BJP targets key states

s the political landscape in India evolves, the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections in 2024 stand as a pivotal moment, shaping the trajectory of the nation's governance. With Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and West Bengal emerging as crucial battlegrounds, the stakes are high for all political stakeholders, particularly for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). A recent analysis sheds light on the BJP's digital political advertising strategy, pinpointing the top 10 states where the party is channeling significant resources. These states, collectively sending 328 Members of Parliament to the Lok Sabha, hold the key to the BJP's ambitions for a decisive victory in the upcoming elections. The BJP's dominance in these states, underscored by its impressive performance in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, is facing new challenges. Conflicting signals and shifting alliances have injected an element of uncertainty into the party's electoral calculations. While the BJP aims to replicate its past success, recent developments such as failed alliance attempts, allegations of corruption, and contentious seatsharing arrangements have complicated its path to victory.

The BJP's digital advertising expenditure reflects its strategic focus on these pivotal states, with Uttar Pradesh topping the list as the party's top priority. However, the emergence of alliances like the Congress-Samajwadi Party coalition poses a formidable challenge to the BJP's dominance in the state. Similar dynamics are at play in Odisha, where the BJP's hopes for an alliance with the Biju Janata Dal have been dashed, setting the stage for a fierce electoral contest. In Bihar, the BJP faces a resurgent opposition alliance, threatening its electoral fortunes in a state where it once enjoyed near-total dominance. Meanwhile, in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP's electoral prospects have been hampered by a decline in voter support, raising doubts about its ability to retain its stronghold. Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and West Bengal present a mix of challenges and opportunities for the BJP. From the emergence of new alliances to internal party dissent, each state presents unique hurdles that the BJP must navigate to secure victory. In states like Rajasthan and Haryana, where the BJP faces farmer discontent and opposition alliances gaining momentum, the road ahead is fraught with uncertainty. Similarly, in West Bengal, the BJP's ambitious plans are met with stiff resistance from the ruling Trinamool Congress, signaling a tough electoral battle ahead.

As the political landscape continues to evolve, the BJP's ability to adapt and strategize will be put to the test. With alliances shifting and voter sentiments in flux, the road to victory in 2024 is anything but certain for the ruling party. The BJP's focus on key states underscores the significance of these battlegrounds in shaping the outcome of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. However, with challenges aplenty and uncertainties abound, the path to victory for the BJP is riddled with obstacles that will require adept maneuvering and strategic acumen to overcome. As the countdown to the elections begins, all eyes will be on these pivotal states, where the future of Indian politics hangs in the balance. In states like Punjab, Karnataka, Assam, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, the BJP faces a mixed bag of challenges. From entrenched opposition strongholds to internal party dynamics, each state presents unique obstacles that the BJP must navigate to expand its electoral footprint and secure victory in the upcoming elections.

Fossil fuels soon to be outmatched by renewal energy sources



By: Er. RajeshPathak

Building up favourable atmosphere in the business world, the boom in the growth in the country's economy registered recently in the third quarter (Q3) of the financial year 2023 -24 with GDP of 8.4% has now even started yielding positive results. Long awaited deal of manufacturing Electrical vehicle (EV) by Tesla is going to get done, as new EV policy to engage it and such other had been announced. This step may make India an EV- hub of the world.

In this policy minimum 500 million dollars (about 4 thousand rupees) will have to be invested, while there is no restriction in upper limit. Along with that in the starting three years 25% of the total components to be required in the final product will have to be acquired from Indian companies as a domestic value addition; where after 5 years the limit will be increased to have been 50%, notably.

In view of our dependence on import to meet the requirement of natural gas and petrol the importance of this deal could be understood in better way. However, the availability of electricity could not be left being fulfilled shear depending upon the coal. As it has its limit as a reserve; and prevailing climatic compulsions! It is because of this we see the world's biggest solar-wind power plant being built up in Gujarat near the Pakistan border in as large as 72,600 hectares of land, or as vast as the country of Singapore.

At the end of this year 2024 it is expected to generate electricity for the country. The desert of Kachchh where it lies is marked by itstemperature kept soaring up

most of the time, with even the minimum temperature in winter being as high as 35 degree. And being open uninterrupted area, the wind also flows continuously with high velocity. It is therefore before startingup the process of its construction this place was selected in 2020.

Besides, this is near the industrial city Mundra where Adani's solar equipment manufacturing plant already exists to fulfilits required needs. Its installed capacity of power generation is reported to be 30,000 megawatt.

Today country's almost 70% of total electricity need is fulfilled through fossil fuel (coal and others). While the target is set to see sources of renewal energy being increased to have achieved 57% share of the total installed power generation capacity by 2027, downsizing that of the fossil fuel the fossil fuel thereof.

If we split the data into respective sources of renewal energy components the projected figures would get to be somewhere around 52,446 megawatt from large hydropower; 185, 566 MW, solar; 72, 895 MW, wind; 5,200 MW, small hydro; 13,000 MW, biomass. Whereas, that from coal the final figure after projected increment would get to be 235,133 MW; from gas and nuclear being 24,824 and 13,080 MW respective.

However this is not all. As for the components required in the erection of acomplete solar unit we have set to gradually build up our capacity to export them world over, either. America's move to impose ban over the import from the China has come as a shot in our arm, of course. Last year only we made the export of solar modules worth \$1,136 million to America.

BJP's electoral anxiety: Tactics, insecurities, and the pursuit of power

he evident lack of confidence within the Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is striking. Instead of displaying assurance in their position, the BJP appears to resort to tactics such as the arrest of prominent figures like Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, Bharat Rashtra Samithi's Kalvakuntla Kavitha, and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by agencies like the Enforcement Directorate or Central Bureau of Investigation in the lead-up to Parliamentary elections. The relentless targeting of opposition leaders carries a clear implication: Prime Minister Modi may lack confidence in securing a third consecutive term.

Despite public assertions from Modi and his allies about sweeping victories with 370 seats for the BJP and 400 for the NDA, doubts seem to plague their ranks. If their confidence were truly unwavering, why would the Modi administration persist in striving for opposition-free elections to secure BJP triumphs?

Modi's sharp intellect and unwavering realism define his leadership. He understands that electoral success isn't guaranteed for the BJP, and he doesn't rely solely on his charisma. While undoubtedly India's most prominent leader, he recognizes that personal appeal alone won't ensure victory for his party.

Modi understands that the electorate evaluates the government based on its performance. With unemployment reaching unprecedented levels and essential commodity prices skyrocketing, life has become increasingly difficult for many. The widening wealth gap exacerbates the situation, as the rich prosper while the poor struggle. Modi and his team are undoubtedly concerned about these factors as they assess the BJP's chances in the upcomelections, ing

contributing to their unease.

By: Dipak Kurmi

Such is the severity of the situation that the BJP is resorting to unconventional tactics for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, including fielding former chief ministers like Shivraj Singh Chouhan from Madhya Pradesh and Basavaraj Bommai from Karnataka. Additionally, senior leaders are tirelessly analyzing caste dynamics in each constituency, reflecting the party's deep concern and determination to secure favorable outcomes for their candidates.

The BJP's evident insecurity is highlighted by the Income Tax department's decision to reopen assessment proceedings against the Congress Party for accounts dating back to 1994-95. This move seems akin to exhuming long-buried corpses for postmortem examinations decades later. Interestingly, while Modi and other BJP leaders often accuse the Congress of corruption, the BJP itself has been seen embracing leaders with criminal records, raising questions about the party's stance on ethical governance. The recent inclusion of Janardhan Reddy, a figure with a staggering record of 20 police cases, including nine from the CBI for alleged forest and mining violations,

k Kurmi

Respectively.

Respectively

the BJP eight months prior,

added to the scrutiny.

Naveen Jindal, another Congress MP embroiled in the 'Coalgate' scandal, has also joined the BJP ranks, alongside his mother, Savitri Jindal. The trend prompts questions about the BJP's motives in embracing politicians from other parties entangled in significant corruption controversies. In the aftermath of Indira

Gandhi's assassination in 1984, the Congress party secured a historic victory, surpassing 400 seats in the Parliamentary elections. Since then, no other party or coalition has managed to achieve such a feat.

For three decades following 1984, no single party could muster enough seats to form a government independently. However, in 2014, the BJP broke this trend by winning 282 seats, capitalizing on the failures of the Congress and promising a new era of prosperity, termed "achchhe din" (good days).

Subsequently, in 2019, the BJP

further expanded its mandate to a remarkable 303 seats, leveraging the Pulwama attack to its advantage. Prior to the Pulwama tragedy, the BJP's electoral prospects seemed less certain. However, the event proved to be a turning point, reshaping the political landscape. Following the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the BJP anticipated a surge in support, hence proclaiming ambitious seat targets, signaling a triumph of Hindutva ideology over secular-liberal narratives. For a pragmatic party like the BJP, achieving a twothirds majority is a formidable task. The party recognizes the limited opportunities for further gains, particularly in North India where it has already made significant inroads. In states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Punjab, the BJP's organizational reach is constrained, making it challenging to expand its electoral footprint. Despite securing 25 out of 28 seats in Karnataka in 2019, the current political landscape, with Siddaramiah-Shivakumar's leadership, may lead to a decrease in BJP's seat count.

Similarly, despite BJP's presence in Maharashtra through alliances, the NDA is unlikely to replicate its 2019 success of 41 seats out of 48. Even with Nitish Kumar's return to the NDA fold in Bihar, the electoral outlook appears less promising compared to the previous elections when the NDA secured 39 out of 40 seats.

The BJP's current state of unease, marked by a crisis of confidence and acute insecurity, reflects the looming uncertainty as the decisive moment approaches. With the hour of reckoning drawing near, the party finds itself grappling with doubts and fears of losing its grip on power. In a desperate bid to cling to authority, the BJP is employing every available tactic, driven by a sense of panic and apprehension. (The writer can be reached

dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)

'Chirag': Bearer of immense possibilities of Bihar politics

By: Lalit Garg

hirag Paswan calls himself Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Hanu-'man.' During the electioneering, he is in the limelight in Bihar politics. By rapidly strengthening his political base through political acumen and effective strategy, 'Chirag' of Bihar politics is becoming a carrier of immense possibilities. Chirag Paswan is a capable public representative, as well as a symbol of original thinking and sensitivities. He has great experience at a young age in making a distinction between relevant and irrelevant by being microscopic, far-sighted and making his presence felt in Indian politics. The true representative of democracy is the one who strengthens the country along with strengthening his caste, class and society. Chirag, who is fighting the battle of 'Bihar First, Bihari First', is committed to connecting 14 crore Biharis with the mainstream of development.

It would be no surprise if the upcoming Lok Sabha elections-2024 brings forth Chirag's strong and hopeful political future, and leads him to the top of Bihar leadership. Such indications have already started emerging in Bihar politics. Recently, Vinod Tawde from the BJP headquarters made public his formula of seat sharing in the NDA alliance of Bihar, in which BJP got 17 seats, JDU 16 seats and Chirag Paswan led LJP (Ram Vilas) five seats. Whereas, the parties of Upendra Kushwaha and Jitan Ram Manjhi were given one seat each. A big picture of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's residence surfaced, in which Nitish is seen in a blessing posture with his hand on Chirag's

shoulder. A similar picture became popular earlier in which Prime Minister Narendra

Modi is also seen patting Chirag's back. Big things are often said about the participation of youth in Indian politics from every platform, but no party gives them a chance to lead, because in their eyes, youths are just vote-banks. Political parties keep using them for mobbing and trolling. However, Chirag broke this pattern, he had won Jamui parliamentary seat by more than 80,000 votes in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, and in a single parliamentary term, he won the trust of the public to such an extent that in the 2019 elections, Chirag got more than 5 lakh votes, achieving victory for the second consecutive term. Chirag, who has a charismatic personality, has claimed that NDA will get 40 out of 40 seats in Bihar in the upcoming elections.

However, there is no doubt about this claim, because in 2019 when there were 3 parties in NDA, 39 out of 40 seats were won, while currently there are 5 parties in NDA and the enthusiasm of the people shows that with 40 seats in Bihar, NDA is going to achieve the target of more than 400 seats in the entire country.

Chirag Paswan is the son of Ram Vilas Paswan, the top leader of Dalits in Bihar who garnered massive votes in Indian politics under the banner of Lok Janshakti Party (LJP). Chirag has created a buzz in highlighting the youth possibilities not only in the politics of Bihar, but also in the entire country. This is the voice that will give a new direction and vision to Indian politics, because of the policy of social upliftment. By running an NGO in the name of employment, he has made possible the political campaign to provide employment

to the youth of Bihar on a large scale. 'Chirag's employment' is the result of an original thinking and Chirag is emerging as a leader symbolizing an original thinking in Indian politics and originality is a strength in itself which is a present's over execution.

in itself, which is a person's own creation. The world salutes the one who dares to raise his head above the crowd, who makes his existence known. Originality is as valuable today as it always has been. If a person has got an original idea or program, the world moves aside to make way for him and allows him to move forward. The person who invents original ideas and new ways of working is the great creative power of the society and nation, otherwise the world is full of such ordinary people who want to follow behind, and want someone else to do the thinking for them.

If Chirag has thought something new for the young generation in Indian politics, has thought something original, then success is the dead cert. There is no doubt that with this thinking, he will prove capable of providing successful leadership by moving from state politics to central politics.

LJP is now completely in the hands of the youth. Chirag is young, capable, a strong speaker, a skilled organizer and manager, and he has proved his decisiveness along with these abilities on many occasions in the past. It has come to light on many occasions that he has come to understand very well the intricacies and equations of Bihar as well as central politics.

However, the biggest challenge before him will be to become the next flag bearer of Dalit politics and gain acceptance amongst his target voter group. Chirag is adept at drawing new lines, he will not just be a shadow of his father, but will set some new paradigms and create new definitions of politics; because they are adept at creating an environment of trust and confidence by creating harmony in adverse situations.

Finding a solution to widely prevalent despair amongst youths is a big challenge for an aspiring, strong and powerful nation. Chirag has experienced this situation; it is the result of his positive politics and humanitarian thinking. Chirag is a little different from other leader's sons in this matter, because his outlook and style appear to be future-oriented and evolutionary. This is why Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also deeply understood the political possibilities in Chirag. Despite all this, the question remains whether Chirag will be able to give a new dimension to his father's legacy of Dalit politics. Or will he show his ability in mainstream politics apart from this legacy? Chirag is an expert in understanding the nuances of politics.

In understanding the meteorology of politics, Chirag has well sensed Modi's storm; about which he is in no doubt. He also has strong acceptance among his voter group. In recent times, many leaders and sons of the new generation in Indian politics have not yet raised much hope. Be it Rahul Gandhi or Tejashwi Yadav, at present their political stars are rising and falling. At the same time, they are failing somewhere in maintaining continuity in their influence. Although Chirag does not own a huge political legacy in comparison to these names, yet he has proved his sense of belonging, the ability to do something unique and win the hearts of the people. (The author is a journalist, columnist can be reached lalitgarg11@gmail.com)

India partners SP and Congress preparing well to take on BJP in UP

By: Pradeep Kapoor

amajwadi Party and Congress are busy in setting up coordination committees from state level to booth level to take on BJP in crucial Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh. There has been a long meeting of senior leaders of Samajwadi Party with important leaders of the Congress. The latest status of the preparedness was reviewed and the measures to take on the BJP discussed.

Significantly enough Samajwadi Party called office-bearers from 17 Lok Sabha constituencies from where Congress candidates are contesting and got them introduced to senior leaders of Congress for better understanding. Samajwadi Party is contesting 63 seats leaving 17 to Congress. As a strategy Samajwadi Party is concentrating on five seats won in 2019 and another 31 seats where party was placed second. It would be worth mentioning here that during 2019 Lok Sabha polls, there was alliance between Samajwadi Party and RLD. Now RLD has joined NDA.

Samajwadi Party also suffered setback when Apna Dal (K) of Pallavi Patel parted company with Akhilesh Yadav and joined hands with Asaduddin Owaisi and announced alliance with AIMIM. Out of 31 Lok Sabha seats where Samajwadi Party was placed second, 11 are eastern UP, eight in Western UP, 10 in Central Region and two in Bundelkhand Samajwadi Party has organised training camps, cadre building small meetings with experts to educate about party's ideology, important issues and achievements of previous governments. A team of 10 new members is being

prepared for every booth.

Special focus has been given on sensitising backward communities about need for caste census and issues concerning dalits. Ambedkar Samajwadi teams are also touring these constituencies to win over the dalit voters.

Akhilesh Yadav is also playing soft Hin-

dutva card to win over upper caste voters by the construction of big temple of Lord Shiva in Itawah and regular visits to various temples. Samajwadi Party is maintaining PDA in ticket distribution. Out of 48 tickets declared so far Samajwadi Party has

lims and rest to upper castes.

Akhilesh Yadav is also banking on his family where Yadav and Muslims decide the fate of candidates. His wife Dimple is contesting from Mainpuri, Uncle Shivpal Yadav from Badaun, cousin brother Dhar-

given 24 to OBC, 14 to dalits, four to Mus-

mendra from Azamgarh and another cousin Akshay from Firozabad.

While the SP supremo has decided not to contest Lok Sabha polls, alliance partner Congress has fielded UPCC president Ajay Rai from Varanasi for third time to take on PM Narendra Modi.

There is a suspense about candidates from Amethi and Rae Bareli. People are wondering whether Priyanka Gandhi will contest from her mother's seat Rae Bareli or not. Mrs Sonia Gandhi who represented family seat for several terms is already in

Rajya Sabha due to health issues.

Congress Party is also emphasising on the training of youth and small meetings of experts with party workers to sensitise them on important issues to go to masses before polls in their areas. There is great consolidation of muslim community behind the alliance of Samajwadi Party and Congress. The three young leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and Akhilesh Yaday are effectively in communication to

take on the BJP in the state which sends 80

members to the Lok Sabha. (IPA Service)

POST BAG

Ladakh saga

Sir/Ma'am

The Ladakh region, renowned for its breathtaking beauty and strategic significance in Indian foreign policy, has undergone significant changes since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, which led to the establishment of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir as separate Union Territories.

The promise of the BJP led NDA government in the outset of 2019 LS polls granting Ladakh Sixth Schedule status under Article 244 of the Indian Constitution raised hopes among the local population for greater autonomy through the establishment of an Autonomous District Council (ADC).

The ADC would have authority over taxation and the implementation of laws pertaining to forest management and eco-centric issues, which will provide a mechanism to regulate activities like mining that threaten Ladakh's natural treasures and ecosystem.

The inadequacy of political representation, with only one Member of Parliament in the Lok Sabha and no representation in the Rajya Sabha, has long been a point of Disagreement for Ladakhis.

The recent event like Sonam Wangchuk's indefinite hunger strike ardently seeks Government's positive attitude towards the voices of Ladakhis and towards inclusive governance which will respect their unique identity and address their concerns about sustainable development and political representation.

Aditya Ankur Nath Tezpur, Assam adityaankur277@gmail.com

Regulate reused cooking oils

Sir/Ma'am

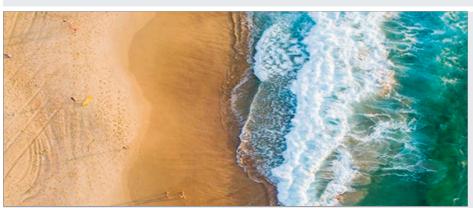
In commercial settings like restaurants, its common practice not to discard oil after a single use. Unfortunately, with deep frying, failure to regularly change the oil can lead to the generation of Trans fats through repeated reheating, potentially causing inflammation in the body as per health experts. Unhealthy oils can adversely affect mainly heightening the risk of cardiovascular diseases and type 2 diabetes.

Repeated heating of oil also leads to the accumulation of visible and invisible granules, altering the oil's composition and introducing neo-formed compounds (NFCs) over time. This process diminishes the oil's nutritional quality. FSSAI lacks regulations or definitions for reused cooking oils, often leading food safety officials to rely on visual cues such as colour or appearance. Therefore it's imperative for FSSAI to frame regulations for reused cooking oils.

Vijaykumar H K Raichur, Karnataka hkvkmech1@gmail.com THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2024

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How can climate resilience be 'inclusive' at the municipal level?



By: Deepti Talpade & Lubaina Rangwala

There are increasing social, economic, and political inequalities in Indian cities which lead to underserved populations getting pushed to city peripheries in environmentally degraded or hazardous areas. Multiple studies have proven that these areas are most vulnerable to climate disasters.

When climate actions are targeted in these locations, various challenges are faced on the ground. Through WRI India's engagement in select vulnerable neighbourhoods in Mumbai. it was realised that several gaps in the existing governance systems in such areas pose a major hurdle to inclusive climate actions.

Two of these locations were in the P/N and M/E wards of Mumbai, where an attempt was made to upgrade open spaces with naturebased solutions for climate adaptation. Both these wards have high-density populations, insecure tenures, and inadequate amenities, and are also most vulnerable to consistent climate disasters caused due to flood and heat risks.

The WRI India's project objective was to increase the green cover of dense residential settlements and integrate nature-based solutions to increase the resilience of these areas, build recreational spaces, and in the process create a road map for inclusive climate adaptation actions. It partnered with Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) as local partners active in the ward.

Their previous experience of working in the neighbourhoods helped leverage existing friendships with the communities to co-create a plan to address climate issues. Through workshops with community youth groups, society federations, co-operative societies, and women's organizations, WRI India was able to understand residents' needs and inadequacies in infrastructure services.

The common necessity that was highlighted was the need for a safe public space for recreational activities including playing, group studying, congregating, and walking amongst others.

Urban greening was identified as a strategy which resonated with the youth, through which they could claim the space[1] for recreational needs. The project involved working on six sites in R&R colonies, informal settlements, and municipal schools to transform underutilised, derelict areas into safe, vibrant, accessible, and shaded public spaces. There were challenges in addressing the existing lack of services such as water, drainage, solid waste management, footpaths, etc. in the

Apart from the lack of per capita open space provision in low-income areas which BMC attempts to acquire by implementing the Development Plan (DP) 2014-34, there are various on-ground upgradation initiatives by communities that are instrumental in upgrading

smaller plots and interstitial spaces that may not be captured in a DP. Supporting such initiatives can help strengthen community cohesion, create hierarchies of open spaces that are well-knit and ensure long-term climate re-

silience. The project involved working on six sites in R&R colonies, informal settlements, and municipal schools to transform underutilised, derelict areas into safe, vibrant, accessible,

and shaded public spaces. Following are some suggestions that municipal entities can play a key role in encouraging community-led open space upgradation projects at the local level, thereby increasing in-

1. Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) through a community cell: For the development of public open spaces, several departments can get involved at the ward-level such as gardens, stormwater drainage, solid waste management, sewerage operations, roads and traffic. These may also include education, or the health department based on the intent of

It would help to have a single window at the ward office and an SOP to guide community representatives in a stepwise manner to help them realise their vision. This community-facing cell, through the SOP, could guide community representatives in validating the plan, help in understanding which departments would be relevant to their project, answer FAQs, collaborate to oversee the progress and include contacts of resource persons.

2. Awareness and feedback drives: A platform to invite inputs from the larger neighbourhood needs to be organised before commencing the pre-conceptualisation stage of the public project. Depending upon the scale of the project, awareness of its initiation can be announced in the relevant catchment

For example, for a plot less than 500 square meters, a catchment of 500 mts around the plot can be targeted to spread awareness and invite suggestions. These could be communicated in the form of signages outside the plots, published on official websites and spread through local intel, giving contact details of project leads. This would help in gathering support and seeking opinions about the real-

istic needs of the neighbourhood. 3. Stakeholder workshops for conflict **resolution:** In-person stakeholder workshops with community members can be hosted by relevant municipal departments. For example, during the projects at P/N and M/E wards, the Garden department and Tree Authority hosted a couple of stakeholder workshops and consequent smaller meetings with community representatives, NGOs, design and biodiversity experts and other relevant departments to resolve challenges on ground. This helped garner confidence amongst the communities

in achieving success. 4. Formally appointing NGOs/CBOs as

community mobilisers: NGOs, community mobilisers, and expert negotiators need to be an integral part of carrying out public projects, to make sure that community concerns are raised and opportunities for decision-making are available at every stage of the project.

Often, after initial meetings with community members, projects are implemented without further community engagement during the execution stages. This distance, from vision to execution and project realization, creates a sense of doubt and in turn, causes detachment from the project. This can eventually lead to a lack of ownership and consequently affect long-term sustenance.

5. Participatory budget and funding: Ward-level participatory budgeting processes can be formally introduced to reflect on the priorities of community members through needs-based assessments. For example, adequate provision of recreational spaces may take precedence over road widening activities based on local needs and should therefore be reflected in that ward's budget.

Budget heads that are directed towards aiding maintenance and awareness can be appropriately used for low-income areas that need them the most. CSR funds or donations that are received by the municipal corporation can be pooled and channelised in prioritized loca-

A dashboard to transparently display these pledges can be created by the corporation, to ensure that the grant recipients are deserving

6. Inclusive tendering: Government tender documents for the development of large public plots, should be cognizant of local SMEs getting priority if they belong to the neighbourhood. Contractors that employ service staff like gardeners and gatekeepers, local artists and designers, and local labour should be given priority in the tendering process to encourage generating local livelihoods.

7. Representation of diverse individuals: It is important to identify whether the local community organisations are themselves inclusive, in terms of caste, class, religion, language, culture, colour, race, gender, age, and

A socially inclusive environment needs to be created right from the composition of the organisation, to creating equitable processes for active participation or feedback from diverse groups, across all phases (conceptual. preparatory, design, execution and continuous monitoring) of the project.

8. Monitoring impact due to inclusive processes: A monitoring and evaluation framework and system needs to be set up, with indicators in the SOP, to check the impact of the implementation of how successfully climate resilience is created through social cohesion and environmental enhance-

Achieving climate resilience through inclusive measures at the municipal level requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the social, economic and political inequalities prevalent in our cities. Climate adaptation in vulnerable areas underscores the importance of community engagement, local partnerships, and tailored strategies.

Enhancing green spaces, integrating naturebased solutions, and addressing infrastructure ment with inclusive tendering practices and robust monitoring mechanisms are essential to empower underserved populations. It can also aid in fostering climate actions that prioritise the needs of vulnerable communities and building resilient urban environments for

Wine production crossing the Channel & more: Study captures changing geography of vineyards due to climate change

limate change is transforming the geography of wine production. So, while you may have been accustomed to consuming the best vintages from Bordeaux, Alsace, Napa Valley or Stellenbosch, be ready to trade them for Kent, Kenya or the Pamirs & Himalayas in the future, says a new study.

The researchers, led by Cornelis van Leeuwen of the Uni-Bordeaux, de versité segmented each continent and its wine-producing areas into macro-regions defined by specific climate-driven conditions.

...we estimate a substantial risk of unsuitability (ranging from moderate to high) for 49-70 per cent of existing wine regions, contingent on the degree of global warming. Simultaneously, 11-25 per cent of existing wine regions might experience enhanced production with rising temperatures, and new suitable areas might emerge at higher latitudes and altitudes," van Leeuwen and others noted.

The assessments are based an exhaustive literature review and exhibit specific features

across continents. Currently, vineyards sprawl across most of the 'mid-latitudes', temperate zones extending from about 30 to 60 degrees north or south of the equator.

They include California, the richest US state; southern (Mediterranean) France; northern Spain and Italy (Po river valley); Barossa, Australia; Stellenbosch, South Africa; and Mendoza, Argentina, among others.

Here, the climate is warm enough to allow grape ripening, but without excessive heat, and relatively dry to avoid strong disease pressure. But the warming planet is changing all that.

Bye-bye Bordeaux and

Perhaps the greatest change is going to be in Europe, the primary producer of premium wine worldwide.

The world's second-smallest continent is warming rapidly. A recent study by the European Environment Agency (EEA) noted that Europe is the fastest warming continent in the

The European part of the Mediterranean littoral is going to be particularly impacted by global warming. "In southern annua and summer rainfall are projected to decrease, whereas aridity, droughts and fire hazards are all likely to increase." the EEA study pointed out.

All this will impact wine production.

"Under low levels of global warming (<2°C), most traditional wine-producing regions will maintain suitability, albeit contingent on the implementation of adaptation measures, notably in southern Europe," said the study.

Rising temperatures and reduced rainfall will induce severe risk of drought over south Iberia, Mediterranean France and Spain, the Po Valley, coastal Italy, the Balkan Peninsula and the southwestern Black Sea regions.

However, a severe warming scenario could spell disaster for the region's wine industry. According to the study, most Mediterranean regions could become climatically unsuitable for wine production in such conditions.

"...vineyards below 45°N might be so challenged that the only feasible adaptation would be to relocate to higher altitudes," it warned.

Ninety per cent of southern Europe's traditional wine regions situated in the lowlands and coastal regions of Spain, Italy and Greece could be at risk of disappearing by the end of the century. The study calculated that only a minor portion of this loss (less than 20 per cent) could be potentially compensated for by shifting vineyards towards mountainous areas, considering elevations of up to 1,000 m.

But even as traditional wine regions may suffer, some may benefit. These include Galicia on Spain's 'green coast' on the Atlantic as well as the northern Balkans.

Meanwhile, "new wine regions are expected to expand northward, notably along the Atlantic sector".

The biggest beneficiary of this could be the United Kingdom. "Vineyard area in the United Kingdom has expanded approximately 400 per cent between 2004 and 2021, and studies predict emerging viticultural suitability across large portions of the country," the study stated.

Wine production would be coming back to Britain after millennia. It existed in Roman Britain, according to the researchers since "climate conditions in the Northern Hemisphere were almost as warm as 1960-1990".

Viticulture disappeared from the island in the 1500s as imports from abroad increased as well as persistent cold conditions due to the so-called Little

Other continents The scenario is not good for traditional wine regions on other continents as well.

In North America, California – home to Napa Valley – will take a hit.

Coastal California's winemakers "will face increasing risks of drought, heatwaves and wildfires, necessitating the proactive adoption of adaptation measures. If global warming exceeds 2°C, coastal California will transition to a very warm and arid climate for viticulture, probably resulting in a decline in wine quality and economic sustainability". The same is predicted for inland and southern California.

"Overall, the net suitable area for wine production in California could decline by up to 50 per cent by the end of the twenty-first century," the research said.

Vineyards in Mexico, the US Southwest and the US east coast south of New Jersey also face similar risk.

Meanwhile, like in Europe, vineyards will shift northwards to New British Columbia, Washington State, Oregon on the west coast and the Great Lakes region and New Eng-

land on the east coast. In South America, wine production may shift to higher slopes of the Andes range under a severe warming scenario. This will include the Argentinian section of Patagonia as well as the Ecuadorian and Colombian Andes.

The study also estimated the risk to traditional wine regions in the extreme north and south of Africa.

The researchers noted that the scientific literature on future wine production South Africa, where the wine industry is a legacy of French Huguenot settlers, is "limited, resulting in a low-confidence assessment of a moderate risk of suitability loss in both the more productive western region and the eastern region".

For the North Africa section of the Mediterranean littoral (the Maghreb), the researchers predicted "a moderate-to-high risk of suitability loss".

Future wine production in the Maghreb could shift to higher altitudes like the Atlas Mountains.

"Potential emerging wine regions in Africa include the highlands of Kenya and notably the highlands of Ethiopia, where the wine industry is in its early stage of development," the study noted. In Asia, eastern Anatolia (Asiatic Turkiye) and the Pamir-Himalayan Mountains show potential for future wine production, according to the study.

One thing is certain: climate change will drive major changes in global wine production in the near future. Having the flexibility to adapt to these changes will be essential,' concluded the researchers. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Discovering a new - and at risk - endemic plant species in Bengaluru

By: Sharmila Vaidyanathan

t first glance, Dr M. Sanjappa knew that there was something different about the plant in front of him.

Earlier in the day, Dr N. Dhatchanamoorthy from the Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) chanced upon a leguminous plant species while surveying the scrub forest areas near Hesaraghatta, Bengaluru. He decided to consult Sanjappa, Indian National Science Academy Honorary Scientist, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK (Gandhi Krishi Vigyana Kendra), who has a keen interest in leguminous plants and has been studying them for decades.

The scientists knew that the specimen represented the Teramnus genus but were debating which of the eight known species under this group it belonged to.

'A characteristic of this genus is that the fruit has a hook-like structure, and when I saw that, I knew that we needed to collect more specimens to look into the details of the flowers, fruits and seeds, which will aid in con-

firming its identity," Sanjappa says. Along with Dr A.N. Sringeswara. curator, Mahatma Gandhi Botanical Garden, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, the researchers returned to where the specimen was col-

lected the previous day. To their dismay, they found the patch of land, close to a residential community, completely cleared out. On inspecting the surrounding area, they encountered the plant in plenty and managed to collect samples for their identification.

Comparing every part of the plant to existing records, the team realised they were in the presence of one that had never been described before — a new leguminous species which they

C. Kameswara Rao, former chairman of the botany department at Bangalore

Teramnus kameswararaoi's existence is restricted to the Hesaraghatta village in Bengaluru, making it an endemic species, one that has a limited geographic range. In the article outlining this discovery, the researchers name urbanisation as a 'looming large' threat to the species owing to the plant's presence close to residential and industrial areas. Immediately after its discovery, T. kameswararaoi's fate hangs in the balance, much like the teeming biodiversity of developing

Endemic species are everywhere

The term endemic often conjures up images of a plant or animal shrouded in the mystery of the Western Ghats or high up amidst the Himalayan abodes. just like Teramnus kameswararaoi, endemic flora and

fauna are present all around us. In 2023, researchers discovered a new gecko species in the Vairengte town of Mizoram. Named Cyrtodactylus vairengtensis after the place of discovery, the gecko was found to be

endemic to the state. Similarly, while studying the floral diversity along the banks of the Mutha River that runs through the city of Pune, researchers found the region playing host to eight previously described endemic plants.

In fact, in 2022, Sanjappa also coauthored another study where they discovered a tree species endemic to Karnataka. They first spotted the tree in a sacred grove opposite a bus station in Agumbe village, Shivamogga

While these discoveries make us look at the verdure around us with a renewed fascination, they add another laver of discussion to conserving biodiversity in and around human-domi-

named Teramnus kameswararaoi after anated spaces. Considering the fact that the need for such spaces is increasing exponentially, it does become imperative to understand the role of endemism in a rapidly changing landscape.

The United Nations Habitat's World Cities Report 2022 — Envisaging the Future of Cities states that India's urban population will reach about 675 million by 2035. How can we account for expansion that is mindful of a region's biodiversity so plants like T. kameswararaoi are not wiped out even before we learn of their existence? Understanding endemism and its

impacts on conservation In 2022, a group of researchers from India tested the claim that savannah landscapes in the country lack the presence of endemic plants, thereby making these ecosystems a lower priority from a conservation standpoint.

Combing through decades of national, regional and local taxonomic descriptions, the team documented the presence of 206 endemic flora in these grassy biomes, of which 43% were described only in the last two decades.

Lead author Dr Ashish Nerlekar of Michigan State University explains that while there is a greater appreciation for endemics in forested ecosystems compared to others, endemism is not the only benchmark to value a

'We have to keep in mind that people change environments and environments change people. This dynamic view of nature across time needs to be accepted," says Nerlekar.

"If you look at old pictures of cities like Delhi, Bangalore, Pune, and parts of Tamil Nadu, you will see that even a couple of centuries ago, these were savannah landscapes. People added a lot of the green cover because of its tangible benefits," he adds.

Highlighting how this evolution is ongoing, Nerlekar states that a unidimensional approach to conservation based on the presence of endemics is a flawed one.

"This is the approach we took about 50 years ago when resources and ecosystem knowledge were limited. But now we know that ecosystems can be of value for various reasons being an important landscape for the pastoralist communities, for migrant birds, providing carbon storage or simply because it is a region where we find several common, old trees. Endemism can be clubbed with these factors to provide a fitting canvas for conservation," he adds.

Protecting urban biodiversity

Referring to recent endemic discoveries across cities in India, Nerlekar adds that these are just the tip of the iceberg. "From reptiles to insects and more plants, several species remain to be discovered.

Our study shows that it's only been 20 years since most of the endemic plants have been described, which means we can expect to add 100-200 new ones in the coming decades," he

While it is exciting to await these discoveries, it looks like we have placed ourselves in a catch-22 situation with several species going extinct even before their names are registered in our records.

In 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) published a Global Assessment Report that underscored the unprecedented decline in biodiversity, 'faster than at any time in human history'.

According to the report, within decades, many of the 1 million species that face extinction will disappear from the planet. The report also highlights that human-led activities are significantly impacting local biodiversity, leading to a loss of endemic

"We don't even know what we are losing to begin with," says Seema Mundoli, faculty at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, pointing at the lack of baseline data for urban ecology.

The author of Cities and Canopies: Trees in Indian Cities and Shades Of Blue: Connecting the Drops in India's Cities, Mundoli is deeply interested in understanding the socio-ecological impacts of urban commons (collectively managed public spaces and resources) and the ramifications of development on urban green areas.

"Let's face the fact that urbanisation is inevitable. The bigger question is how do we choose places that are nogo areas? Do we always wait to discover an endemic species to say that this area is off-limits for development? That wouldn't be feasible," she

Adding to Nerlekar's argument that endemism cannot be the only consideration. Mundoli shares that a more pragmatic approach to protecting natural environments in developing cities is to secure biodiversity-rich green areas with multiple uses for people to engage with these spaces.

For example, in 2022, Mundoli and other faculty members at Azim Premji University published a book called Chasing Soppu, highlighting the importance of urban foraging, where people gather edible plants from public and private green spaces in cities.

Both Nerlekar and Mundoli add that emphasising the presence of endemic species is a great way to introduce people to a landscape and encourage dialogues about its conservation. Still, the overall goal must be to protect the biodiversity of a given place as a

"Urbanisation presents a tricky situation and has complicated impacts on its surrounding nature. In some cases, the presence of endemics depends on human interactions," explains Ner-

In one study on the conservation of Indian Peninsular Wolves (Canis lupus pallipes), which are endemic to the subcontinent, the researchers found that while the wolves avoided areas with high human densities, they did frequent places where livestock husbandry was practiced.

Nerlerkar explains that understanding these dynamics will aid in devising better conservation measures.

But as urbanisation moves towards the peri-urban areas and smaller towns, starting these conversations early on will be crucial in mindful development, savs Mundoli.

"Our biggest challenge now is talking to people who make decisions on urban planning. Also, how do we reconnect children and adults with the natural world and protect the existing green spaces in our cities?" she questions. Looks like one way to set context is to share details about plants or animals found only in that state or re-

gion and nowhere else. Meanwhile Sanjappa and his team continue to unearth new species, a task that is easier said than done. With the aforementioned tree they discovered in Agumbe, the team had to wait for four years to collect its fruits, making it possible to distinguish it from other

known candidates. "There are several examples of endemic species in cities, but we need sufficient funds and resources for extensive surveys and to understand their range. Additionally, there is a dearth of taxonomists who can identify such flora and fauna, which is why capacity building is vital for future

discoveries," says Sanjappa. Amidst frogs that don't cross state lines and trees that overlook the frenzy of human commute, endemic species bring greater reverence for the biodiversity that envelops us. (Courtesy: The Wire)

THE HILLS TIMES

The quake and aftershocks also caused 24 landslides and damage to 35 roads, bridges and tunnels

Taiwan's strongest earthquake in nearly 25 years damages buildings, leaving 7 dead

TAIPEI, April 3: Taiwan's strongest earthquake in a quarter century rocked the island during the morning rush hour Wednesday, damaging buildings and highways and leaving seven people dead.

In the capital, Taipei, tiles fell from older buildings as the earthquake shook the city, and schools evacuated their students to sports fields, equipping them with yellow safety helmets. Some children covered themselves with textbooks to guard against falling objects as aftershocks continued. Afterward, a five-story building in Hualien County, near the offshore epicenter, was left leaning at a 45-degree angle, with its first floor collapsed.

Taiwan's national fire agency said seven people died in the quake, which struck just before 8 a.m. The local United Daily News reported three hikers died in rockslides in Taroko National Park and a van driver died in the same area after boulders hit the vehicle.

Government statistics showed 736 people were injured and 77 stranded. The quake and aftershocks also caused 24 landslides and damage to 35 roads, bridges and tunnels

Authorities said they had expected a relatively mild quake of magnitude 4 and accordingly did not send out alerts. Still, the earthquake was strong enough to scare

"Earthquakes are a common occurrence, and I've grown accustomed to them. But today was the first time I was scared to tears by an earthquake," said Hsien-hsuen Keng, a resident who lives in a fifth-floor apartment in Taipei. "I was awakened by the earthquake. I had never felt such intense shaking

Television images showed neighbors and rescue workers lifting residents, including a toddler, through windows and onto the street. All appeared mobile, in shock but without serious injuries. Doors had been fused shut by the pressure of the

The national legislature, a converted school built before World War II, and sections of the main airport in Taoyuan, just south of Taipei, also saw minor damage.

Traffic along the east coast was at a virtual standstill after the earthquake, with landslides and falling debris hitting tunnels and highways in the mountainous region. Train service was suspended across the island of 23 million people, as was subway service in the capital, Taipei, where a newly constructed above-ground line partially sepa-

Japan Meteorological The Agency said a tsunami wave of 30 centimeters (about 1 foot) was detected on the coast of Yonaguni is-



land about 15 minutes after the quake struck. Smaller waves were measured in Ishigaki and Miyako

The earthquake was felt in Shanghai and several provinces along China's southeastern coast, according to Chinese media. China and Taiwan are about 160 kilometers (100 miles) apart. China issued no tsunami warnings for the Chinese mainland and all such alerts in the region had been lifted by Wednesday afternoon.

The initial panic after the earthquake quickly faded on the island, which is regularly rocked by temblors and prepares for them with drills at schools and notices issued via public media and mobile phone.

By noon, the metro station in the busy northern Taipei suburb of Beitou was again buzzing with people commuting to jobs and seniors arriving to visit the hot springs or travel the mountain paths at the

base of an extinct volcano. Stephen Gao, a seismologist and

professor at Missouri University of Science and Technology, said Taiwan's earthquake preparedness is among the most advanced in the world, featuring strict building codes, a world-class seismological network, and widespread public education campaigns on earthquake

Hualien was last struck by a deadly quake in 2018 that collapsed a historic hotel and other buildings. Taiwan's worst quake in recent years struck on Sept. 21, 1999, with a magnitude of 7.7, causing 2,400 deaths, injuring around 100,000 and destroying thousands of build-

Taiwan lies along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," the line of seismic faults encircling the Pacific Ocean where most of the world's earthquakes occur.

People evacuate to higher ground

after a tsunami warning following a powerful earthquake in Naha, Okinawa prefecture, Japan, Wednesday, April 3, 2024. A powerful earthquake rocked the entire island of Taiwan early Wednesday, collapsing buildings in a southern city and creating a tsunami that washed ashore on southern Japanese islands.(Kyodo News via AP)

People evacuate to higher ground after a tsunami warning following a powerful earthquake in Naha, Okinawa prefecture, Japan, April 3, 2024. (Kyodo News via AP)

The economic fallout from the quake has yet to be calculated, but Taiwan is the leading manufacturer of the world's most sophisticated computer chips and other hightechnology items that are highly sensitive to seismic events. Parts of the electricity grid were also shut down, possibly leading to disruptions in the supply chain and financial losses.

Taiwanese chipmaker TSMC, which supplies semiconductors to companies such as Apple, said it evacuated employees from some of its factories in Hsinchu, southwest of Taipei. Hsinchu authorities said water and electricity supplies for all the factories in the city's science park were functioning as normal.

The Taiwan stock exchange opened as usual on Wednesday, with the index wavering between losses and gains. (AP)

Ukraine lowers its conscription age to 25 to plug a shortfall in troop numbers fighting Russia

Wednesday lowered the military conscription age from 27 to 25 in an effort to replenish its depleted ranks after more than two years of war following Russia's fullscale invasion.

The new mobilisation law came into force a day after Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed it. Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, passed it last year.

It was not immediately clear why Zelenskyy took so long to sign the measure into law. He didn't make any public comment about it, and officials did not say how many new soldiers the country expected to gain or for which

Conscription has been a sensitive matter in Ukraine for many months amid a growing shortage of infantry on top of a severe ammunition shortfall that has handed Russia the battlefield ini-

Russia's own problems with manpower and planning have so far prevented it from taking full advantage of its edge.

The average age of Ukrainian soldiers, like those on the Russian side, is around 40, military analysts say. Some Ukrainians worry that taking young adults out of the workforce will backfire by further harming the war-ravaged economy, but the problem reportedly has become acute as Kyiv girds for an expected summer of-

fensive by the Kremlin's forces. Zelenskyy has rarely mentioned the mobilisation issue, and parliament has held long and inconclusive debates about it in recent months.

Last December, Zelenskyy said Ukraine's military wanted to mobilise up to 500,000 more troops. But he said he had asked the top brass to spell out the details on what is "a very sensitive matter" before deciding whether to grant their wish.

Such a major mobilisation would cost Ukraine the equivalent of USD 13.4 billion, Zelenskyy said at the time. Other aspects to be considered include whether troops currently on the front would be rotated or allowed home leave, he said.

The need for a broad mobilisation to beef up the number of Ukrainian troops reportedly was one of the areas of disagreement between Zelenskyy and Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the popular commander in chief of Ukraine's armed forces whom the president replaced in February.

Ukrainian Defence Ministry statistics say the Ukrainian military had nearly 800,000 troops in October. That doesn't include National Guard or other units. In total, 1 million Ukrainians are in

Biden and Trump win presidential Indonesian prez-elect vows to primaries in four more states

WASHINGTON, April 3: US President Joe Biden and his Republican rival and predecessor Donald Trump have easily won their presidential primaries in four more states as they are set for a 2020 rematch in November.

On Tuesday, hundreds of delegates were up for grabs in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and the crucial battleground state of Wisconsin.

Multiple names remained on the presidential ballots in the four states, though neither Trump, 77, nor Biden, 81, faced any major challenger.

In all the four states where the primaries were held on Tuesday, Trump bagged more than 75 per cent of the votes, while Biden, a Democrat, received more than 80 per cent of the votes. Trump with four wins now has 1,860

delegates. Biden has so far won 3,030 delegates as against the minimum requirement of 1,968 delegates. Biden and Trump have already

amassed enough delegates to win their respective nominations. But the turnout could provide more clues about the elec-

Their rematch is expected to mirror the 2020 campaign, though Trump will run this time under the spectre of 91 felony charges.

Their nominations will be confirmed at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee in July and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August.

Connecticut and Rhode Island al-

the primary, while Wisconsin offered a similar option of "uninstructed delega-

There was an effort in Wisconsin on Tuesday by anti-Biden protesters to encourage people in the Democratic primary to pick the "uninstructed" option in opposition to Biden's policies on the Israel-Hamas war.

Pressure has been growing on Biden especially, to push harder for a ceasefire in Gaza, with some states, including Michigan, fostering similar campaigns for residents to submit "uncommitted votes" for the president

These victories offer insights into base voter enthusiasm for the upcoming 2020 rematch, particularly in Wisconsin, a crucial November battleground.

Biden and the Democratic National Committee have outpaced Trump and the Republicans in fundraising. Biden claimed the largest single-event fundraising record last week when he received USD 26 million at a star-studded New York event. Trump hopes to bring in USD 33 million at a Palm Beach, Florida fundraiser.

Meanwhile, CNN reported that Democrats have been growing increasingly anxious about public polls showing Trump making unprecedented inroads among Black and Hispanic voters.

"But there may be reasons for Republicans to feel uneasy about these polls too," it said, adding that surveys now consistently show Trump leading President Joe Biden nationally and in almost all of the key swing states. (PTI)

further strengthen ties with Japan after visiting China

TOKYO, April 3: Indonesian President-elect Prabowo Subianto said he wants to "further strengthen" relations with Japan as he met with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Wednesday on the heels of a visit to China.

Subianto, who's currently defence minister, told Kishida that the two countries are longtime friends who have built a cooperative relationship, and that he hoped to further strengthen the relationship.

Japan has been seeking closer ties with Southeast Asian countries, especially in maritime security and defence, in the face of China's increasingly assertive military pres-

Subianto, who will succeed Joko Widodo in October, chose Beijing for his first official overseas trip after his February election victory in a bid to emphasise steady ties with China amid rising tensions in the South China Sea, where China and the Philippines have had repeated high-seas confrontations. In his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Subianto pledged a continued friendly policy toward

China is Indonesia's largest trading partner, with Beijing investing in major infrastructure projects, and Indonesia has maintained a relatively neutral stance amid rising tensions between China and the Philippines over rival territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Kishida welcomed Subjanto's early visit to Tokyo, telling his future counterpart that the gional and global issues as "comprehensive and strategic partners".

Kishida said Japan hopes to contribute to Indonesia's development in areas including infrastructure and energy, while stepping up cooperation in security and defense.

Kishida's meeting with Subianto comes just a week before the Japanese leader will travel to Washington for a summit with US President Joe Biden, and three-way talks that will also include Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., at which the leaders are expected to discuss further reinforcing security ties.

Later Wednesday, Subianto held talks with Japanese Defence Minister Minoru Kihara. The two ministers vowed to enhance defence cooperation, the Japanese Defence Ministry said in

North Korea says it tested new solid-fuel intermediate-range missile with hypersonic warhead

SEOUL, April 3: North Korea said Wednesday it tested a new hypersonic intermediate-range missile powered with solid propellants, extending a run in weapons demonstrations that's deepening a nuclear standoff with neighbours and the United States.

With the supposed success of the test, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared his country had acquired the ability to build solid-fuel, nuclear-capable systems for missiles of all ranges as he pursues an arsenal that could viably threaten rivals in Asia and the United States.

The report by North Korean state media came a day after the South Korean and Japanese militaries detected the North launching a missile from near its capital toward its eastern sea.

North Korean state media said the test was supervised by Kim, who described the Hwasong-16B missile as a key piece of his nuclear war deterrent he vowed to further build up to counter his "enemies," a reference to the United States, South Korea and

Kim said the North has now developed nuclear-capable, solid-fuel systems for "all the tactical, operational and strategic missiles with various ranges," the Korean Central News Agency said.

In recent years, North Korea has been focusing on developing more weapons with built-in solid propellants. Those



weapons are easier to move and hide and can be made to launch quicker than liquidpropellant missiles, which need to be fuelled before launch and cannot stay fuelled for long periods of time.

North Korea last year tested a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile for the first time, adding to its arsenal of longrange weapons targeting the US mainland. The country also has an extensive lineup of short-range and mid-range solid-fuel missiles that can be fired from land vehicles, ships and submarines and are potentially capable of reaching targets throughout South Korea and Japan.

The North in recent months demonstrated some of these missiles in drills it described as simulated nuclear strikes while issuing provocative threats of nuclear conflict.

The North has since 2021 also been testing hypersonic weapons designed to exceed five times the speed of sound. If

perfected, such systems could potentially pose a challenge to regional missile defence systems because of their speed and maneuverability. However, it's unclear whether the North's hypersonic vehicles consistently maintained a desired speed exceeding Mach 5 during tests in 2021 and

During Tuesday's test, the missile's hypersonic glide warhead after being separated from the launch rocket reached a peak altitude of 101 km (62 miles) and flew about 1,000 km (621 miles) while performing various flight maneuvers before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, the KCNA said.

The South Korean and Japanese militaries had assessed that the missile flew around 600 (372 miles) although Japan's Defence Ministry announced a similar apogee with the North Korean report.

The North had also tested a purported hypersonic IRBM in January, which came years after it flight-tested liquid-fuel IRBMs. Experts say such weapons if perfected is potentially capable of reaching remote US targets in the Pacific, including the military hub of Guam.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. said the missile tested on Tuesday was likely different from the system tested in January, which state media didn't name but would likely be the Hwasong-16A. (AP)

Fire at Istanbul nightclub that was being renovated kills 29 people two countries are longtime friends that share basic values and principles, and that Japan side of the city bisected by the closed for the holy Muslim ISTANBUL, April 3: A fire enon a stretcher toward an ambuhoped to further strengthen cooperation in re-

gulfed an Istanbul nightclub on Tuesday during renovations, trapping workers and employees inside and killing at least 29 people, officials and reports said. Several people, including managers of the club, were detained for questioning.

One person was being treated at a hospital with serious injuries, the Istanbul governor's office said in a statement.

The Masquerade nightclub, which was closed for renovations, was located on the ground and basement floors of a 16story residential building in the Besiktas district on the European

Bosphorus Strait.

The fire reached the third floor of the building before it was extinguished, video footage of the blaze showed. Gov. Davut Gul told reporters

at the scene that the cause of the fire was under investigation and that the victims were believed to be people involved in the renovation work. The private DHA news agency identified one of the victims as a nightclub employee. Video from the scene showed flames billowing from the side of the building, firefighters dousing an entrance to the

lance. Several firefighting trucks were called to the scene.

Private NTV said some of the victims died in hospital after being pulled out of the blaze. Authorities detained eight

people for questioning, including managers of the club and one person in charge of the renovations, Gul's office said. A club official could not be reached for comment. The government appointed three prosecutors and several investigators to probe the

The nightclub — which had a capacity to host up 4,000 guests, according to its website — was

month of Ramadan. Its owners were trying to complete the renovation work in time for next week's Eid holiday, which fol-

lows the month of fasting. "See you on April 10," the club said in message posted on its website. Police sealed off the area while power and natural gas to the neighborhood was cut off as a safety precaution. Residents were safely evacuated from the building. Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, who

was reelected in local elections on Sunday, said authorities were inspecting the entire building to

Akshaya Patra's four billionth meal milestone celebrated at the UN

The historic milestone achieved by the Akshaya Patra Foundation of serving four billion meals was celebrated at the United Nations headquarters, with the commemoration highlighting India's proactive measures to ensure

food security and offering a tem-

plate to other nations for impact-

ful action.

UNITED NATIONS, April 3:

The Permanent Mission of India to the UN hosted a special event - 'Achievements in Food Security: India's Strides Towards Sustainable Development Goals' - on Tuesday, showcasing the country's innovative strategies, policies and achievements in food security and nutrition and their alignment with SDGs, par-

ticularly the target of zero hunger. The event, attended by Infosys founder N.R. Narayana Murthy, Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi and chairman of The Akshaya Patra Foundation Madhu Pandit Dasa, commemorated the milestone four billionth meal served by the Indian NGO.

In a message sent especially for the occasion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated with "immense pride and joy" the entire team of The Akshaya Patra Foundation on the "remarkable milestone" of serving four billion "This achievement

stands as a testament to an unwavering commitment to eradicate hunger and provide nourishment to humanity. The significance of this milestone is further highlighted

by serving the meal at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, showcasing a passion for global wellbeing," Modi said in the message that was read out by India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboi.

Modi said Akshaya Patra has served meals to countless children, ensuring that the "makers of the world's future are well nourished". He also recalled the occasion when he had served the three billionth meal at Vrindavan in February 2019. The Indian mission said in a concept note that with a population of

> India's efforts in ensuring food security have fareaching implications and serve as a model for other nations striving to combat food insecurity

over 1.4 billion,

In his keynote address. Satyarthi told the gathering that commemorating the milestone of four billion meals at the UN headquarters is "very significant" and sends a "very strong message" since this is the "place that represents the hopes and inspira-

of the international community towards making commendable progress in achieving the 2030 development goals. "If we fail SDGs, we fail the future," he said."In this situation of sometimes despair and hopelessness, we always need success stories. We need a ray of hope and today through the Government of India

Satyarthi lamented the failure

able to give this hope to the world that India is not just a land of several problems, it is the mother of over a billion solutions," the Nobel Peace Prize laureate said.

and Akshaya Patra's effort, we are

Commending the foundation's efforts, Satyarthi said that serving four billion meals is "not a joke".

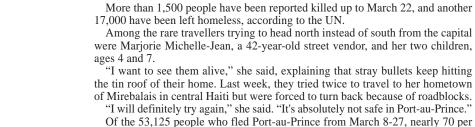
Lamenting the shrinking moral compass globally, Satyarthi said this is the time to globalise compassion. "India will lead the globalisation of compassion. If India cannot lead the globalisation of compassion, no one can lead," he said. Murthy appealed to leaders

of other countries at the UN to emulate the Akshaya Patra model and "bring joy, health, confidence, hope and success to poor children in their own countries".

Lauding the work done by the foundation, Murthy said that Akshaya Patra raises "our confidence that good things can indeed happen in India".

Murthy emphasised that India has been making good economic progress due to the success of the government's economic policies, vision and hard work of Indian entrepreneurs and citizens as well as the foreign direct investment from multinationals.

He noted that the Government of India runs the world's largest food security programme, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), which benefits over 800 million people. As part of it, the school feeding program PM POSHAN (Poshan Shakti Nirman) scheme directly benefits over 118 million chil-



spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

more than 4,000 inmates.

or in crowded and unsanitary makeshift shelters across the capital, the UN found. More than 90 per cent of Haitians leaving the capital have been crowding into buses, risking travel through gang-controlled territory where gang rapes have been reported and gunmen have been known to open fire on public transport. The violence forced Prime Minister Ariel Henry to announce last month that he would resign once a transitional presidential council is created. Henry was in

cent already had been forced to abandon their homes and were living with relatives

Haiti's surge in gang violence has

led more than 53,000 to flee the

capital in less than three weeks

PORT-AU-PRINCE, April 3: More than 53,000 people have fled Haiti's capital

in less than three weeks, the vast majority to escape unrelenting gang violence,

More than 60 per cent are headed to Haiti's rural southern region, which worries

"Our humanitarian colleagues emphasised that these departments do not have

sufficient infrastructure, and host communities do not have sufficient resources,

to cope with the large number of people fleeing Port-au-Prince," said UN

left Port-au-Prince, according to the report by the UN's International Organisation The exodus from the capital of some 3 million people began shortly after pow-

erful gangs launched a series of attacks on government institutions at the end of

February. Gunmen have burned police stations, opened fire on the main interna-

tional airport that remains closed and stormed Haiti's two biggest prisons, releasing

The southern region already hosts more than 116,000 Haitians who previously

according to a United Nations report released Tuesday.

Kenya to push for the UN-backed deployment of a police force from the East African country when the attacks began, and he remains locked out of Haiti. The transitional council, which will be responsible for choosing a new prime minister and council of ministers, has yet to be formally established.

Meanwhile, the mass migration from Port-au-Prince is expected to continue. But Gary Dorval, 29, who was among a handful of people joining a demonstration on Tuesday, said he wants to stay until a new government is installed: "I want to be part of the change." (AP)

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THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2024

BJP seeks to make footprint in Sikkim ruled largely by regional parties BJP to go solo in Sikkim Assembly polls after severing ties with SKM

GANGTOK, April 3: The BJP is trying to make a footprint in Sikkim by riding on the wave of nationalism and welfare measures in the Himalayan state, which has been ruled largely by regional parties since its merger with India five decades ago.

The saffron party decided to go alone in the Sikkim Assembly polls after severing its alliance with the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) led by chief minister Prem Singh Tamang last month after the seat-sharing talks broke down on the latter's reluctance to meet the BJP's demand for a respectable number of seats.

The BJP had 12 MLAs in the outgoing Sikkim Assembly with ten of them being defectors from the opposition Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), while two others had won assembly bypolls held in October 2019 in alliance with the SKM. Five of those 12 MLAs have deserted the party with three of them joining the SKM and will contest the Assembly elections on the SKM symbol.



Of the remaining seven BJP MLAs, only two have been given tickets to contest the assembly polls. The BJP is contesting 30 Assembly seats and the lone Lok Sabha seat in Sikkim.

Elections to the 32-member Sikkim Assembly and the one lone Lok Sabha seat in the state will be held on April 19.

BJP Sikkim unit president DR

Thapa, who was elected on SDF ticket from Upper Burtuk assembly constituency in 2019 and was the architect of defection of 10 MLAs from his erstwhile party to the BJP, is confident that the people of Sikkim will repose trust in

the leadership of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and elect the saf-

fron party in the state in line with

their aspiration to join national

mainstream and reap the fruits of development and welfare meas-

"The people of Sikkim want to establish an emotional connection with the rest of India by being a partner in the ongoing development process underway at the national level under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership,' Thapa said at party meetings.

"Sikkim is a strategically important state which must have a strong government to protect the rights of the people and usher in a seamless development aligned with national aspirations," he said.

The BJP state unit president has been very critical of the SKM government charging it with corruption, misrule and financial mismanagement, besides abetting violence against political adversaries.

The SKM has been restrained in taking on the local BJP despite the latter making serious charges against it apparently to keep ajar the door for post-poll alliance. However, Kala Rai, the SKM

candidate from Upper Burtuk against Thapa, made a scathing attack on the BJP saying: "the lotus does not bloom in hills" apparently hinting at BJP's defeat in the elections in Sikkim.

The other opposition parties, Sikkim Democratic Front and the Citizen Action Party (CAP), have been more strident in criticism of the BJP and have urged the people of Sikkim to keep it at away from power otherwise the special status and old laws of Sikkim protected under article 371 (F) of the constitution will be diluted beyond recognition if it gets power in the

The regional parties have been fuming with rage at the expansion of the definition of 'Sikkimese' people beyond indigenous Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali people by including descendants of old settlers living in Sikkim till 1975 in the new Finance Act, of 2023.

The BJP has defended the decision saying that it was done to provide income tax exemption only to the descendants of old settlers. (PTI)

Kharge, Rahul Gandhi to campaign for Congress candidates in Arunachal



ITANAGAR, April 3: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi are likely to visit Arunachal Pradesh to campaign for the party candidates.

Elections to the 60-member Arunachal Pradesh Assembly and two Lok Sabha constituencies in the state will be held simultaneously on April 19.

The Congress party has prepared a list of the campaigners in Arunachal Pradesh, however, the dates and places have not been fixed yet, party sources said quoting a list issued by All India Congress Committee general secretary KC Venugopal.

Several other Congress leaders including former Union ministers Mukul Wasnik, Jairam Ramesh. Gaurav Gogoi, Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah, Telangana chief minister Revanth Reddy, Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Karnataka deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar, actor Raj Babbar, cricketer Mohd Azharuddin and others will campaign for the party in the state.

Former chief minister and APCC president Nabam Tuki will lock horns against Union earth sciences minister Kiren Rijiju in the Arunachal West Parliamentary seat while former state minister Bosiram Siram will be up against BJP s Tapir Gao for the Arunachal East Parliamentary seat. (PTI)

Fire breaks out in relief

camp sheltering

Myanmar refugees

AIZWAL, April 3: A fire

broke out at a relief camp for

Myanmar refugees in south

Mizoram's Siaha district on

No casualty has been re-

ported in the incident that took

place in Lungpuk area, they

At least three huts in the re-

lief camp have been gutted in

Troops of Assam Rifles,

who are posted at Lungpuk,

rushed to the site and immedi-

ately evacuated inmates of the

relief camp to safer places, of-

Using fire extinguishers and

water, the Assam Rifles per-

sonnel and the refugees doused

the fire before it spread to other

the fire, they said.

ficials said.

Wednesday, officials said.

Book inauguration ceremony held

HT Correspondent HOWRAGHAT, April 3: A ceremony was held at Bodoland Guest House in Kokrajhar to inaugurate several books. The books, intended for Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Academy of classes UKG, LKG, and class 1, were inaugurated by Preetam Brahma Choudhary, a senior journalist and correspon-

dent at Prasar Bharati AIR/DDK. The book release event was attended by notable figures including Aswini kr Swargiary, president of All Brahma Dharma Committee; Dr Kamal Kr Brahma, principal of Baneswar Brahma Engineering College, Kokrajhar; Dr Kumud Ranjan Basumatary, chairman of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Academy Board; and Dr Ajit Boro, president of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Trust, among

Left parties teaming up with Congress to save democracy: Tripura CPI(M) leader

AGARTALA, April 3: Tripura CPI(M) leader Jitendra Chaudhury on Wednesday said that the Left parties have teamed up with the Congress in the state to safeguard democracy and constitution.

Chaudhury's assertion follows persistent attacks by the BJP on the CPI(M) in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls.

Chief minister Manik Saha, who has been leading the party's campaign trail, has been criticising the CPI(M) for aligning with the Con-

"Every murder is condemnable. It is a fact that many Congressmen were killed during the Left regime in the state and several comrades have also fallen to violence during the Congress rule. We stand for an apology for this", Chaudhury said during a press conference here.

Alleging that people involved in past violence are now associated with the BJP, Chaudhury empha-

sised that the "murder" of democracy and the constitution is more detrimental than individual killings. He explained that the Left parties

have joined forces with the Congress to protect democracy and the constitution, which are under threat during the BJP regime.

that ideological differences with the Congress will persist.

Kumar Deb, the BJP candidate for Tripura West Parliamentary constituency, questioning why he was forced to resign as CM. He urged Deb to share the story before criticising the CPI(M) for aligning with the Congress

Deb, who led the BJP to victory in 2018, defeating the 25-year-old communist government in the northeastern state, resigned in May 2022, paving the way for Manik Saha to become chief minister.

AAP to support Congress LS candidate in Mizoram

AIZWAL, April 3: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday announced that it will support the candidate of its INDIA ally Congress in Mizoram's lone Lok Sabha

Polling for the Lok Sabha seat will be held in the first phase on April 19.

Addressing a press conference in Aizawl, AAP's Mizoram unit president Andrew Lalremkima said his party has not fielded a candidate for the polls and will extend support to Congress nominee Lalbiakzama since both parties are members of the INDIA bloc.

He said AAP hopes that "democracy will be restored" if the INDIA bloc is voted to power at the Centre. Andrew alleged that the BJP-led NDA government was suppressing opposition parties.

Referring to the arrest and imprisonment of AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal and two



tion shows the BJP is afraid of the

Andrew said the BJP is trying hard to make inroads in Mizoram, the only northeastern state where it has not gained any ground yet.

cal arena in the country is broadly divided into two groupings - NDA and INDIA – he asked the state's ruling party Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) to make its stance clear on whether it will join either of the

democratic values. The commis-

sioner and returning officer provided

insights into the procedures for han-

dling different types of postal ballots

and clarified protocols regarding ve-

of conducting elections in a free, fair

and inducement free election, em-

phasizing the need for all stakehold-

ers to adhere strictly to the code of

conduct and ethical guidelines to en-

sure the integrity of the electoral

During the meeting, candidates

It was reiterated about importance

hicle permissions.

houses, they said. The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, they said. (PTI) 5.4 kg heroin seized, 2 arrested

in Mizoram AIZWAL, April 3: Two persons including a Myanmar national were arrested after 5.4 kg of heroin was seized from their possession in Aizwal on Wednesday, the state excise and narcotics department said

in a statement. The department officials conducted an operation at Aizawl's Falkland area on Wednesday morning during which 5 kg of heroin was

seized from a mini truck. While one of the accused is a resident of Teidu in Tripura and the other hailed from Myanmar's Khampat Kanaan. They were arrested for possessing the contraband, which had been smuggled from Myanmar.

The vehicle used for transporting the contraband was also seized by the department officials.

The duo was booked under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, the statement added. (PTI)

4 nabbed in Manipur, heroin worth Rs 4.07 crore seized

IMPHAL, April 3: Officials of the directorate of revenue intelligence (DRI) arrested four persons along with 581.95 gram of heroin powder, valued around Rs 4.07 crore in the international illicit market, from Bishnupur district in Manipur, an official source said on Wednesday.

The four persons were booked under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, said the official source.

Officials of Imphal regional unit of DRI who were on alert based on credible information, intercepted a Hyundai I20 car at Bishnupur Bazar on Monday evening. Upon checking the vehicle, the officials recovered 50 soap cases containing the narcotic substances. (NNN)

Over 2,500 houses, schools, govt buildings damaged in storm in Mizoram

AIZWAL, April 3: More than 2,500 houses, schools and government buildings were damaged and a woman was killed in a thunderstorm that hit Mizoram in the past three days, officials said on Wednesday

A powerful storm and hailstorm accompanied by heavy rain lashed several parts of Mizoram between Sunday and Tuesday, wreaking havoc in the state, they said. Officials also said that a 45-year-old woman died when a tree uprooted by a strong wind fell upon her on Monday.

According to state disaster management and rehabilitation department officials 15 churches in five districts, 17 schools in five districts, 11 relief camps in Champhai and Saitual districts, which housed Myanmar refugees and internally displaced people from Manipur, 11 Anganwadi centres in Kolasib and Serchhip districts, and several government buildings were among over 2,500 houses damaged by thunderstorm and hailstorm. North Mizoram's Kolasib district, which borders Assam, was the hardest hit as over 800 structures, including 795 dwelling houses, seven schools, 6 churches, 8 Anganwadi centre and 11 staff quarters have were destroyed, followed by Aizawl district, which suffered a damage to 632 dwelling houses, it said. State disaster management and rehabilitation minister, K Sapdanga said that the government will provide assistance to the affected people as permissible under the existing laws despite the election model code of conduct being in place. He said that the state government has sought permission from the Election Commission of India. Chief minister Lalduhoma has also informed the poll panel about the disaster and the need to provide assistance to people. (PTI)

However, he also acknowledged

Chaudhury took a dig at Biplab

Meeting held to assess preparedness ahead of LS polls



KOHIMA, April 3: In a bid to ensure free, fair and inducement free election in Nagaland, the commissioner and returning officer of Nagaland Parliamentary constituency. Sushil Kumar Patel along with a team of election observers convened a significant meeting with contesting candidates and political parties in Kohima on Wednesday.

The meeting served as a platform for open discussion on various issues pertinent to the electoral process. Present at the meeting were gen-

eral observers Avinash Champawat and P. Ramesh, police observer

observers Vivek Chauhan and Satya Key topics addressed during the

meeting included the handling of postal ballots, vehicle permissions for election-related activities, and the role of stakeholders in upholding

and political party representatives voiced their concerns and sought Sukesh Kumar Jain and expenditure clarifications on various issues and same was clarified. The meeting concluded on a posi-

process.

tive note, with stakeholders reaffirming their collaboration to ensure a smooth and successful conduct of the upcoming elections in Nagaland.

Breakthrough of tunnel T-7 achieved in Sivok - Rangpo rail project

Sivok - Rangpo rail project among most prestigious ongoing national projects in India

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 3: In a major

milestone, tunnel T-7 of the Sivok – Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP), located in Kalimpong district of West Bengal, achieved breakthrough on March 30.

With this breakthrough, mining activities have been successfully accomplished in 10 tunnels of this project. Notably, the first underground railway station within the Indian Railways network i.e. Teesta Bazar station comes in this tunnel, marking a pioneering step in the advancement of railway infrastructure in the country.

The main tunnel spans 3082 meters, accompanied by an access tunnel. The cavern extends for 650 meters, featuring a single platform as part of its design. This extensive cavern incorporates a network of six cross passages, with the total adit length reaching 800 meters, showcasing the project's comprehensive

To ensure passenger safety and comfort, meticulous ventilation has



been integrated into the design, creating a conductive environment within the underground space. Situated near the Teesta in the Kalimpong district of West Bengal, this tunnel traverses through vulnerable and challenging geological and seismic conditions of the Younger Himalayas. Like all other tunnels in the SRRP, to counter vulnerability of the ground mass, latest and most sophisticated tunneling technology, i.e., New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) has been used

The Sivok – Rangpo new rail link project connecting Sivok (West Bengal) and Rangpo (Sikkim) is about 45 kms long and is characterized by 14 tunnels, 17 bridges and

longest tunnel (T-10) is 5.3 km and length of longest bridge (Br-17) is 425 meters. About 38.64 kms of the entire project alignment is passing through tunnels. 92.31 per cent of the tunneling work has already been accomplished. At present final lining has been completed in tunnel T-14, T-9 and T-2 and is under progress in tunnels T-3, T-5, T-6, T-, T-8, T-10, T-11 and T-12. Total 11.96 km lining has been completed till date.

Work in allsections is being carried out round the clock. This is one of the most prestigious ongoing National Projects in India and on completion of this project, first time the state of Sikkim will be connected via railwavs.

This rail network on its completion is aimed to provide alternate connectivity to the state of Sikkim. At present all the activities related to construction of tunnels, bridges and station yards are being implemented on a war footing for early completion of the project.

Cong candidates opted out of electoral race due to BJP's popularity: CM Khandu

ITANAGAR, April 3: Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday said several Congress candidates left the electoral race because of BJP's popularity among people.

Khandu emphasised that the people of the state have witnessed the development trajectory initiated by the BJP and asserted that only the saffron party could lead the state towards further growth.

"People of the state have discarded Congress from their hearts because of misrule and mismanagement. BJP never believed in money politics and had never allured any Congress candidate to surrender in the elections. It is because they have realised that only the BJP can bring development in the state," Khandu said while dismissing Congress leader Nabam Tuki's allegations.

Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Nabam Tuki had on Tuesday accused the ruling BJP in the state of luring their candidates with money to secure victory in the assembly elections. Tuki claimed that many party candidates withdrew their nomination papers after being offered substantial sums by the ruling

"Many Congress candidates did not file nominations and those who filed later withdrew their papers because of the development-oriented performance of the BJP government which was never witnessed during

believe in money politics and our main mantra is development," the chief minister said. Khandu, who won uncontested from Mukto along with nine other party candidates this time, accused the Congress of playing politics on

Congress rule in the state. We never

religious lines. 'The Congress is trying to garner support of the Christian community in the state through a prominent forum in the state which is bad for a democratic setup. It is the dirtiest politics being played by the opposition," he said. Khandu's accusation came after the Arunachal Christian Forum, a prominent body in the state, had announced its support for

non-BJP candidates in the state. "I believe that the Christian community will never surrender to the dirty politics of the Congress and people of the state will never forgive the opposition party in the days to come," he said. (PTI)

'Modi ki guarantee' unsuccessful, does not reach people: Kharge

NEW DELHI, April 3: Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks about "Modi Ki guarantee" but it is "unsuccessful" and does not reach people, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge alleged on Wednesday as he launched his party's "Ghar Guarantee" initiative under which it aims to reach out to eight crore households across the country.

Kharge launched the initiative from Usmanpur, Kaithwada in the North East Delhi parliamentary constituency and distributed pamphlets on the Congress's "Paanch Nyay Pachees Guaran-

Party general secretary Jairam Ramesh said it is important to note that the "Ghar Ghar Guarantee" initiative is being launched from a place from where, in 1978, the Congress used the "hand" symbol for the first time. Interestingly, this time the Congress's campaign tagline is also centred around its poll symbol --"Haath Badlega Halaat".

Kharge hit out at Modi, saying, "We give a guarantee that our government has always worked for people and will always do so. The prime minister talks about Modi ki guarantee, but his guarantee is unsuccessful and does not reach people.

Modi had promised generating



never got to see those jobs, the Congress chief said, adding that he fails to understand why people encourage such propaganda and vote for those who "lie".

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) talked about doubling farmers' income and providing a legal guarantee for a minimum support price (MSP) on crops, but did not honour those promises, he said.

"We want to tell the country that whatever we promise, we fulfil," Kharge asserted.

He also recalled how Congress governments in the past gave guarantees and programmes like

MGNREGA, RTI, Right to Food

and Right to Education even

though it had not promised those. Raising the issue of income-tax authorities issuing notices to the Congress, Kharge said, "This government wants to scare the opposition parties. It froze our accounts. The Supreme Court has intervened in the matter.... The I-T dept took ₹ 135 crore from our funds. Can an election be held fairly in a democracy in such a manner? Shouldn't there be a

level-playing field?' He said neither the BJP nor the RSS made any contribution in the

"We want to tell those people that the public wants democracy and to protect the Constitution, Kharge said.

He said the Congress is distributing its guarantee card to take its "Panch Nyay Pachees Guarantee" to people. "We want to take this initiative to eight crore households across the country," Kharge said while launching the initiative.

"All Congress leaders and workers will take this card to households across the country and tell people what our alliance's government will do when it assumes power," he added.

The Congress's poll pitch is centred around "Paanch Nyay" or five pillars of justice -- "Yuva Nyay", "Naari Nyay", "Kisaan Nyay", "Shramik Nyay" and "Hissedari Nyay" -- as well as the guarantees it has given to people under these heads.

The opposition party will release its Lok Sabha poll manifesto here on April 5, with its top leaders addressing mega rallies in Jaipur and Hyderabad the next

The party has already launched its new slogan, #HaathBadlega-Halaat -- referring to its poll symbol -- on social media platforms. In a post in Hindi on X, Ramesh said the Congress presi-

dent launched the door-to-door

North East Delhi Lok Sabha constituency.

"Congress workers will distribute these guarantee cards, printed in 14 different languages, to eight crore families across India over the next few weeks," he said.

Under the "Yuva Nyay", the party has promised "Bharti Bharosa" -- 30 lakh new central government jobs, according to a jobs calendar. Under "Pehli Naukri Pakki", the Congress has promised a one-year paid apprenticeship for all educated youngsters at ₹ 1 lakh a year or ₹ 8,500 a month.

It has promised a law to ensure that government recruitment examination question papers are not leaked and also, better working conditions and social security for gig workers.

Under its "Yuva Roshni" guarantee, the party has promised a ₹ 5,000-crore start-up fund for voungsters.

As part of "Nari Nyay", the Congress has promised the "Mahalakshmi" guarantee of ₹ 1 lakh a year for a woman in every poor

It has promised 50 per cent reservation for women in new central government jobs and doubling the Centre's salary contribution for all ASHA, anganwadi and mid-day meal workers. (PTI)

Boxer Vijender Singh joins BJP



NEW DELHI, April 3: Vijender Singh, India's first Olympic medallist in boxing who took a plunge in politics in April 2019 by joining the Congress, switched to the BJP on Wednesday.

Addressing a joint press conference with BJP leaders at the party headquarters here, Singh praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said that the respect for Indian sportspersons has increased in the country and abroad since the BJP came to power at the Centre

"I am the same old Vijender. Whatever I would feel wrong, I would call it wrong. I will call it right if I feel it is right," said Singh who had been a vocal critic of the BJP and had come out in support of farmers' protests and wrestlers' stir, often expressing his views on social media.

A number of leaders have switched their parties ahead of Lok Sabha elections though Singh's entry into the BJP is among those that may have surprised many.

Singh joined the BJP in the presence of party national general secretary Vinod Tawde and other senior leaders of the party at its headquarters here.

"I am joining the BJP today under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and party president JP Nadda. In a way it is my 'ghar wapasi' (homecoming)," he said, adding "There is a saying in English- 'Good to be back'. I am feeling very good".

Singh fought the 2019 Lok Sabha election unsuccessfully from the South Delhi constituency on a Congress ticket. His name was doing the rounds for the last few days as the party's nominee from Mathura, from where actor and incumbent MP Hema Malini

remained engaged 24 hours a day

in the service of the country. Since

his arrest, Kejriwal's weight has

health at risk by putting him in

jail," she alleged in a post on X in

If something happens to Arvind

Kejriwal, not just the whole coun-

try, even God will not forgive

Later, at a press conference, the

Delhi minister said, "Today, the

Delhi High Court will hear a plea

challenging his arrest by ED. After

the court decides on it, we will

seek legal help over his health sit-

He comes from the Jat community, which has political influence in a large number of seats in Haryana, his home state, western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

"When we travelled abroad to fight (participate in matches) in the UK, Dubai, Ireland and other places, many times there used to be so many things at the airport. Since the BJP came at the helm under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it has become easier for us to go anywhere," Singh said.

The 38-year-old trailblazing boxer had delivered India's first Olympic and men's world championship medals back in 2008 and 2009 and joined professional boxing in 2015.

Singh said he would work for the welfare of the people.

Tawde said that it was a matter of great joy that Singh, who has brought glory to the country, has joined the BJP family.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our government has taken many meaningful steps for the welfare of youth and sportspersons in the last 10 years due to which Vijender ji has joined us," he said, adding it would add strength to the resolve of making 'viksit Bharat (developed

"The BJP will certainly utilise his (Singh's) strength in Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and all other regions. I am confident that the BJP will succeed in achieving its target more firmly

with his joining the party," he said. Union minister Kiren Rijiju welcomed Singh into the party fold.

"Welcome to the party which loves sports. Brother, you wasted your precious time in a party that has nothing to do with sports," Rijiju, who earlier held the sports portfolio, posted on X. (PTI)

Delhi BJP sends defamation notice to Atishi, demands public apology over her 'join BJP offer' claim

NEW DELHI, April 3: The BJP's Delhi unit has sent a defamation notice to senior AAP leader Atishi and demanded a public apology for her claim that the saffron party approached her through a "very close" person to join it.

A day earlier, the Delhi minister claimed that four senior AAP leaders, including herself, would be arrested soon and claimed that she was advised to join the BJP or be ready to be arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a month. At a press conference here on Wednesday,

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said a defamation notice has been sent to Atishi, demanding a public apology for her claim. "Atishi failed to provide evidence of who approached her, how and when. The AAP is undergoing a crisis in Delhi, which is why they are making such baseless allegations out of frustration. But we will not let her get away with this,' he said.

Sachdeva chief asked Atishi to submit her phone to an investigation agency to prove her claim.

The Delhi BJP's lawyer said the party has sent a defamation notice to Atishi to withdraw her statement which he termed "false, defamatory, and concocted" and claimed was made with a "mala fide intent"

Further legal action will be taken against her if she fails to back up her claims, he said. (PTI)

MP Tharoor files nomination from Thiruvananthapuram

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, **April 3:** Senior Congress leader and three-time Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor filed his nomination on Wednesday from the Thiruvananthapuram constituency for the fourth consecutive time in the Lok Sabha

Tharoor arrived at the district collectorate in the afternoon along with senior party leaders, including MLA M Vincent, former minister V S Sivakumar, and Thiruvananthapuram DCC president Palode Ravi, along with other workers.

He shook hands with people and exchanged pleasantries while pro-

ceeding to the Collectorate complex. Some party activists draped shawls around him and expressed their support. Before filing his nomination, Tharoor offered prayers at famed shrines in the constituency, including Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple and Pazhavangadi Ganapathi Temple.

With senior CPI leader and former Thiruvananthapuram MP Pannian Raveendran and BJP leader and Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar as Tharoor's challengers in the fray, the high-profile Thiruvananthapuram constituency is set for a fierce three-cornered battle in the crucial polls this time. (PTI)

Kejriwal lost 4.5 kg since arrest, BJP putting his health at risk by keeping him in jail: Atishi

Hindi.

them, she added.

In a statement, Tihar jail authorities said, "Upon arrival on April 1, Kejriwal was examined by two doctors and all vitals were normal. Also, his weight is constant at 65 Kg, since his arrival in jail and till date. Home-cooked food is being provided as per court order. His

Kejriwal was arrested by the

Alleging that Kejriwal has been put behind bars in a "false case", Atishi said they are closely moni-

toring his health condition. "The whole country is watching. For a severely diabetic patient, if their sugar levels fall below 50 mg/dL, it is extremely

worrying. While he was in ED custody, his sugar levels fell thrice, including one time when it came down to 46 mg/dL," she

Modi facilitated return of Indian students from conflict-hit Ukraine: Rajnath

GHAZIABAD (UP), April 3: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Narendra Modi facilitated the return of 22,500 stranded Indian students from Ukraine after speaking with the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and the United States, which no other world leader could do.

Launching his Lok Sabha poll campaign for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate from Ghaziabad in western Uttar Pradesh. Singh also lauded Modi for transforming India's reputation on the global stage since becoming prime minister in 2014.

"India has become a powerful country. The world did not take India seriously.... But Prime Minister Modi has done a miracle. Today, when India speaks on the international stage, the entire world listens to it carefully. This is India's reputation, which has grown rapidly," he said.

Referring to the Russia-Ukraine conflict that is going on for two years, the defence minister said, "Around 25,000 Indian students were studying in Ukraine. Their parents demanded from the prime minister that the children must be brought back.... Every parent in India was worried."

'What no other prime minister in the world could do, our prime minister did that. He called up Russia's President (Vladimir) Putin and Ukraine's President (Volodymyr) Zelenskyy. Not just that, he even spoke to President

(Joe) Biden of the US, which is considered the most powerful na-"Brothers and sisters, you should be proud that the war stopped for four-and-a-half hours

and more than 22,500 Indian chil-

dren came back from Ukraine. This is India," Singh said. Modi has resolved that India would no longer be counted among

poor countries and by 2047, it can become the world's largest economy, he said.

"You might have read in the newspapers that there was a perception about India being a poor and weak country. This was a worldwide perception. But the miracle that Modi has done in nine years, you would be proud that 25 crore people have been lifted out of poverty," Singh said. (PTI)

INDIA bloc alliance of dynastic parties; half its leaders in jail, half out on bail: BJP chief Nadda JAIPUR, April 3: The opposiment, India should stand as a

tion INDIA bloc is an alliance of dynastic parties, half of whose leaders are in iail and half out on bail, BJP National President JP Nadda said on Wednesday. Nadda made the remarks while

addressing an election rally in Raiasthan's Jhalawar. The BJP has renominated Dushyant Singh from the Jhalawar-Baran Lok Sabha constituency. "The INDI Alliance is a

'Bhrastachar Bachao Alliance (save corruption alliance)'. It has parties in which the president is from the family, the general secretary is from the family and ministers are also from the familv. These are parties of the family," Nadda said.

He also alleged that the Congress committed scams every-

Nadda asked, "Is Rahul Gandhi out on bail or not? Are Sonia Gandhi, Chidambaram, (AAP Rajya Sabha MP) Sanjay Singh out on bail or not? Are Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia in jail or not?"

"Half the leaders of the INDI



Alliance are in jail and half (out) on bail," he said.

The BJP chief said, "They (INDIA bloc parties) have nothing to do with the country. They are busy saving their families, trying to save their parties. There is nothing more than this.'

Nadda claimed it is the BJP that is working to take the country forward under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra

"We have moved forward with the resolve of a developed India. Under the leadership of Modi ji,

we are engaged in wiping the tears from the eyes of the poor, deprived, oppressed, exploited, Dalits, youngsters, farmers and

"Today, India's aspiration is that there should be a corruptionfree government. There should be a development-oriented government. The country progressed at a fast pace under the leadership of Modi ji," Nadda said. Through unimagined develop-

the women," he said. Nadda also hailed Modi, saying the country has progressed at a fast pace under his leadership.

"developed country", he said. The BJP leader also claimed

the situation in villages has changed under Modi's leadership. There were 18,000 villages with no electricity, which became electrified after Modi became prime minister in 2014. Highlighting the development

works done by the BJP-led Cen-

tre, Nadda said 3.5 lakh villages

have been connected by paved

roads. Eighty crore people are being given free ration, resulting in lifting 25 crore people above the poverty line. He said 55 crore people -about 40 per cent of the population, including the poor, rickshaw-pullers, tea vendors, bus drivers, and cleaners -- have been

of Rs 5 lakh under Ayushman Bharat for serious illnesses. Singh, the BJP candidate, and former chief minister Vasundhara Raje were also present at the

given a yearly insurance facility

In Rajasthan, the Lok Sabha elections will be held in two phases on April 19 and 26. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, April 3: Delhi diabetic. Despite health issues, he

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been rapidly losing weight since his arrest on March 21, senior AAP leader Atishi claimed on decreased by 4.5 kg. This is very Wednesday and accused the BJP worrying. The BJP is putting his of putting his health at risk by keeping him in jail.

She said the Aam Aadmi Party will seek legal help over the chief minister's health condition. However, the administration of

Tihar jail, where Kejriwal is lodged till April 15, said his weight has been constant since his judicial custody began. A senior Tihar jail official said the chief minister's vitals are normal.

vital statistics are normal."

Enforcement Directorate in an excise policy-linked money laundering case. He has been sent to judicial custody till April 15.

"Arvind Kejriwal ji is a severe

Moving on was in party's best interest, will certainly campaign for Gehlot's son: Pilot

The best candidates who can

people have to play. The AICC decided that these are the best candidates. I am responsible for all our candidates. In the media sometimes it appears that he or she is of this faction or that faction, that is not the case at all. Every Congress candidate is our candidate, we have

The Congress had not opened its account in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls or in the polls before that in before the party, he noted.

Pilot said the feedback he has received is that the Congress will do "exceedingly well" this time in Rajasthan because the people are "fed up and want a change".

ion very freely these days but on voting day, they will vote for the Congress," he said.

is contesting from Jalore, Pilot said, "I will 100 per cent go (to campaign for Vaibhav Gehlot)."

I was the Rajasthan Congress president, I pushed for his (Vaibhav Gehlot's) ticket to get finalised from Delhi, I went for his nomination. He could not win the polls that time but I had campaigned for

According to the Congress general secretary, the lack of jobs and the "agrarian crisis" would be key factors in the polls, as also the "brazen manner" in which the gov-

NEW DELHI, April 3: Having buried the hatchet with former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot, Congress leader Sachin Pilot says moving on was in the best interest of the party and stressed he would "100 per cent" campaign for his senior colleague's son Vaibhav who is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Jalore. In an interaction with PTI edi-

tors at the news agency's head-

quarters here, the Congress general

secretary said a redux of the 2004

election when the party won the polls despite the India Shining campaign of the NDA is very much on the cards. "Repeat of 2004 is very much possible given the circumstances, given the unrest among most people. What you don't see in the media is the real sentiment on the ground. This politics of jumlas and

limits," Pilot said earlier this week. Asked how he has been able to shake off his past differences with Gehlot and the former Rajasthan

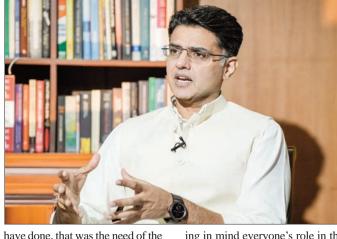
overconfidence (by the BJP) has its

CM's 'nikamma-nakara' jibe at him in 2020, Pilot said, "I saw no advantage in replying in the same coin, I refused to be provoked, chose dignity and grace over name-calling and, more importantly, decided to show a large heart and move on.'

This, he said, was better for the party, better for his state and certainly better for him.

"I can look back and say with pride. I never used any words that are unbecoming of a public figure, I have never used language that is derogatory because the value system ingrained in me since childhood has taught me to show respect to elders no matter what the circumstances and I always maintained that," Pilot said

Stressing on the mantra of forgive and forget, Pilot recalled the meeting in Delhi last year when he sat down with party president Mallikarjun Kharge and former AICC chief Rahul Gandhi. "I was asked to forgive and forget and move on, which is exactly what I



have done, that was the need of the hour for the party and the state."

On why he and Ashok Gehlot, two of the biggest names in Rajasthan Congress were not contesting elections, Pilot said the decision and that of not fielding state unit chief Govind Singh Dotasra was made by the CEC (central election committee) keeping in mind everyone's role in the elections

"Final decision on candidate selection is with the CEC. The party took that decision. I have got responsibility for the state in Chhattisgarh... In an election campaign, the leadership allocates different responsibilities to various leaders,"

win have been fielded in Rajasthan and in Chhattisgarh, he asserted.

"The party decides what role to work in a dedicated manner to ensure they win," Pilot said.

Rajasthan, so the challenge is there

"People don't voice their opin-

Asked if he would campaign for

Ashok Gehlot's son Vaibhav, who

"Last time (in 2019 polls) when

This time he is fighting from another seat, Jalore, I will definitely campaign for him this time also,'

ernment has acted in many cases, subverted the norms and crossed the line repeatedly. Asked about claims of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi being "unstoppable", Pilot said nobody is "unstoppable" and again cited the 2004 example. (PTI)

encounter in Chhattisgarh; toll rises to 13

RAIPUR, April 3: At least 13 Naxalites including three women have been killed in an encounter with security forces in dense forests in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said on Wednesday.

Three more bodies were found in the morning at the site of the encounter which lasted for nearly 12 hours, said an official.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai hailed the security personnel, stating that the fight against the Naxalites has been intensified since the BJP government came to power in the state last year.

As many as 46 Naxalites have been killed so far this year in separate encounters with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region which comprises seven districts including Bijapur.

Following a tip-off about the presence of Naxalites belonging to the Peoples Liberation Guerilla Army's (PLGA) company no 2 and platoon nos 11, 12 and 13 in the interior forest under Gangaloor police station limits, an operation was launched on Monday night, Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Kumar Yaday said.

Personnel of the District Reserve Guard and Special Task Force of police, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and its elite unit Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) were involved in the operation, he said.

As the security personnel were cordoning off forests near Korcholi and Lendra villages, an exchange of fire broke out around 4.45 am on Tuesday, he said

The gun-battle continued intermittently until 5 pm on Tuesday when the firing ceased, the SP said.



While the bodies of ten Naxalites were found on the same day, three more were found on Wednesday

"The identity of the slain Naxalites was yet to be ascertained, but it appears that they belonged to PLGA company no 2 and platoon no 2 of Maoists," Yadav said.

A Light Machine Gun (LMG) with 58 rounds, a .303 rifle with 39 rounds, a .12-bore gun, three barrel grenade launchers with 17 shells, a hand grenade, an Under Barrel Grenade Launcher (UBGL) shell, seven 'tiffin bombs', gelatin sticks, cordex wire, safety fuses, electric wire, a laptop, walkie-talkie, solar plates, bags and items of daily use were recovered from the spot, he

The security forces returned safely to their base in the morning, the official added.

Talking to reporters in Mahasamund, chief minister Sai said the new BJP government in Chhattisgarh has intensified the fight against Nax-

"Since our government was formed (in December 2023), we have been fighting strongly against Naxalism. Bodies of 13 Naxalites have been recovered, and I believe this was the biggest achievement of security personnel so far." Sai said.

"We have been setting up new camps in sensitive areas. I call them `suvidha camps' as we want to provide ration, electricity, roads and water to people living in the interior areas through these camps. But Naxalites oppose them," he said.

The state government has launched 'Niyad Nellanar' (your good village) scheme to provide basic amenities and other facilities through security camps, he said.

Asked about a CoBRA jawan getting injured in a pressure-triggered IED blast in Bijapur on Tuesday, Sai said, "It happens in war. Both sides have to suffer losses. But finally, we will achieve a victory.'

The CoBRA commando was injured when an IED planted by Naxalites went off in Gangaloor area on Tuesday.

Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said better coordination between the state police and Central forces and better strategy has resulted in neutralising of 46 Naxalites in Bastar region, including 27 in Bijapur district, so far this year.

Besides, 181 Naxalites were arrested and 120 surrendered in the region since January, he added. Bastar division comprises the dis-

tricts of Kanker, Kondagaon, Narayanpur, Bastar, Bijapur, Dantewada and Sukma.

As many as 19 new camps of security forces have been set up in the region this year, the IG added.

Bijapur district comes under the Bastar Lok Sabha constituency which will go to polls in the first phase of the general elections on April 19.

Notably, Naxalites carry out their so-called Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign (TCOC) between March and June every year, stepping up their activities. This period is generally marked by increased attacks on secu-

Virgin Atlantic sees 'infinite demand' in Indian mkt; plans to expand codeshare with IndiGo

Storm-hit Jalpaiguri residents complain about inadequate relief supplies

pecting immediate govern-

almirah received from his in-

Rs 2.5 lakh were lost along

with my wife's jewelry," he

said, struggling to compre-

For vulnerable people like

octogenarian Harimoti Ray,

the future is uncertain. Unable

to move and left without shel-

ter, she tearfully questioned

who would provide her with

food and aid in rebuilding her

Pregnant women in the vil-

lages remained anxious about

maternity care in this devas-

hend the extent of his loss.

"My entire life's savings of

JALPAIGURI, April 3: For the past three nights after a devastating storm claimed five lives and rendered over 200 people homeless in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, numerous residents have been spending sleepless nights outdoors, while voicing complaints about insufficient relief

On Wednesday, tensions flared as villagers confronted block officials over the distribution of relief materials, which they deemed woefully inadequate given the scale of the crisis.

"When hundreds of homes are affected, they (the government) have provided relief materials for just a few," villagers claimed.

Moreover, there are accusations of misallocation of relief supplies, with unaffected areas receiving assistance while the worst-hit regions languish without aid.

Rakhali Ray, a local resident, expressed frustration over the lack of baby food and drinking water, highlighting the dire situation faced by

In the apparent absence of government assistance, some local residents and NGOs have stepped in, offering whatever support they can.

The destruction of homes has forced many people to undertake the task of repairing their dwellings without extated situation where obtaining basic food has become a

Recently married Kamal Ray recounted how the storm The devastation extends benot only demolished his home yond homes, impacting livelibut also destroyed his new bed hoods and natural resources. and jewelry stored in a new

As farmers grapple with ruined crops, the sight of dead fish in ponds serves as a grim reminder of the storm's wrath.

However, the district administration dismissed allegations of shortage of relief items and asserted that the government is doing its best to handle the cri-

Nearly 200 people were injured and several houses were damaged, trees uprooted and electric poles came crashing down as strong winds accompanied by hail struck most parts of the district headquarters town and many areas of neighbouring Mainaguri on Sunday. (PTI)

Navy Chief holds talks with Australian counterpart

NEW DELHI, April 3: Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and his Australian counterpart Vice Admiral Mark Hammond on Wednesday held wide-ranging talks focusing on boosting bilateral military ties and reviewing the situation arising out of attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea by Houthi militants.

Hammond, the Chief of Royal Australian Navy, is on an official visit to India from April 2 to 6.

"The discussions focused on avenues to strengthen bilateral maritime cooperation, including increased operational engagements, training exchanges, and information sharing," the Indian

People familiar with the talks

said the two officials also deliberated on the situation in the Red Sea and its adjoining areas.

There have been mounting global concerns over Houthi militants targeting various merchant ships in the Red Sea in the last few

Ahead of his talks with Admiral Kumar, Hammond laid a ceremonial wreath at the National War Memorial. He was also accorded a Guard of Honour at the South Block in the Raisina Hills.

The visiting Australian naval commander is also scheduled to call on Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari and Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane. (PTI)

BENGALURU, April 3: Witnessing "infinite demand" in the strong Indian aviation market, British car-

rier Virgin Atlantic on Wednesday said it will start an additional daily flight connecting Mumbai and London from October, as well as look to expand its codeshare partnership with IndiGo. Currently, Virgin Atlantic operates two daily flights to London Heathrow from Delhi and one each from Mumbai and Bengaluru. The London-Bengaluru

services started on March 31. During a media roundtable here, Virgin Atlantic CEO Shai Weiss said India is the third largest market for the airline after North America and the Caribbean.

From 2025, Virgin Atlantic will offer over one million seats to India, a capacity growth of 350 per cent since 2019. At present, the airline operates around 10 per cent of its total capacity to India.

The carrier will have a total of 45 planes, including B787s and A350s, by the end of this year.

The airline will launch its second daily direct service from London Heathrow to Mumbai from October 2024, subject to government approval under the enhanced bilateral flying rights. Weiss said the airline will look to

expand its codeshare partnership with IndiGo. Currently, the partnership with IndiGo offers 36 additional destinations for Virgin Atlantic passengers. Codesharing allows an airline to book its passengers on its partner carriers and provide seamless travel to destinations where it has no presence. Besides, the British airline is

quadrupling the number of Indian

cabin crew this summer and each of its flights from India will have four of them. Weiss said that pandemic years have actually strengthened India than any other markets and added that for every flight to and from India, there will be around four Indian cabin crew.

"Next year marks 25 years of operations and with our new daily service to Bengaluru and second daily service to Mumbai, it will be the first time that we'll offer more than one million seats from London Heathrow," Weiss said. With five daily services, the air-

line said Virgin Atlantic Cargo will offer over 40 million kilogram of space to and from India, a 336 per cent increase in capacity versus 2019. There is an infinite demand in the Indian market, which has grown significantly. Tickets tend to be cheaper now than in the future, there is good visibility into the summer and fares are holding up, Weiss noted.

For Virgin Atlantic, the ticket sales is around 35 per cent in India while it is 55 per cent in the UK, and Weiss said the number is expected to go up to 50 per cent in India. In terms of air traffic for Virgin Atlantic, Weiss said that around 80 per cent are Origin & Destination, while 20 per cent is for onward

With the growing number of Indian business travellers, tourists, and students to the UK, the addition of Virgin Atlantic to the existing air travel options would be of tremendous benefit to the entire southern region of India," Chandru K Iyer, British Deputy High Commissioner for Karnataka & Kerala, said. (PTI)

Bittu Bajrangi thrashes man in police presence

FARIDABAD, April 3: Cow vigilante Bittu Bajrangi, who was also accused in Nuh violence, was caught on camera thrashing a man with a stick while a policeman watched, police said on Wednesday. They said Bajrangi has been booked and they are considering suspending the policeman.

In his complaint, the victim Shyamu said that he was thrashed because Rakumar Panchal, also known as Bittu Bajrangi, thought he was a Muslim. Shyamu said he was he taking a girl to buy chocolates when he was picked up by some men and taken to Bajrangi's

A video of the incident surfaced on the internet showing Bittu Bajrangi, a ow vigilante, along with so men thrashing Shyamu, a tenant residing in Sanjay Enclave of Faridabad. According to the complaint filed by Shyamu at the Saran Police Station, the incident occurred on Monday when he was on his way to a shop with a girl to buy chocolates. He said some men caught him and took him to Bajrangi's house where they pinned him down, thrashed him with sticks and threatened to kill him.

"That girl is like my daughter but due to some misunderstanding, they took me to Bittu Bajrangi, who without any reason assaulted me assuming that I am from the Muslim community," he said in the complaint. Based on the complaint, an FIR was registered on Wednesday against Bajrangi and his associates under the Indian Penal Code section 323 (causing hurt), 341 (wrong-

Bengal higher secondary council suggests warm-up course on AI for class 10 students

KOLKATA, April 3: The West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education has proposed that secondary schools introduce a warm-up course for Class 10 students interested in pursuing the new Applied Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Security subjects in the higher secondary curriculum.

Council president Chiranjib Bhattacharya said this short-term course will serve as a basic warm-up for students considering subjects like Modern Computer Applications, Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence, Applied Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, and Cyber Security in higher secondary

"Applied Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Security are the two new subjects set to be introduced from the academic year 2024-25. The syllabus for the existing subjects, Modern Computer Application and Computer Science, has been updated to ensure relevance and contemporaneity," Bhattacharya added. He added, "Given this scenario, the council believes that a basic warm-up course is necessary for interested class 10 students of 2024."

In a statement to schools on April 1, Bhattacharya suggested a short-duration computer course, termed the 'Bootstrap Program,' which would provide students with a basic platform to pursue any of the aforementioned courses. Bhattacharya clarified that the council is only suggesting schools to consider implementing the Bootstrap

Program and not mandating its conduct. He proposed that the months of April and May be utilised for this course before the commencement of the core higher secondary curriculum. The results of the higher secondary exams, held in mid-February, are expected to be announced within 90 days.

"Theory classes may be conducted in the classroom or online, as per the school's convenience. If a school is unable to conduct the course, the study materials provided by the council may be shared with interested students. Schools planning to conduct the course can drop an email at academic@wbchse.net with relevant details," Bhattacharya said.

'Onus on assembly speaker to take decision on resignation of 3 Independent MLAs' SHIMLA, April 3: Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla on Wednesday said that he had forwarded the letters of three Independent MLAs to the

their resignations is on him. The MLAs -- Hoshiyar Singh, Ashish Sharma and K L Thakur -- submitted their resignation letters to the assembly speaker on March 22 and then wrote to the governor seeking his intervention.

assembly speaker and the onus

to take a decision on accepting

"I have sent the letters to the speaker quoting the Supreme Court verdicts in cases of Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh and hope that the speaker has taken cognizance of it," Shukla

said, adding that the Raj Bhawan has dignity and he will maintain it.

The governor said the Raj Bhawan does not possess authority in this matter and that he acted as a conduit forwarding the letters to the speaker.

These three MLAs, along with six Congress rebels, had voted in favour of the BIP in the Rajya Sabha election held on February 27. They submitted their resignation from the assembly to the speaker, a day before they joined the BJP.

However, the assembly has sought explanation from these MLAs by April 10 following a representation from the Congress Legislature Party that they resigned under duress and not voluntarily.

Peeved over the delay in accepting their resignations, the three Independent MLAs on Saturday sat on a dharna at the Vidhan Sabha, demanding immediate acceptance of their resignations.

Leader of the opposition Jai Ram Thakur had on Tuesday said that "as per the rules, if a member of the legislative assembly submits resignation personally to the speaker, it should be accepted without any delay and maybe the speaker is under pressure from the Congress government and Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu," but this is not right. (PTI)

ful restraint), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 34 (acts done by several persons in

Multi-institutional team tracks virus behind India's lumpy skin cattle fore, finding so many genetic vari-

BENGALURU, April 3: A multiinstitutional team has provided critical insights into the evolution and origins of the virus strains fueling lumpy skin cattle disease outbreak, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has said.

In May 2022, cattle across India began dying of a mysterious illness. Since then, about 1,00,000 cows have lost their lives to a devastating outbreak of what scientists have identified as lumpy skin disease, Bengaluru-based IISc said on Tuesday in a press release.

"It was a calamity in some waysa national emergency," said Utpal Tatu, Professor in the Department

of Biochemistry, IISc. Tatu is part of a multi-institutional team that decided to probe the cause of the outbreak. Their study was published in 'BMC Genomics', the press release issued by IISc said

A viral infection caused by the Lumpy Skin Disease Virus (LSDV), it is transmitted by insects like flies and mosquitoes. It causes fever and skin nodules, and can be fatal for cattle.

LSDV was first found in Zambia in 1931 and remained confined to the Sub-African region until 1989, after which it started spreading to the Middle East, Russia and other southeast European nations, before

spreading to South Asia. There have been two major outbreaks of this disease in India, the first in 2019 and a more severe outbreak in 2022, infecting more than

two million cows, the release said. To investigate the current outbreak, the team collected skin nodules, blood and nasal swabs from infected cattle in various states including Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Karnataka, in collaboration with veterinary institutes. They performed advanced whole-genome sequencing of DNA extracted from 22 samples.

"The biggest challenge was the lack of an established LSDV genome sequencing and analysis pipeline. We had to adapt techniques from COVID-19 research," said Ankeet Kumar, PhD student at IISc and co-lead author.



compiled all available global LSDV genome sequences to make our analysis robust," he added.

Their genomic analysis revealed two distinct LSDV variants circulating in India -- one with a low number of genetic variations and another with a high number of genetic variations. The sequence with fewer variations was genetically similar to the 2019 Ranchi and 2020 Hyderabad strains that were sequenced previously. The samples with high variations, however, turned out to be similar to LSDV strains from an outbreak in Russia

Kumar said that there are no previous reports of such highly varied LSDV strains in India. Viruses that have DNA as the genetic material--like LSDV--are generally more stable than RNA viruses. Thereations was quite surprising, and could explain the severity of the disease, he added The team found a large number

of genetic variations -- over 1,800. These include deletions and insertions in various genes, single-letter changes in DNA (called SNPs), and genetic variations in regions between genes, the release said.

Importantly, they found a large number of genetic variations in viral genes critical for binding to host cells, evading immune response, and replicating efficiently. This likely enhanced the virus's ability to cause disease.

"Cattle developed more severe symptoms in areas where we found highly diverse strains. This suggests that the genetic variations could elevate virulence," said Kumar.

Such insights can pave the way for improved diagnostics, vaccines and interventions to combat emerging infectious diseases that threaten livestock and livelihoods. Tatu's research group has conducted similar

studies on COVID-19 during the pandemic, and more recently on the rabies virus. "The genomic data will prove in-

valuable for vaccine development

by revealing molecular hotspots and genetic variations to target," "This is a first for characterising the genomic landscape of LSDV during India's outbreak on a na-

tional scale.' The study represents an example of the "One Health" approach in which multidisciplinary teams, including molecular biologists, computational experts and veterinary doctors come together to address

issues of national relevance. Tatu also emphasises how collaboration between veterinary experts and multiple scientific institutions was critical to tracing the variants across the country. "We learned a lot from the veteri-

nary doctors," he said. "They understand the field knowledge, and their perception about the disease was very important for us," he added. (PTI)

women all the tools and the

trust that we can do it all without losing our essence, without losing our femininity. I think that men have a purpose in society and

women have another purpose as well. We complement each other, and that complement should not be

When the interviewer asked, just because a woman can do it all doesn't mean she should, Shakira said:

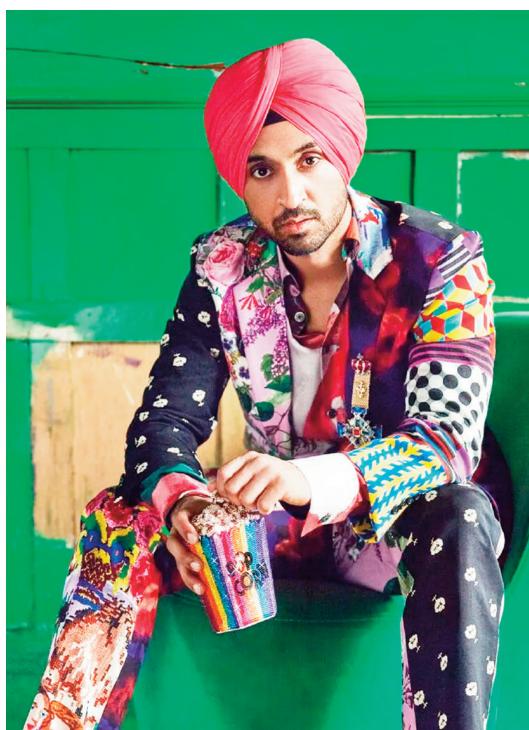
"Why not share the load with people who deserve to carry it, who have a duty to

When the interviewer asked, just because a woman can do it all doesn't mean she should, Shakira said:

"Why not share the load

lost," she added.

carry it as well?"



HAD TO UNLEARN A FEW THINGS AS **MUSICIAN: DILJIT** DOSANJH ON PLAYING **CHAMKILA**

MUMBAI, April 3: The best thing about acting is that one can start from zero, says singerstar Diljit Dosanjh who had to "unlearn" certain things to play the character of slain Punjabi musician Amar Singh Chamkila in the upcoming Imtiaz Ali film.

Dosanjh, who is a popular name in not just Punjabi and Hindi cinema but also a globally recognised musician, said he mostly relied on Ali's "clear vision" to create Chamkila on the screen. Chamkila, a grassroots singer who ruled street concerts in the '80s in Punjab, was shot dead along with his singer-wife Amarjot in 1988. "I had to unlearn things and start from zero. It's a plus point in the life of an artist to do this. It's tough to start from zero because you often get lost in your own personality and you feel this is who you are (but) the best thing about an actor's job is that you get the opportunity to start from zero, and I look at this as an

opportunity," Dosanjh told PTI in an interview. The 40-year-old actor said he relied completely on Ali to portray the nuances of Chamkila, regarded as one of the best livestage performers to have come from Punjab. "I didn't do much prep for the film, Imtiaz sir

prepped a lot. He had a clear vision about the character of Chamkila. I knew Chamkila as an artist, but I had no idea about how he was as a person or how he would perform on stage. I got a lot of help from Imtiaz sir.'

Dosanjh believes the audience will get to know the late musician well through the movie. "I personally believe everyone knows about Chamkila. However, if there are some people who don't know about him, then it's an interest-

ing story to watch. It's not just the story of an

artist but the story of a person, his journey, and

what all happened in the 1980s in Punjab. "It is not a fictional story; it is true. I feel there's something to learn from this film too. Those who don't know about Chamkila will know about him and those who are fans of Chamkila will definitely watch the film.

"Amar Singh Chamkila" is set to premiere on April 12 on Netflix. It is produced by Mohit Choudhary, Select Media Holdings LLP, Saregama, and Window Seat Films. (PTI)

SHAKIRA SAYS 'BARBIE' IS **EMASCULATING** TO CERTAIN EXTENT, HER SONS HATED IT

NEW YORK, April 3: Pop star Shakira says she and her sons aren't fans of Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" as they found the 2023 summer blockbuster "emasculating"

The singer, who shares sons Milan (11) and Sasha (9), with former husband footballer Gerard Pique, shared her criticism about

Regarded as a cultural phenomenon that explored themes of patriarchy and gender dynamics, "Barbie" grossed USD 1.4 billion worldwide at the box office.

'My sons absolutely hated it ('Barbie'). They felt that it was emasculating. And I agree, to a certain extent," Shakira, 47, told Allure mag-

As a mother of two sons, the multiple Grammy winner said she wants her children to also feel empowered while "respecting women".

"I like pop culture when it attempts to empower women without robbing men of their possibility to be men, to also protect and provide.



Priyanka Chopra Jonas boards **Barry Avrich's documentary** 'Born Hungry' as producer

LOS ANGELES, April 3: Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas says she and her production banner Purple Pebble Pictures are set to back Barry Avrich's new feature documentary "Born Hungry".

Chopra Jonas and Mary Rohlich, Head f TV and Film at Purple Pebble Pictures, will serve as producers, according to Deadline.

"Born Hungry" is a gritty drama about a young Indian boy who finds himself abandoned by his family and goes on to become celebrity chef Sash Simpson.

"Now, Sash Simpson, a celebrity chef who once survived alone on the streets of Chennai eating from garbage bins before ultimately being adopted by a Canadian couple, returns to India armed with only blurry memories to find his lost family," read the logline of the documen-

Chopra Jonas said she was extremely moved by Simpson's journey and bringing his story to screen was a no-brainer. 'Aligning with stories and filmmakers

that have the ability to move the audience by having a unique point of view is what we always look for at @purplepebblepictures. @barryavrich22's new feature documentary, Born Hungry is exactly that. "I was so moved by Sash's incredible story of resilience and deter mination, and also that it is an amazing

brancy of iconic Bollywood filmmaking. When I discovered this story, I was immediately struck by the passion and complexity of this emotional journey," added Avrich. "Born Hungry" premiered at the 2024 Palm Springs International Film Festival and will screen at Hot Docs Film Festival in Toronto on April 26. (PTI)

always loved the brilliantly colorful

storytelling from India and the vi-

Tuesday.



No superstar ensures a box office success: producer Boney Kapoor

MUMBAI, April 3: The presence of a superstar in a movie does not guarantee box office success but ensures the saleability of the film beyond the theatrical domain, says producer Boney Kapoor.

Known for producing films like "Mr. India", "Wanted", "No Entry" and "Company", Kapoor is now coming out with period sports drama "Maidaan", headlined by Ajay Devgn.

'No superstar ensures a box office success. The superstar can only assure a sense of potential business a film could have. Rest is dependent on how the film is shaped. So, it basically boils down to what the content is,' Kapoor told PTI in an interview,

"Bigger the star, lesser the risk. You got several verticals which are not theatricals, like OTT, satellites and audio. These are verticals that do not depend on the box office," he added.

Directed by Amit Ravindranath Sharma of "Badhaai ho" fame, "Maidaan" is based on the golden years of Indian football.

It tackles the true story of Syed Abdul Rahim, who served as a coach and manager of the Indian football team from 1950 until his death in 1963.

The film's production journey was filled with hurdles, Kapoor said, recounting how they leased out a 16-acre land in 2019 to build an entire

stadium to shoot eight football matches of the film but then the coronavirus-induced lockdown was announced in March

After that, the film's set was destroyed in a cyclone, which led to further delays.

"It was unfortunate but that's destiny. That's the reality we have to face. But thankfully my crew did not give up on the film. I am glad the way the film is shaped up and it's all due to their efforts," Kapoor said.

The producer, who earlier collaborated with Devgn for Ram Gopal Varma's "Company" (2002), hailed the actor

for his versatility. "Ajay Devgn is one of the finest actors we have. He will be the one man who will continue to be a big star even in his '80s like Amitabh Bachchan. We also have Anil (Kapoor) who has that kind of longevity," he said, also counting the Khan trio -- Shah Rukh, Salman and Aamir -- as stars who will enjoy a long career.

"(But) Ajay stands out... He has done all types of film. He can mould himself to any character which means he can walk with laurels at any party because he gives his all," he added.

Also featuring Priyamani, Gajraj Rao and Rudranil Ghosh, "Maidaan" is presented by Zee Studios. It will be released in theatres on April 10. (PTI)



HOW RCB'S PLANNING UNRAVELLED AGAINST LSG AND MAYANK YADAV

BENGALURU, April 3: Royal Challengers Bengaluru's strategy against the super-quick Mayank Yadav was to use his extreme pace against him, and it is not an unfamiliar approach in top-flight cricket.

But even on a slightly gripping Chinnaswamy pitch, Mayank, who clocked consistently north of 150 kmph and used angles wonderfully, upended RCB's plans to walk away with impressive figures of 4-0-14-3.

Lucknow Super Giants won their IPL 2024 match by a princely 28-run margin to go fourth on the table with four ence of playing Mayank in local points. Mahipal Lomror, who cricket, in the post-match press came in as an impact sub, was a

distant spectator from dugout when Mayank unleashed his fury, but he was candid enough to explain RCB's failure in detail.

"Honestly, our plan was simple...to use his (Mayank) space against him. It's a small ground and the ball flies here. So, our overall plan was just to use his pace and not to go against it.

"But there were some mistakes which happened and I think we need to be very clear about what we're going to do if someone is bowling every ball at 150 clicks. We need to be clear in our heads, said Lomror, who has the experi-

However, Lomror said playing Mayank in local tournaments is quite different from playing him in a top-tier event like the IPL.

"I knew what Mayank brought to the table, and knew a little bit about his bowling. But in those local tournaments, you will not get this skiddy kind of track that we had here tonight, the local pitches are more damp. But yeah, he is bowling really well," said Lomror. A quick glance back at two match situations can validate the words of Lomror.

Anuj Rawat attempted a couple of ramp shots but the left-hander saw the ball whizzing past his ribs and ears and Mayank's 152 kmph thunderbolt carried far too much

pace in it for Glenn Maxwell to ers to good effect in that match impart timing to his pull, turning it into a wimpy top-edge to Nicholas Pooran.

It was Maxwell's 16th duck in IPL, and second in four matches this season.

But that was not the only time the RCB thinktank's -- comprising captain Faf du Plessis, head coach Andy Flower and director of cricket Mo Bobat -- calculations went awry on the night.

For reasons known best to them, the Royal Challengers benched Vysakh Vijayakumar, their best bowler against Kolkata Knight Riders with figures of 4-0-23-1. The pacer used the knuckle balls and slower bouncto check the free-stroking KKR batters, and he could have been invaluable on a tacky deck against LSG.

As Quinton de Kock and later Nicholas Pooran waded into them with a mix of slices, cuts and pulls, RCB quickly ran out of bowling options.

Perhaps, LSG skipper KL Rahul offered them the best lesson on preparation for a match.

"The chat was very simple there's a bit of help on the wicket, try and use the wicket, not to go for the yorkers really quickly," said Rahul.

Will it spark a re-evaluation in the RCB board room? (PTI)



Cristiano Ronaldo nets another hat trick in Saudi Arabia



ABHA (SAUDI ARABIA), April 3: Cristiano Ronaldo notched his second hat trick in the space of 72 hours as Al-Nassr routed Abha 8-0 in the Saudi Pro League on Tuesday.

The five-time Ballon D'Or winner scored three goals and recorded two assists in the first half for the nine-time Saudi Arabian

The hat trick was his third of the league season following his treble in Saturday's 5-1 win over Al-Tai. The Portugal star leads the league with 29 goals.

Ronaldo's first two goals Tuesday came from free-kicks. With 11 minutes on the clock, he opened the scoring with a low shot from a central position just outside the area. The second came 10 minutes later when he curled the ball around the wall from the left

Ronaldo then assisted Sadio Mané for Al-Nassr's third just after the half-hour, pulling the ball back from the left for the former Liverpool forward to score.

Three minutes before the break, Ronaldo then completed the hat trick with a beautiful chip from outside the area as he ran toward goal. There was still enough time in the firsthalf for Ronaldo to slip the ball to his right for Abdulmajeed Al-Sulayhim to score into an open goal from close range.

The star was taken off at the break though Al-Nassr continued to find the target. Saudi Arabian international Abdulrahman Ghareeb added a sixth soon after the restart and substitute Abdulaziz Al-Aliwa scored two more.

Despite the win, Al-Nassr is still in second, 12 points behind runaway leader Al-Hilal with eight games remaining.

Al-Hilal announced earlier in the day that striker Aleksandar Mitrovic, second behind Ronaldo with 22 goals, is likely to miss the

Hardik credits uncle Jugraj Singh for shaping his career

NEW DELHI, April 3: If it was not for a timely advise from his uncle and former India drag-flicker Jugraj Singh, men's team vice captain Hardik Singh would have shifted to the Netherlands back in 2017 when he was striving hard to kick open the door of national camp for himself without success.

Hardik, a star mid-fielder from Khusropur village near Jalandhar in Punjab, says he was on the verge of giving up his dream of playing for India if his maternal uncle Jugraj had not motivated him to stay focussed. "I progressed from the sub-junior level to the senior level at a good pace after I joined the Mohali Hockey Academy as a 14-yearold. But after a few years, I found myself in a situation where I had

lost confidence after being ignored for the national camp. "At that time, way back in 2017, I thought of shifting base to the Netherlands to play club hockey there. I gave up hope of representing India. If he (Jugraj) had not guided me at that time, I wouldn't be here now. When you are doing well, you need good guidance," Hardik told PTI in an exclusive chat.

"He advised me to explore hockey in the country more and improve my game. That time I was 18-19 year old. So I thought let me give me some more time and explore my hockey in India," he added.

"He (Jugraj) told me you have age on your side. You have the game, you can shine even by staying back in India. Play for domestic teams and show your skills so that people can know about you," he said.

"If not for his guidance I wouldn't have been here today because I didn't have so much patience." Hardik's decision to stay back yielded desired results as he went on to become the mainstay in the Indian team's midfield and was also a part of the Tokyo Olympics bronze medal-winning squad besides being a member of the Hangzhou Asian Games gold medal-winning side. He was also part of the silver medal-winning side of 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games.

Recently, Hardik was named FIH Player of the Year as well Hockey

India Player of the Year. "As an individual I am happy about the awards, but our greater focus is on the team as hockey is a team game. If one player out of the 16-member squad doesn't play well, it will harm the team," he said. Jugraj said as an athlete, Hardik too had his setbacks but he just reminded him about the significance of representng the national flag and that motivated the star midfielder.

"It is a proud feeling for the entire family about what he has achieved so far but the journey is not over yet. So I advised him to work hard and he will get the results. He also did a lot of hardwork," Jugraj told

1st All Assam Open Rapid Chess Tournament concludes

DIPHU, April 3: 1st All Assam Open Rapid Chess Tournament was held from March 31 to April 2 at Divine Valley School, Sepon, Charaideo District. Rintu Brahma from Karbi Anglong won the championship title while Thong Teron finished 9th in overall ranking. Altogether 159 players from across the state have participated in the

Karbi Club Volleyball Academy launches jersey

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 3: Karbi Club Volleyball Academy has launched their jersey here at the club. The jersey is sponsored by Kangtang SC. The Karbi Club Volleyball Academy has gratitude for the contribution facilitated by the members of Kangtang.

England played good cricket, 1-4 verdict against India undeserved: Robinson

bowler Ollie Robinson reckons that his team endured an "undeserved" verdict in India where they lost the Test series 1-4 despite playing some "really good cricket"

He also countered criticism around England's aggressive style of playing, termed 'Bazball', saying it was entertaining and a few tweaks would make his side a dominant force in all three formats

"We were really close to reversing

LONDON, April 3: England pace that result. Obviously the catch I dropped in the fourth Test would have helped us but, no, we feel like 4-1 was undeserved, really," Robinson told Sky

> We played some really good cricket and maybe on another tour it could have been 3-2 to us, who knows?

> The Ben Stokes-led England won the opening game by 28 runs, but lost the remaining four Tests by 106 runs, 434 runs, five wickets and an innings and 64 runs respectively.

Robinson only played the fourth Test don 'Baz' McCullum, was pleasing to in Ranchi. He dropped Dhruv Jurel on watch. 59 in the hosts' first innings as the wicketkeeper-batter scored a crucial 90 in India's five-wicket victory. The pacer also bowled 13 overs without

'Very frustrating to me. I put in a lot of hard work before and during that tour. I waited to the fourth Test to get a game,"

Robinson said 'Bazball', which gets

"The brand of cricket that we're playing is really good to watch for fans and good to play in. I think we're really close to being the best in the world, to be hon-

"A few one percenters here and there and we can really dominate the world of cricket," he added.

England next play Pakistan in a T20 series before the T20 World Cup in June its name from their head coach Bren- in the West Indies and USA. (PTI)

T20I series vs Pak: Bracewell appointed

New Zealand skipper for first time

SAIL Football Academy conducts selection trial at Diphu

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 3: The Steel Authority of India (SAIL) Football Academy, Bokaro, Jharkhand conducted preliminary selection trial at Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) for Assam state players to scout talented budding players for their academy.

The trial camp was conducted under the banner of KASA. All together 50 children participated in the trial camp, out of which 6 were selected. The selected children will undergo trial again at the academy at Bokaro for final selection.

The chief coach Subhash Rajak said, "Out of 50 participants we have selected 6 players and they will participate in the selection trial at the academy at Bokaro."

About the academy the chief coach said the SAIL Football Academy was set-up in 1998 is one of the two football-dedicated academies run by the state owned steel making giant. For 20 years now the

football academy at Bokaro has been shaping future talent for Indian football in its state of the art facilities. There are players from Assam in the academy.

The residential academy at Bokaro has a capacity of 40 cadets. Its vision is to provide every deserving child a pathway to professional football. The cadets at the academy are provided every facility from medical to schooling to clothing and apparels. The cadets are provided with traveling expenses, accommodation and food and gym facility for fitness.

General Secretary, KASA, Dr. Pankaj Teron said it is an opportunity for budding players of this region in such a trial camp conducted by SAIL Football Academy. Players like Angtong Teron are still in the SAIL Football Academy. There are other players from Assam who are trained in Bokaro academy and are now playing in top league clubs in the country

AUCKLAND, April 3: With a host of top players competing in the IPL, New Zealand will be led for the first time by allrounder Michael Bracewell in a five-match away T20I series against Pakistan later this month.

The likes of Trent Boult, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitch Santner and Kane Williamson are playing in the IPL, while Tim Southee, the team's leading T20 wicket-taker since the last T20 World Cup, has not been considered following a busy playing schedule across formats

Bracewell, 33, who was sidelined since March last year due to a ruptured Achilles followed by a broken finger, got his T20I cap only two years back and has played just 16 matches in the shortest format.

Bracewell will be in charge of a side that has seven members from the previous T20 World



Cup squads, along with two newly-selected players in batter Tim Robinson and pacer Will O'Rourke.

O'Rourke has already made his Test and ODI debut. "Michael (Bracewell) has faced a long period on the side-

said New Zealand Cricket (NZC) selector Sam Wells.

"The fact he's back playing at a high level after an Achilles rupture is testament to his hard work and application," he

"He's a well-respected leader and has captaincy experience for Wellington (in domestic cricket) along with New Zealand A and New Zealand XI teams, which we believe holds him in good stead to lead the group in Pakistan."

Bracewell has scored 113 runs in 16 T20Is, including an unbeaten half-century. He has also played eight Tests and 19 ODIs. On the two newcomers in the squad, Wells said they had come into the side on the back of good domestic performances.

'Tim (Robinson) is still very early in his domestic career but his natural ability and explosive power was on full display this season. Combined with his out-

line and it's exciting to see him back playing cricket again," standing fielding, we believe he has a skill-set that's well suited has a skill-set that's well suited to the format.

'We''e been delighted with Will's early efforts in international cricket, in both the formats he's played so far. This tour will be an excellent chance for him to test his skills in foreign conditions," he added.

Gary Stead will head the New Zealand support staff with Luke Ronchi as the batting coach.

The coaching group will be assisted by former England international James Foster, who recently worked with the team in the UK and India.

The first match against pakistan will be played in Rawalpindi April 18. PTI AM

Squad: Michael Bracewell (c), Finn Allen, Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Dean Foxcroft, Ben Lister, Cole McConchie, Adam Milne, Neesham, O'Rourke, Tim Robinson, Ben Sears, Tim Seifert (wk), Ish Sodhi. (PTI)

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12 THE HILLS TIMES Punjab Kings batters to face different challenge against Gujarat Titans

AHMEDABAD, April 3: Bruised by Mayank Yadav's scorching pace, Punjab Kings' batters will face an altogether different challenge when Gujarat Titans' bowling unit tries to take the pace off deliveries on a slightly tricky Motera track in their IPL match here on Thursday.

The Kings have lost their last two away games and another slipup against Titans will lead to further loss of momentum which tends to shift very quickly due to lack of turnaround time.

Titans, on the other hand, are brimming with confidence after beating Sunrisers Hyderabad comprehensively by seven wickets in their last game

In the previous match, Kings were completely undone by Mayank's speed and most of their top-order batters looked illequipped to face the fast bowler, who was regularly clocking 150 clicks and more importantly, aiming to bowl into the body of the

completely different when veteran Mohit Sharma comes calling at the back-end, presenting a palate of variations. Mohit uses knuckle balls, slow bouncers and wide yorkers to good effect and this year's IPL trend has shown that save Mayank, all speedsters, who have been able to take pace off their deliveries, have been more successful. It will pose a different kind of challenge for the likes of Shikhar Dhawan, Jonny Bairstow and Jitesh Sharma, all of whom like the ball to come on to the bat.

If Liam Livingstone is unavailable for Thursday's match after sustaining a hamstring niggle in the last game, it will spell doom for Punjab as they would then happen to lose their key enforcer during the death overs.

Punjab will also have to deal with the accuracy of the incomparable Rashid Khan and the guile of Noor Ahmed, former's left-arm alter-ego. The third Afghan in the line-up, Azmatullah Omarzai's allround skills will also be a chal-

More than Punjab's batting, it is their bowling, especially at the death, that has been a cause for concern. Harshal Patel, one of their million dollar buys, has had a pathetic season so far going for an economy rate of 11.41 runs per over, having bowled his quota in all three games.

Equally disappointing has been leg-spinner Rahul Chahar, who has conceded runs at an economy rate of 11.37, and hasn't been able to complete his quota of overs.

Arshdeep Singh, India's designated death overs yorker specialist, has also been profligate to a certain extent and it has once again compounded Kings' worries.

For Titans, the performance against defending champions Chennai Super Kings could be termed an aberration as they have executed their plans pretty well.

The batting is yet to fire in unison but the bowling unit has shown its wares by defending well in opening game and restricting a rampaging SRH to a manageable

Teams (from): Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Robin Minz, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Mandhar, B Sai Sudarshan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Azmatullah Omarzai, Shahrukh Khan, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Kartik Tyagi, Shshant Mishra, Spencer Johnson, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Umesh Yadav, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit

Punjab Kings: Shikhar Dhawan (captain), Matthew Short, Prabhsimran Singh, Jitesh Sharma, Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajann, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw. Match starts at 7.30 PM

Sharma and Manav Suthar.



Rabada hugely impressed with Mayank's raw pace and accuracy, sees him playing T20 WC

NEW DELHI, April 3: Immensely impressed by Mayank Yadav's raw speed and accuracy, South Africa and Punjab Kings pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada sees the fast bowling sensation as a "potential pick" in India's squad for the T20 World Cup.

The 21-year-old from Delhi has been pushing the speed barrier with every game and on Tuesday night, bowled a 156.7 kmph thunderbolt against Royal Challengers Bengaluru. It was his second straight man of the match performance in his debut season, leading Lucknow Super Giants to a convincing win.

Rabada's team Punjab Kings was at the receiving end of Mayank's barrage of shortpitched deliveries last week when the debutant struck thrice with his rattling pace. One of the best pacers in the game, the South African also spoke about Mayank's remarkable accuracy.

"He has got something that you cannot buy and that is raw pace. That is what exactly he is exploiting and exploiting it extremely well," Rabada told PTI in an interview.

"The lengths that he hits, his plan is clear and now batters are going to be aware of what he can bring to the party but it is pretty obvious he has got immense pace and it seems he can control where he wants to bowl.

"When you have got pace and control as well, and he understands his role. So, when you have got clarity, it is no surprise that he is turning out performances like that," said Rabada.

Mayank is only two games old in the IPL but his name is already being discussed widely as a potential selection in India's squad for the T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean. Rabada too thinks he can't be overlooked.

"At this stage, he is looking hot and I have no doubt selectors will be looking at him at as a potential guy in the team but that is none of my business. To my understanding, he will def-



initely be looked at as a potential pick." The IPL 2024 has assumed more significance as it precedes the T20 World Cup in June where Rabada will be trying to help South

Africa win an elusive ICC title. But before that, he remains fully committed to Punjab Kings' campaign this season. "My goal is to play each and every game and to make myself available for each and every game this IPL. The rest is up to the coach and man-

"Leading up to the World Cup, if picked, it is something that I would love to be involved in. The IPL would definitely be a test to see where you are at and and see where you can be a bit better and brush up. At the same time, it is about trying to win games for Punjab Kings." Rabada got closest to winning the IPL when Delhi Capitals reached the final in 2020. Hun-

gry for titles both for South Africa and in IPL,

Rabada is hoping to land a trophy double over

His illustrious South African teammate Ouinton de Kock had divided opinions by saying that the IPL is the biggest thing he has won in his career after lifting the trophy with Mumbai Indians. Rabada would not go that far but to him, IPL is by far the biggest prize in the world of franchise cricket.

"The IPL is the biggest T20 league in the world barring the ICC events. It seems to be a league that is growing from strength to strength, attracting the world's best players

"He (de Kock) is right in saying it...IPL is definitely the best out there. I still think country takes precedence over any sort of league

"However, winning the IPL would be monstrous and would be a huge achievement and a tick off the bucket list. We came so close with Delhi but now with Punjab, we are hoping this could be our year." On the season so far, he added: "What is missing is a team performance, we got the team, we have got the players and each player has to take responsibility."

The 28-year-old also feels the two bouncer per over rule that has been introduced in IPL this season should also make its way to the highest level. "I don't see why not, it balances the game more. As you have seen there have been whole lot of runs scored, wickets are better. It makes the game more interesting," he opined. "It makes both batters and bowlers think more about the game. It adds more to strategy. From the fans' perspective, it adds another talking point. As a cricket player, it gives you a lot more to work with, it allows batters to find new ways to deal with short ball. "If you use it to your advantage just the like Mayank has used (for LSG) that is playing into his hands extremely well. Each team can use it as a weapon in its arsenal," reckoned Rabada. (PTI)

Kumara claims 4 wickets as Sri Lanka wins 2nd test to sweep series over Bangladesh



CHATTOGRAM (BANGLADESH), April 3: Fast bowler Lahiru Kumara claimed four wickets for 50 runs as Sri Lanka swept the two-test series against Bangladesh with a 192-run victory in the second match on Wednesday.

Sri Lanka won the first test by 328 runs and with the series sweep maintained its record of not losing a test in Bangladesh.

It won the earlier three-match T20 series 2-1 before losing the ODI series by the same margin.

"We're very satisfied with the (test) win," Sri Lanka captain Dhananjaya de Silva said. "There are many areas for us to improve, and I've talked about those with the team and the coaches are

working towards that. If we can

ning a habit." Resuming Day 5 at 268-7 and needing 243 runs for an unlikely victory, Bangladesh was bowled out for 318 with Mehidy Hasan Miraz staying unbeaten on 81. Occasional bowler Kamindu Mendis, who took 3-32, got the breakthrough for the visitors in the

learn day by day and raise our

game by 1%, we can make win-

Nishan Madushka at gully. But Mehidy raised his sixth test 50 off 62 balls, hitting Kamindu for a boundary. He batted aggressively to raise the prospect of his only second century but Hasan Mahmud and Syed Khaled Ahmed

failed to give him support.

fourth over of the day when he

dismissed Taijul Islam, caught by

Both of the batters were dismissed by Kumara, leaving Mehidy 19 runs short of his century. He played 110 balls for his 81, including 14 fours.

"After the team does badly, the players feel bad. They always want to improve. They communicate with each other. We don't think about test match fees,' Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said. "We are looking for improvement even when we are doing well. Everyone feels bad when we lose, but we prepare very well. We practice very hard.

"This is a very young team. We don't have much experience. Every player has the desire to improve. Give it more time, the team will make better decisions.

Sri Lanka posted 531 in its first innings with six batters getting past half-century marks, making it the highest total without any batters scoring a century.

It then dismissed Bangladesh for 178 runs, and took a 353-run lead but the visitors decided against the follow-on. Despite a batting collapse in the second innings, Sri Lanka was able to leave Bangladesh a record chase of 511 after declaring on 157-7. "The bowlers did their basics on this wicket, and the batters did their job as well," Dhananjaya said. "The batters were a bit disappointed about not getting runs in the first test, but we have experienced players. I was confident they would get runs." (PTI)

From pacer to left-arm spinner: how LSG's M Siddharth made transition

BENGALURU, April 3: On a sultry Tuesday night, Virat Kohli's wicket might have given Manimaran Siddharth the validation he was seeking after turning to left-arm spin from pace bowling some summers ago. In the fifth over of the Power Play, his third, Siddharth dismissed Kohli, a leading edge off a fuller ball on the off-stump landing in the hands of Devdutt Padikkal at backward point.

It was the first brick in Lucknow Super Giants' 28-run win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their IPL 2024 match.

"I have always dreamt of taking Kohli's wicket, it's the biggest wicket you can ever take," Siddharth, who was acquired by LSG for Rs 2.4 crore in last year's auction, said in the post-match press-conference. But the whole journey to this point was not smooth as he had to shift

Manimaran grew up in Jakarta, Indonesia, till he was eight, and his parents moved to Chennai for their son to have a better crack at a cricketing career. The turning point of his floating career came when India and Tamil Nadu spinner Washington Sundar, a close friend of Siddharth

from one country to another and battle with injuries.

now, asked him to train with AC Prathiban, a former First-Class cricketer. "He came in with a lot of skill sets to me a couple of years ago. Washi was full of praise for him. We were working on the mental aspect more than the skill aspects here. "After all, at this level it is more in the mind, as players are almost on

the same page as far as skills are concerned," Prathiban told PTI.

Siddharth showed his mental fortitude while accepting LSG head coach Justin Langer's directive to bowl in the Power Play against RCB. Kohli's well-chronicled weakness against left-arm spin might have played a part in Langer's call, but it was a big occasion for a cricketer who was playing only his second IPL match.

Siddharth wasn't overawed. He bowled eight balls to Kohli in the Power Play, conceded seven runs before bagging the star batter's wicket. "It is definitely a big thing to take Kohli's wicket. He is one of the best batsmen of all time. But for me, the presence of mind Siddharth showed to bowl three overs in the Power Play was more satisfying, as even some of the more experienced bowlers can falter," said Prathiban. "He wanted to be a fast bowler, but he did not. That attitude remains

in him, I think," he remarked with a chuckle. However, Siddharth has reasonable experience in bowling in Power Plays as TN skipper Dinesh Karthik had asked him to do the duty in

2019, his debut year in domestic cricket. He earned an IPL contract at his base price with Kolkata Knight Riders

in 2020, and hopped over to Delhi Capitals the next year. But an injury forced him to sit out of IPL 2021, and had to be contended with being a net bowler for Mumbai Indians (2022) and Chennai Super Kings (2023). "He was a bit frustrated but did not show that while training. I just told him to keep working on your skills and the opportunity will come knocking," noted Prathiban.

That opportunity came during last year's Tamil Nadu Premier League (TNPL). The 25-year-old took 11 wickets from nine matches for Kovai Kings and his economy was exceptional – 5.61. "It gave him a lot of confidence that he can be successful at this level consistently. After all nothing breeds confidence like success," said Prathiban. (PTI)

IOC sets deadline of 'early 2025' to keep boxing in the Olympics for LA with a new partner

LAUSANNE (SWITZERLAND), April 3: The International Olympic Committee on Wednesday said it needs to find a suitable new international boxing body by early next year or else risk boxing dropping out of

the Olympics for the Los Angeles Games in 2028. The IOC stripped the International Boxing Association of the right to run the Olympic boxing tournaments in Tokyo in 2021 and Paris this year.

On Tuesday, the Court of Arbitration for Sport upheld the IOC's decision to formally de-recognize the IBA, in effect cutting it out of the Olympic movement

The IOC has long cited concerns about the IBA's governance and the integrity of how boxing matches are refereed and judged. It also accused the IBA's Russian president Umar Kremlev of using "violent and threatening language" about IOC personnel last year.

"Because of the universality and high social inclusivity of boxing, the IOC wants it to continue to feature on the program of the Olympic Games," the IOC said Wednesday. "Unfortunately, this is far from certain for the Olympic Games LA 2028 because, for governance reasons, the IOC is not in a position to organize another Olympic boxing tournament. To keep boxing on the Olympic program, the IOC needs a recognized and reliable International Federation as a partner, as with all the other Olympic sports."

The IOC called on national boxing bodies and Olympic committees to help set up a new international governing body for boxing. To keep boxing in the Olympics for Los Angeles, "the IOC needs to have a partner International Federation for boxing by early 2025," it said. The IOC didn't name any candidates but the likeliest might be World Boxing, a breakaway body backed by boxing officials in the United States and Britain which split from the IBA last year and elected its own president, Boris van der Vorst of the Netherlands. World Boxing has started hosting its own tournaments and said it had members from 27 nations and territories when it held a congress in November. (AP)

Ishant bhai told me that I should never compromise on speed for extra skills: Mayank

BENGALURU, April 3: Talented fast bowlers are often told to trade-off pace for more variations but Mayank Yadav, at the very onset, received golden advice from his illustrious Delhi senior Ishant Sharma -- never compromise on speed to acquire other skills.

Having already bowled this IPL season's fastest delivery (156.7 kmph) against Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), India's newest pace sensation, during his conversation, with 'Jio Cinema' spoke about the tips he got from

Ishant, a veteran of 100-plus Tests and another senior pacer Navdeep Saini. "All the bowlers I spoke to in Delhi, Ishant bhai and Saini bhai, they all told me that even if I wanted to try anything new, I should play around my speed. "If I want to add a new skill, it should be around my speed and that don't need to add any skills that could compromise my speed," said Mayank. While the focus is on taking as many wickets as possible in a winning cause, the intent of generating pace through every delivery is always there at the back of his mind. "My attention isn't on speed as much as it is on taking wickets and contributing to the team by taking wickets. However,

it's always in the back of my mind that when I am bowling deliveries, I

Could have been handled better with clear communication: Shastri on Pandya captaincy row

NEW DELHI, April 3: Former India coach Ravi Shastri feels the fan backlash towards Hardik Pandya could have been avoided had Mumbai Indians shown "clarity in communication" while an-

nouncing him as captain. Shastri also advised Pandya to stay calm and weather the storm with solid performances.

"This is not the Indian cricket team that's playing. This is franchise cricket. They have paid top dollar. They are the bosses. It's their entitlement as to who they want as captain. Okay, where I think this could have been handled better was with more clarity in communication," Shastri said told Star Sports' 'Cricket Live Show'.

"If you wanted Hardik Pandya as captain, then say that we are looking at the future. We are looking to build. Rohit has done a fabulous job, as everyone knows, and we want him to help out Hardik in these next three years as the team

"That communication, that clarity should have come out a little more for all this to die down. So it's not a case of you saying, 'No, we don't want Rohit Sharma,' or 'He was treated badly,' and all the things that are coming out in social media," he added.

Shastri expects the tide to turn once Mumbai Indians start winning. The team is currently on a three-match losing streak.

"So, my advice to Hardik would be to be calm, patient, ignore, and just focus on your game. Get a couple of performances going. Mumbai Indians is a terrific side. If they get on a roll, they win three or four matches on the trot, everything will subside," he said.

"At the end of the day, nothing beats results. You win matches, and things will change. There's a lot of bull crap out there as well. You know, and some of the stories are just planted. A lot of it is just



planted on other people's names, including my name," he added.

Former Australia batter Matthew Hayden also felt that fans' affection for Rohit is understandable given his 11-year tenure as MI captain.

ently is to ensure that Rohit is on board with it...," he said. Hayden said its is not fair to judge Pandya based on just three matches. "...there are some concerns in and around Hardik's leadership but I think it's grossly unfair to look at the start of the season which is notoriously slow for the Mumbai Indians, and judge one of the iconic cricketers in India and will be for a long time to come as well, subject to his own fitness which is always vulnerable

stakeholders in this and they often

don't have the politics, the in-

sights, but they want to understand

this, they love Rohit Sharma.

There's going to be no getting

around that.

being an all-rounder as he is. "But it's grossly unfair to misjudge his performances so far, and the team's performances and then speculate around what is and what isn't happening inside that changing room which we don't know, he observed.

"So potentially how it could have been handled little bit differ-

MI will next play on April 7 against Delhi Capitals at the Wankhede stadium.(PTI)

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