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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."

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 for 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 Tarun Gogoi for three terms in Parliament. (PTI)

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 Assam 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

GUWAHATI, April 3: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal stated on Wednesday that "Jatiyotabad" prioritizes indigenous rights over the destruction of public assets. He made these remarks while addressing the public during meetings at Anguri, Naharani, and Kenduguri under the Jaipur mandal as the campaigning for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections gains momentum. The senior BJP leader emphasized the need for a healthy democratic environment for the country's growth and development. Sonowal was quoted in an official statement as saying, "The true essence of 'Jatiyotabad' lies in prioritising

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 destruction of public assets," he added. Sonowal justified his statement by recalling the Congress' enactment of the anti-people, anti-Assamese IMDT Act. He highlighted the approach taken by his government to secure legal (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Police asked to take action against candidate for threatening CM

IMPHAL, April 3: Imphal east deputy commissioner Kumanthem 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 Totomsana made derogatory statement against the CM violating the model code of conduct.

HT BRIEFS 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 Salmari Chariaili.

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 namghar. 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.

BJP candidates file nomination for 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. Assam excise and transport minister 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 constituency 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 phase on April 26. The chief minister said the party is committed to deliver Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'guarantee

for 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 Barak Valley will continue this time also and the region will become one of the best in the country in the years to come. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



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

Planters' body in NE opposes govt notification to sell 100 pc tea through auction

GUWAHATI, April 3: An association of tea planters in the north-east 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 year through auction as it will be "detrimental" to the survival 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 of the tea industry", he said. A gazette notification, Tea (Marketing) Control (Amendment) Order, 2024, issued on February 26, directed that not less than 50 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

apply to a mini tea factory. "The basic principle of our objection is that since the government cannot guarantee the price realisation and the time taken for sale through auction, it should not intervene 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 green leaf to factories", he said. "Managing the cash flow is a huge burden on producers. Any disruption or uncertainty in cash flow may invite social unrest and violence", he added. There are about 10 lakh workers employed directly in the tea industry of Assam and 1,25,484 small tea growers who produce 48 per cent of the total green tea leaves produced in the state. Tea producers use three different channels to sell their produce - public auction, directly from the factory through a one-to-one deal and export or through merchant exporters. "Public auctioning of tea is more than 150 years old but it has never been able to attract producers to sell 100 per cent of their produce through public auctioning. The main reason for many producers not routing their produce through public (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam can't survive without secularism: Borah

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 made. "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 minister 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-



ment 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 assessment of the situation can be made.

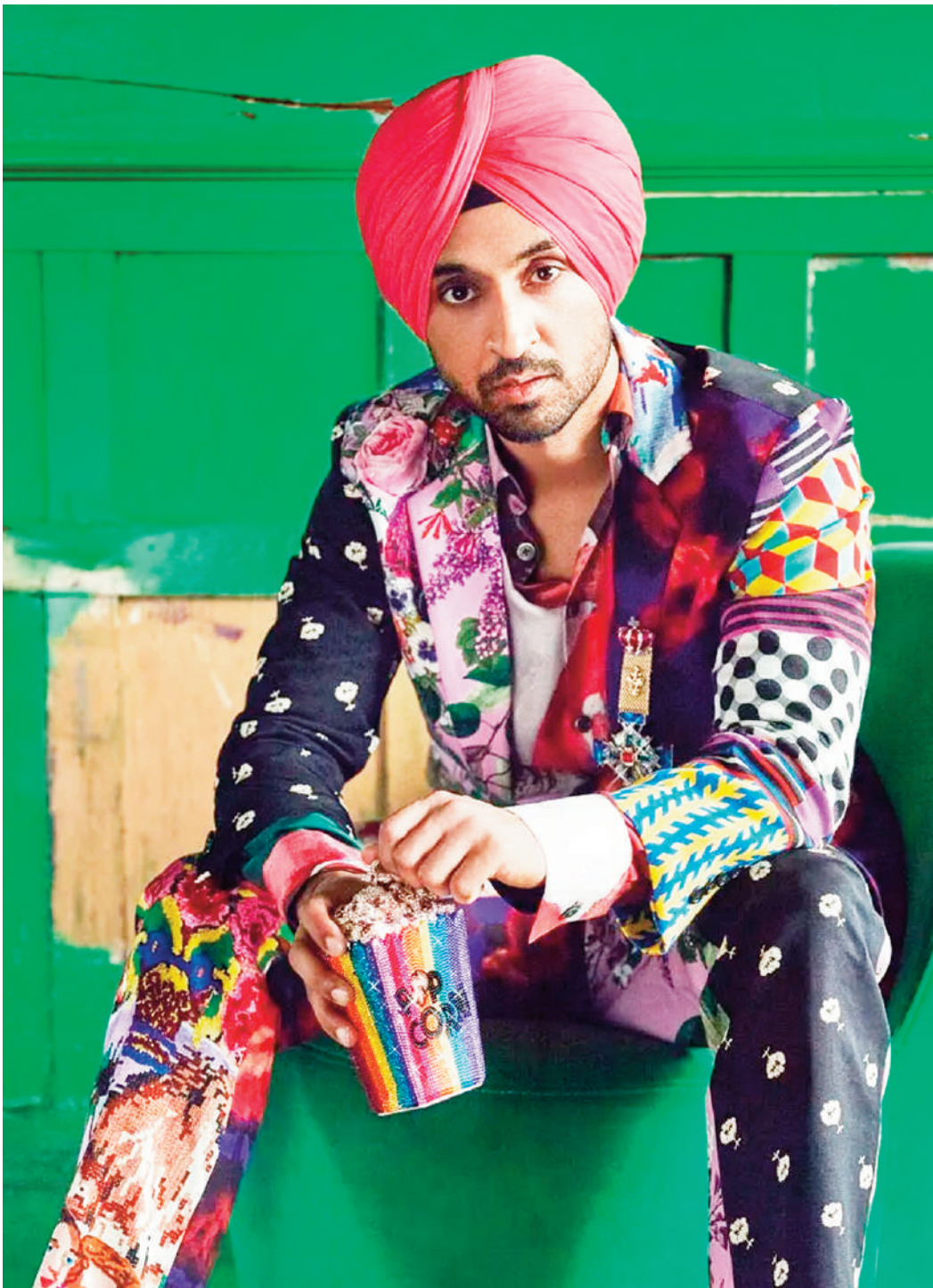
He also advised senior officials to meet with states for better coordination and understanding, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts in the efficient management of heat-related illnesses. Union minister of state for health Bharati Pravin Pawar stressed on the formation of state- and district-level 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)

Key meeting in Diphu assesses election preparedness

DIPHU, April 3: A pivotal meeting was convened today in Diphu, bringing together general observers, expenditure observer, police observer, district 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 duties. In his concluding remarks, general observer IAS Jaydip Mukhopadhyay 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)



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 singer-star 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 live-

stage 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 interesting 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 the film.

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 magazine.

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. "I believe in giving



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 lost," she added.

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 carry it as well?"

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 carry it as well?" (PTI)

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 of 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 documentary.

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 determination, and also that it is an amazing rendition of an extremely sensitive story, it was a no-brainer for us to collaborate. We cannot wait to share this story with you," she wrote on Instagram on Tuesday. "I have

always loved the brilliantly colorful storytelling from India and the vibrancy 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)



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 2020.

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 Priyamanu, 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 points. Mahipal Lomror, who 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 experience of playing Mayank in local cricket, in the post-match press meet.

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 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 bounc-

ers to good effect in that match to 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 champions.

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 side.

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 first-half 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 rest of the season through injury. (AP)

Hardik credits uncle Jugraj Singh for shaping his career

NEW DELHI, April 3: If it was not for a timely advice 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-year-old. 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 representing 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 PTI. (PTI)

1st All Assam Open Rapid Chess Tournament concludes

HT Bureau

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 tournament.

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

LONDON, April 3: England pace 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 in world cricket.

"We were really close to reversing

that result. Obviously the catch I dropped in the fourth Test would have helped us but, no, we feel like 4-1 is undeserved, really," Robinson told Sky Sports.

"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 in Ranchi. He dropped Dhruv Jurel on 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 success.

"Very frustrating to me. I put in a lot of hard work before and during that tour. I wanted to the fourth Test to get a game," he added.

Robinson said 'Bazball', which gets its name from their head coach Brend-

on 'Baz' McCullum, was pleasing to watch.

"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 honest. (PTI)

"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 in the West Indies and USA. (PTI)

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.

T20I series vs Pak: Bracewell appointed New Zealand skipper for first time

AUCKLAND, April 3: With a host of top players competing in the IPL, New Zealand will be led for the first time by all-rounder 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-

line and it's exciting to see him back playing cricket again," 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 added.

"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-

standing fielding, we believe he has a skill-set that's well suited to the format.

"We've 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 McConechie, Adam Milne, Jimmy Neesham, Will O'Rourke, Tim Robinson, Ben Sears, Tim Seifert (wk), Ish Sodhi. (PTI)

