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## Eight candidates with criminal cases in 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of LS polls in Assam

# Dulu Ahmed tops the list; Ajmal faces 2 cases

**GUWAHATI, May 4:** Eight candidates, including AIUDF chief and sitting Dhubri MP Badruddin Ajmal, contesting in the third and final phase of Lok Sabha polls in Assam have criminal cases registered against them as per affidavits submitted by them while filing nomination papers.

Besides Ajmal, the ruling NDA's partner Asom Gana Parishad's (AGP) MLA Phani Bhushan Choudhury and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) Jayanta Basumatary, three independents and one each from the Asom Jana Morchah and Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal have cases pending against them.

Dhubri constituency has four candidates with cases against them while Barpeta has two and Guwa-



hati and Kokrajhar (ST) have one each.

Ajmal, contesting from Dhubri Lok Sabha seat for the fourth consecutive term, has two cases pending against him in the state but no charges have been framed against

him yet.

The cases are related to promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony

and charges related to word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman.

AGP's Choudhury, former minister and eight-time MLA who is contesting from Barpeta constituency, has one case pending against him related to cheating and dishonestly acquiring property along with criminal conspiracy but no charges have been framed against him yet.

UPPL's Joyanta Basumatary contesting from Kokrajhar (ST) has one case pending against him for voluntarily causing hurt by obscene acts and songs but charges have not been framed against him yet. The highest number of 15 cases are pending against independent candidate Dulu Ahmed, contesting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Shah mocks Rahul for contesting from two LS seats

**BODELI (GUJARAT), May 4:** Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday took a dig at Rahul Gandhi for contesting from the Wayanad and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seats, claiming that the Congress leader will lose from Rae Bareilly by a huge margin.

Addressing a gathering at Bodeli town in the tribal-dominated Chhotaudepur district, Shah accused the opposition INDIA bloc of robbing the quota meant for Dalits, tribals and backward classes.

"The Congress is fighting elections under their leader Rahul Gandhi. When he lost elections from Amethi, he went to Wayanad. As he has realised that he will lose from Wayanad this time, he is also contesting from Rae Bareilly instead of Amethi," he said.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls,

Gandhi had contested from the Amethi and Wayanad seats. While he won from Wayanad, he lost the Amethi seat to Union minister Smriti Irani.

"Rahul Baba, take my advice. The problem is with you, not with the seats. You will lose from Rae Bareilly also, by a huge margin. Even if you run away, people will find you," the senior BJP leader said while campaigning for Jashubhai Rathva, the BJP candidate for Chhota Udaipur (ST) Lok Sabha seat.

He said "Rahul Baba and company" were spreading a lie that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will abolish reservations if he wins another term.

"Rahul Baba, Modi had a full majority in 2014 and 2019. But, he never (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Dima Hasao on alert for 10-days due to heavy rain forecast

**HT Correspondent**

**HAFLONG, May 4:** As the Indian Meteorological Department, Regional Meteorological Center, Guwahati, have issued warnings of heavy rainfall anticipated in Dima Hasao district from May 5th to May 15th, 2024, the District Commissioner (DC) and Chairman of DDMA, Simanta Kr Das, on Saturday an alert asking people not to venture out except for emergencies.

As per the alert, movement of heavy commercial vehicles along the Jatinga-Harangajao stretch of NH-27 will be stopped from 8 pm on Saturday, with the traffic being diverted through alternative routes.

"In response to the forecast, a comprehensive advisory and order have been issued, urging citizens to refrain from unnecessary travel during (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## SC agrees to hear plea of victim's father against acquittal of Surendra Koli

**NEW DELHI, May 4:** The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a plea challenging Allahabad High Court's order acquitting Surendra Koli in the 2006 Nithari serial killings case.

A bench of Justice BR Gavai, Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Sandeep Mehta issued a notice on an appeal filed by one Pappu Lal, the father of one of the victims.

Senior advocate Geeta Luthra and advocates Rupesh Kumar Sinha and Sataroop Das, appearing for Lal, submitted that the high court erred in its finding.

The bench issued the notice and sought the response of Koli on

### Nithari killings



Lal's plea and directed the registry to call for records from the trial court and the high court.

In his plea, Lal challenged the high court's October 16 order and has arrayed only Koli as the party.

Koli was the domestic help of Moninder Singh Pandher.

In the case of Lal, Pandher was acquitted by the session's court while Koli was awarded the death penalty on September 28, 2010. The case was investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

On October 16, the high court pronounced verdicts on several appeals filed by Koli and Pandher, who were awarded the death penalty by the trial court.

It acquitted the pair while holding that the prosecution failed to prove the guilt "beyond reasonable doubt" and that the investigation was (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## KAAC CEM pays homage to late Sum Ronghang

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, May 4:** In a poignant display of respect and remembrance, chief executive member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, offered prayers and bid farewell to the departed soul of the late Lt. Sum Ronghang here on Saturday.

The former executive member (EM), chief executive member (CEM), and HAD minister of the Government of Assam, Lt. Sum Ronghang, was honored at his native home in Richo Hidi, Volongkom Aji.

Late Ronghang's mortal remains arrived at his residence in Rajapathar-Richo Hidi late last night, accompanied by an outpouring of grief from family, friends, and political associates.

The Congress flag flies at half-mast in honor of the late leader, who served as President of the Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (KADCC) until his passing.



Former MP Biren Sing Engti, CEM Tuliram Ronghang, deputy chairman Ajit Dey, along with executive members of KAAC and MACs, paid their respects to the departed leader, reflecting on his remarkable contributions to both politics and culture.

President-in-charge of KADCC, Bidyasing Rongpi, expressed profound sadness at the untimely loss, describing Ronghang as not just (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## PM Modi a 'shahanshaah', cut off from public: Priyanka Gandhi

**LAKHANI (GUJ), May 4:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday called Prime Minister Narendra Modi a 'shahanshaah' (king of king) who lives in a palace but is cut off from the public, responding to the PM's 'shehzada' jibe for her brother Rahul Gandhi.

Addressing a public rally at Lakhani in Gujarat's Banaskantha Lok Sabha constituency to canvass for her party candidate Geniben Thakor, she also accused Modi of using the people of Gujarat for power and then forgetting them.

"He calls my brother 'shehzada'. I would like to tell him that this shehzada (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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# Govt lifts ban on onion exports

## Imposes minimum export price of USD 550/tonne

**NEW DELHI, May 4:** The government on Saturday lifted the ban on onion exports subject to a minimum export price of USD 550 per tonne, a decision that can help boost income of a large section of farmers and comes ahead of the Lok Sabha polls in key producing regions including Maharashtra.

The government has imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 550 per tonne (around ₹ 46 per kg) as well as 40 per cent export duty. Taking duty into account, the shipments will not be allowed below USD 770 per tonne (around Rs 64 per kg).

On December 8 last year, the Centre had banned onion exports in early December to control retail prices amid concerns over likely fall in production. During the last 4-5 years, the country annually exported between 17 lakh and 25 lakh tonnes of onions.

Consumer affairs secretary Nidhi Khare said the lifting of the ban would not lead to any price rise in retail markets.

"Prices will remain stable. If at all there is any increase, it should be very marginal," she said, while asserting that the government is committed to protect the interests of both consumers and farmers.

Earlier in the day, the director general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a notification that "the export policy of onions is amended from prohibited to free subject to MEP of USD 550 per metric tonne with immediate effect and until further orders."

Last night, the finance ministry imposed a 40 per cent export duty.



The decision assumes importance as it comes before the crucial Lok Sabha polls in key onion belts like Nashik, Ahmednagar and Solapur in Maharashtra. Farmers of this region have been demanding a lifting of the ban so that they can get a better price for their produce.

Explaining the rationale behind the decision, Khare said the "ban on onion exports has been removed from today (Saturday) because the supply situation is comfortable and prices are stable in both mandies as well as retail markets." The modal price at Lasalgaon mandi in Nashik was Rs 15 per kg in April.

She said the decision has been taken after considering the latest estimates of onion production in rabi season at 191 lakh tonnes, which is comfortable. Availability and prices of onion in global markets were also factored in while taking this decision. The secretary said the monthly domestic demand of onion is around 17 lakh tonnes.

"Lifting of the ban would also

encourage the farmers to put more area under onions. The monsoon forecast is above normal," Khare said.

The secretary noted that the decision has been taken after wider discussions with stakeholders. A high-level team also visited key onion producing belts in Maharashtra to assess the ground situation.

Khare also pointed out that the shelf life of onions is less and therefore a need was felt to export onions.

The secretary said that the government is procuring 5 lakh tonnes of onions as buffer stock, so that it can intervene in the market in case of price rise.

"We are continuously monitoring the prices of all essential food items. We will continue to keep a watch on the availability and price situation," she said.

A senior government official explained that there is an inter-ministerial committee (IMC) which reviews the prices, production,

availability and exports of essential food items including onions.

"So do not think of this as an isolated instance of decision making by IMC," the official said, when asked whether the decision has been made in view of general elections.

The official said the IMC has been taking a series of steps in various commodities including wheat and rice to boost domestic supply and keep prices under check.

In March, the Union Agriculture Ministry released the data for onion production.

As per the data, onion production in 2023-24 (First Advance Estimates) is expected to be around 254.73 lakh tonnes compared to around 302.08 lakh tonnes last year. This is due to a decrease of 34.31 lakh tonnes output in Maharashtra, 9.95 lakh tonnes in Karnataka, 3.54 lakh tonnes in Andhra Pradesh and 3.12 lakh tonnes in Rajasthan, the data showed.

Last month, in an official statement, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution said the government has allowed export of 99,150 tonnes of onion to six neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, UAE, Bhutan, Bahrain, Mauritius and Sri Lanka.

The Congress last month accused the Narendra Modi government of "callously neglecting" Maharashtra's onion farmers affected due to the ban on onion exports and said that its manifesto promises a predictable import-export policy to prevent such catastrophic last-minute policies being imposed on farmers. (PTI)

## NCLT registers 43pc jump in debt resolution cases: IBBI



**KOLKATA, May 4:** Amid several bottlenecks, the Insolvency Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) declared 2023-24 as a landmark year, with the National Company Law Tribunal achieving a significant 43 per cent increase in resolutions, jumping from 189 cases last year to 270 this year.

The IBBI is expected to submit a report to the government over the next 2-3 months for including "mediation" in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), which is currently under discussion and scrutiny.

The regulator is also working on prepackaged insolvency for large corporate cases, which is only allowed in MSME cases as of now.

For the first time in a year, the number of outputs has increased from the number of inputs, reducing the pendency across India, said Sudhaker Shukla, an IBBI whole-time member, while addressing the CH organised 7th Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

conclave.

He said that despite bottlenecks in the last seven years, resolution of 3.5 lakh crore was achieved, and 27,000 applications worth ₹ 10 lakh crore were withdrawn, making the IBC a powerful tool for debt resolution in the country.

Shukla stated that the law has evolved over time and that the interventions to improve it have been remarkable.

"In 2023-24, around 12 amendments and 86 interventions have been made in the IBBI within a single year. This portrays that we are responding to market requirements to bridge the gaps," he said.

He further added that a sectoral approach has been adopted to address unique problems for a speedy resolution, like in real estate.

"We are trying to follow the sandbox approach. The recent amendments were made on real estate where project-wise resolution was made, keeping the allotted houses from liquidation was a big step forward in a sectoral approach," Shukla said.

Speaking about the demand for mediation and prepacks for insolvency for large accounts, Shukla said it was currently under scrutiny and in the next 2-3 months, it will be submitted to the government.

He further said prepacks for large accounts were also under consideration as they aim for speedy resolution. Prepackaged insolvency involves negotiating and agreeing on a resolution plan between the debtor and its creditors before going into formal bankruptcy.

P Santhosh, managing director of NARCL, the government-backed bad bank, asserted that a delay in resolution will deteriorate the quality of the asset, making revival difficult. (PTI)

## IDBI announces quarterly results for Q4 FY24

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 4:** IDBI Bank on Saturday announced its quarterly results for Q4 FY24. Net Profit surges to all time high at ₹5,634 crore for the year with YoY growth of 55% and ₹1,628 crore for Q4 FY 24 with QoQ growth of 12%.

The operating profit stood at ₹9,592 crore. NIM was recorded at 4.93%, and Net Interest Income stood at ₹3,688 crore with a YoY growth of 12%. Cost of Deposit stood at 4.48% for Q4-2024 as compared to 3.71% for Q4-2023. CRAR stood at 22.26% with YoY growth of 182 bps. Return on Assets (ROA) was recorded at 39 bps to 1.82% for Q4-2024 as compared to 1.43% for Q4-2023 and Return on Equity (ROE) stood at 19.50% (YoY growth of 335 bps). Net NPA at 0.34%, down from 0.92% as on March 31, 2023. Gross NPA at 4.53%, down from 6.38% as on March 31, 2023. PCR stood at 99.09% as against 97.94% on March 31, 2023.

## India should prioritize R&D investment for economic growth: Ather CEO

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 4:** Tarun Mehta, the CEO of Ather Energy, emphasised the critical need for India to boost its investment in Research and Development (R&D) to spur economic growth. He lays emphasis on the need for entrepreneurs to target R&D of a million engineers in India in all critical sectors. In addition, he also spoke of the expansive investment made by the Chinese electric vehicle giant BYD in R&D and its growing team of engineers.

Mehta reiterated that China's success in technological progress, particularly in sectors like electric vehicles, is a result of substantial R&D investments. He pointed out that BYD now boasts a larger R&D team than the entire auto industry outside of China, thus indicating the pivotal role of R&D in driving industrial

competitiveness. He mentioned, "An R&D team size approaching one lakh people with some 20-30K engineers hired last year alone! Almost 10 percent of their revenue is spent on R&D, even at the scale of USD 40-50 billion in annual revenues."

"Given the demographic advantage we are sitting on, our policy focus on R&D needs to go up in an immense way. Remember, suppliers come and set up capacities where OEMs produce. OEMs produce where their new product development (NPD) happens. And NPD happens where there are engineers. That's why China today wins the NPD game so that it can continue to maintain its eventual manufacturing advantage," he wrote on X.

He said that often, Indian companies are satisfied seeing just a 3-4 percent R&D spend but we need

to focus a lot on the numbers, otherwise no one can beat a 10-100X numbers advantage. To align with India's ambitious economic goals of becoming a USD 10 trillion economy in the coming decade, Mehta emphasizes on the importance of allocating at least 10%-15% of the total investment in R&D initiatives, across sectors. Additionally, he underscored the need for the cultivation of a strong engineering talent pool, contributing towards India's technological advancements. In essence, Mehta asserts that R&D paves the way to progress; an Indian product focused company with a million engineers is not too far fetched a vision and is pretty much imminent, with spends amounting to almost \$40-50B per year, which is similar to the spends of big tech players in the US. "Throw enough engineering muscle at a problem. Eventually progress," he says.

## HDFC Bank reappoints Atanu Chakraborty as part-time chairman for 3 years

Chakraborty is a retired IAS officer of the 1985 batch Gujarat cadre

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 4:** HDFC Bank Limited announced the re-appointment of Atanu Chakraborty as the part-time chairman of the bank for a period of three years effective from May 5, 2024, to May 4, 2027.

The Reserve Bank of India ("RBI") vide its communication dated May 2, 2024, has approved the re-appointment of Atanu Chakraborty as the part-time chairman of the bank under Section 10B (1A)(i) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 for a period of three years.

Pursuant to the approval by the RBI and based on the recommendation of the Nomination and Remuneration Committee, the board of directors of the bank has approved the re-appointment of



Atanu Chakraborty as part-time chairman and independent director of the bank.

Chakraborty is a retired IAS officer of the 1985 batch Gujarat cadre and has served in the gov-

ernment for 35 years. He was also Union finance secretary during FY20 apart from being the investment secretary. Chakraborty also handled financial stability and currency, domestic and foreign-related issues as well. He managed the flow of funds with multilateral and bilateral financial institutions and had multiple interfaces with them. He has also served as secretary to the Union Government for Disinvestment (Department of Investment and Public Asset Management) wherein he was responsible for both policy as well as execution of the process of disinvestment of Government of India's stake in state owned enterprises. He also headed a multidisciplinary task force that produced the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP).

Contd. from Page 1...

## Dulu Ahmed tops the list; Ajmal

from Barpeta, on charges related to cheating and dishonestly inducing acquiring property, criminal breach of trust, forgery for the purpose of cheating, defamation, charges related to obscene acts and songs, charges related to word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman, etc.

Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal's Amitabh Sarma, contesting from Guwahati constituency, has five cases pending against him with no charges framed against him yet. The cases are related to sedition, attempt to commit offences punishable with imprisonment for life, causing hurt to deter public servant from his duty, criminal breach of trust, forgery for purpose of cheating, cheating and dishonestly acquiring property, criminal conspiracy, promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth.

Assam Jana Morcha's Shukur Ali, contesting from Dhubri, has one case pending against him related to criminal breach of trust, cheating and dishonestly acquiring property but no charges have been framed so far.

Independent candidate Faruk Khan, contesting from Dhubri constituency has one case related to forgery for the purpose of cheating but no charges have been framed against him.

Another Independent Alakesh Roy, also contesting from Dhubri, has a case related to Illegal payments and disobedience to order duly promulgated by a public servant pending against him but no charges have been framed yet. Elections to the four constituencies of Dhubri, Barpeta, Kokrajhar (ST) and Guwahati will be held in the state on May 7. (PTI)

## Shah mocks Rahul for contesting

touched the reservation meant for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. This is Modi's guarantee that till the BJP is in power, no one can touch your reservation."

The Union minister alleged that it was the INDIA bloc that robbed the quota meant for the Dalits, tribals and backward classes. "After forming the government in Karnataka, they (Congress) gave 4 per cent reservation to Muslims by robbing the 4 per cent quota meant for OBCs, and in Andhra Pradesh, they gave five per cent reservation to Muslims, which effectively reduced the quota meant for OBCs," Shah claimed.

If the opposition comes to power, they will snatch the quota meant for these classes and give it to Muslims, he said.

"I want to ask the opposition if they want to take back the reservation given to Muslims in those states. This is like 'ulta chor kotwal ko dante' (pot calling the kettle black). They were the ones who snatched the reservation, but they are levelling allegations against Prime Minister Modi," he said.

Shah further alleged that the Congress had tried to stall the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and opposed the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

"We had sent an invitation to Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and even Arvind Kejriwal for the consecration of the Ram temple. But no one came. Why? Because they are afraid of their vote bank. I hope you know who their vote bank is. But we are not afraid of that vote bank," he said.

The Union minister said PM Modi has eliminated terrorism from the country during his ten-year rule.

"There was a time when infiltrators from Pakistan ran away after carrying out bomb blasts in the country every day, but the previous Congress governments never took steps, fearing it would upset their vote bank. It was Modi who eliminated terrorists by entering their houses," he said.

Shah claimed that the Congress was "anti-Adivasi" since the beginning, which is why it never allowed a member of the tribal community to become the country's President for nearly 70 years.

Modi gave the country a tribal President for the first time in the form of Droupadi Murmu, he said. (PTI)

## Dima Hasao on alert for 10

the rainy period unless under emergency or medical circumstances. Emphasising vigilance, citizens are advised to stay prepared for any potential emergencies due to adverse weather conditions," said an official order.

For assistance, the District Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC) can be reached at 03673-236324, 03673-1077 (Toll-Free), and via email at deochafong@gmail.com.

The administration has recommended alternative routes through Meghalaya for heavy commercial vehicles destined for Barak Valley and beyond. These measures have been instituted to prioritise commuter safety and mitigate risks associated with severe weather conditions and ongoing repair activities.

"Non-compliance with the orders will be addressed in accordance with the provisions of the Disaster Management Act 2005, Section 51(b)," the order concluded.

## KAAC CEM pays homage

a politician but also a talented artist. Late Ronghang's passion for music, evident during his tenure as an All India Radio (AIR) artist, left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of the region.

Bhubon Tokbi, a close associate and cultural activist, reminisced about Ronghang's musical legacy, highlighting several of his compositions that continue to resonate with audiences. Songs such as "Nangle avete, nangta kedo pakejot" and "Thurnon thurnon riso ejang" serve as enduring reminders of his artistic prowess and love for his community.

Despite his political career, Ronghang remained deeply connected to his cultural roots, founding the socio-cultural organisation Karbi Jutang Chingthur Asong (KJCA) and spearheading multiple cultural festivals.

Late Ronghang's final rites are scheduled to take place on Sunday at the village cremation ground of Sarant village, Rajapathar, as the community bids farewell to a beloved leader and cherished cultural icon.

## PM Modi a 'shahanshaah', cut off from

walked for 4,000 kilometres from Kanyakumari to Kashmir to listen to your (people's) problems, met my brothers and sisters, farmers and labourers and asked how we can resolve their problems," she said.

Addressing a rally in Gujarat on Thursday, PM Modi had targeted Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, saying Pakistan was eager to make the 'shahzada' of the grand old party India's next PM as the country's enemies want a weak government at the helm.

"On the other hand is your 'shahanshaah', Narendra Modi. He lives in a palace. Have you ever seen him on TV? Clean clothes with not a single speck of dust, not a single stray hair strand. How will he ever understand your hard work, your farming? How will he understand your problems, that you are overburdened with inflation?" she said. She said several BJP leaders have said on record that their government will change the Constitution if it returns to power.

"When they say they want to change the Constitution, it means they want to reduce and weaken all the rights given to you in the Constitution. If you understand politics today, the biggest thing that Modi has done in the last 10 years is to weaken the rights of the public," she said.

Gandhi also questioned Modi's decision to not contest the Lok Sabha elections from Gujarat. This is because he used the people of the state and forgot them, she claimed.

"Modi is surrounded by power and no longer recognises you. Why is he not contesting elections from here if he is not cut off from the people of Gujarat," she asked.

She said Modi was contesting from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh and not Gujarat because he is cut off from the people of Gujarat.

"He used you, earned power, name and respect with your support and went on to become the prime minister only to forget you and cut himself off from you," she said.

Gandhi also attacked Modi over his statement that Pakistan wanted to make Rahul Gandhi the next PM of India and use X-ray machines to steal 'mangalsutra' and gold belonging to the public when voted to power.

"The election is in India, and Pakistan is being talked about...Such low-level utterances by the country's prime minister? You elected a prime minister to keep the country's respect intact, one whom the entire country could see talking sense, because this has been our tradition," she said.

She alleged that the PM speaks a lot of lies.

"Earlier it was limited to lies, now he utters such gibberish that Congress will steal one of your two buffaloes. Congress had been in power for 55 years, did it ever steal your buffalo and jewellery using an X-ray machine," she asked. The PM is making such statements because the public is waking up and asking him not to make Hindu-Muslim the issue in an election and instead talk about electricity, water, jobs and inflation, she said.

She said that the then Congress government formed cooperative sectors like Amul and Banas Dairy for the prosperity of farmers and claimed that today BJP leaders are trying to capture the sector.

"Equality is enshrined in the Constitution. Today the prime minister himself says that those fighting for equality are anti-Constitution. You must understand how you are being misled," she said.

Gandhi also targeted Modi over unemployment and said that over 30 lakh central government posts are vacant. She claimed that the unemployment rate is the highest in 45 years and accused Modi of giving away government properties to billionaires which she claimed has reduced jobs. Privatisation of government jobs has ended reservations, she said.

"Youth are jobless but the government is not filling these posts. You are focused elsewhere and not on job creation. When you don't get a job, you work for outsourcing and contract employment," she said.

"All the (country's) properties now belong to the billionaires. If the government understood (this) properly, they'd know that they need to create jobs...But he does not think about you...All policies are meant for billionaires," she said. She said Modi's biggest policy is to make everything "for the success and prosperity of billionaires". Gandhi said the now-scrapped Electoral Bonds were "a scheme for corruption". (PTI)

## SC agrees to hear plea of victim's

"botched up". The verdict brought back memories of the chilling crime targeting children that came to light after skeletal remains were found behind a bungalow in Noida.

Reversing the death sentence given to Koli in 12 cases and Pandher in two, the high court noted the prosecution had failed to prove the guilt of both the accused "beyond reasonable doubt, on the settled parameters of a case based on circumstantial evidence" and that the probe was "nothing short of a betrayal of public trust by responsible agencies".

Pandher and Koli were charged with rape and murder and sentenced to death in the killings that horrified the nation with its details of sexual assault, brutal murder and hints of possible cannibalism.

The high court had observed that prosecution was based on the confessional statement given by Koli to the Uttar Pradesh Police on December 29, 2006, but the procedure required to be followed for recording his disclosure, leading to the recovery of biological remains i.e. skulls, bones and skeleton etc, were given a "complete go by".

It allowed multiple appeals filed by Koli and Pandher, who had challenged the death sentence awarded by a CBI court in Ghaziabad.

The high court noted that the prosecution's stand kept changing from time to time as it initially attributed recoveries jointly on Pandher and Koli but, over time, the "guilt was fastened exclusively" upon Koli.

In all, 19 cases had been lodged against Pandher and Koli in 2007.

The CBI filed closure reports in three cases due to lack of evidence. In the remaining 16 cases, Koli was earlier acquitted in three and his death sentence in one was commuted to life.

The sensational killings came to light with the discovery of the skeletal remains of eight children from a drain behind Pandher's house at Nithari in Noida, bordering the national capital, on December 29, 2006.

Further digging and searches of drains in the area around Pandher's house led to more skeletal remains being found. Most of these remains were that of poor children and young women who had gone missing from the area. Within 10 days, the CBI took over the case and its search resulted in the recovery of more remains. (PTI)

### PUBLIC NOTICE

I, Shri Morning K Phangcho S/o Late Sarthe Phangcho an inhabitant of Village-Plimlamlangso PO-Diphu, PS- Diphu in the district of Karbi Anglong have changed my name from Morning Phangcho to Morning K Phangchoby swearing an affidavit in the court of District Judicial Court at Diphu, Karbi Anglong on dated 02/05/2024.

Henceforth, I will be known as Morning K Phangcho instead of Morning Phangcho Shri Morning K Phangcho Village Plimlamlangso, Diphu  
Ph No. 99540 80903

## Daytime passenger trains to run on Lumding-Silchar hill section



**HT Correspondent**

**HAFLONG, May 4:** Lumding DRM Premranjan Kumar stated on Saturday that in the wake of incessant rain in Dima Hasao disrupting train modifications have been made to the existing train schedule.

While some local passenger trains under Lumding Division have been temporarily suspended, long-distance services remain uninterrupted. Out of the total 21 pairs of passenger trains operating on this hill line, 17 pairs are currently in operation. However, four pairs of passenger trains, including the Silchar Special Passenger Trains and Guwahati-Dulajjan Train, have been temporarily canceled. To manage the situation effectively, nine trains have been rescheduled, while eight trains are being regulated at various stations. Stringent safety measures, including convoy transportation of trains from 5 am to 9 pm and from 3 pm to 6 pm, have been implemented to ensure passenger safety.

Beyond immediate operational challenges, concerns regarding soil instability and the risk of

landslides have prompted railway authorities to propose a long-term solution is being considered for the fault-prone area at the 110/7 km mark, with a projected completion timeline of one to two years, the DRM said.

This infrastructure endeavor aims to provide a lasting solution to recurrent issues, bolstering the safety and reliability of railway operations in the region.

Despite the inconveniences posed by changes in train schedules, DRM Premranjan Kumar reassured passengers of ongoing efforts to minimize delays and uphold safety standards. Additionally, plans are underway to resume freight train services, with discussions ongoing regarding the feasibility of night-time operations in the near future.

The press conference, attended by senior officials including Senior DCM Ramesh Kumar Mahato and representatives from North East Frontier Railway, underscored the collaborative approach adopted to tackle railway challenges in the region.

## More Summer special trains to operate from Guwahati



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 4:** NFR to operate three pairs of summer special trains from Guwahati to cope up with the sudden surge in passengers demand during summer.

One special train will operate between Guwahati and Jammu Tawi in Jammu & Kashmir for nine trips each and the other will operate between Guwahati and Hadapsar in Pune, Maharashtra for eight trips each in both directions. Both the trains will have AC 2-tier, AC 3-tier and sleeper class coaches for the convenience of the passengers. Another special train will run as one way from Guwahati towards Agartala for a single trip.

Accordingly, summer special train no 05656 (Guwahati - Jammu Tawi) will depart from

Guwahati at 8.30 pm on every Monday from May 6 till July 1 to reach Jammu Tawi at 5.35 pm on Wednesday.

In return direction, summer special train no. 05655 (Jammu Tawi - Guwahati) will depart from Jammu Tawi at 10:00 am on every Thursday May 9 till July 4, to reach Guwahati at 1.20 pm 13:20 hours on Saturday. During its both ways journey the special train will run via Rangiya, New Bongaigaon, New Jalpaiguri, Katihar, Begusarai, Hajipur, Chhapra, Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Bareilly, Saharanpur, Ludhiana, Kathua.

Another summer special train no. 05610 (Guwahati - Hadapsar) will depart from Guwahati at 8.40 pm on every Monday from May 6 till June 24 to reach Hadapsar at 6.20 pm on Wednes-

# Opposition unity must to stop BJP post-polls: Assam TMC chief Ripun Bora

*'BJP won't benefit from the opposition not fielding joint candidates in the state'*

**KOKRAJHAR, May 4:** Asserting that opposition unity is a "must to stop BJP" post-election, Assam Trinamool Congress (TMC) president Ripun Bora said lack of joint opposition candidates in the state "will neither affect Lok Sabha poll results nor help BJP in any manner".

He claimed that though the opposition parties are contesting against each other in some seats in Lok Sabha elections Assam, it will not favour the BJP as the opposition, especially TMC, refrained from putting up candidates in constituencies where another party has a substantial base to take on the ruling regime.

"The BJP won't benefit from the opposition not fielding joint candidates in the state as we have approached it tactfully. In constituencies like Jorhat, Nagaon, Dhubri and Karimganj, we didn't allow opposition to get divided

and are hoping that Congress pools all the votes from our camp," Bora said in an interview with PTL.

"Where we have seen that Congress is powerful and can take on BJP, we, especially TMC, have not let the votes to be divided. But in seats where we have seen that the Congress cannot take on BJP, we have weak organisation, TMC is contesting," he added.

TMC has fielded candidates in four constituencies, including Kokrajhar and Barpeta where polls are due on May 7.

Bora, a former state Congress president who joined the TMC in 2022, claimed that lack of joint opposition candidates will neither affect poll results much nor help the BJP in any manner.

"People have also understood that though the opposition may appear divided, but we have fielded candidates tactfully. People will



analyse themselves and vote for the most aggressive opposition in any given seat," he claimed. A former state Cabinet minister

and Rajya Sabha MP, Bora maintained that opposition parties have to come together in the post-election scenario.

"Post-election, opposition unity is a must. There is no other alternative. Only then we can stop the BJP," he said.

On prospects of TMC candidates in the four constituencies it is contesting in the state, Bora said the party has got good and positive response from the people and hopeful of a favourable result.

"What we have understood is that people don't have options and they don't want to vote for BJP. People want a strong, uncompromising opposition and for that, they are choosing TMC," the state party chief maintained.

He also claimed that the TMC will emerge as the alternative to BJP in the state and said, "Though TMC had its presence in the state for several years now, it started functioning here in a big way in April 2022. It is the beginning. TMC will be the main opposition in Assam soon." (PTI)

## Assam Gramya Hiruratna Botah 2023 to 20 persons

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOWRAGHAT, May 4:** 'Asom Goriyohi Pathi Hangrokhoyon aru Hahiya-Sankriti Bikah Mancha' will award Assam Gramya Hiruratna Botah 2023 to 20 persons. The 20 persons to be awarded are from the fields of literature, journalism and social work.

Among those to be awarded are 'Axomiya Pratidin' daily, Howraghat correspondent, resident of Gorokhiya Pukhuri villager poet, writer and journalist Dharmendra Khaklary and another resident social worker Rupali Basumatary; from Golaghat multilingual poet and litterateur Maheswar Basumatary and another from Golaghat, poet and social worker Swapnani Gogoi Chetia.

## Inspired by TV show youth joins NDA

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 4:** Vansh Goswami, a spirited youth from Assam, has got into the National Defence Academy, a milestone that echoes his patriotism and commitment to serving his nation.

Inspired by the valor and dedication showcased in Aaj Tak's flagship show "Vande Mataram," Goswami has decided to join the Indian Army, a decision fuelled by his deep-seated admiration for the Armed Forces and his desire to make his mother proud. Aaj Tak's "Vande Mataram" is a pioneering show that showcases various aspects of the Indian Defence Forces.

Hosted by Aaj Tak's managing editor Sweta Singh, this particular episode provided a gripping insight into the arduous journey of Gentlemen Cadets from the Indian Military Academy as they transform into proud defenders of the nation.

Reflecting on his decision, Vansh Goswami expressed heartfelt gratitude towards Aaj Tak and Sweta Singh for igniting his passion and guiding his path towards service to the nation. He remarked, "First of all, I would like to thank

Aaj Tak a lot for showing me how to become a Gentleman Cadet. Aaj Tak's anchor Sweta Singh hosts the show called Vande Mataram and showed how a Gentleman Cadet is trained, and that was the first hint for me that I have to do something like this for the country. Because when the programme showed the passing out ceremony of the cadets, their parents were proud that their son has done something for the country. So, I would like to thank Sweta Singh Ji for it; she has contributed a lot through that show. If that show hadn't come, I wouldn't have been so motivated, and I wouldn't have joined the forces."

Goswami's decision to join the armed forces is also deeply rooted in his desire to honor his mother, a single parent, by making her proud. His journey exemplifies the spirit of dedication and sacrifice that resonates deeply with the ethos of the Indian Army.

As Goswami embarks on this noble journey, he stands as a beacon of inspiration for the youth of the nation, exemplifying the values of courage, integrity, and selflessness.

## Governor to inaugurate the first North East Textile Expo at Gaushala

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 4:** A delegation of the International Trade Corporation (ITC) met Governor Gulab Chand Kataria at Raj Bhawan.

Organiser Mrinal Ganerwal, Vikram Modi & Hiralal Mahnot from ITC, Jhankar Dudheria, former president of Terapanth Dharmasthala, Jivraj Pincha, outgoing president of Sadhumargi Jain Shrivak Sangh (Samta Bhawan) were present. During this, the delegation invited the Governor to be the chief guest in the Northeast Textile Expo to be organized by the organization at Vrindavan Garden of Sri Gauhathi Gaushala, Athgaon from May 18, which Governor Sri Kataria gladly accepted and he will give his consent to inaugurate the Expo.

During this, the organisers informed the Governor about the Northeast Textile Expo being organized for the first time in the Northeast. In this regard, organizers Mrinal Ganerwal said that for the first time in the history of the Northeast, many manufacturers of Panipat will arrive to participate in this North East Textile Expo. The special thing about this expo is that Blankets, Bedsheets, Quilt, Bed Covers, Handloom goods, Home Furnishing etc. will be available under one roof. In this, all small and big traders of North East including Assam can participate to give more momentum to their business. Vikram Modi said during the three days long Expo, B2B meet will also be organized, through which small and big businessmen of North East including Assam will get a golden opportunity to directly interact and do business with the manufacturers of Panipat. Through this Expo, the traders here will not only get a chance to expand their business but they will also get the opportunity to see many unseen products. Organisers said that more than thirty big manufacturers of Panipat are participating.

## KAAC EM visits community health centre

**HT Correspondent**  
**BOKAJAN, May 4:** The executive Member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), health & family welfare, Surya Rongphar visited Bokajan Community Health Centre to take stock of the situation in the hospital.

The EM held a brief meeting with the doctor, nurse and staff and made enquiries about the functioning of the hospital.

Later the EM Karbi inaugurated Grand Mart, a liquor vent at Khatkhati, near Nagaland border.

The EM was accompanied by Borjan Village Development Committee, chairman, Sunaram Singnar; Bokajan Block education board chairman Sardili Bey; Dr D Bharali and Bokajan CHC sub-divisional medical health officer, Dr Devraj Deori.

## Journalists harassed

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, May 4:** Two Journalists were allegedly harassed by Railway officials when they went to the cover the ongoing restoration work between Jatinga Lampur and New Haranggajao.

Swadeep Hasamsa of N E Live along with senior journalist of Dima Hasao, Anup Biswas went to cover the spot. There were a good number of railway officials camping there on Tuesday. Since authorization is needed for Railway official to offer byte before media the journalists were made to wait for the DRM Lumding. After waiting for several minutes, a person with guards shouted at the journalists and chased them away before they can introduce themselves.

The officials used unparliamentarily words and tried to snatch their mobile phones. Then the official went back and instructed others to forcibly snatch their phones and deleted all the footage. In the scuffle one of the journalists phone got damaged. Later, they came to know that the official was none other than the DRM, Lumding, Prem Ranjan Kumar.

The journalists Swadeep Hasam, North East Live Haflong and Anup Biswas, senior journalist, Haflong lodged complaint with General Manager, N F Railway.

## Career workshop held

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 4:** A Career Awareness workshop was organised by the department of mechanical engineering, Assam Don Bosco University School of Technology on May 4 at Anutiati Kamaldev Higher Secondary School, North Guwahati.

The resource persons for the workshop were Dr Buljit Buragohain, a prominent career counsellor of the state and Head, Department of Mechanical Engineering of Assam Don Bosco University School of Technology and Kamaldeep Kalita, Assistant Professor of the Department of Mechanical Engineering. The introduction of resource persons was given by Momi Gayan Das and the workshop was moderated by Dr Akashi Baruah.

Dr Buljit Buragohain explained that students should choose disciplines and subjects in higher secondary according to their personality, interests and skills. He discussed various trades of ITIs and three-year diploma courses of Polytechnics that students can study after passing the high school examination. He talked about the importance of reading newspapers. Dr. Buljit Buragohain also mentioned the need for general knowledge in various competitive examinations and interviews conducted for recruitment. Apart from clearing the doubts of the students while choosing the right career path, Dr. Buragohain also informed about the free Career Counselling over phone (9435188630) on every Saturday from 6 PM to 9 PM. Another resource person, Mr. Kamaldeep Kalita informed the students about the importance of having a goal in one's career. He also explained about the use of technology based learning and briefed about the proper utilisation of the internet in the academics of students.

# Assam foresters receive training on Hoolock gibbon conservation

*Course has provided participants with an initial understanding of the basic principles of Primatology*

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 4:** Premier biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak organised a training programme on Hoolock gibbon conservation for foresters of Assam Forest Department in Hoolongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in collaboration with Jorhat Forest Division with support from The Habitats Trust and IUCN Primate Specialists Group.

During the week-long and residential training course, a wide range of topics were covered including Biodiversity in Northeast India and Conservation, Primates Conservation in Northeast 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, Population and Habitat Monitoring, Gibbon Rescue and Rehabilitation, Global Positioning System & use in field, and Legal Orientation (Wildlife Laws and its Application).

This course has provided participants with an initial understanding of the basic principles of Primatology, experience with the methods and techniques used in field research.

The course consisted of daily lectures and field exercises.

"The Western Hoolock gibbon (Hoolock hoolock) is only the ape of India and is distributed



in northeast India. Their distribution in India is limited to the seven states of northeast India on the southern bank of the Dibang -Brahmaputra river system. Unfortunately habitat fragmentation encroachment and hunting are the major threats to gibbons in India," Dr Dilip Chetry, head of

Aaranyak's Primate Research and Conservation Division said.

Aaranyak has designed this series of "Training of Foresters for the Conservation of Hoolock Gibbon in Assam in 2024" basically to sensitise newly-recruited foresters about various aspects of

primate conservation with focus on Hoolock gibbon.

The training for the second batch of foresters was started on April 22 at Gibbon Conservation Centre of Aaranyak in Jorhat district of Assam. It was inaugurated by Rupak Bhuyan, Deputy Range Officer in charge of Mariani under Jorhat Forest Division.

He urged the trainees to make use of the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge for the conservation of Hoolock gibbon and other wildlife of Assam.

Twenty-two foresters participated in the training from various forest divisions in Assam -- Doomdooma Forest Division, Sibsagar Forest Division, Golaghat Forest Division, Karbi Anglong East & West Forest Division, Dima Hasao East & West Forest Division, South Nagaon Forest Division, Cachar Forest Division, Hailakandi Forest Division Karimganj Forest Division.

The resource persons included Dr I.C. Baruah of Assam Agricultural University, Dr Prabal Sarkar of University Science and Technology Meghalaya, Dr Bhaskar Choudhury from Wildlife Trust of India, Ajoy Kumar Das, of Gauhathi High Court, Gunin Saikia, former deputy conservator of forest, Animesh Medhi, forest range officer, Mariani Forest Range, Mridu Paban Phukan from Wildlife Conservation & Study Centre, Dr Dilip Chetry, Arup Kumar Das, Akshay Kumar Upad-

haya, Simanta Medhi, Arif Hussain and Pitam Jyoti Gore.

The convocation of the training was held on April 28 with well-known primatologist Dr Dilip Chetry in the chair.

The chief guest of this occasion was Animesh Kalita, forest range officer, Mariani range, who appreciated Aaranyak for conducting the training that was the need of the hour. He hoped this training would boost the capacity of the trainees for conservation of Hoolock gibbon in particular and biodiversity in general.

He shared his experience as forest officer and requested the trainees to be active in performing their responsibility to save the forest and wildlife. Dr Dilip Chetry, vice president of Aaranyak, requested the trainees to use the knowledge gained from this training for the conservation of biodiversity of Assam.

Dr Chetry expressed gratitude to Assam Forest Department especially Jorhat Forest Division and local community for the support extended during the training.

He also informed that the 3rd such training programme, as part of the series, will be organised from May 20 to 26.

The training programme concluded with distribution of the study material like training manuals, Gibbon books, Posters, stickers certificates, among the trainees.

# Hunar: Nawachar Se Rojgar Tak

By: Er. Prabhat Kishore

“HUNAR” as a concept evolved under the active guidance of Honourable Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar. The “Hunar” programme under the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGL) of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan was inaugurated by Honourable Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at S.K. Memorial Hall, Patna on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2008 at state level and by then Union Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh in Delhi on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2008 at national level.

HUNAR is a collaborative project of the Government of Bihar and the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development. It is an innovative and powerful project focusing on Minority Muslim Girls which will have far-reaching ramifications in terms of creation of decentralized educational delivery mechanisms.

This Programme is totally community based. It encourages a network of educational institutions (Madarasa, Makhtabs and Centers run by socio-religious organizations of the Muslim Community) in the minority community neighbourhood, which allows easy access to these young girls in terms of both geographical and socio-religious context, which is acceptable to their families and community. This type of decentralized delivery mechanism has never been attempted on such a large scale. Girls education statistics, particularly among Muslim girls, in Bihar is very low and the Hunar Programme is an intervention that will encourage Muslim girls to join the educational mainstream in the long term.

To implement Hunar, Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) has entered into an agreement with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), an apex nodal body for distance education in the country. This agreement provided free skill training to about 13768 girls across Bihar, who are either studying in various schools or have dropped out.

The seven trades (along with course code identified by BEPC for skill training were 251-Jute Production, 256-Bakery & Confectionary, 401-404-Gram Sakhi (for health care service), 439-441-Early Childhood Care and Education, 442-444-Basic Rural Technology, 612-Beauty Culture, and 705-706-Cutting and Tailoring.

The Hunar scheme has been implemented through three Nodal Agencies in Bihar i.e. Imarat Sharia Educational and Welfare Trust, Edara-e-Sharia and Rahmani Foundation. These 3 are old established socio-religious organizations of the Minority Muslim Community which run schools, Makhtabs, Hospitals etc. They have deep penetration in minority dominant areas of the state and enjoy the trust of the community. Under this scheme NIOS, in consultation with BEPC, has made special provisions for parameters related to infrastructure, fees as well as number of students at study centers (designated as AVIs) run by these nodal agencies. These special provisions were made to facilitate easier accreditation of AVIs for this programme.

Hence accreditation for traditional educationally backward institutions, especially Madarasas and Makhtabs, was easier. It is envisaged that the skill training of girls will help them in their future areas of work. NIOS provides free course material including Urdu text books under this programme which is useful for most of the girls coming from families living under abject poverty.

The BEPC has utilised funds provided by the Government of India (Under SSA through NPEGL), and the State Government of Bihar for this purpose. This initiative significantly improved the access of Muslim girls to the school level education



*HUNAR is a collaborative project of the Government of Bihar and the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development. It is an innovative and powerful project focusing on Minority Muslim Girls which will have far-reaching ramifications in terms of creation of decentralized educational delivery mechanisms*

being provided by the aforesaid eventual accredited centers and encouraged their parents to ensure their enrolment in government schools.

**Objective of Hunar Programme**

- To mainstream the education of Minority Muslim girls aged 10 year and above into the formal education structure.

- To promote/motivate girls enrolment in School.

- To promote retention in school through the incentive of free vocational training programme.

- To attract the dropouts and bring them back into mainstream education.

- To strengthen girls economically and otherwise through vocational training.

**Course Fee and Duration**

The course fee and training duration of the selected trades were as: 251-Jute Production (₹ 2000, 6 month), 256-Bakery & Confectionary (₹ 1200, 6 month), 401-404-Gram Sakhi (₹ 3500, 1 Year), 439-441-Early Childhood Care and Education (₹ 3000, 1 Year), 442-444- Diploma in Basic Rural Technology (₹ 3000, 6 month), 612-Beauty Culture (₹ 1000, 6 Month), and 705-706-Cutting and Tailoring (₹ 2000, 6 month).

The process followed in implementing 'Hunar' is summarized below.

**Stage I: Conception Phase**

Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) after due deliberation identified NIOS as the best suited agency to collaborate for project Hunar. It was envisaged that free of cost skill training/upgradation would be provided to young Muslim girls (10-14 years), who are already enrolled in formal schools of Bihar or have dropped out. The beneficiary group was extended subsequently expanded to cover girls (11-16 years) by BEPC in consultation with the community representatives.

The entire cost (in terms of fees and other expenses) of the training incurred by NIOS was to be reimbursed by BEPC. Based on the outcomes of this Pilot Project, its scope would be further enhanced to cover other most deprived sections, in addition to minority Muslim girls, in the next academic session.

After the agreement with NIOS, BEPC published an advertisement in the local newspapers of Bihar in the month of February/March 2008 about this project and invited applications from the target group for “7” selected trades. In response, approximately 15000 applications were received by BEPC. These applications/admission forms were processed by Bihar Education Project Council and subsequently handed over to NIOS, which found that approximately 13768 applications met the criteria and were as per budget available in academic year 2008-09.

**Stage-II: Preparatory Stage**

The implementation strategy during this stage was jointly worked out by BEPC and NIOS. It was envisaged that suitably located and equipped Educational institutions in Bihar like Madarasas and Makhtabs in the neighbourhood or vicinity of these young Muslim girls would be identified and granted accreditation as AVIs of NIOS based on the relaxed revised

norms of NIOS.

This was a unique and novel implementation strategy which has not been undertaken till now elsewhere. It involved a series of meetings with the religious cum educational leaders of the community for enlisting their active support and collaboration for this project at various levels.

**The Process for collaboration was as follows:**

I. Collaboration of Government of Bihar and Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) with NIOS,

II. Collaboration with community leaders, educationists and other activists from Civil Society Organization belonging to Muslim community in Bihar for ensuring that the project takes a feasible and concrete shape.

For this purpose BEPC was able to identify amongst others, “3” nodal agencies based on its earlier experience suggested to NIOS, which are leading socio-religious and educational institutions for Muslim community in Bihar viz., Imarat Sharia, Edara-e-Sharia and Rahmani Foundation.

These prominent socio-religious organizations of the Muslim community are responsible for running a large number of unit organizations involved in socio-religious, medicare & educational activities at village, block and district level in Bihar and neighbouring states. These are mostly in the form of Madarasas and Makhtabs which are controlled & affiliated by these umbrella organizations. They have a very high degree of community acceptance and reach, both in geographical and social terms.

Since this was the first time that a central Government Organization (apex vocational training body-NIOS) was making an attempt to create this network at the grassroots level, there was no pre-existing data or baseline information that could be used for the purpose of creation of community based educational network to be used as delivery mechanism for an educational intervention by Government of India and Government of Bihar. A tripartite arrangement was arrived at between NIOS, Nodal Organizations (Imarat Sharia, Edara-e-Sharia and Rahmani Foundation) and Madarasas and Makhtabs affiliated and controlled by these nodal organizations, creating an elaborate and complex network of educational institutions at grass root level to act as delivery mechanism for this project.

Other remarkable feature of this delivery mechanism is that it comprises socio-religious/ educational institutions run and controlled by community in local neighbourhood or vicinity without the participation of government or its institutions at any level.

Since, this was a complex task involving collaboration at grassroots level, it required series of meetings and interactive sessions to identify and enlist the support of prominent socio-religious leaders and institutions for this project, which was process oriented and involved people across all levels. (... to be continued in the next Sunday special edition)

# Special on World Laughter Day Laughter can unite the whole world!

By: Lalit Garg

World Humour Day is a wonderful day and a unique gift to the entire humanity to celebrate happiness and to relieve stress by laughing, without any expense. It unites the entire humanity, which makes life better. World Humour Day is celebrated on the first Sunday of May; this day ensures good health, mental peace and overall development by providing lots of opportunities for laughter. Laughing brings enthusiasm to the body and mind; in fact, laughing from the heart is no less than a medicine.

According to studies, people who laugh often live longer; they are better off, are richer and happier and also have more positive energy. Before others make you sad and stressed by laughing at you, learn to laugh at yourself. Laugh at your own shortcomings and view them as opportunities. Most people take other persons' laughter too seriously and they become sad. Whereas laughing at yourself enables you to be more invulnerable, more adventurous, more courageous, healthier and more authentic.

World Humour Day is not just an excuse to smile; but it is an inspiration and a life force. The credit for implementing this day goes to Dr. Madan Kataria, the founder of Hasya Yoga Movement, who celebrated World Comedy Day for the first time on 11 January 1998 in Mumbai. The main objective was to reduce increasing stress, unrest, anxiety and problems in the society, and to teach them to live a happy life. Because laughing is very helpful in everyone's physical, mental, emotional and intellectual development, laughter is also the key to success in our life, it is also the solution to many problems.

Laughter is a balm that heals the wounds of a sad heart. This is also an exercise for our facial muscles and to rest our mind. Research reveals that as we grow older, we laugh less. On this, author Michelle Prichard says, “We do not laugh less, because we have grown old; but we become old, because we have stopped laughing.

Today's busy man is forgetting his smile and laughter; as a result he is inviting stress-related diseases, like - high blood pressure, diabetes, migraine, hysteria, madness, depression etc.



Laughing increases energy and oxygen circulation.” Contaminated air comes out of the body. Always laughing openly strengthens and strengthens all the organs of our body. It also increases blood circulation in the body. Apart from this, the digestive system works more efficiently. That is why doctors also say that humour is useful for patients suffering from disease. People who make us laugh remain etched in our memories.

We may like or dislike somebody for various reasons, but in the long run, the people who deserve our love are those who make us laugh and become the smile on our faces. Perhaps that is why Victor Borg says, “Laughter is the shortest bridge to cross the distance between two people.” Laughing is such a precious gift, which nature has bestowed only on humans.

Humour is a universal language. It has the ability to integrate humanity irrespective of caste, religion, colour, gender and language. This is an initiative to connect man to man. Laughter is capable of creating new worlds by connecting different communities. This idea may seem imaginary, but people have a deep belief that only laughter can unite the world. That is why Martin Luther King said, “If I am not allowed to laugh in heaven, I will not go to heaven.”

If there are clouds of sadness and restlessness, the sunshine of laughter cannot bloom. Author Emily Mitchell says, “A day without laughter is like living in darkness, you try to find your way, but you cannot see it clearly.” Laughing is a tremendous positive emotion and energy that a person possesses that makes not only the internal, but also the external appearance effective, prosperous and stunning.

Humour is a powerful emotion that has the ability to energize a person and to make the world peaceful.

It affects the electro-magnetic field of the person and transmits positive energy to the person.

When a person laughs in a group, the positive energy from his laughter spreads throughout the environment. Both happiness and sorrow come and go in the world like sunshine and shade. If a person remains cheerful in both situations, his mind always remains under control, and he can stay away from worries.

Laughing brightens the soul. With this, you not only get pleasure, but also make others happy. Humour is the enemy of pain, and a sure cure for despair and anxiety and a panacea for sorrows. Laughter works as a great tonic.

Professor Sophie Scott of the University of London says, “Through laughter, our subconscious mind signals that we are relaxed, feeling safe.” Hotei was Lord Buddha's disciple in Japan. He was a beggar of very humble nature. He believed in living life in a very detached manner.

Whatever work he was doing, he would become completely immersed in it. There is a belief in Japan that once Hotei became so enthralled, while meditating that he started laughing loudly, while meditating. Only after this amazing incident, people started addressing him by the name of Laughing Buddha.

Thereafter, travelling, exploring the country, making people laugh and providing happiness became the aim of Laughing Buddha. In China, Laughing Buddha is also known as Putai. Chinese people see him from the perspective of a beggar who, with a bag of money and grains in one hand, shows his big belly and slim body with a smile on his face, transmitting positive energy to everybody by making them laugh.

They are also considered messengers of prosperity and happiness and symbols of removal of Vaastu de-

fects in homes.

In Japan, people teach their children to laugh right from the beginning, so that their future generation is capable and bright.

Most of the countries of the world are afraid of terrorism, violence, war and epidemics, at such a time the great need of World Humour Day is felt. Never before has such panic and unrest been seen among the people of the world. Today, there is a lot of panic and unrest inside every person. In such times, only laughter can spread positive energy across the world. Harvard University professor Teresa Amabile has said that our brain becomes most creative when we laugh.

We should promote humour and humour not only in the family environment, but also in the office. The office environment should be one of harmony and laughter, so that enthusiasm for work can be spread among the team. Laughing can prove effective for a beautiful face. Laughing increases the body's immunity, which also increases a person's self-confidence. Medical experiments have found that laughing for 10 minutes leads to two hours of deep sleep.

People who laugh make many friends and in this way a feeling of brotherhood and unity arises among them, which we never realize. There is chaos in every person's life. Then the great need of 'Comedy Day' is felt. Never before has this much unrest been seen in this world.

In this busy, turbulent and stressful life, people should take out at least one day for them to laugh and make others laugh to the cockles of their heart. That's why Osho has said that when you calm down after laughing, you will realize that the whole world, these trees, plants, stars, stones, mountains, all are laughing with you. (The author is a journalist, columnist who can be reached at [lalitgarg11@gmail.com](mailto:lalitgarg11@gmail.com))

# The AstraZeneca controversy: Reflecting on the larger issues of the pandemic



By: Dipak Kurmi

The revelation by the British-Swedish pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca regarding potential rare side-effects of their anti-COVID vaccine, marketed as Covishield in India, has sparked a significant controversy. While the company acknowledges the possibility of blood clotting incidents known as TTS and a reduction in platelet levels, it is essential to put these concerns into perspective.

Statistics indicate that out of the billions of doses administered globally, only 51 cases of such adverse reactions have been reported. Crucially, these instances typically occurred within a specific window of 4 to 42 days after vaccination. AstraZeneca now faces a legal challenge from British citizen Jamie Scott, who alleges that the vaccine caused him permanent brain injury in April 2021, a case the company must defend in the UK courts.

However, this situation highlights broader issues that warrant global attention and discourse. The balance between vaccine safety and efficacy, the role of pharmaceutical companies in public health initiatives, and the potential long-term implications of mass vaccination campaigns are all critical matters that require thoughtful examination and open dialogue among stakeholders.

The global effort to develop and distribute COVID-19 vaccines played a crucial role in mitigating the devastating impact of the pandemic. Scientists and healthcare professionals worldwide acknowledge that widespread vaccination campaigns averted countless additional deaths that would have occurred without these lifesaving interventions. However, it cannot be ignored that certain vaccines produced by major pharmaceutical companies were priced exorbitantly and raised concerns about their quality and suitability for use in countries like India, where cost considerations are paramount.

India's decision to prioritize domestically manufactured vaccines over importing expensive Western alternatives was a judicious move that should not be politicized, especially in light of the recent AstraZeneca controversy. This pragmatic approach ensured access to affordable and locally appropriate vaccines, averting potential pitfalls associated with relying solely on high-priced, imported options of uncertain quality. While the rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines was a remarkable scientific achievement, India's pursuit of a tailored vaccination strategy aimed at maximizing accessibility and affordability for its population deserves recognition, rather than being subjected to partisan politicization.

The controversy surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into question the role played by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its handling of the crisis. Accusations have been leveled against the organization for turning a blind eye to China's actions during the initial stages of the outbreak, allowing the virus to spread unchecked.

Furthermore, the WHO's decision to grant emergency clearance to Chinese vaccines, whose efficacy was not conclusively proven, has been a subject of intense scrutiny. This move potentially put millions of lives at risk, while delaying the release of a more effective vaccine developed in India.

To date, the WHO has failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for its decision to unleash upon the world vaccines that proved to be ineffective even in their country of origin, China.

Beijing was forced to implement stringent lockdowns and quarantine measures across large swaths of its population to curb the spread of the virus, as the vaccines were not providing adequate protection. This unprecedented situation led to widespread protests erupting in various parts of China, with citizens voicing their dissent against the series of lockdowns imposed by President Xi

Jinping.

The WHO's actions during the pandemic have raised serious questions about its ability to respond effectively to global health crises and its alleged bias in favor of certain nations or interests. The organization's perceived failure to prioritize the well-being of the global population has eroded public trust and highlighted the need for reforms to ensure transparency and accountability in its decision-making processes.

The COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented global catastrophe of the 21st century, has left an indelible mark on humanity. Millions of lives were tragically lost, livelihoods shattered, and economies across the globe plunged into turmoil. The devastating impact on developing nations was particularly severe, delivering a crippling blow to their already fragile economies. Even the most affluent nations have yet to fully recover from the widespread disruptions caused by this insidious virus.

Yet, amidst this colossal upheaval, a concerning lack of accountability persists. The origins of the virus remain shrouded in mystery, with China, the suspected epicenter, facing no consequences for its potential role in unleashing this scourge upon the world. Disturbingly, efforts to obfuscate the truth surrounding the virus's genesis have been apparent, even from esteemed organizations like the World Health Organization, whose investigation into the matter has been widely criticized as a sham.

Alarmingly, the Western nations, themselves complicit in outsourcing research and experiments to China, have seemingly turned a blind eye to this cover-up. Their silence is deafening, perhaps motivated by their own entanglement in the very practices that may have contributed to the creation of one of the deadliest pathogens in recent history.

This stark absence of accountability and the apparent unwillingness to uncover the truth surrounding the pandemic's origins is a sobering reminder of the fragility of global cooperation and the lengths to which nations will go to protect their interests, even at the cost of transparency and justice.

The AstraZeneca controversy might appear to be a relic of the past, an unpleasant memory from the darkest days of the global pandemic. However, the repercussions of that unprecedented health crisis continue to reverberate through society, even four years after its inception. Until a thorough investigation is conducted, accountability is established, and appropriate reparations are made, the world cannot truly move on from the trauma inflicted by that catastrophic event. The pursuit of justice and closure remains an ongoing endeavor, lest we allow the wounds of the past to fester unaddressed. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com))

# “Orgasmic sovereignty: Deconstructing power, pleasure, and politics in the realm of women’s sexuality”

By: Dr. Aniruddha Babar

“In the complex journey of life, the intertwining of women, sexuality, orgasm, and politics creates a powerful canvas of empowerment, longing, and liberation. Here, personal stories meet broader social structures, weaving a story of resilience and change. Each individual’s experience is a reminder of the ongoing battle for liberation, self-respect, and justice. Let’s answer the call to lift up those whose voices are often ignored, challenge unjust structures of power, and pave the way for a future where everyone can embrace joy freely, where everyone’s voice matters, and where every woman’s story inspires ‘tectonic’ social transformation.”

In the labyrinth of political discourse, where ideologies clash and agendas intertwine, there exists a silent battleground seldom acknowledged—women’s sexuality. In the grand narrative of political maneuvering, the nuanced dynamics of pleasure, desire, and orgasmic empowerment often find themselves relegated to the periphery. Yet, it is within these intimate realms that profound societal transformations take root, challenging the very foundations of power structures and societal norms.

In this exploration, we delve into the clandestine corridors where women’s sexual autonomy intersects with the fabric of politics, where the pursuit of pleasure becomes a revolutionary act. From the bedrooms to the boardrooms, from legislative chambers to the streets, the negotiation of sexual agency emerges as both a deeply personal journey and a collective struggle for liberation. This article embarks on a provocative journey, dissecting the intricate connections between women’s sexuality, orgasm, and the political landscape.

Here, we confront taboos, dismantle stigmas, and amplify the voices of those who refuse to be silenced—either in the bedroom or boardroom. Through candid discussions, empirical insights, and unapologetic advocacy, we unveil the transformative potential of embracing female pleasure as a catalyst for societal change. Join us as we navigate the complex intersections of gender, power, and

pleasure, forging a path towards a more equitable and liberated future for all.

Women, sexuality, orgasm, and politics - four seemingly disparate realms that intertwine in the complex fabric of human existence. In the modern era, the intersection of these domains has become increasingly pronounced, sparking discussions, debates, and even controversies. At the heart of this intersection lies the profound exploration of female sexuality, agency, and power dynamics, which reverberate not only in bedrooms but also in corridors of political influence. This intersection challenges traditional notions of femininity and sexuality, highlighting the interconnectedness between personal desires and societal structures. The dynamics of power and control extend beyond intimate relationships to shape broader socio-political landscapes, influencing policies, legislation, and cultural norms.

Moreover, the discourse surrounding women’s sexuality often serves as a barometer of societal attitudes towards gender equality and autonomy. As such, the exploration of women’s sexuality within the realm of politics is not only a personal endeavor but also a deeply political act, challenging existing power structures and advocating for the recognition of women’s agency and rights.

Sexual pleasure, particularly the elusive orgasm, has long been a subject of fascination and inquiry. For women, the journey towards experiencing orgasm has historically been shrouded in mystery and misconceptions. The patriarchal norms that have dominated societies for centuries have often relegated female pleasure to the sidelines, focusing instead on male satisfaction. Women’s sexual desires and needs have been minimized or dismissed, leading to a pervasive culture of silence and shame surrounding female pleasure.

However, in recent times, there has been a burgeoning movement to reclaim and celebrate female sexuality in all its manifestations. From grassroots activism to mainstream media campaigns, there is a growing recognition of the importance of centering women’s pleasure and agency in discussions surrounding sexuality and intimacy. This movement seeks to dismantle the patriarchal structures

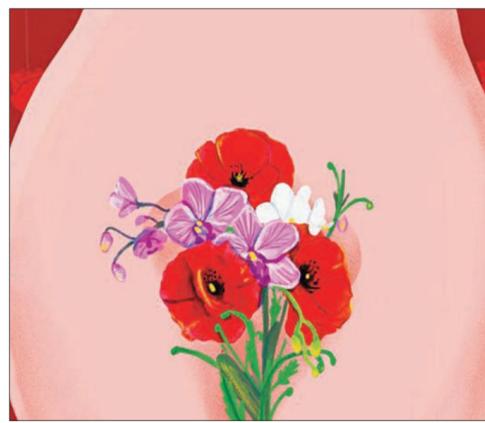
that have long constrained women’s sexual autonomy and to create space for diverse expressions of desire and pleasure.

By challenging outdated stereotypes and advocating for sexual education that is inclusive and comprehensive, activists and advocates are working to empower women to embrace their bodies and explore their sexuality on their own terms. This shift towards a more holistic and empowering understanding of female sexuality represents a crucial step towards achieving gender equality and social justice in the realm of sexual politics.

The quest for sexual liberation and empowerment among women has dovetailed with broader political movements advocating for gender equality and social justice. As women assert their rights to sexual autonomy and bodily integrity, their personal experiences intersect with larger political narratives. Policies regarding reproductive rights, access to contraception, and comprehensive sex education are not merely abstract concepts but tangible manifestations of political ideologies that directly impact women’s lives and sexual health.

These policies dictate the availability of crucial healthcare services, the accessibility of information, and the extent of individuals’ agency over their own bodies. The struggle for reproductive justice encompasses not just the right to choose whether or not to have children, but also the right to access safe and affordable healthcare, free from judgment or coercion. In this context, advocating for sexual liberation and reproductive rights becomes inherently political, as it challenges entrenched power structures and asserts the fundamental rights of individuals to control their own bodies and destinies.

In the realm of sexual politics, women’s bodies have often been commodified and objectified, reduced to mere vessels of male desire and reproduction. The pervasive influence of the male gaze, perpetuated by media, advertising, and popular culture, has contributed to the perpetuation of narrow standards of beauty and desirability, dictating how women should look and behave to be considered attractive or worthy of attention. This objectification not only



undermines women’s ‘natural’ autonomy and agency but also reinforces harmful stereotypes and power imbalances. However, women are increasingly pushing back against these oppressive norms, demanding representation and recognition of diverse body types, desires, and expressions of sexuality. Through movements like body positivity and sex-positive feminism, women are reclaiming ownership of their bodies, mind and sexuality, challenging the notion that their worth is contingent upon their ability to conform to unrealistic standards. By celebrating diversity and embracing the complexity of human desire, women are forging paths towards a more inclusive and liberated understanding of sexuality, one that celebrates individuality and rejects the confines of traditional gender roles.

The fight for psycho-sexual liberation and bodily autonomy is inherently intertwined with broader struggles for gender equality and social justice. It is essential to recognize that the right to pleasure is not merely a frivolous indulgence but a fundamental human right, integral to one’s physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. In societies where policies criminalize or stigmatize consensual sexual behaviour, harmful power dynamics are perpetuated, and societal inequalities are reinforced. These policies not only infringe upon individuals’ rights to

autonomy over their bodies and desires but also contribute to the marginalization and oppression of already vulnerable communities. By challenging such unjust structures, we can strive towards a more equitable and just society where all individuals are empowered to freely and safely express their sexuality without fear.

Moreover, the orgasm gap, wherein women are consistently less likely to experience orgasm during sexual encounters compared to men, underscores deeper disparities in sexual education, communication, and cultural attitudes towards female pleasure. This gap is a symptom of broader societal issues, including the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the marginalization of women’s sexual desires and experiences. Addressing this disparity necessitates a multifaceted approach that goes beyond mere acknowledgment to systemic change. Comprehensive sex education programs must be implemented from an early age, providing students with accurate information about anatomy, consent, art of pleasure, and communication skills.

Additionally, destigmatizing female sexuality requires challenging ingrained cultural norms and representations that prioritize male pleasure while silencing or erasing female desire. Promoting open and honest communication between partners is essential in fostering mutual under-

standing, trust, and respect in sexual relationships. By dismantling barriers to sexual empowerment and advocating for inclusive and affirming spaces, we can begin to close the orgasm gap and create a more equitable and fulfilling sexual landscape for all genders.

As women continue to assert their agency and demand recognition of their sexual rights and desires, the landscape of both sexual and political discourse is evolving. The emergence of movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp has brought issues of sexual harassment, assault, and gender-based violence to the forefront of public consciousness, sparking a reckoning with entrenched power structures and demanding accountability from those in positions of authority. These movements have not only shed light on the pervasive nature of sexual misconduct but have also catalyzed a cultural shift, prompting discussions about consent, boundaries, and respect in both personal and professional spheres. They have empowered survivors to speak out against their abusers, fostering solidarity and support networks that challenge the culture of silence and victim-blaming.

Moreover, these movements have underscored the importance of intersectionality, recognizing that experiences of sexual violence are shaped by factors such as race, class, and gender identity, and advocating for inclusive solutions that address the needs of all survivors. By amplifying marginalized voices and holding perpetrators accountable, #MeToo and #TimesUp has paved the way for tangible policy changes, institutional reforms, and greater awareness of the systemic injustices that perpetuate gender-based violence. As we continue to navigate these complex issues, it is crucial to sustain momentum and work towards creating safer, more equitable environments for all individuals, free from harassment, discrimination, and abuse.

The nexus of women, sexuality, orgasm, and politics serves as a fertile terrain for multifaceted exploration, nuanced research endeavours, and impassioned activism, where the intricacies of personal experiences intersect with the broader fabric of

social, cultural, and political forces, thereby shaping narratives and propelling transformative change. By intentionally centering women’s voices, lived experiences, and nuanced desires within both sexual and political discourses, we embark on a collective journey towards the realization of a more inclusive, equitable, and just society that upholds the dignity and rights of all individuals.

Moreover, recognizing and affirming the diverse array of women’s experiences across intersecting axes of identity—such as race, caste, class, religion, sexuality, and ability—emerges as an imperative cornerstone in the pursuit of social justice. Intersectional feminism, as a theoretical framework and praxis, underscores the critical importance of acknowledging and confronting the multifaceted oppressions faced by women who navigate the intricate intersections of various forms of marginalization. By amplifying marginalized voices and centering their experiences within broader discourses of power, privilege, and oppression, intersectional feminism endeavors to cultivate truly inclusive and equitable movements for social change that challenge entrenched systems of domination and foster collective liberation.

This article has been dedicated to every woman who embodies resilience, strength, and a commitment to change. It is a homage to those who navigate the intricate intersections of women’s sexuality, orgasm, and politics, confronting societal norms and advocating for their rights with grit and determination. To the women who courageously share their experiences, challenge unjust patriarchal systems, and strive for gender equality, this article acknowledges your contributions and celebrates your resilience. Your voices resonate within the fertile ground of exploration and reflections explored in these words, shaping narratives and propelling transformative change. May your continued advocacy inspire collective action and solidarity, as ‘humanity’ works together towards a more inclusive, equitable, and just society for all. (The author is a senior faculty in the Dept. of Political Science, Tetsu College. He is also the Director, Project Constitutional Justice, Tuensang, Nagaland)

## BOOK REVIEW

# Gypsy poet Aura Barbosa’s vision of a beautiful world

By: Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee

She is the visionary co-founder and Vice-President of the Global Writers Academy. Aura inspires the global literary community by fostering a space for diversity and recognition of poetic expression. In short, Aura’s journey is a paean to multifaceted achievement, inspiring others to pursue their dreams with fervour and dignity, defying social and racial boundaries, with her life symbolizing the triumph of passion and steadfastness. Aura Esmeralda Barbosa, from the vibrant Brazilian gypsy community, born under the rule of the sign of Aries in the year 2000, is the living portrait of courage and constancy.

Aura extends the concept of love to general humanity from the personal level. In a world brimming with diversity and complexity, she emphasizes the need for empathy which in her opinion, stands out as one of the most valuable virtues a human being can cultivate. The ability to put oneself in the shoes of others, to understand their emotions, needs, and experiences, is an act of generosity and understanding that transcends barriers and strengthens the bonds of compassion and solidarity between people.

Empathy, in her opinion, is the ability to “put on another person’s shoes,” goes beyond mere sympathy or compassion. It involves a genuine effort to understand each other’s inner world, to acknowledge their humanity, their pains, joys, and challenges. In one of her poems, ‘Do Not Be Surprised’ she writes, “In a universe of deep dreams and desires, /Our souls are intertwined in an eternal bond.”

Aura is a poet of soft sensibility in spite of her strong determination. She admires the softness of heart which we all need in this modern universe of technological rigidity. In the poem ‘Be Soft’ she writes, “In the softness of the heart, in the delicacy of each soul, /Reside the wonders of existence, which adorn the universe with its calmness. /In every look, in every movement, a charm unfolds. /In the slightest subtleties, love and beauty expanding and shining. /The lightness of essence, the tenderness that reaches us.” She discovers in this softness of approach ‘the magic that brings us together and leads us dancing. She is a poet, she inspires the poets, she is one of the most beautiful women of Brazil, she is a dreamer of the blissful world and she is above all a researcher.

Aura dreams of the “day be blessed and serene, /filled with affection, clarity and wholeness amen”. She wants each moment that harmony and peace be the course of our destination. She loves everyone intensely with a full and sincere heart to sing together a melody of vividness. The beauty of life inspires us every moment and Aura Barbosa who comes of a vibrant gypsy community hopes that life will smile on us with the sweetness and charm of poetry. Aura is a poet of love and romance she can write in of her love poems, “Every beat of my heart echoes your name, /Every breath connects me to you, even if we are far away. /You are the light that brightens my dark days, /The safe shelter through the storm. /In every gesture, in every word, in every look, /I feel your presence, your essence that engulfs me and completes me.”

Aura has a poetic conviction that Time is just a spectator in the love plot and distance is just a challenge to be overcome. Her Platonic concept of love is vividly expressed in her poem, “For while our bodies are separated, /Our souls dance in harmony, in an eternal melody....For in every thought, every dream, every prayer, /We are united, entwined in a love that transcends existence.”

By practicing empathy, we not only connect more deeply with the people around us, but we also contribute to building more authentic and enriching relationships. One of the most powerful aspects of empathy according to Poet Aura is its ability to elevate without diminishing. She also warns that, being empathetic does not only mean offering a friendly shoulder or words of comfort, but also recognizing the dignity and intrinsic worth of each individual.

Aura in spite of her poetic commitment gives serious efforts to achieve higher goals in her pursuit of education. Her academic dedication is clear in her attainment of a master’s degree in Mass Communication. She is unstoppable and currently she is pursuing PhD from a prestigious Ivy League institution, Harvard University, USA. Her intellectual ambition is high and she has great respect for the Indian poets and editors.

Recently she recognizes the poetic efforts of Biswananda Sinha President of Global Writers Academy, an Indian Poet and Chief Managing Editor of The Global Nation a Newspaper published from Dhaka Bangladesh and mentions him in her

research assignment. She inspires the Indian poet and shows her respect for their contribution as International Administrator Poet of the GWA.

Aura has become an icon, symbolizing big brands with inherent authenticity and elegance. At the same time, her poetic soul, awakened at the age of nine, finds expression with the release of “BANHO CIGANO”, her 2022 work that pays homage to gypsy culture.

Aura wrote, “I am a gypsy and will never be a slave to an empire! With each dawn, I praise the day fervently, letting the sun be my guide on this journey of uncertain paths. I live in constant motion, with faith as a compass guiding my steps and commanding my destiny. Freedom is my anthem, and the laughter echoing in my soul is living proof that joy is my constant companion” Aura has extraordinary poetic vibes. When pain tries to keep her down, she choose to dance to the tune of life instead of surrendering to tears.” Her nomadic essence refuses to be attached to one place, always changing the tone of my song to accommodate the winds that blow on my journey.

Between the magic tale and the naked and raw reality, /Resides the purest essence, naked truth. /Little Hat and Wolf, intertwined into one being, /Reflect the complexity of the soul, duality flourishing.” Her social message as a poet is so sweet, “Let love be our compass, our constant light, /And may the sensitivity of each being lead us to peace, virtue, without refusal. /May our hearts overflow with smiles and bonds being made.” The glory she seeks is not in material riches, but in the blood that pumps in her veins, in the firmness of her steps that do not yield in the face of challenges, in the star that shines in her sky, guiding her like Santa Sara Kali.

Aura being a gypsy loves nature and she opens her arms to embrace nature”. She does not belong to the world of those who seek to dominate what is ephemeral, for the earth, in its essence, has never had a declared owner. Aura loves the “cloudy nights under the starry sky, /Dancing gypsy goddesses enchanted mystery /Yemanjá, queen of the sea, mother of divine waters, /With its supernatural power, it charms and fascinates. /Beautiful women in roses, adorned with veils.”

She is aware of the “Seduction in a woman’s looks, secret in her brief reads and she warns, /But/beware, O mortal, of your stealthy touches, /For these goddesses are pure to be admired, never to be alive. /With their melodious voices, they sing spells in the wind. Aura says, “The charms of these goddesses are like sharp spears, /They can disarm you in a second and leave you in flames.... /Therefore admire them from afar in adoration, She is aware of the Dr. Jekyll and Hyde duality of life.” (The author is an affiliate Faculty of English Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond USA. He is also a multilingual Poet and writer who can be reached at bhattacharj@vcu.edu)

## POETRY

### Musical Drizzlings Of My Romance...

By: Bipul Chandra Kalita

Musical drizzlings of my romance with your hatred matter  
When your illicit yawnings fasten any outsider’s heartbeats;  
Weighing love and hatred, I whistle soulfully to oversee you.

My friends’ leisure time, to eye our absurd mindsets pass well  
When our focused moments spend  
‘ambiguous experiences;  
Time does witness how our dancing feet miss rhythm of life.

Life will demand a meaning of such pride and prejudice  
When each of us fails to define love and hatred without ambiguity;  
Tell me why your hatred for me gives you pleasure  
And I will reset your heartscape with my fertile and insightful desires  
That can bring us together spiritually to overcome physical distances!

### Flames and smoke

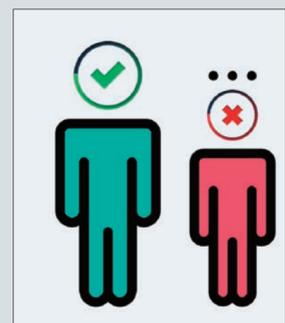
By: Jashashree Das

One land.  
One home.  
Two skies,  
One, where birds fly,  
The other, where souls go to  
when they die.  
A playground,  
A war land.  
One sleeps with lullabies of fire-flies,  
One wakes up to sounds of sirens.  
A home echoes with laughter,  
A house ripples in disaster.  
A spring blossom,  
A winter sun.  
Caged birds, abandoned souls,  
Free spirits, Imprisoned cores.  
Bewailing eyes,  
Watching the field of butterflies.  
Fatigued hands, flowering bones,  
Two lands and two homes.

### Consent

By: Mowsam Hazarika

One day  
Everyone got permission  
To choose their own ‘likes’  
The Sun made light its own  
The Moon merged with the stars  
The river flowed to the sea  
The wind fled in search of the fragrance  
The clouds embraced the rain  
And love...  
Love stopped  
In the waiting yard!



The 3 are believed to be members of an alleged hit squad tasked by the GoI with the killing of Nijjar, outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023.

## Canadian authorities arrest three Indian nationals in connection with Nijjar's murder, say more people involved

**OTTAWA/NEW YORK, May 4:** Canadian authorities, who arrested three Indian nationals in connection with the killing of Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, have said that their investigation has not concluded and "others" who played a role in the homicide would also be arrested.

Karan Brar, 22, Kamalpreet Singh, 22, and Karanpreet Singh, 28, all Indian nationals residing in Edmonton have been charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) on Friday said they are investigating if the Indian government was involved in the killing of Nijjar, a Canadian citizen.

The three are believed to be members of an alleged hit squad tasked by the government of India with the killing of Nijjar, 45, outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023.

"The investigation does not end here. We are aware that there are others out there that played a role in this homicide and we remain dedicated to identifying and arresting each one of them," Superintendent Mandeep Mooker, Officer in Charge of the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) said.



The three men were arrested for the murder of Nijjar Friday morning by IHIT investigators, with the assistance of members from the British Columbia and Alberta Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Edmonton Police Service.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Assistant Commissioner David Teboul said they are not able to make any comments about the nature of the evidence collected by police nor "can we speak about the motive" behind Nijjar's murder. When asked whether there are any Indian "sleepers" in Canada, Teboul said he could not say more because the issue is "very much at the centre of evidence and ongoing investigations", CBC News reported.

Asked whether the public should consider the men to have been "guns for hire", police said more information would come out in court, it

and "motivated."

During the press conference, Superintendent Mandeep Mooker, who leads the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team, said, "IHIT is releasing photos of the accused men in hopes of furthering its investigation. Anyone who may have seen these individuals, in or around Surrey, in the weeks leading up to the homicide, or anyone with information about the homicide is asked to contact IHIT."

He said that the suspects "were not known to the police" before the investigation into Nijjar's death, according to reports.

Mooker said all three are Indian nationals and have been living as non-permanent residents in Canada for the last three to five years.

He said coordination with India has been "challenging and rather difficult for the last several years". Mooker said that his investigation has relied on the Sikh community's support.

"We would not be at this point without the bravery and courage of the Sikh community coming forward with information for this investigation," he said, adding that he believes they will continue to come forward for any future investigations, according to the report.

Citing sources, a report in Global News said that the suspects had entered Canada on "student visas but may have been working at the direction of Indian intelligence when they shot Nijjar."

According to court records, Brar has been charged with a murder that occurred in Surrey on June 18, 2023. He also faces a charge of conspiracy to murder on May 1, 2023, in Edmonton and Surrey, the report said.

Talking to reporters, Canada's Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc declined to confirm the Indian government connection, saying such questions are best addressed by the RCMP.

"I have full confidence in the security apparatus of the government of Canada and the work that the (Canadian) Security Intelligence Service does," LeBlanc said.

"I think the police operation that you see ongoing today confirms that the RCMP take these matters extremely seriously. But questions with respect to particular links or non-links are properly put to the RCMP," he added.

The indictments Friday allege the conspiracy unfolded in both Surrey and Edmonton between May 1, 2023, and the date of Nijjar's killing. (PTI)

that the party has had issues with Muslim voters, but the results in general were positive for the man who is favorite to become prime minister at the next general election.

"We're fed up with your division, with your chaos, with your failure," he said Saturday. "If you leave your country in a worse state than when you found it 14 years later, you do not deserve to be in government a moment longer." He called on Sunak to call an election now. Sunak has the power to decide on the date, and has indicated that it will be in the second half of 2024.

Thursday's elections in large parts of England were important in themselves, with voters deciding on who runs many aspects of their daily lives, such as garbage collection, road maintenance and local crime prevention. But with a national election looming, they are being viewed through a national prism.

John Curtice, professor of politics at the University of Strathclyde, said the results show that Sunak has not helped the Conservative brand following the damage accrued by the actions of his predecessors, Boris Johnson and then Liz Truss.

"That in a sense is the big takeaway," he told BBC radio. Sunak became prime minister in October 2022, after Truss's short-lived tenure. She left office after 49 days following a budget of unfunded tax cuts that roiled financial markets and sent borrowing costs for homeowners surging.

Her chaotic — and traumatic — leadership compounded the Conservatives' difficulties following the circus surrounding her predecessor Johnson, who was forced to quit after being adjudged to have lied to Parliament over coronavirus lockdown breaches at his offices in Downing Street.

By midmorning Saturday, with most of the 2,661 seats up for grabs in the local elections counted, the Conservatives were down by more than 446 while Labour was up 173. Other parties, such as the centrist Liberal Democrats and the Green Party also made gains. Reform U.K., which is trying to usurp the Conservatives from the right, also had some successes, notably in Blackpool South, where it was less than 200 votes from grabbing second place. (AP)

## London takes center stage as vote count begins in mayoral contest that could be closer than thought

**LONDON, May 4:** London took center stage on Saturday as the counting of votes began in the capital city's mayoral contest, a day after Britain's governing Conservative Party suffered a drubbing in local election results.

Sadiq Khan, the Labour Party mayor who is chasing a historic third straight election win, had been widely expected to win easily, but there are some concerns that the race may be tighter than previously thought.

That's mainly due to the fact that turnout at Thursday's election — at a total of 40.5% — was higher in the outer suburbs than in the inner city. Khan's main opponent, the Conservatives' Susan Hall, focused her campaign on issues such as a levy imposed on high-polluting vehicles, which has resonated in the suburbs where residents depend more on their cars for work and essential travel.

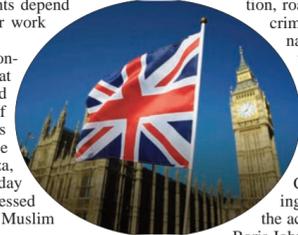
Also, there are concerns within Labour that Khan may have suffered from the blowback of the party leadership's strong pro-Israel stance over the war in Gaza, which results Friday clearly showed depressed support in strongly Muslim areas in England.

The result is due around lunchtime but officials have cautioned that it could run into the early hours of Sunday. Overall, the results of Thursday's array of local elections cemented expectations that the Labour Party will return to power after 14 years in a U.K. general election that will take place in the coming months.

Labour won control of councils in England that the party hasn't held for decades, and was successful in a special election for a seat in Parliament. If those results are repeated in the general election, it would lead to one of the Conservatives' biggest-ever defeats.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was able to breathe a sigh of relief when the Conservative mayor of Tees Valley in the northeast of England was reelected, albeit with a depressed share of the vote. The victory of Ben Houchen, who ran a very personal campaign, appears to have been enough to cushion Sunak from any revolt by Conservative lawmakers.

Sunak will be hoping that Andy Street will also hold on in the West Midlands, especially in Birmingham, which has a big Muslim community. Labour leader Keir Starmer conceded



## Won't comment on Biden's remarks on xenophobia: UN spokesperson

**UNITED NATIONS, May 4:** A UN spokesperson has declined to comment on US President Joe Biden calling India, China, Russia and Japan "xenophobic", but stressed that all member states should continue to uphold the basic standards in the UN human rights covenants.

"I wouldn't comment on what he said, but certainly..." Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesperson for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said on Friday when asked about Biden calling China, Japan, Russia and India as "xenophobic".

When pressed further on the issue and what the definition the UN has for Xenophobia, Haq said "This is simply the dictionary definition of Xenophobia, which you can be free to look up. But certainly, we believe that all of our Member States should continue to uphold all of the basic standards in the UN Human Rights covenants, including those that involve treating all races, all nationalities with respect. And we believe that all of the Member States of the UN work towards that end."

Biden called two of his QUAD partners — India and Japan — and two of his adversaries — Russia and China — "xenophobic" nations, asserting that none of these countries, unlike the United States, welcome immigrants.

"This election is about freedom, America and democracy. That's why I badly need you. You know, one of the reasons why our economy is growing is because of you and many others. Why? Because we welcome immigrants." Biden told his supporters at a fundraiser in Washington on Wednesday evening.

"We look to — the reason — look, think about it. Why is China stalling so badly economically? Why is Japan having trouble? Why is Russia? Why is India? Because they're xenophobic. They don't want immigrants," Biden, the presumptive candidate of the Democratic Party, said.

Responding to a question about the remarks made by Biden at an election fundraiser on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said that the president was making a "broader point".

"He was making a broader point. Our allies and partners know very well that — how much this president respects them," Jean-Pierre told reporters at her daily news conference on Thursday.

Immigration is a hot topic in the November 5 presidential election in which Biden will face former president Donald Trump, the presumptive candidate from the Republican Party. (PTI)



## Ready to hold talks but not for striking deal, says Imran Khan

**ISLAMABAD, May 4:** Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has said that he is ready to hold talks but not to strike a "deal" with anyone who has stolen his party's mandate in the February 8 general election. Talking to journalists at the high-security Adiala jail in Rawalpindi on Friday, the 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder asserted that negotiations were held only with adversaries and therefore the talks should be held with those who were the biggest opponents of PTI at present, apparently a reference to the military establishment, the Dawn newspaper reported on Saturday.

Underlining that he had been saying for 18 months that he was ready to hold negotiations but not to strike a deal, Khan reiterated that his party would hold talks with everyone but the three parties, the Geo News reported. "Someone who wants to leave the country or avoid imprisonment makes a deal," he said, in an apparent reference to PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif.

Khan named Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub and Leader of the Opposition in Senate Shibli Faraz for holding negotiations.

"I have proposed these three names for talks and not for a deal," he said. The February 8 general elections delivered a fractured mandate. Independent candidates, a majority of them backed by Khan's PTI, won 93 seats in the 336-member National Assembly.

Former three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) won 75 seats while the Bilawal Zardari Bhutto-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) came third with 54 seats. The Mutthahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) won 17 seats.

Khan's PTI party has maintained that the powerful establishment had favoured Sharif's PML-N and that the Election Commission of Pakistan deliberately used a different form to declare the results to "steal the mandate" that belonged to it.

The PML-N struck a post-poll deal with Bhutto's PPP and four smaller parties and formed the government in March. Khan reiterated that he was "always ready for talks, but it could only take place when their stolen mandate was returned and innocent imprisoned workers were released," the Dawn newspaper quoted PTI's media department as saying on Friday. Without naming anyone, Khan told reporters that "they" were going to lodge the fourth case against him concerning the Toshakhana gifts. They should make whatever the cases they wanted all at once, he added. (PTI)

## King Charles III takes over hundreds of charity patronages on Coronation anniversary

**LONDON, May 4:** Britain's King Charles has significantly increased his charity patronages by nearly 300 this weekend to mark the first anniversary of his Coronation in May last year, taking over several that Buckingham Palace said were supported by his mother late Queen Elizabeth II.

The palace said a major review of more than 1,000 royal patronages and charity presidencies was undertaken following the 75-year-old monarch's accession to the throne in September 2022 after the death of his mother.

Other working members of the royal family, including wife Camilla and son and heir Prince William, will also take on the patronage of a number of organisations previously supported by the late Queen to add to their existing portfolios.

"The King and Queen [Camilla] will continue to serve as patron to many of the charities and institutions with which His Majesty was affiliated as Prince of Wales, and respectively Her Majesty as Duchess of Cornwall," a Buckingham Palace statement said on Saturday.

"In addition, Their Majesties are pleased to continue the patronage of a great variety of charities and organisations previously supported by Queen Elizabeth II...Royal patronage highlights the vital work of these organisations and allows their many achievements and valuable contributions to society to be more widely recognised and promoted," it said.

Among the charity patronages King Charles has inherited from his mother, there are a number of Commonwealth institutions including the Association of Commonwealth Universities, which champions the power of higher education to improve lives, and the Royal Commonwealth Society, which is committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens globally.

"With his long record of support for the Commonwealth and as a champion of the environment, he embodies the values to which the Royal Commonwealth Society aspires, and which inspires our work to make a practical difference in the lives of the 2.6 billion people who make up the Commonwealth family," said Dr Linda Yueh, Executive Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

The King retains patronages from his time as heir to the throne which highlight causes such as supporting communities, conservation and culture, including the Wildlife Trusts, a grassroots nature organisation; Youth United Foundation, which brings uniformed youth organisations together so they can learn from each other, share best practice and collectively support more young people; and the Heritage Crafts Association, a national charity preserving traditional heritage crafts.

Queen Elizabeth II was patron of 492 organisations at the time of her death, of which 376 are due to be retained by King Charles and other members of the royal family. Over 441 organisations were affiliated with Charles from his time as the Prince of Wales, of which 367 have been retained by members of the royal family. The palace said that a further review will be carried out to consider the royal patronages held throughout 14 other Commonwealth Realms, where King Charles is Head of State. (PTI)

## Southern Brazil has been hit by the worst floods in more than 80 years, killing 39



**SAO PAULO, May 4:** Heavy rains in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul killed 39 people, with another 68 still missing, the state civil defense agency said on Friday, as record-breaking floods devastated cities and forced thousands to leave their homes.

It was the fourth such environmental disaster in a year, following floods in July, September and November 2023 that killed 75 people in total.

The flooding statewide has surpassed that seen during a historic 1941 deluge, according to the Brazilian Geological Service. In some cities, water levels were at their highest since records began nearly 150 years ago, the agency said.

On Thursday, a dam at a hydroelectric plant between the cities of Bento Gonçalves and Cotipora partially collapsed and entire cities in the Taquari River valley, like Lajeado and Estrela, were completely overtaken by water. In the town of Feliz, 50 miles (80 kilometers) from the state capital, Porto Alegre, a massively swollen river swept away a bridge that connected it with the neighboring city of Linha Nova. Operators reported elec-

tricity, communications and water cuts across the state. More than 24,000 people had to leave their homes, according to the civil defense agency.

Without internet, telephone service or electricity, residents struggled to provide updates or information to their relatives living in other states. Helicopters flew continually over the cities while stranded families with children awaited rescue on the rooftops.

Isolote Neumann, 58, lives in the city of Lajeado in the Taquari River valley and told The Associated Press she has never before seen a scenario like the one she is now experiencing. "People were making barricades in front of hospitals with sand and gravel. It felt like a horror movie," she said by phone. Some people in her region were so desperate, she added, that they threw themselves into the water currents.

Neumann's own neighborhood wasn't inundated, but has no running water and she hasn't showered since Tuesday. She said she's collecting rainwater in a basin to be able to cook. A clothing store she owns in the city's central area is flooded, she added.

"I don't even know how it must be. There must be nothing left." The downpour started Monday and is expected to last at least through Saturday, Marcelo Seluchi, chief meteorologist at the National Center for Monitoring and Alerts of Natural Disasters, told Brazil's public television network Friday.

On Thursday night, Gov. Eduardo Leite alerted the state's population — known as gauchos — about the persistence of rains and floods. The situation was expected to worsen in Porto Alegre, he said. (AP)

## Drone footage shows Ukrainian village battered to ruins as residents flee Russian advance

**KYIV, May 4:** The Ukrainian village of Ocherytne has been battered by fighting, drone footage obtained by The Associated Press shows. The village has been a target for Russian forces in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

Russian troops have been advancing in the area, pounding Kyiv's depleted, ammunition-depleted forces with artillery, drones and bombs. Ukraine's military has acknowledged the Russians have gained a "foothold" in Ocherytne, which had a population of about 3,000 before the war, but says that fighting continues.

Residents have scrambled to flee the village, among them a 98-year-old woman who walked almost 10 kilometers (6 miles) alone last week, wearing a pair of slippers and supported by a cane, until she reached Ukrainian front lines.

Not a single person is seen in the footage, and no building in Ocherytne appears to have been left untouched by the fighting. Most houses, apartment blocks and other buildings look damaged beyond repair, and many houses have been pummeled into piles of wood and bricks. A factory on the outskirts has also been badly damaged.

The footage also shows smoke billowing from several houses, and fires burning in at least two buildings.

Elsewhere, Russia has in recent weeks stepped up attacks on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-



largest city, in an attempt to pummel the region's energy infrastructure and terrorize its 1.3 million residents.

Four people were wounded and a two-story civilian building was damaged and set ablaze overnight after Russian forces struck Kharkiv, in northeastern Ukraine, with exploding drones, regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said on Saturday.

The four, including a 13-year-old, were hurt by falling debris, he said on the Telegram messaging app. Russian state agency RIA reported Saturday reported that Moscow's forces struck a drone warehouse in Kharkiv that had been used by Ukrainian troops overnight, citing Sergei Lebedev, described as a coordinator of local pro-Moscow guerrillas. His comments could not be independently verified.

Syniehubov said Russia also bombed Kharkiv on Friday, damaging residential buildings and sparking a fire. An 82-year-old woman died and two men were wounded.

Ukraine's military said Russia launched a total of 13 Shahed drones at the Kharkiv and

Dnipropetrovsk regions of eastern Ukraine overnight, all of which were shot down by Ukrainian air defenses.

Ukraine's energy ministry on Saturday said the overnight strikes damaged an electrical substation in the Dnipropetrovsk region, briefly depriving households and businesses of power.

According to Serhii Lysak, the province's governor, falling drone debris damaged unspecified "critical infrastructure" and three private houses, one of which caught on fire. Two residents, a man and a woman, were rushed to hospital.

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed early on Saturday that its forces overnight shot down four U.S.-provided long-range ATACMS missiles over the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014. The ministry did not provide further details.

Ukraine has recently begun using the missiles, provided secretly by the United States, to hit Russian-held areas, including a military airfield in Crimea and in another area east of the occupied city of Berdyansk, U.S. officials said last week. Long sought by Ukrainian leaders, the new missiles give Ukraine nearly double the striking distance — up to 300 kilometers (190 miles) — than it had with the mid-range version of the weapons it received from the U.S. last October. (AP)

## Yoga officially makes debut in Pak

**ISLAMABAD, May 4:** After making global headlines, the ancient Indian physical, mental and spiritual practice of yoga has officially arrived in neighbouring Pakistan.

According to the official Facebook page of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), which is responsible for the upkeep of Islamabad, the Metropolitan Corporation of Islamabad has launched "Free yoga classes in F-9 Park" in the capital.

"Many people have already joined in to kickstart their journey towards health and wellness," the CDA said.

It also posted pictures of people taking part in the yoga exercises.

Recognising its universal appeal, the United Nations on 11 December 2014 proclaimed 21 June as the International Day of Yoga. A draft resolution establishing the International Day of Yoga was proposed by India and endorsed by a record 175 member states.

Yoga is normally linked with India and there are not many formal institutions in Pak-

istan to teach yoga. Though privately people like the physical part of yoga exercises.

Many residents appreciated the move to organise Yoga classes with several people inquiring about the programme.

A step at the official level to organise yoga at the most prominent park of the capital is a welcome move and may send a positive message across the border amidst a chill in bilateral ties over the Kashmir issue and cross-border terrorism.

"Good job I really appreciate your work CDA pls send the timing," Shahid Iqbal, a resident, commented.

However, some criticised the CDA for failing to provide decent residential facilities to the people of Islamabad and instead resorting to showcasing sideshows.

Ghulam Mustafa said in his comments that CDA failed to develop new sectors.

"For God's sake concentrate on your core functions and develop the residential sectors you failed to develop during the last 35 years," he said. (PTI)

# Congress gnawing at itself like a 'termite', facing ideological bankruptcy: Scindia

**GUNA (MP), May 4:** The Congress is heading towards its end and is like a "termite" gnawing at itself, Union minister and BJP Guna Lok Sabha seat candidate Jyotiraditya Scindia has said.

The Congress has become ideologically bankrupt and nobody wants to stay with it. While the party has not fielded candidates on many seats, some of its nominees have withdrawn from the poll race, Scindia told PTI in an interview.

The scion of the erstwhile royal family of Gwalior severed his 18-year-long ties with the Congress in 2020 and joined the BJP.

In a coordinated rebellion, Scindia quit along with 22 Congress MLAs loyal to him, leading to the collapse of the then 15-month-old Kamal Nath-led Madhya Pradesh government and the BJP's return to power in the state.

Hitting out at the Congress over its allegation that the BJP will change the Constitution if it returns to power, Scindia said the party that imposed Emergency in the country is now giving lessons on the Constitution.

"The Congress has become bankrupt in terms of ideology, human resources... Nobody wants to stay with the Congress and there is no honour and respect for anyone in the party," Scindia told PTI on his way from Guna to Shivpuri amid hectic electioneering.

"The party that used Article 356 (to im-



pose President's rule) 91 times to dismiss elected governments, the party whose prime minister had changed the chief minister before going to Andhra Pradesh, the party which had imposed Emergency in the country is now giving us lessons on the Constitution.

"The party which defeated its own candidate Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in the elections is giving sermons to the country on the issues of Dalits and the Constitution, it should look at its track record. The Constitution is the BJP's scripture and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has clarified that no one has the courage to change the Constitution," he added.

Addressing a rally in Madhya Pradesh's

Bhind on April 30, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed that if the BJP returns to power at the Centre, it will "tear apart" and "throw away" the Constitution which grants rights to the poor, Dalits, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes.

Scindia claimed the Congress is headed towards its end.

"It was not clear (till Friday) who is contesting from Amethi and Rae Bareilly. The (Congress) candidates from Indore and Surat Lok Sabha seats have withdrawn from the race. There are no candidates on many seats, while on many others, they have not been declared yet. The Congress is now heading towards its end and is like a termite which is gnawing

at itself," he said.

The Congress on Friday announced the candidature of Rahul Gandhi from the Rae Bareilly seat, held by his mother Sonia Gandhi for the last two decades, and that of Kishori Lal Sharma, a close aide of the Gandhi family, from Amethi.

Asked about the dip in the voter turnout in the first two phases of the Lok Sabha elections as against 2019, Scindia said the lotus (BJP's poll symbol) will bloom in all 29 parliamentary constituencies in Madhya Pradesh as people have complete faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. The voter turnout stood at 66.14 per cent in the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections and at 66.71 per cent in the second phase, according to the Election Commission.

In 2019, a voter turnout of 69.43 per cent was recorded in the first phase and 69.64 per cent in the second phase.

Scindia is contesting the polls from Guna seat for the sixth time. He won four of the last five elections but lost the seat to sitting BJP MP and his former confidant K P Yadav in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Yadav defeated Scindia by a margin of over 1.25 lakh votes.

This is the first time in his political career that Scindia (53) is contesting as a BJP candidate from Guna, which was earlier represented by his late father Madhavraj Scindia and late grandmother Vijayaraje Scindia. (PTI)

# Army to host summit on May 8 to highlight role of veterans in nation's progress

**NEW DELHI, May 4:** The Indian Army will host a summit next week with an aim to highlight the capabilities, potential and skills of military veterans as a driving force in the nation's progress, officials said on Saturday.

The summit, which is being organised by the Army Welfare Placement Organisation (AWPO), will be held on May 8.

The event promises to provide a comprehensive understanding of how veterans can serve as an engine of growth for the nation, a senior official said. It will highlight the capabilities, potential and skills of military veterans as a driving force in the nation's progress. With the participation of corporate leaders, military veterans, leading industry figures and veteran entrepreneurs, the summit aims to bridge gaps in training, orientation and preparation, paving the way for veterans to make significant contributions across diverse sectors of the economy, the army said.

Since its inception in 1999, the AWPO has been instrumental in facilitating the seamless integration of veterans into civilian careers, while upholding the spirit of service and dedication that defines the armed forces, it said. The AWPO serves as a bridge between the skilled workforce of veterans and the opportunities available in the corporate and public sectors, the officials said.

The summit will be centred around three major themes — harnessing veteran's potential and experience, skills required to meet public and private sector needs and unveiling opportunities for veterans in India's growth story. Discussions have also been planned on many

other macro and micro issues concerning the veteran community.

Military veterans represent a profoundly trained, motivated and exceptionally skilled resource, capable of seamlessly transitioning into diverse sectors with minimal orientation, the army said.

Annually, around 60,000 adept and driven soldiers, whose professionalism, leadership, technical and managerial abilities have been meticulously honed through extensive training, superannate from service, it said.

These veterans, at the zenith of their capabilities developed through real-world high-pressure experience and a goal-oriented mindset cultivated over years of service, embody a significant national asset that must be effectively leveraged to propel India's growth story, the army said.

The AWPO empowers veterans for entrepreneurship programmes, government jobs and job opportunities in friendly foreign countries. It is pertinent to note that the AWPO has shown a 30 per cent increase in its placements during the last two years, the army said. The bulk placements include 3,000 in the Indian Railways, 1,200 in dedicated freight corridors and approximately 3,200 as drivers for the Bihar Police, which is still under progress, it said.

Some have also been placed with the Port Trust in Kolkata and Kandla ports, and as observers with the National Testing Agency.

In its latest drive, the AWPO, as a pilot project, has been able to place 10 veterans with the All Nippon Airways. They have been employed in Japan since March this year. (PTI)

## Online radicalisation continues to pose significant challenge to global security: India

**NEW DELHI, May 4:** Underlining that there can be no distinction between "good terrorism and bad terrorism", India has said online radicalisation continues to pose a significant challenge to global security.

Heading the Indian delegation at the recently concluded 19th Interpol Conference of Heads of National Central Bureaux at France's Lyon, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Director Praveen Sood highlighted the challenges posed by the nexus between organised crime, terrorism and extremist ideologies.

Sood said online radicalisation poses a significant challenge to global security.

He unequivocally condemned all forms of terrorism and conveyed that there can be no distinction between "good terrorism, bad terrorism".

The event was attended by the national central bureaux of 136 countries, represented by senior police officials, according to a statement issued by the CBI.

The National Central Bureau (NCB) in each country is the nodal organisation responsible for coordination with Interpol. In India, the CBI is the designated NCB.

The aim of the event was to strengthen the operational cooperation among the NCBs of Interpol to combat transnational crimes.

"During the event, the Indian delegation held discussions with law-enforcement agencies from multiple countries for enhanced coordination on Interpol channels for a concerted action to combat organised crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, online radicalisation, cyber-enabled financial crimes and to prevent these crimes on a real-time basis," the statement said. The three-member Indian delegation, during its discussions with a number of countries including the United States, the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia, emphasised the need for swift sharing of information through Interpol, expediting mutual legal-assistance referrals and extradition requests.

"Addressing the regional roundtable of the Asia Pacific region, India reiterated to contribute in regional capacity building and sharing India's policing best practices," the agency said.

Sood highlighted India's efforts in tackling crimes and detailed the role of institutions set by the government. (PTI)

## INDIA bloc PM will be first among equals, all oppn parties will join hands after polls: Shashi Tharoor

**NEW DELHI, May 4:** Opposition parties, campaigning together or against each other, will join hands after the Lok Sabha polls, says Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, asserting that the people will get a prime minister who is first among equals and listens to others with an INDIA bloc coalition government. Including the Trinamool Congress in his argument on opposition parties getting together after the "day of reckoning" on June 4, Tharoor said in an interaction with PTI editors at the news agency's headquarters that a coalition government is nothing to be afraid of.

"The growth performance of the Indian economy has been better under such dispensations than under single party governments," he said.

In his view, this is an election for "change" and as of now the BJP has "lost its grip" on the narrative.

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) member also defended the party's decision to not attend the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, saying it was right to turn down the invitation as it was "essentially a political platform for the greater glorification of Prime Minister Narendra Modi".



"It would have been a mistake in my view had we done it. As a purely political decision, it was the right one," he said during the freewheeling interaction.

Tharoor said it is true a coalition government functions very differently from a monolithic one-party government.

"Given Mr Modi's style, the personality cult built around him, and the way the BJP has been ruling, I think it is fair to say that it (an INDIA bloc government)

would be very unlike what we have seen in the last 10 years," he said, confident that the Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) will form the next government.

The record and experience of the Indian public with coalition governments has been rather good, the former Union minister said.

"So, in many ways the advantage of a coalition is that there won't be any sort

of autocratic tendencies whoever becomes prime minister... they will have to take into account the others. Frankly, it is the classic political theory of parliamentary systems of governance. Right now we are seeing a parliamentary system being run presidentially which is the worst of both the worlds," Tharoor argued.

"If you have a coalition government of the INDIA bloc, you are going to see, for the first time in a long while, a PM who is first among equals, who has to listen to others, take their point of view into account and who would have to be a good manager," he said.

"Mr (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee is considered in many ways an excellent example of that kind of consensus builder. He did not have a majority, far from it... he had 26 parties in his coalition but his government was able to deliver effective results and at the same time reassure Indians that they had a functioning government," Tharoor said.

The author-politician also hailed former prime minister Manmohan Singh's style of governance, saying he was able to pursue "very relentlessly" his economic goal and preside over the best growth period India has ever seen. (PTI)

## Reeling under acute shortage, women and children of village in Jalna go on daily water hunt



**CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, May 4:** Women and children of a village in Jalna district in the drought-prone Marathwada region of Maharashtra spend most of their days scouring nearby areas for drinking water.

Tucked away in the interiors of Badnapur tehsil, Tapovan village, located near the Jalna-Bhorkardan road, does not have natural water sources and is dependent on water tankers every day.

According to villagers, the groundwater sources in the village have dried up in the last three months, forcing the women and children to walk at least 2 to 4 km looking for drinking water in the nearby areas and making several trips in the blistering heat daily.

Various parts of the district are facing an acute water shortage due to inadequate rainfall in the last monsoon season.

Talking to PTI, one of the villagers, Annapali Borde, said a tanker supplies water for domestic use every day, but it has a yellowish tint and can't be used for drinking and cooking.

"The tanker empties water in the artificial tank in the village. We have to carry water back to our homes. But this water is not consumable. We fetch potable water from water sources located in fields in other villages," Borde said.

Often, owners of wells don't allow them to draw water, she said. Nearby villages of Tapovan, Tandu, Tupewadi and Banegaon are also dependent on water tankers.

As of April 30, 282 villages and 68 hamlets in Jalna depended on 419 tankers.

Chayabai Borde, another resident of Tapovan, said, "We walk around 2 km one way in search of drinking water. Sometimes, we make two to three trips as per requirement."

And now, as schools are closed for the summer holidays, children are helping women in their water hunt, she said.

Banegaon is the nodal point for tankers to fill water for supply to Tupewadi, Dhamangaon, Tapovan, Garkheda and other areas in nearly 25 km of its periphery.

Ganesh Sasane, a tanker driver, ferries water to Tapovan from a well, which is 12 km away, every day.

"I have to wait for an hour to fill my tanker. I make at least two trips to Tapovan, which has around 400 houses," he said.

Talking to PTI, village sarpanch Jyoti Jagdale said, "There is no major water source like a river or irrigation project in the periphery of our village."

She said the work for a pipeline is underway under the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme, and villagers will get some relief once it is done. (PTI)

## ED files money laundering case against YouTuber Elvish Yadav, others

**LUCKNOW, May 4:** The Enforcement Directorate has filed a money laundering case against YouTuber Siddharth Yadav alias Elvish Yadav and some others under the charge of suspected use of snake venom as a recreational drug in parties he hosted, official sources said Saturday. The central agency has pressed charges under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after taking cognisance of a FIR and charge sheet filed by the Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida) district police in Uttar Pradesh last month against him and other linked to him.

The alleged generation of proceeds of crime and use of illicit funds for organising rave or recreational parties is under the scanner of the ED.

Yadav and some others linked to the case will be questioned as part of the investigation, the sources said. Yadav was arrested on March 17 by the Noida Police in connection with its probe into suspected use of snake venom as a recreational drug in parties that were allegedly hosted by him.

The 26-year-old YouTuber, also the winner of reality show Bigg Boss OTT 2, was booked under various sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, Wildlife Protection Act, and the Indian Penal Code (IPC) by the Noida police.

Yadav was among the six people named in an FIR lodged at Noida's Sector 49 Police Station on November 3 last year on a complaint from

a representative of animal rights NGO People for Animals (PFA).

The five other accused, all snake charmers, were arrested in November and were later let out on bail by a local court. The five snake charmers were arrested from a banquet hall in Noida on November 3 last year and nine snakes, including five cobras, were rescued from their possession, while 20 ml of suspected snake venom was also seized. According to police, Yadav was not present at the banquet hall then. In April, the Noida Police filed an over 1,200-page charge sheet in the case.

The charges included are snake trafficking, use of psychotropic substances and organising rave parties, the police had said. (PTI)

## 'Kallakkadal' red alert revised to orange

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 4:** The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services on Saturday withdrew a 'red alert' issued for 'Kallakkadal' in the coastal areas of Kerala and the south Tamil Nadu coast and revised it to an 'orange alert'. 'Kallakkadal' is a phenomenon of sudden sea swells causing rough waves in coastal areas. As part of the phenomenon, the low-lying areas of the Kerala coast are likely to experience rough sea and sea surge due to extremely strong waves of 0.5 meters to 1.5 meters till 11.30 pm on Sunday, the INCOIS said. The low-lying coastal areas of south Tamil Nadu are also likely to experience a similar situation and high waves of 0.5 meters to 1.8 metres may cause sea surge there till tomorrow night, the agency warned. INCOIS, the central agency that issues weather warnings for fishermen in the country, advised people to safely moor their fishing vessels in the harbour. Authorities advised people to continue their caution and avoid trips to the beach and completely stay away from activities at sea.

The term 'Kallakkadal' literally means a sea that comes suddenly like a thief. INCOIS has earlier said that the swells result from strong winds in the southern part of the Indian Ocean at certain times, and that they occur suddenly without any particular indications or warning which is why it is named 'Kallakkadal'. (PTI)

## 'Amazon of Aligarh': Google Doodle pays tribute to India's first woman wrestler Hamida Banu

**NEW DELHI, May 4:** It was on this day in 1954 when Hamida Banu defeated famed wrestler Baba Pahalwan in just one minute and 34 seconds. While Baba Pahalwan deemed it fit to retire from professional wrestling, Banu's career expanded to international arenas and her victories reported across the globe. Commemorating Banu's victory and to pay tribute to her as "India's first woman wrestler," Google on Saturday put up a colourful doodle on its homepage.

Born into a family of wrestlers in the early 1900s near Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, Banu grew up wrestling, winning over 300 competitions throughout her career that spanned the 1940s and 1950s at a time when women's participation in athletics was strongly discouraged. Banu, however, competed with men anyway, and issued an open challenge to all male wrestlers, wagering her hand in marriage to whoever defeats her, Google wrote in a post.

Banu's success in international matches gained her further acclaim. One of these matches was the one

against Russian woman wrestler Vera Chistilin, who she defeated in under two minutes. Having made newspaper headlines for years, Banu came to be known as the "Amazon of Aligarh".

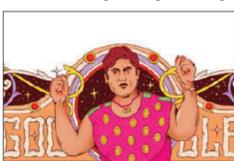
The bouts she won, her diet, and her training regimen were widely covered. According to a BBC report, she weighed 108kg and was 5ft 3in tall.

"Her daily diet included 5.6 litres of milk, 2.8 litres of soup, 1.8 litres of fruit juice, a fowl, nearly 1kg of mutton and almonds, half a kilo of butter, 6 eggs, two big loaves of bread, and two plates of biryani," the British media outlet reported.

Reuters noted that she slept for nine hours and trained for six.

A "trailblazer of her time," Banu not only fought fellow wrestlers but the norms of her times.

"Hamida Banu was a trailblazer of her time, and her fearlessness is remembered throughout India and across the world. Outside of her sporting accomplishments, she will always be celebrated for staying true to herself," Google's note read. (PTI)



## 'The Book of You': The story of life told by a hundred ravens

**NEW DELHI, May 4:** Businessman Manoj Jain mixes prose and art to explore karma, the human mind, the past and the future in his new book "The Book of You as Told by a Hundred Ravens".

The book addresses, what he calls, universal questions.

"There is no real outline of a situation being addressed - the words are intended for you to relate to your own personal lives and dilemmas," he says.

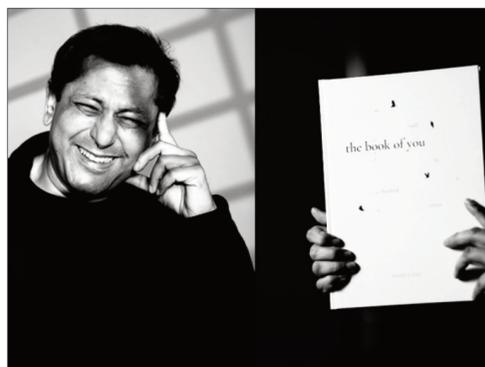
According to Jain, there is a wanderer, a seeker within each of us.

"This book is for the wanderer within each one of us. It can either be read sequentially or any page can be opened randomly to hear the message from the ravens for you, at that moment of time," he suggests.

The book has artwork by Jain, all conceptual and abstract.

"When I'm not immersed in the world of business, I find solace and inspiration within the pages of fiction," he says.

"The Book of You" invites readers to delve into the depths of the human psyche, exploring themes of karma, personal growth, and the interconnectedness of life.



There was an old man who died leaving behind his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was the wealthiest man in the village, and the entire community had come to mourn. The old man lived in a house that had a very big garden.

Close by, there was a large tree, home to many birds, including a hundred ravens. The old man always fed them grains and gave fresh

water. After his death, the family had kept a large bag of bird food to be scattered near the tree but in the midst of the rituals, they forgot to feed the birds.

Though one of the sons wanted to get rid of the birds another told that they should be allowed to be where they are. A great-grandson of the old man who was just seven years fed the birds and continued to do so

every day.

The oldest of the ravens too wanted to leave the place and go somewhere else. Then they saw the little boy approaching, his small hands holding a bag of bird food. The old raven croaked to the tribe again.

"Today we will offer our thanks to the old man who kept food for us everyday. Before we pick up our food from the ground, we must each give a special piece of wisdom to the boy."

A young raven then said, "But he will not understand our language for we speak different tongues."

Yet another bird from the tribe said, "He is too young for words of wisdom. Will he comprehend the meaning of our messages?"

The old raven sighed and then smiled sagely. "We speak from the universal energy within, timeless, ageless, young and ancient at the same time. It transcends language and age so his energy will grasp our messages."

The other birds nodded at the words of the old raven and thus began "the words of hundred ravens". (PTI)

