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- Protesters take over Columbia University's Hamilton Hall
- Missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels damages a ship in the Red Sea

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- We hit terrorists in their homes, don't send dossiers on them: PM
- My soul is 'restless' for common man and farmers: Pawar

Manipur cops drove 2 Kuki women to mob that paraded them naked: CBI



NEW DELHI, April 30: The Manipur Police personnel allegedly drove the two women from the Kuki-Zomi community, who had sought refuge in their official gypsy, to a mob of around 1,000 Meiti rioters in Kangpokpi district, the CBI charge sheet has said.

The two women were subsequently stripped naked and paraded before being sexually assaulted during the ethnic violence in the state, the charge sheet added.

The women, one of whom was the wife of a Kargil war veteran, desperately asked the police personnel to drive them to a safe location but were allegedly told by them that

"there was no key" (of the vehicle) and did not provide any help, the officials giving details of the charge sheet said.

A video showing two women being paraded naked surrounded by a mob of men went viral last year in July, nearly two months after the ethnic violence broke on May 4.

The CBI filed its charge sheet against six accused and a report against one Child in Conflict with the Law (CCL) before the Special Judge, CBI Court at Guwahati on October 16 last year. It has alleged that the two women were running away from a mob of around 900-1,000 persons carrying sophisticated weapons like AK rifles, SLR, INSAS and .303 rifles.

The mob had forcefully entered their village in Kangpokpi district, about 68 km south of Saikul police station, it said.

The women, along with other victims, ran into the forest to escape from the mob but were spotted by the rioters who had separated the victims. Some members of the mob told the women to reach the police vehicle parked on the roadside to seek help, officials in the know (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Quota for SC, ST, OBC to stay, assures HM

Shah attacks Cong over 'lies' on Constitution change, Revanna issue

GUWAHATI, April 30: Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday alleged that the Congress was spreading lies that the BJP intends to change the country's Constitution and end reservations if it returns to power for a third term.

He also attacked the Congress over the sex scandal involving Janata Dal (S) MP Prajwal Revanna, asking why the ruling party of Karnataka did not take any action against the accused.

"The Congress is spreading lies about the BJP changing the Constitution and ending reservations... We do not see voters as a minority or majority. The BJP will win 12 of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam," he told a press conference here.

The BJP is a supporter of reservations for the SC, ST and OBC and will continue to play a proactive role in safeguarding their rights, he said, adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has clarified this in several of his public speeches.

It is the Congress that has deprived the SC, ST and OBCs of their rights as



they gave reservations to Muslims in undivided Andhra Pradesh and for this, the OBCs were affected. Without conducting any survey, they put all Muslims in Karnataka in the OBC category and reserved a 4 per cent quota for the

minorities,' Shah said.

The BJP believes that reservation based on religion is not constitutionally valid and the party will remove that religion-based quota after coming to power in those states, the Union home

minister said.

Referring to the Revanna issue, Shah said that the saffron party will in no way tolerate insult to women.

"The issue regarding Revanna in the media is very hurtful and cannot be tolerated in any way, he said.

Allegations of obscene videos and sexual abuses have been levelled against Revanna, grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, and NDA-JD(S) alliance candidate for the Lok Sabha Hassan constituency where polls were held on April 26.

Shah said Congress has been alleging that an NDA partner's candidate is involved in the incident, "but I just want to ask a small question - whose government is there in that state (Karnataka)?"

Why the Congress, which is in power in Karnataka, has not taken any action in this matter, he asked.

"We cannot take any action as law and order is a state issue," Shah said, adding that the BJP is in favour of an inquiry and JD(S) has also announced that action will (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Fire erupts

BOKAJAN: A shop burnt down last evening at Madhuram Terang village, Borpathar police station, Karbi Anglong. The shop owner said that he noticed the fire from his home while he was cooking his dinner. He tried to put down the fire but was unable to do so.

Petrol and diesel

BOKAJAN: The people around Borjan are inconvenienced by non availability of petrol and diesel. There is an oil pump at Dillai but as fuel is often not available there the people are having a bad time. Public transportation is also suffering as auto rickshaws do not have petrol to run on.

Trucks seized

BOKAJAN: Three trucks along with loaded timber were seized from Misolongong under Eastern Range Bokajan Forest in Karbi Anglong. The Forest department got wind of the illegally felled logs being loaded and they accordingly launched an operation. In the operation three trucks along with the logs present there at Misolongong were seized and brought to the Bokajan Forest Range office. The seized timber has a market value of ₹ 5 lakh.

Tezpur Cancer Centre

TEZPUR: Tezpur Cancer Centre has started world class Brachytherapy services on Tuesday, which is another major milestone in cancer care. The first Intracavitary Brachytherapy under general anaesthesia was successfully done by Dr Sanjeev K. Gupta, Senior Consultant & Head, Department of Clinical Oncology, Dr Anil Koiry, Anesthesiologist, Suhlas V Navada, Associate Consultant and team. Dr Sanjib Hazarika Medical Superintendent, TCC congratulated Dr Sanjeev K Gupta & team on this occasion. It is worth mentioning that Brachytherapy is a type of internal radiation therapy where a radioactive source is inserted near tumors to eliminate and shrink tumors.

AstraZeneca admits 'very rare' side effect of Covid vaccine in UK court

LONDON, April 30: UK-headquartered pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca (AZ) has admitted that in "very rare cases" its Covid vaccine can cause a blood clot related side effect but the causal link is unknown, according to court papers being quoted in the UK media.

"The Daily Telegraph" reports that in a legal document submitted to the High Court in London in February for a group action being brought by 51 claimants, AZ admitted that the vaccine developed with the University of Oxford to protect against COVID-19 may cause Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) in "very rare cases".

The AZ Vaxzevria vaccine, also manufactured by the Serum Insti-

tute of India (SII), was known in India as Covishield.

"It is admitted that the AZ vaccine can, in very rare cases, cause TTS. The causal mechanism is not known. Further, TTS can also occur in the absence of the AZ vaccine (or any vaccine). Causation in any individual case will be a matter for expert evidence," the newspaper quotes the legal document as stating. Lawyers acting on behalf of the claimants say they, or their loved ones, who received the AZ vaccine suffered TTS - a rare syndrome characterised by the concurrence of thrombosis or blood clotting and thrombocytopenia or insufficiency of platelets. The consequences of TTS are (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Suspense on Rahul, Priyanka from Amethi, Rae Bareli continues as 3 days left for nominations

NEW DELHI, April 30: Suspense over the Amethi and Rae Bareli Lok Sabha seats mounted on Tuesday, even as three days remain for the filing of nominations for the two seats considered as traditional pocket boroughs of Gandhi-Nehru family.

Amid speculation that Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra would be fielded from the two constituencies, the Congress workers in Amethi on Tuesday held a sit-in, demanding that the party names a member of the Gandhi family as its candidate from the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency.

Sources said Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is keen to contest from the Rae Bareli seat and her candidature is likely to be announced soon, once the party leadership takes a final call on the seat.

Rahul Gandhi is yet to finalise his candidature on his second seat of Amethi and the leadership is likely to announce his name soon.

The state leadership in Uttar Pradesh has already urged the central election committee and the party leadership to field Rahul Gandhi from Amethi and Priyanka from Rae Bareli. The CEC members had also supported the view of the Uttar Pradesh Congress during the last meeting of the CEC on Saturday.

The Amethi seat has been represented by Rahul Gandhi from 2004 and he remained the member of Parliament from the constituency for three consecutive

terms till 2019 when he was defeated by BJP's Smriti Irani. Rahul Gandhi currently represents the Wayanad constituency in Kerala, from where he had also contested in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

The Amethi and Rae Bareli constituencies go to polls on May 20 in the fifth round of the seven-phase general elections. The Rae Bareli constituency was represented by Sonia Gandhi from 2004 to 2024. Prior to that Sonia Gandhi had represented the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency after she entered politics and contested for the first time in 1999.

While only three days are left for the filing of nomination papers, the Congress is yet to declare a candidate for the seat, with leaders and workers, including Congress district president Pradeep Singhal and former district president Yogendra Mishra, gathering at the party office in Amethi with posters reading "Amethi maange Rahul Gandhi" (Amethi wants Rahul Gandhi), "Amethi maange Priyanka Gandhi" (Amethi wants Priyanka Gandhi Vadra).

"People of the constituency and Congress workers want a member of the Gandhi family as their candidate. We want Rahul Gandhi to contest from Amethi to bring back its lost honour," a district Congress leader said. The demonstrators demanded that the Congress immediately declare a candidate in Amethi and that its nominee be from the Gandhi family. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

UPPL-led BTC addressing 'misconceptions' among non-Bodo voters: Pramod Boro

KOKRAJHAR, April 30: Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) chief Pramod Boro claimed that his party UPPL is working to address "misconceptions" among non-Bodo voters about alleged discrimination against them by the prominent tribal community in Assam.

He claimed that these "misconceptions" led non-Bodo voters in Kokrajhar Lok Sabha seat to elect a non-Bodo MP in the last two elections, despite which the lawmaker "failed to raise their issues" in Parliament.

In an interview with PTI, Boro claimed that the BTC administration, which governs Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam, led by his United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), an ally of the ruling BJP, has initiated the process of addressing the longstanding issues of the



non-Bodo communities, the results of which would be reflected in support for his party in the elections.

Kokrajhar (ST) constituency was represented since 2014 by Naba Kumar Sarania as an Independent candidate, though he could not contest this year's elections as his Scheduled Tribe (ST) status was cancelled by the government and upheld by the Gauhati High Court. Sarania, who heads the Gana

Suraksha Party which has fielded Binita Deka from the seat this time, was the only non-Bodo person to represent Kokrajhar seat ever.

"Non-Bodo people had a grievance that Bodos discriminated against them as the council is largely ruled by the tribe. A lot of issues of the non-Bodos were not addressed since Independence and they thought if they elected a non-Bodo candidate, he will raise those matters in Parliament, but he did not," he said.

Sarania failed to keep the promises he had made to the people, and those who voted for him are now angry, Boro alleged.

"His role (in Lok Sabha) didn't count anyway as he was an Independent and came from a very different background... he was a former (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SC questions ED on timing of Kejriwal's arrest, seeks its reply

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Supreme Court on Tuesday questioned the Enforcement Directorate on the timing of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest ahead of the general elections and sought a reply from the agency.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta asked Additional Solicitor General SV Raju to reply on the question of the timing and said, "Life and liberty are exceedingly important. You can't deny that." The bench, which asked Raju several other questions, asked the probe agency to reply on the next date of hearing of Kejriwal's plea challenging his arrest in the money laundering case related to the excise policy scam.

The matter is likely to be taken up for hearing on Friday -- from Wednesday; both judges will be sitting in different combinations.

Kejriwal is currently lodged in



the Tihar jail here under judicial custody after his arrest on March 21 in the case. The top court issued ED a notice on April 15 and sought its response to Kejriwal's plea.

On April 9, the high court upheld Kejriwal's arrest, saying there was no illegality and the ED was left with "little option" after he skipped repeated summonses and refused to join the investigation.

The matter pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now scrapped excise policy for 2021-22. (PTI)

The programme kicked off at Bimala Prasad Chaliha College in Nagarbera 'Buddy Voter' programme to encourage first timers to vote

AMINGAON, April 30: Aiming to increase poll turnout, the second time voters have been engaged to motivate and guide the first timers to cast their electoral franchise during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections in Kamrup district of Assam, an official said.

As part of its Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) initiatives, the Kamrup Election District conducted an innovative voter awareness programme 'Buddy Voter' in Nagarbera on Monday to encourage new voters to cast their votes on May 7, the polling day in the district.

Kamrup district election officer Keerthi Jalli conceptualized the 'Buddy Voter' programme, in which young voters who participated for the first time in previous Assembly polls in 2021 tied 'Buddy' bands on the hands of first-time voters who are set to cast their votes next week.



"Usually, the younger sister ties Rakhi to the elder siblings asking for protection. Likewise, the Buddy band is a promise from the senior to the junior that they shall take care of the new voter," she said.

The programme kicked off at Bi-

mala Prasad Chaliha College in Nagarbera. It witnessed participation of around 200 first-time voters in addition to the second-time voters from the college.

The last time's new voters acted as mentors to this year's first-time

voters and they shared their voting experiences and insights into the election process. "Young adults look up to their seniors for guidance on courses to take jobs to seek and interviews to face. We wanted to capitalise on this bond. The seniors have turned buddy mentors to juniors in this initiative," Jalli said.

They will join the new voters this time and will accompany them to the respective polling stations on the day of the election, she added.

The SVEEP team introduced buddy bands in colourful tags. It has seven knots or beads made locally where 'VOTE ON 7' is inscribed.

Taking part in the programme, first-time voter Saiki Rabha said: "This kind of activity will definitely motivate us to go for voting. Our friends and seniors will assist us on poll day. So, that's cool." Another new voter Trishna Kalita said she really liked the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Constitution, soul of poor, will be 'thrown away' by BJP if it returns to power: Rahul

BHIND, April 30: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday warned that if the BJP returns to power at the Centre, it will "tear apart" and "throw away" the Constitution which granted rights to the poor, Dalits, scheduled tribes and other backward classes.

Addressing an election rally in Madhya Pradesh's Bhind district, Gandhi, while holding a copy of the Constitution, said the ongoing Lok Sabha poll is not a normal political event, but a fight between two ideologies.

The Congress's star campaigner noted that only rich people and celebrities, and not poor labourers or farmers, were present during the January 22 idol consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The opposition MP said his party and its INDIA bloc allies are fighting to save the Constitution.

Before Independence and drafting of the Constitution, the poor, Dalits, tribals, backwards and farmers did not have any rights and they were bestowed on them when the statute book came into force in 1950, he pointed out.

Gandhi cautioned that if the BJP is elected to power again, the rights enjoyed by the poor, tribals and Dalits will no longer be in force and schemes like MGNREGA, land rights, reservation, pension and other welfare measures, too, will disappear.

"Now, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, home minister



Amit Shah and their MPs have made up their mind that if they get elected, they will tear apart and throw this (Constitution) book. The BJP wants this book to be thrown away and only 20 to 25 billionaires should run the country," the Wayanad MP claimed.

The Congress's star campaigner pointed out that the Constitution gave voice to Dalits, tribals, backward sections and the poor people belonging to other castes.

Top BJP leaders have already openly declared that if their party wins the elections, they will change the revered document, he charged.

"This (Constitution) is the soul of the poor and no one can touch it. No power in the world can change it. These BJP people are dreaming. The Congress, along with B R Ambedkar and the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Stock markets close lower on fag-end selling in banking, IT shares

MUMBAI, April 30: Reversing early gains, benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Tuesday due to a sell-off in banking and IT shares in the last hour of the session amid a mixed trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 188.50 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 74,482.78. The index opened higher and rallied further 440.11 points or 0.58 per cent to hit a high of 75,111.39 in day trade. However, the barometer pared all the gains as selling emerged in banking and IT shares towards the end of the session.

The broader Nifty hit a lifetime intraday high of 22,783.35 in day trade before squandering its gains. Nifty closed lower by 38.55 points or 0.17 per cent to finish at 22,604.85 as metal, pharma and IT shares declined. As many as 25 Nifty shares closed lower, 24 advanced while one closed unchanged.

Losses in HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Infosys, TCS and Tech Mahindra dragged indices from the day's high levels.

From the Sensex basket, Tech Mahindra, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, HCL Technologies, Tata Consultancy Services, Larsen & Toubro and Kotak Mahindra Bank were



the biggest laggards.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Power Grid, Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank and Maruti were the major gainers.

"Nifty erased all the intra-day gains in the last hour of trade and ended in the negative zone in a highly volatile session," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

"Global markets remained mixed ahead of the US FED policy

meet as markets appear to have already factored in the slim chance of a near-term rate cut. Profit booking ensued towards a close given the sharp rally in the last

couple of days and a holiday-led truncated week," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Domestic initial Q4 corporate earnings forecasts were conservative, however, Nifty50 companies' earnings to date have remained marginally better, with the exception being the IT sector, while auto and realty continue to be robust, Nair added.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.49 per cent and smallcap index advanced 0.10 per cent.

Among the indices, teck dropped 0.98 per cent, IT by 0.98

per cent, metal by 0.85 per cent, commodities by 0.56 per cent and telecommunication by 0.33 per cent. Consumer discretionary, financial services, utilities, auto, realty and power were the gainers.

"The Bank Nifty witnessed a volatile trading session during the expiry day, with bulls dominating the first half and bears taking control in the second half. Although the index fell short of reaching the 50,000 mark, the overall sentiment remains bullish," Kunal Shah, Senior Technical & Derivative Analyst at LKP Securities said.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were mostly trading lower. Wall Street ended with gains on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were buyers on Tuesday as they bought equities worth ₹ 1,071.93 crore on net basis, according to exchange data.

In the previous session, the BSE benchmark jumped 941.12 points or 1.28 per cent to settle at 74,671.28 on Monday. The NSE Nifty went up by 223.45 points or 1 per cent to 22,643.40.

Domestic equity markets will remain closed on Wednesday on account of Maharashtra Day. (PTI)

Gold slumps ₹ 150; silver plunges ₹ 750

NEW DELHI, April 30: Extending the losses for the second straight session, gold prices on Tuesday slumped ₹ 150 to ₹ 72,600 per 10 grams in the national capital amid fall in precious metal rates in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had closed at ₹ 72,750 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver prices also plunged ₹ 750 to ₹ 83,750 per kg. In the previous close, it had ended at ₹ 84,500 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 72,600 per 10 grams, down ₹ 150 taking bearish cues from overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,320 per ounce, down USD 13 from the previous close. "Gold prices continued to weaken... as this sell-off was attributed to the anticipation of a hawkish stance from the US Federal Reserve in the upcoming interest rate policy announcement scheduled for May 1. "Additionally, the week ahead is expected to see continued volatility in gold prices, driven by key data releases such as the Nonfarm Payroll and Unemployment data," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. Silver was also quoting lower at USD 26.80 per ounce. In the previous session, it had finished at USD 27.22 per ounce.

Investors will await for the key data, including the US consumer confidence due to release later on Tuesday, which if it is reported lower than expectations then it could support bullion prices on the lower end. Navneet Damani, Senior VP of Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said. (PTI)

Global gold demand stays strong, supporting record-high prices

GUWAHATI, April 30: The World Gold Council's Q1 2024 Gold Demand Trends report reveals that total global gold demand (inclusive of OTC purchases) was up 3% year-on-year to 1,238t, marking the strongest first quarter since 2016. Demand excluding OTC fell 5% to 1,102t in Q1 compared to the same period in 2023.

Healthy investment from the OTC market, persistent central bank buying, and higher demand from Asian buyers, helped drive the gold price to a record quarterly average of US\$2,070/oz—10% higher year-on-year and 5% higher quarter-on-quarter.

Central banks continued to buy gold space, adding 290t to official global holdings during the quarter. Consistent and substantial purchases by the official sector highlight gold's importance in international reserve portfolios amidst market volatility and increased risk.

Turning to investment demand, bar and coin investment increased 3% year-on-year, remaining steady at the same levels from Q4 2023 at 312t. Gold ETFs continued to see outflows with global holdings falling by 114t, led by North American and European funds but slightly offset by inflows into



Asian-listed products. China generated the bulk of that increase, with renewed investor interest in gold dueto the weakening local currency and poorly performing domestic equity markets.

Global jewellery demand remained resilient, despite record-high prices, only falling 2 per cent year-on-year. Demand in Asia countered decreases in both Europe and North America.

In addition, demand for gold in technology recovered 10% year-on-year driven by the AI boom in the electronics sector.

On the supply side, mine production increased 4% year-on-year to 893t - a record first quarter. Recycling also reached the highest

and technology excellence.

PayZapp is jointly developed by Zeta and HDFC Bank, leveraging Zeta's next-gen processing platform, Zeta Tachyon, and its bespoke engineering offering, Zeta Studios. Since its launch in March 2023, PayZapp has rapidly acquired 6+ million customers and has been rated by nearly half a million customers with ratings of 4.8 on iOS and 4.3 on Android, making it a top-rated app in the finance section on the Indian app stores.

On receiving the award, Ravi Santhanam, group head, chief marketing officer and head of Direct to Consumer Business, HDFC Bank said, "Celent's recognition is a tes-

tament to our commitment to delivering world-class digital banking solutions that meet the evolving needs of our customers. PayZapp is a critical pillar of our digital transformation journey and a testament to the power of a modern customer experience built on a next-gen, cloud-native issuer-processing stack."

"Zeta is honored to have played a pivotal role in PayZapp's success," added Ramki Gaddipati, CTO and co-founder, Zeta, "A Zeta Studio, in partnership with HDFC Bank's talented and visionary teams, has delivered unparalleled payment choice for Indian consumers."

ened geopolitical risk and ongoing macroeconomic uncertainty driving safe-haven demand for gold. In addition, the continued and resolute demand from central banks, strong OTC investment and increased net buying in the derivatives market, have all contributed to the higher price of gold," he said.

"Interestingly, we are witnessing shifting behaviour trends from Eastern and Western investors. Typically, investors in Eastern markets are more responsive to the price, waiting for a dip to buy, whereas Western investors have historically been attracted to a rising price, tending to buy into the rally. In Q1, we saw those roles reversed with investment demand in markets such as China and India growing considerably as the gold price surged," he further said.

"Looking ahead, 2024 is likely to produce a much stronger return for gold than we anticipated at the beginning of the year, based on its recent performance. Should the price level off in the coming months, some price-sensitive buyers may re-enter the market and investors will continue to look to gold for a safe haven asset as they seek clarity around rate cuts and election results," he added.

UCO Bank aims to bring down govt stake to 75pc this fiscal: MD

KOLKATA, April 30: UCO Bank on Tuesday said it aims to reduce the government's stake in the bank from the current 95.39 per cent to 75 per cent in several tranches by fiscal 2024-25, to comply with the minimum public shareholding norms set by SEBI.

The lender has time until August to comply with this but it hopes to receive a further extension, a top bank official said. Four other public sector banks have also laid out plans to pare down government holdings to meet SEBI regulations. "We don't need equity for growth as our capital adequacy is at 16.98 per cent. However, we must reduce the government's stake to 75 per cent to meet listing regulations, and we aim to

do so within this fiscal year. The board has approved the issuance of 400 crore equity shares for this purpose. We will execute this in tranches," said UCO Bank MD & CEO Aswani Kumar. He said various options will be explored as issuance plans get firmer.

"To comply, the issuance of 330-340 crore equity shares at Rs 10 each would have been sufficient, but we have allowed some additional headroom," he said at a post-earnings interaction. Speaking about the credit growth outlook, Kumar mentioned that the bank is targeting a growth of 12-14 per cent, and corporate lending is expected to remain robust with a growth target of 3-4 per cent. (PTI)

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Manipur cops drove 2 Kuki

of the development said. The two women managed to get inside the vehicle, in which two police personnel and the driver were sitting. Three to four personnel were outside the vehicle. One of the male victims, who also managed to make his way inside the vehicle, kept pleading with the driver to drive them to a safe place but was told "there was no key". The husband of one of the victims had served the Indian Army as a subedar of the Assam Regiment. The police also did not help the father of the man sitting in the vehicle from being assaulted by the mob, the CBI alleged.

Later, the driver of the police gypsy drove the vehicle towards a mob of around 1,000 people and stopped it in front of them. The victims desperately asked the police personnel to drive them to safety, but no help was provided to them. The mob had already killed the father of one of the male victims who was sitting in the gypsy along with the two women, the agency has said. The violent mob came towards the gypsy when the police personnel fled from the scene, leaving the victims at the mercy of the crowd.

The rioters dragged the women out, stripped them of their clothes and paraded them naked before sexually assaulting them, the charge sheet has said. The CBI has charge sheeted Hurem Herodas Meitei, who was nabbed by Manipur police in July, and five others, and a report has been filed against a juvenile. The accused have been charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including those pertaining to gang rape, murder, outraging the modesty of a woman and criminal conspiracy, the CBI has said. (PTI)

Quota for SC, ST, OBC

be taken against Revanna. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi is "questioning us (on that issue) but I want to tell her that instead of asking Prime Minister Narendra Modi or me, she should ask her party's chief minister," he said. On the arrest of a Congress functionary of Assam on Monday for allegedly circulating a fake video of Shah, the BJP leader said the grand old party's "frustration and disappointment have reached such a level that it made and circulated it on social media and even chief ministers and state unit chiefs also forwarded it." Shah alleged that since Rahul Gandhi assumed leadership of the Congress, its level of politics is sinking and the attempt to create confusion and mislead people is condemnable. "They should contest elections on the basis of their principles, programmes and manifesto and not by circulating a fake video," he said.

Regarding Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi contesting from Amethi and Raebareli respectively, Shah said that they are running away from their traditional seats in Uttar Pradesh and "I don't think they have the courage to fight elections from there." "Rahul Gandhi can say whatever he wants to do after winning elections but it all depends on whether they will get the opportunity as people are not going to give Congress a chance this time too," he said. He asserted that the BJP was getting a "very good response" from voters in the southern states. The senior BJP leader slammed the Congress for practising the "politics of appeasement since the very beginning", and said it wants to save "the little of what is remaining of their support base".

"We are in favour of implementing the Uniform Civil Code across the country and ensuring that there is one law for people of all religions," the home minister said. In a secular country, it is not right to have laws based on religion, and this is against the spirit of the constitution, Shah said. The BJP condemns the Congress' promise to bring back the Muslim Personal Law as mentioned in its manifesto, he said. (PTI)

UPPL-led BTC addressing

underground leader (militant)," he said. Boro claimed that the region witnessed a lot of bloodshed in the past but things started changing after his party formed the government in BTC in 2020 and addressed sensitive issues. "There have been a lot of violence and killings in the region in the last 15-20 years... the system was not working properly. People had lost hope in the government," the BTC chief executive member said. "But now, things are changing. Peace prevails, trust building initiatives are being taken and the people have love and respect for each other. People want peace, security and development, and we have delivered those to them," he asserted.

A tripartite Bodo Peace Accord was signed between the Centre, Assam government and Bodo representatives, including those from factions of militant outfit NDFB and students' body ABSU. The accord led to the surrender of over 1,500 insurgents, rechristening of Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts (BTAD), covering Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri districts in the northern bank of Brahmaputra as Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) with enhanced powers for BTC, besides financial package for the development of the region.

The region had been a witness to a bloody insurgency from 1980s till the signing of the latest Bodo Accord in 2020. It also witnessed bouts of ethnic violence between Bodos and non-Bodos, including Adivasi and Bengali-speaking Muslims. The UPPL chief said his party was fighting the Lok Sabha elections "in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma". The UPPL is contesting only Kokrajhar constituency, while the BJP has fielded nominees in 11 seats and AGP in two seats.

"On one hand, we have a prime minister who is working for the development of Assam and the Northeast, while on the other, we also have a CM who has been addressing most of the issues. Though all issues have not been resolved, he (Sarma) is addressing those. All communities and sections of the society are happy," Boro claimed.

He claimed that a new "political and executive culture" has been introduced in the state which believes in addressing all issues ranging from infrastructure development to community wellness. These positive steps will reflect in people's mandate in favour of candidates of the BJP and its allies in the elections, Boro said. "In the 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state, we don't have any big challenge in any constituency, except maybe Dhubri. In the remaining seats, we have huge support of the masses and hope to win 13 seats," he asserted. Boro said that besides focusing on Kokrajhar, UPPL is also working in tandem with allies BJP and AGP to ensure the victory of candidates of the ruling alliance. The BJP has nine MPs in the outgoing Lok Sabha from the state, while UPPL and AGP have no representation. Three seats were held by the Congress, one by AIUDF and one by Sarania, as an Independent. Kokrajhar, along with three other constituencies, will go to the polls in the third and final phase in the state on May 7. Polling for five constituencies each in the state was held in the first two phases on April 19 and 26. (PTI)

'Buddy Voter' programme to

band and will keep it safe as a memento, which will remind her of the first voting experience. Safikul Islam, a senior who will guide the juniors this time, said: "I voted during the last assembly elections. Though initially I was a bit worried but later I felt it was interesting. Casting my vote, I felt so empowered. Everyone should cast their votes." Bimala Prasad Chaliha College principal Kamal Chandra Pathak lauded the effort of the administration and said such initiatives also help build a healthy relationship between the seniors and juniors. (PTI)

Constitution, soul of poor

countrymen, fought against the British and drafted the Constitution, which is the voice of India," Gandhi noted. He also targeted the BJP government over the issue of reservation in jobs and education for underprivileged sections of society. "They (BJP) say they are not against reservation. If you (ruling dispensation) are not against reservation, then why are you privatising the public sector, the Railways. Why did you bring the Agniveer scheme (for short-term recruitment in armed forces)? These all works go against the reservation system," Gandhi alleged. The Congress leader claimed the BJP-led government at the Centre has waived corporate loans worth ₹16 lakh crore of 22 to 25 people. This amount was enough to waive farmers' loans for 25 years and distribute benefits under rural job scheme MGNREGA for 24 years. "But I want to ask whether the loans of farmers, labourers, small traders and employees were waived? A poor person goes to a private hospital and comes under debt (due to high medical bill) but has (PM) Narendra Modi ever said he will write off the loans of the poor?" he asked. "These 22 people (billionaires) have money that is equal to that held by 70 crore Indians. When the Ram temple consecration took place all these people were sitting there. Did you see any poor labourers or farmers (at the event)? Bollywood actors, Indian cricket team members were there, but no poor, backward, tribal people were seen there," Gandhi said. (PTI)

AstraZeneca admits 'very

potentially life-threatening including strokes, brain damage, heart attacks, pulmonary embolism and amputation. Of the 51 claimants in the group action being represented by the law firm Leigh Day for damages under Section 2 of the UK's Consumer Protection Act 1987 against AstraZeneca UK Ltd in respect of injuries sustained as a result of the vaccine, 12 are acting on behalf of a loved one who died. "All of those within the group have death certificates or medical evidence confirming that the vaccine caused the deaths and injuries suffered," said Sarah Moore, partner at Leigh Day. "It has taken AstraZeneca a year to formally admit that their vaccine has caused this harm, when this was a fact widely accepted by the clinical community since the end of 2021. In that context, regrettably it seems that AZ, the government and their lawyers are more keen to play strategic games and run up legal fees than to engage seriously with the devastating impact that the vaccine has had upon our clients' lives," she said.

It is the claimants' case that the safety of the AZ vaccine fell below the level of safety that persons were generally entitled to expect. AZ has strongly denied the claims. "Our sympathy goes out to anyone who has lost loved ones or reported health problems. Patient safety is our highest priority, and regulatory authorities have clear and stringent standards to ensure the safe use of all medicines, including vaccines," AstraZeneca said in a statement. "From the body of evidence in clinical trials and real-world data, the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine has continuously been shown to have an acceptable safety profile and regulators around the world consistently state that the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks of extremely rare potential side effects," it noted. The British-Swedish multinational points out that product information relating to the vaccine was updated in April 2021, with the approval of the UK regulator, to include "the possibility that the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine is capable, in very rare cases, of being a trigger for" TTS, indicating that the court documents reference this aspect rather than something new. (PTI)

Suspense on Rahul, Priyanka

Amid the suspense on who the Congress would field in Amethi, posters supporting Rahul Gandhi's brother-in-law Robert Vadra's candidature had surfaced in the constituency on April 24. The seat has previously been represented by Sanjay Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi. (PTI)

Free legal aid services provided by the DLSA explained DLSA, Jorhat highlights rights and schemes of women tea garden workers

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, April 30: The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Jorhat, on Tuesday organised an awareness programme on the rights and schemes of the women tea garden workers and maintenance of their health and hygiene was held at Cinnamara Tea Estate here.

The programme was organised to commemorate May Day which is observed worldwide on May 1 every year.

ADLSA official informed that addressing the women workers of the garden in the stand-up meeting at pluckers weighing point of the tea garden DLSA (Jorhat) secretary-cum-judicial officer Devoiyoti Bhuyan elaborated about the protection and benefits provided to the women workers under different legislations and schemes.

He also explained about the free



legal aid services provided by the DLSA to needy people seeking justice at different levels.

Dr Malita Rajkonwar, senior medical officer, Bagchung PHC, in her address sensitised the women workers about various precautionary measures to be taken in both pre and post natal stage for

their health and urged everyone to maintain proper hygiene to avert the commonly found disease in the tea estates.

The meeting was also attended by Asit Baran Choudhury, manager, Cinnamara Tea Estate who too spoke on the occasion.

Meanwhile, the district and ses-

sions judge (Jorhat), P Das, who is the chairman, DLSA, Jorhat, on Monday (April 29) inaugurated a pure drinking water system installed at the Children's Home, Jorhat. The Manthan Ladies Club, Jorhat, has donated the pure drinking water system.

P Das, speaking at the function organized on the occasion, urged everyone to be sensitive about child rights and their protection while applauding the gesture of the Manthan Ladies Club. He observed that such initiatives provides opportunity to work together for the children in need of care and protection.

The programme was attended by DLSA secretary-cum judicial officer Devoiyoti Bhuyan and district child protection officer Rizwana Hazarika and members of the Manthan Ladies Club, Jorhat along with the officials of the children home.

Basanta Utsav 2024 at Nehrubali on May 4

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 30: As part of Rongali Bihu celebration, 'Srishti', a pioneer cultural organisation of the small town is going to organise Basanta Utsav 2024 for the consecutive 21 years at Nagaon Nehrubali field on May 4 here.

Local MLA and the president of 'Srishti' Rupak Sarma informed it this afternoon while addressing a press conference at the conference hall of Nagaon Sports Association in Nurul Amin stadium here.

MLA Sarma also intimated that like the previous years, the organisation will felicitate three youngsters who are able to bring laurels to the district by achieving tremendous performances in their respective fields. They are IAS Bhaskar Saikia, model and vogue star Pori Borkakoti and Devashree Kashyap who secured 3rd position in HSLC Exam 2024. Besides, like the previous years, the organisation will also present its prestigious 'Kolongporia Award 2024' to Bihuram Saikia, a centenarian artist of Satriya and Shankari arts and culture of the greater Raidongia area, Sarma said, adding that the noted singer Angarag Papon Mahanta and Ritika Sharma will perform musical extravaganza in the cultural night. In addition, a special programme titled as 'Amaar Nagaon - Amaar Gourav' will be showcased during the cultural night too through which the glorious past as well as heritage of Nagaon will be screened.

Assam cops show bravery in Uttar Pradesh

HT Correspondent
MORIGAO, April 30: Two cops of Morigaon district have been acclaimed for daring act while on election duty in Uttar Pradesh.

The state police department stated that the department hailed their efforts for saving a mother and her child from committing suicide.

The mother taking her child in her arms jumped off the bridge into river Ganges on Wednesday. The policemen duo who were taking bath in the river with their colleagues after covering election duty sprung into action and rescued the mother and her child.

Assam police department said that cop Indreswar Medhi and Kashyap Deka of 10th Assam police battalion have raised the department's name high in the national context.

Medhi is a resident of Rajagaon and Deka of Ghagua Kalbari in Morigaon.

Both mother and child were later handed over to



the local police station.

The Assam policemen were praised by the local administration for saving the lives of two lives and their bravery lauded throughout Uttar Pradesh.

Artificial flood harasses Margherita



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, April 30: Artificial floods have wreaked havoc in various locations under the 83rd Margherita Constituency of Tinsukia district.

Localities such as Ledo, Ledo Bazaar, Ledo College, Margherita Segunbari, and Bargolai have been

severely impacted due to continuous torrential rain.

The situation has disrupted the daily lives of students, company employees, officegoers, businessmen, and traders.

Local residents of Ledo area attribute these artificial floods to an unscientific approach to drain con-

struction, which causes rainwater to remain stagnant on the roads.

Residents claim that neither government officials nor public representatives from the 83 no Margherita constituency have addressed the ongoing issue, leaving the people to struggle with the artificial floods for an extended period.

"We are fed up with this artificial flood especially in Ledo as this part resides in a low-lying land and the water flows down heavily after a few spell of rain. Coal India could have solved the problem but due to their ignorance, we the people are suffering now," a concerned local said.

The locals have also complained that due to these artificial floods along with the students, even the office goers have to face the wrath of the artificial calamity.

Apollo hospitals introduce state-of-the-art clinic

Structural heart disease management



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 30: Apollo hospitals in Kolkata has launched a comprehensive clinic to manage structural heart disease, said an official statement on Tuesday.

As per the statement, this announcement was made during a press conference at hotel named Pragati Manor in Guwahati to shed light on the latest advancements in the treatment of structural heart disease.

Led by its esteemed Consultant, Dr Sumanto Mukhopadhyay, the event aimed to raise awareness about the complexities of structural heart disease and the evolving landscape of treatment options available to patients.

Structural heart disease encompasses a range of defects or disorders in the heart's structure, whether congenital or acquired later in life. While initially asymptomatic in some cases, warning signs such as breathing difficulty, chest pain, dizziness and fatigue often prompt individuals to seek medical attention.

Dr Sumanto Mukhopadhyay emphasised the pivotal role of preventive measures, highlighting the significance of healthy lifestyle choices such as nutritious eating habits and regular exercise in mitigating the risk of coronary heart disease, which differs from structural heart issues.

During the conference, attendees gained insights into the intricate workings of the heart and how structural abnormalities can impact its functionality. With the heart beating approximately 100,000 times daily, ensuring optimal structural integrity is paramount for maintaining overall health and well-being.

In terms of treatment modalities, the discussions underscored significant progress in the field. While open-heart surgery remains a necessity in certain cases, minimally invasive catheter-based interventions are revolutionising patient care, offering reduced complications and quicker recovery times.

Dr Sumanto Mukhopadhyay who is internationally renowned for percutaneous treatment of structural heart diseases, elucidated on various treatment approaches tailored to individual patient needs, ranging from medication to complex interventions. For instance, medications like diuretics may be prescribed to mitigate the symptoms initially, while procedures, including trans-catheter aortic valve implantation, mitral, tricuspid repair (Mitraclip/ Triclip) address specific structural abnormalities even in very high-risk patients.

The event served as a platform to educate the public on the complexities of structural heart disease and the evolving treatment landscape. By fostering dialogue and sharing insights, Apollo Multispecialty Hospitals Kolkata, reaffirms its commitment to advancing patient care and improving outcomes in cardiovascular health.

Public felicitation to social workers

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, April 30: Kanaklata Mohila Xangathan in association with Sivasagar Jila Mohila Samity felicitated several distinguished persons of Sivasagar on Sunday in the cultural evening held on the occasion of Bihu in Boarding Field.

The persons that received the felicitations were educationist and writer Dr Nirupoma Mahanta, educationist Dipali Chaliha, educationist and women activist Monica Saikia, cultural worker Jayashree Chaliha, Municipality chairman Mrinali Konwar, cultural worker Makhan Bora, writer Dipali Bhattacharjya Baruah, noted singer Mahendra Hazarika, stage director Rupak Bhunyan, educationist Dr. Nilakshi Phukan Borgohain, homeopathic doctor Kabita Sharma, journalists Manoj Kumar Borthakur, Bhaskarjyoti Das, M I Bora, Manoj Gogoi, Amrit Raj Bora, Himangshu Neog, musician Anjan Saikia, national badminton coach Kabir Bora and Rituraj Chetia, and two police officers.

Nimaijan and Harmoti Hussori Dals performed hussori, folk dances from several groups, while Mahendra Hazarika, Prarthana Borthakur, Pranami Sarma, and Milan Mili presented popular songs to enliven the evening.

Students participate in mock election at Jharnapani LPS

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 30: To make students aware of the voting system and the voting procedure, a mock election amongst the students of Jharnapani LP School under Biswanath education block was held at the school premises on Tuesday. Before commencement of the voting process, an awareness meeting was held in the conference hall of the school with Khem Prasad Sarma, president of the SMC in the chair. Inaugurating the mock election organised for the school children, Anjan Baskota, a local journalist briefly described the role of voters in a democratic country and explained how to cast their votes. He also explained about the Indian democratic system and election methods. Baskota inaugurated the mock election in presence of dignitaries, guardians, parents, members of eco and youth club.

Samsul Haque, assistant teacher of the school conducted the proceedings of the inaugural session while Sonit Bormudoi, head teacher of the school explained the objectives. The inaugural session was attended by Punya Prasad Nirola, Lila Kanta Sarma among others. Premilal Dahal, Basanta Nirola, Mamoni Saikia and Renuka Devi performed the role of presiding officer and polling officers respectively.

The school had set up a replica of the voting compartment, printed ballot papers, voters slip, relevant posters etc for the smooth functioning of the election process. The students had cast their votes standing in a queue. The mock election was organised in collaboration with the SMC, eco and youth club of the school along with the invaluable support from the parents and guardians. Two students Twinkle Devi and Divas Dhakal had contested for the post of prime minister. Divas defeated Twinkle with a margin of 11 votes.

The conscious people have praised the exemplary initiative undertaken by the school authority.

CEO Assam Anurag Goel visits Gossaigaon

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, April 30: In a bid to conduct the third phase of Lok Sabha election in a hassle free manner which is scheduled on May 7, state chief election commissioner Anurag Goel paid a brief visit at Gossaigaon to oversee the various aspects of polling scenario on Monday last. After arriving in Gossaigaon CEO, Assam Anurag goel visited areas of concern such as Strong Room, Counting Centre, postal facility centre etc. Later on a general meet was also held at the conference hall of SDO-Civil office, Gossaigaon with Anurag Goel, CEO, Assam in the chair and this was largely attended by Aranyak Saikia, IAS, SDO-Civil, Gossaigaon, SDO-CIVIL, Parbatjhora, election officers and took stock of the overall progress report related to Lok Sabha Election.

Awareness lecture on Nasa Mukta Bharat Abhiyan

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 30: Assam Rifles organised an awareness lecture on Nasa Mukta Bharat Abhiyan for students of Balipara Higher Secondary School at Balipara of Sonitpur district on Tuesday, stated in a press release. With a focused agenda aimed at addressing the pressing issue of substance abuse, the programme encompassed various informative sessions, interactive discussions, and engaging activities. Participants were sensitized to the detrimental effects of drug addiction on individuals, families and society at large.

Range officers provided their assistance during the training

Forest staff in Raimona National Park provided GPS training



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 30: A team of experts from region's leading research-driven biodiversity conservation organisation, Aaranyak conducted a series of GPS equipment handling training sessions for forest staff in Raimona National Park of Assam.

Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) conducted the GPS training for the forest staffs in multiple camps of the newest national park of Assam in the last week of April.

Notably, the training took place in eight of Raimona's anti-poaching camps in order to help forest staff conserve the rich wildlife heritage of the national park. The range officers of the national park provided their assistance during the training.

"We hope that this training will

be extremely useful to the forest staff in collecting and analysing data for field and patrol work in the Athiabari and Central ranges of the national park.", Aaranyak says in a press statement issued here on Tuesday. The Aaranyak team resource team comprised of Rounak Dean, Mukesh Kherkatary, and Bijet Baro.

The GPS handling training equips forest staff with skills to accurately map and monitor wildlife habitats, patrol routes, and illegal activities inside a national park.

This enhances conservation efforts in a national park by improving data collection, analysis, and management for informed decision-making and protection of biodiversity.

Raimona was declared a national park by the Assam Chief

Minister on June 5, 2021, on the occasion of World Environment Day making it the sixth national park of the state.

This national park famous for its elephant herds and rare butterflies, is also home to one of the world's most threatened primates, the Golden Langur. Raimona National Park is also a favoured abode for other species of wildlife such as the Royal Bengal Tiger, Clouded Leopard, Gaur and Chital.

Furthermore, the rich wildlife of the national park necessitates the use of technology to protect it. The GPS training provided to the staff of the national park located in the extreme western part of Assam will contribute greatly to the conservation efforts of the park authority in this area.

NIELIT Guwahati office relocation

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 30: National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology, under the Ministry of electronics and information technology, (MeitY), Government of India, i.e NIELIT Guwahati main centre located on the 2nd & 3rd Floor of Vittiya Bhawan, AFC Building, Md Shah Road, Paltan Bazar, Guwahati - 781008 will be relocating to the first building at Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Schedule Caste (AIRT&SC) Campus, National Highway-37, Jawahar Nagar, Khanapara, Guwahati- 781022 with effect from June 1. Subsequently, NIELIT Guwahati centre will exclusively operate from Khanapara.

Swachha Bharat Campaign at RNB Civil Hospital

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, April 30: The 31st Bn SSB, Gossaigaon under the civic action programme organised a Swachha Bharat Campaign and a Search operation by K9 Dog squad team led by Ranjeet Kumar, assistant commandant 31st Bn SSB here at the campus of RNB Civil Hospital, Gossaigaon on Tuesday.

The purpose of the programme was to maintain public law and order while promoting hygiene and cleanliness among citizens in the surrounding area. This also aimed to generate awareness in the society about hygiene and sanitation emphasising the safety and security of the people.

A total of 45 personnel from the 31 Bn SSB Gossaigaon participated in the Civic Action programme.

Ranjeet Kumar, assistant commandant 31 Bn SSB, asserted that, "Maintaining cleanliness and ensuring public safety is utmost importance to us towards the society we exist. With this Swachha Bharat campaign and search operation, we not only aim to promote hygiene and cleanliness but also to ensure the safety and security of the people living in the society."

QUOTE OF THE DAY

It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness. - Leo Tolstoy

AAP's leadership dilemma

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) finds itself at a crossroads, grappling with leadership questions amidst political turbulence. The absence of key figures like Rajya Sabha member Raghav Chadha has stirred speculation, particularly regarding Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's ongoing legal saga and the party's future direction. Chadha's unavailability, attributed to health concerns, has left a void in AAP's ranks, amplifying the scrutiny on Kejriwal's tenure and the party's governance, especially regarding contentious issues such as the Delhi liquor policy. While his absence may provide a reprieve for Kejriwal, it also raises questions about AAP's capacity to navigate challenges without key personnel. The Delhi High Court's recent remarks urging Kejriwal to step aside highlight the mounting pressure on AAP to reassess its leadership structure. However, interpretations of the court's statements diverge, reflecting the contentious political climate surrounding Kejriwal's incarceration and the power dynamics between AAP and opposition parties, notably the BJP. Despite Kejriwal's confinement, AAP's alliance with the Congress appears resilient, with strong backing for candidates like Kanhaiya Kumar. Kejriwal's wife, Sunitha Kejriwal, has emerged as a formidable presence, rallying support and amplifying narratives of injustice surrounding his detention. This, coupled with endorsements from key ministers like Saurabh Bharadwaj and Atishi Marlena, underscores the party's unity amidst adversity.

AAP's steadfastness in supporting Kejriwal's leadership underscores its commitment to continuity, despite legal and political challenges. The party's defiance in the face of calls for leadership changes reflects a broader narrative of resilience and solidarity within its ranks. As the looming Delhi Lok Sabha elections on May 25 draw near, AAP's electoral prospects hang in the balance. The outcome will likely be influenced by factors such as public sentiment towards Kejriwal and the party's ability to leverage narratives of victimization and perseverance. Kejriwal's confinement, while presenting obstacles, has also provided opportunities for AAP to galvanize support and rally around a common cause. Whether this will translate into electoral success remains to be seen, but AAP's unwavering commitment to its leadership amidst adversity signals a party poised to weather the storm. AAP's leadership crisis underscores the complexities of Indian politics and the resilience of its political actors. As the party navigates uncertain terrain, its ability to adapt and mobilize support will be crucial in shaping its future trajectory. AAP's resolve to stand by Kejriwal despite challenges reflects not only loyalty but also a strategic calculation of maintaining continuity and stability in governance. The party's unwavering support for Kejriwal, coupled with the emergence of Sunitha Kejriwal as a prominent figure, suggests a concerted effort to present a united front in the face of adversity.

However, the upcoming Delhi Lok Sabha elections pose a critical test for AAP's leadership and electoral viability. The party's ability to navigate public sentiment and effectively communicate its narrative will be decisive in determining its electoral fortunes. Moreover, the aftermath of the elections will likely shape the party's future trajectory, influencing internal dynamics and strategic decision-making. Amidst legal battles, political maneuvering, and electoral challenges, AAP finds itself at a pivotal moment in its journey. The outcome of these developments will not only impact the party's immediate prospects but also its long-term standing in the complex landscape of Indian politics. As AAP braces for the road ahead, the coming days will reveal whether it can weather the storm and emerge stronger or face significant setbacks in its quest for political relevance.

BJP's election manifesto for 2024 Lok Sabha has special focus on South Indian states

By: Harihar Swarup

The central leadership of BJP including the party's think tanks spent a lot of days in imparting some new dimensions to the election manifesto for 2024 Lok Sabha. The Sankalp Patra moved beyond traditional ideological promises to embrace new objectives like infrastructure development and enhanced service deliveries.

There were cultural promises too, including plans to establish centres across the world in the name of Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar, promote the classical Tamil languages, and organize Ramayan festival globally. Notably, absent was any mention of the controversial national register of citizens, though the party reiterated its commitment to implanting a uniform civil code and 'one nation, one poll'.

Unlike, the previous two Lok Sabha elections where focus was on north India, the battle hottest this season is in the South. Both the BJP and the Congress want to win more than more 50 of the 130 seats from the region. It is an ideological battle. While the BJP accuses the Congress and its allies of insulting regional and cultural symbols, the opposition says it wants to save the Constitution and accuses the Centre of missing investigating agencies.

To counter this, the BJP chose Ambedkar's birth anniversary to release its manifesto. "Prime Minister Modi has given a commitment that the Constitution is our sacred book and we will safeguard it", said BJP general secretary Tarun Chugh.

While BJP manifesto promises to scale up existing schemes and push for infrastructure - a template that resonates more in the South- the Congress has taken a more populist route to woo the electorate. It has promised Rs one lakh annually to all poor households, job reservation for women, an increase in health insurance to ₹ 25 lakhs and a guarantee on minimum support price.

The battle for the south will also decide the contour of politics in the years to come as many

regional satraps and parties vie for a bigger piece of the national pie. They represent strong regional sentiments that both the congress and BJP find easier to ally with than breach.

The BJP, which won 29 seats from the south in 2019, is going all out to increase its tally in the region to reach its target of 400 seats. For this Modi started early- he took Chinese President Xi Jinping to Mahabalipuram in 2019, spoke in Tamil at the United Nations, installed the Sengol in new Parliament building. Modi said that Ram Mandir has architectural elements drawn from temples in the South, named G20 venue Bharat Mandapam after the ancient Anubhava Mandapa cultural academy of Karnataka, and also slammed the Congress government's decision to handover the island of Kachatheevu to Sri Lanka in 1974.

A few days before elections were announced, the home ministry designated September 17 as Hyderabad Liberation Day. The message was against the Nizam rule. Incidentally, September 17 is also Modi's birthday.

As far the Opposition, the Congress leads the grouping and wants to double its tally from south to 56 this time. Rahul Gandhi, the key figure for the India bloc in the region, had started his Bharat Jodo Yatra, from Kannayakumari in September 2022 to establish an emotional connect with the people. Also, his candidature from Wayanad in Kerala is aimed at retaining the 19 of 20 seats the Congress led front had won from the state in 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The India bloc is harping on its claim that the BJP is against federalism and that this could be last election if it wins brute majority. Southern India might not decide who occupies the treasury benches, but this election would signal whether the BJP has pan-India appeal it claims to have. For all the big-ticket decisions it has taken, the NDA government had argued that the mandate empowered it to do so. (IPA Service)

US-China: Is the ice thawing?

The top American and Chinese diplomats held tough talks in Beijing last week, as the sparring superpowers sought to clarify their growing differences on an array of bilateral and global issues that could further strain the already tense relationship.

While US Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed that ties are "beginning to stabilise," his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, did not mince words when addressing a number of contentious topics, including Ukraine, Taiwan and trade issues.

At the Beijing meeting, Wang warned Washington not to cross China's red lines on sovereignty, security and development, adding that "negative factors" have been mounting between the world's two largest economies as the relationship "faces all kinds of disruptions". Meaning, it told the US to keep its hands off the Chinese adventurism in the South China Sea.

"China's legitimate development rights have been unreasonably suppressed and our core interests are facing challenges," Wang told Blinken, asking whether the two countries should keep moving forward or "return to a downward spiral".

For his part, Blinken, who also visited Shanghai and met President Xi Jinping during his latest three-day China trip, said he warned Beijing directly about its assertive moves around the Philippines and vowed to defend the ally.

Blinken said he raised Beijing's "dangerous actions in the South China Sea" during meetings with top leaders. Earlier, Blinken had promised to be "very clear, very direct" in the



talks about "the areas where we have differences and where the United States stands".

Blinken was hoping to build upon the progress made in recent months on resuming counter-narcotics cooperation, military-to-military communications, artificial intelligence and strengthening people-to-people ties.

Both Wang and Biden also referred to the heightened trade tensions between the two sides amid consistent complaints that Chinese over capacity is flooding the US market and undercutting American firms. Though for this the US and the wider West itself is to be blamed.

Antony Blinken also met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. During the meeting Xi told Blinken that the world's two biggest economies should "be partners, not rivals" according to state broadcaster CCTV.

During their meeting in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Xi proposed three major principles: mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation for improving ties with the US.

Apparently, Xi was reported as saying that the earth is big enough to hold the common development and... prosperity of

China and the United States and China would be pleased to see a confident and open, prosperous and developing US, adding that he hopes the US can also take a "positive view of China's development". When this fundamental problem is solved...

relations can truly stabilise, get better, and move forward.

However, China's increasing closeness to Russia in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine has heightened US distrust. Blinken told reporters that during his discussions, he reiterated serious American concern about the People's Republic of China providing components that are powering Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine.

The Wall Street Journal reported ahead of Blinken's trip that the US might threaten to remove some Chinese banks from the global financial system if China does not curtail outflow of dual-use components to Russia.

Officials of both countries said they had made progress on a few smaller, pragmatic fronts, including setting up the first US-China talks on artificial intelligence in the coming weeks.

They also said they would

Last week the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken was in China, ostensibly to diffuse the tension build-up between the two super powers. However, in this latest bilateral exchange, China appears to have taken an upper hand over the US

continue improving communications between their militaries and increase cultural exchanges. But on fundamental strategic issues, each side held little hope of moving the other, and they appeared wary of the possibility of sliding into further

conflict. Meanwhile, in an interview with CNN at the tail end of his China trip, Blinken said he'd reiterated a warning President Joe Biden had delivered to Chinese leader Xi Jinping during their November 2023 summit, in which Biden told Xi not to get involved in the 2024 election. He said recently the United States has learned of Chinese efforts to "influence and arguably interfere" with this year's upcoming general election and is working to stop them.

China professes that it does not get involved in other nations' internal affairs, but over the years Beijing and its allies and affiliates have been the subject of election-meddling accusations from multiple countries.

Earlier this month, Microsoft warned that China might use AI to disrupt elections in the United States, India, and South Korea in 2024. The report said that

"China tacitly approved efforts to try to influence a handful of midterm races involving members of both US political parties" with the idea to try to prevent certain candidates perceived as anti-China from winning and support certain candidates perceived to be pro-China.

All in all, the visit seemed to be full of rhetoric, and seemed to have gained nothing much for the United States but it gave an upper hand to China over the US on reiterating its position on many contentious issues.

In the meanwhile, China continues to support Russia over Ukraine, and be a continuous headache for its neighbours in the South China Sea besides asserting its right over Taiwan, and being an international disruptor on major trade and technological issues while building-up its military power.

Moreover, the visit came at a time when the risk of confrontation between the two is growing, and areas where two could work together seem to be shrinking fast. But the message conveyed was that both countries are trying to salvage what they could. (The author is a Delhi-based senior political and international affairs commentator)

India aims to be in the top group of global space powers by 2047

By: Girish Linganna

India's space programme has been in the spotlight ever since the Chandrayaan-3 mission landed on the Moon's southern hemisphere on August 23, 2023. The mission-costing a meager \$75 million-covered everything, from the rocket launch to the propulsion system and the lunar lander and rover expenses. This cost-effective approach is driving other developing countries eager to establish their own sustainable space programmes.

Following this success, India has unveiled plans for the Chandrayaan-4 mission, designed to land on the Moon's far side and return with lunar samples. The upcoming Chandrayaan-5, 6 and 7 missions will focus on further extending lunar exploration. Starting with Chandrayaan-6, India plans to construct lunar habitats, with Chandrayaan-7 dedicated to building lunar infrastructure.

India's first solar mission, Aditya L-1, focused on studying the Sun's corona, successfully reached the Lagrange-1 point on January 6 after launch on September 2, 2023, taking 127 days to arrive.

India is also working on a human-rated launch vehicle for its Gaganyaan human spaceflight mission. This development includes creating life-support systems, bioastronautics, crew training and obtaining human rating and certification. On December 13, 2023, ISRO's Somanath announced that India is developing its own environmental control and life support system (ECLSS).

Additionally, a second Mars mission is planned for 2030 to study the Martian atmosphere, featuring such experiments as the Mars Orbit Dust Experiment (MODEX), a radio occultation (RO) experiment, an energetic ion spectrometer (EIS) and a Langmuir probe and electric field experiment (LPEX). In 2031, India intends to launch Sukhryaan-1 mission.

In December 2023, India unveiled its official space policy, "Space Vision, 2047", which aims to develop and bolster its commercial space sector and identifies the main institutions responsible for regulating its private space industry and clearly states its stance on using, and owning, space resources.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) announced a space roadmap featuring the Chandrayaan-4 mission, planned for a conceptual phase with a targeted launch no earlier than in 2028; building a space station (Bharatya Space Station), set to be positioned at an altitude of 120-140 kilometres in low-Earth orbit (LEO), by 2035; and sending astronauts to the Moon by 2040.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has proposed changing its name to the 'Indian Air and Space Forces' (IASF). This reflects a shift in India's strategic approach, emphasizing the significance of space in national security. This initiative is part of India's official space policy, which celebrates the 100th anniversary of India's Independence from British rule in 1947.

In 2019, India established the Defence Space Agency, which functions similarly to a space force, along with the Defence Space Research Organisation. Also established in 2019, New Space India Ltd is tasked with commercializing space technologies and platforms developed with public funds. The Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) serves as a one-stop authorization hub for space activities involving both the



public and private sectors.

To achieve its aim of developing and bolstering its commercial space sector, India has designated the Department of Space (DoS), which operates under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as the primary body for space policy-making and implementation. Meanwhile, the ISRO will concentrate on R&D.

As part of its broader initiative of transitioning from being 'a potent air power' to becoming 'a credible aerospace power' in years to come, the IAF is looking to collaborate with ISRO, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), IN-SPACe and the private space sector in India. By proposing to change its name to IASF in 2023, the IAF aims to enhance its precision navigation, timing (PNT) and intelligence, as well as surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), capabilities. Additionally, it seeks to develop abilities in space traffic management, space situational awareness and space weather prediction.

This initiative aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mission DefSpace' plan announced in October 2022, which invited private space companies to tackle 75 defence-related space challenges to foster local development. At the Defence Space Symposium hosted by the Indian Space Association in April 2023, India's Chief of the Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, stressed the need to focus on dual-use technologies, expand the NAVIC satellite constellation, enhance space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and ensure secure satellite-assisted communications.

India is advancing its efforts towards reusable space technologies. In April 2023, ISRO successfully conducted a test of the Reusable Launch Vehicle Autonomous Landing Mission (RLV LEX). This technology, akin to that of a space plane, marks ISRO's stride towards integrating reusable technology with its rocket launchers, aiming to achieve India's 2025 goal of reusable launches.

ISRO is also developing the Reusable Launch Vehicle Technology Demonstrator (RLV-TD) to further this initiative. India's RLV-TD, known as Pushpak Viman, completed another test flight, called RLV-Landing Experiment-02 (RLV LEX-02) on March 22. This test successfully conducted an autonomous landing at the Chalakere runway.

ISRO explains that the winged RLV-TD serves as a flying test bed to assess different technologies-including hypersonic flights, autonomous landing and powered cruise flights. In future, this vehicle will be expanded to form the first stage of India's reusable two-stage orbital launch vehicle.

Besides this, ISRO is developing a radioisotope heater (RHU) as part of the Chandrayaan-4 mission to handle the sig-

nificant and extreme temperature fluctuations on the Moon. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman S Somanath says, "With 17 years until 2040, we have ample time to develop the technologies needed for human missions to the Moon. Meanwhile, our efforts to build the proposed space station are moving forward rapidly and we expect to have the first module ready by 2028."

In 2023, India made significant strategic changes in its international partnerships by joining the US-led Artemis Accords, signalling a clear strategic direction. India stands out as the only signatory of the Artemis Accords that has achieved lunar landing capabilities to date.

In June 2023, the US and India signed a joint statement that emphasized enhancing space cooperation between the two nations. This agreement includes plans for Indian astronauts to train at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, collaboration on the International Space Station starting in 2024 and strengthening ties between the US and India in commercial space endeavours.

During the G-20 summit in New Delhi in September 2023, the US and India issued a joint statement agreeing to set up a working group focused on commercial space collaboration, create a strategic framework for human spaceflight and enhance efforts in planetary defence.

In June, while agreeing to the Artemis Accords, PM Modi proposed the creation of a BRICS satellite network and a space exploration group during the BRICS summit in Johannesburg in August 2023. During the Johannesburg summit, the BRICS countries declared their commitment to maintaining the long-term sustainability of space activities and preventing an arms race in outer space (PAROS).

They emphasised the need for negotiations to create a binding international agreement to prevent the weaponization of space. The revised draft treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects, was presented at the Conference on Disarmament in 2014.

Regarding the UK-led UN General Assembly Resolution 75/36, titled 'Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviors', India expressed that, while it agreed with the UK and other sponsors on the goal of reducing space threats, it believed the resolution failed to tackle the crucial matter of preventing an arms race in space through a universally agreed upon and multilaterally negotiated legally binding agreement on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS).

Additionally, India pointed out that the resolution introduced subjective concepts, such as defining responsible and irresponsible behaviours, characterizing and interpreting actions and the perception of threats. India was of the opinion this resolution was not aligned with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space, which was of the utmost importance. For this reason, India voted against certain sections of the resolution.

In 2023, India had the privilege of hosting the G-20 summit in New Delhi. Alongside the summit, a special Space Economy Leaders Meeting took place. After the summit, Jitendra Singh, Minister for Science and Technology, shared an exciting prediction, stating that India's space economy, which was currently valued at \$8 bil-

lion, was projected to grow significantly and reach a remarkable \$40 billion by 2040.

This suggests a substantial contribution and promising growth for India in the field of space exploration and technology. According to Singh, there has been a remarkable growth in the number of space startups in India. He mentioned that, in 2014, there were only four space startups in the country. However, by 2023, this number had significantly increased to over 150, demonstrating India's recognition of the importance of commercial space ventures and their role in enhancing the country's diplomatic space initiatives.

India, in particular, has unveiled an economic roadmap spanning from 2025 to 2047. This roadmap aims to propel space tourism, develop global space data solutions and establish India as a prominent global space manufacturing centre. The country's vision involves making space more accessible, utilizing space data for various purposes and leveraging its manufacturing capabilities to contribute to the space industry worldwide. These developments mark a remarkable shift from the past and indicate India's growing ambitions in the space domain.

In 2023, the PMO released a detailed timeline outlining India's future plans in space. The Space Vision, 2047, Roadmap, unveiled in 2023, outlines a series of ambitious goals and milestones for India's space programme. The initiatives demonstrate India's long-term vision and commitment to explore and utilize space for various strategic and scientific purposes.

These include the deployment of flexible communication satellites (COMSATS) by 2025; advancements in quantum and optical communications by 2030; initiation of a human spaceflight programme by 2030; development of a reusable heavy launcher by the same year; creation of a two-stage-to-orbit (TSTO) fully reusable vehicle between 2035 and 2040; space-based strategic deterrence by 2040; a manned mission to the Moon in the same year; establishment of interplanetary networks by 2047; and the pursuit of space mining by the same time frame.

India's 2047 space roadmap shares similarities with China's 2049 space strategy. Yet, India faces certain challenges. Notably, it has not yet introduced a super heavy-lift rocket comparable to SpaceX's Starship, or China's Long March 9. Currently, India lacks the ability to conduct human spaceflight, or to build and maintain large space structures. Additionally, India has not developed the advanced reusable space plane technology that China recently showcased. India is yet to establish a nationwide programme for space-based solar power.

This suggests that India still has significant progress to make. However, projecting power in space is about relative strength and capability. Over the past decade, China has rapidly closed the gap with the US in space capabilities. Considering China's economic challenges, India could be well-positioned to leverage its demographic advantages and talent pool by the 2040s to quickly catch up with the Dragon.

Time will reveal which country becomes the leading space power in the 2040s. The nation that consistently focuses on long-term policies, secures funding and invests in education, training and visionary planning will likely gain a strategic edge. (IPA Service)

The rise of Afghanistan's women YouTubers

By: Rohullah Talaash & Orooj Hakimi

Her living room is a far cry from the bustling, brightly lit film sets she once loved, but Setaish Hayat says making YouTube videos at home is the next best thing in Afghanistan where Taliban edicts have increasingly confined women indoors.

Hayat, 21, was a budding actor in local film and television until the Taliban seized power in 2021 and began issuing decrees on women that included banning TV dramas with female actors and ordering women to wear strict hijab while presenting the news.

Now Hayat creates about 30 videos a month – on topics from cooking, fashion and make-up, to skirts with her family – making her one of the most successful of a growing number of women in Afghanistan going online in search of a living.

"We do not use any special equipment like cameras, lights, cranes or fancy props. We record programmes on our phones," said Hayat, whose YouTube channel has garnered more than 20,000 subscribers since its launch last September.

Hayat said she had faced hostility for her channel and so wears a medical mask and sunglasses for her safety when she sometimes films outside.

"It is very challenging for girls and women who work outside the home, especially those who appear on camera and make YouTube content," Hayat told Context from Kabul.

Hayat declined to say how much she earned, but said it was enough to support her family.

International sanctions have severely limited transactions with Afghan banks, so most YouTube content creators had friends abroad pass on earnings via money-transfer companies.

Hayat said most of her viewers were in the United States, Canada, Denmark and Australia, with audiences also in Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Taliban 'control'
The Taliban have stopped most Afghan female staff from working at aid agencies and closed beauty salons, putting tens of thousands out of work. They also barred women from parks and curtailed travel for women without a male guardian.

Most girls and women have been barred from attending high school and going to universities.

"In a situation where women's hands are tied from working in the media, YouTube channels are a good option, and through that, I can also meet my living expenses," said Maina Sadat, a former law student who started creating videos on YouTube after she was barred from going to college.

The Taliban's sudden return to power reversed two decades of Western efforts to boost economic opportunities for women. The Taliban say they respect rights in line with Islamic law.

Fawzia Koofi, an Afghan women's rights activist who was shot in the arm by the Taliban in 2020, said YouTube channels not

only provided income, but also served as a means for women to communicate their messages, experiences and aspirations.

"Every woman in Afghanistan has a mobile phone and is connected to the world. How can you halt the empowered generation?" she asked from her new home in London.

However, many women, including Hayat, fear the Taliban could shut down YouTube channels that do not have a broadcasting license from the Ministry of Information and Culture, which is mandatory for social media influencers and content creators.

"The Taliban are attempting to require every YouTube channel operating in Afghanistan to obtain a licence," said Shadab Gulzar, deputy head of the Afghanistan YouTubers Union.

"Once licensed, they will be more under control and obligated to operate according to signed agreements and commitments," he warned.

Survival
The Taliban assured female YouTubers they had nothing to fear if they satisfy the criteria for a license, which include a journalism degree and three years' work experience – requirements very hard for women to fulfil if they had not already studied and worked before the Taliban came to power.

"Their publications should not contradict the Islamic system and religious values, and they should refrain from religious and ethnic biases," said Abdulwahid Ryan, spokesman for the Ministry of Information and Culture.

"As for other aspects, including the content of their programmes, they have free rein," he said, adding that a license cost 4,000 afghanis (\$56.16).

He said that while he was not sure of the number of female YouTubers in Afghanistan, there were more than 1,000 YouTube channels operating, and 250 had been issued licences.

Gulzar said YouTube channels had become a significant source of income for many women, "with most of them meeting their living expenses" through their content.

Between about 10% and 15% of all Afghan YouTubers earn between \$1,500 and \$2,000 a month and a little over half earn an average of up to \$500, according to his data. These are decent amounts in a country where, according to the World Bank, GDP per capita is just over \$350.

Women say such home-based jobs are key for survival.

When Ayesha Niazi, a former television news presenter, and her husband were forced to quit their journalism, they turned to YouTube to help support their young family.

"Appearing on screen under the current circumstances in Afghanistan is not without its risks ... but we had to do something to generate income," said Niazi, who makes cultural and historical videos three times a week on YouTube and earns about \$300 a month.

"As a mother, I could not see my twins go hungry." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Women's cancers: Curable for the rich, often a death sentence for the poor

By: Ophira Ginsburg, Lesong Conteh, Lynette Denny & Richard Sullivan

Every minute, a woman dies of breast cancer. Every two minutes, a woman dies of cervical cancer. Perhaps you know these statistics, and perhaps these cancers have directly affected you, or someone you love.

Each year 2.7 million women will be diagnosed with cancers of the breast, cervix, endometrium, or ovaries, and more than a million of them will die from these cancers.

Did you know that most of those women live in developing countries?

A woman diagnosed with breast cancer in most high-income countries is very likely to survive. The opposite is true for the hundreds of thousands of women facing the same diagnosis in poor countries. Survival should not be a fluke of geography.

A woman's agency – that is, her ability to seek and receive an accurate diagnosis and care early in the course of disease – can be the difference between life and death. Pervasive myths regarding cancer as a death sentence, and the stigma that accompanies a diagnosis of breast or gynaecological cancer only make these barriers harder to overcome.

Rich and poor

In the case of cervical cancer, 85% of women diagnosed, and 87% of those who die are from poorer countries. Cervical cancer is almost entirely preventable via HPV vaccination for girls and cervical screening,

with treatment of pre-cancerous growths. None of this requires an oncologist or high-level cancer centre.

These cost-effective interventions can save millions of lives, if made affordable. Many low-income countries are eligible for lower-cost HPV vaccines through Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, but many women with a high risk of death from cervical cancer live in countries deemed too wealthy for this special access, while other countries risk losing the vaccine upon "graduation". In other words, developing countries can effectively be disadvantaged by virtue of their economic success.

Bridging the gap

In a series in The Lancet medical journal, we highlight the gross inequities in access to prevention, early detection, and treatment for these two common cancers. We review what type of interventions could close this divide, including HPV vaccination and screen-and-treat approaches for cervical cancer prevention.

For breast cancer, key interventions include improving a woman's access to early diagnosis, increased public awareness, timely access to diagnostic imaging and a biopsy for accurate diagnosis, and improved access to surgery can make a world of difference.

For the majority of women whose breast cancers are "hormone positive", the addition of an estrogen-blocking drug such as tamoxifen (which is generic, inexpensive and widely avail-

able with low rates of serious toxicity) can greatly improve survival.

There are challenges in taking these interventions to scale, beyond issues of cost. For example, there continues to be widespread misinformation regarding the safety as well as the effectiveness of the HPV vaccine, a problem we must urgently overcome to increase coverage globally.

There are pragmatic approaches that can be taken to meet these challenges. Task-sharing – for example, where a nurse receives additional training to perform a visual inspection of the cervix with acetic acid – can greatly improve access to this life-saving intervention, particularly where gynaecologists or other trained physicians are scarce.

Zambia has been successful in this approach, which also includes taking digital photographs of the cervix for quality assurance by a remote gynaecologist Telemedicine can also help bridge the gap, for example when community health workers use smartphones to encourage women to attend the clinic if they have a suspicious breast lump. Nurses can also use smartphones for digital photos as well as data-tracking and follow-up communication between physician and patient.

A question of funding

There is stark lack of global funding for cancer, in spite of the fact that cancer kills more people, in fact twice as many, than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.

Breast and cervical cancer alone account for half a million

more deaths – mostly of women in the prime of their lives – than the number of women who die from complications of pregnancy or childbirth. Any time a woman dies in childbirth, it is a tragedy. But equally tragic is a woman who survives her pregnancy, only to succumb to breast cancer when her child is not yet five. But where is the cry for global investments? Where is the fund for women's cancer in the developing world?

The case must also be made for leverage existing resources, for example by providing breast health education and cervical screening at reproductive health clinics. Women who are living with HIV are four to five times more likely to develop cervical cancer. This is why UNAIDS and the WHO recommend combining HIV services with cervical cancer education, screening and treatment, in settings where HIV prevalence is high.

That said, the total funding for all non-communicable diseases is a mere fraction of what is required, and each day millions of families face catastrophic expenditures, which come from largely out-of-pocket sources.

A 2015 report from eight ASEAN countries found that one year after a cancer diagnosis, 48% experienced financial catastrophe, 29% of adults had died, and just 23% were alive with no financial catastrophe.

Investments must be made now, including direct international assistance for health, as well as increased expenditures from national governments.

Countries moving towards universal health coverage must expand beyond traditional packages that focus exclusively on infectious diseases and mother-and-child health to incorporate services for breast and cervical cancer.

The threat to development
Women's cancers are a major threat to development. It is imperative that we work together, across disciplines, and recognise the role of other partners, including in the UN system, academia, civil society, and the private sector in advocating for women's health and rights.

Gender equality has its own goal in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030, and thus presents a critical opportunity for advocates and activists in the gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and cancer associations and communities to link forces with other women's advocates to drive greater investment in fighting cancer.

The "life course" approach raised in the UN programme, Every Woman Every Child, is essential to improve the health of women and girls. And caring for people throughout their life course also involves screening for, and treating, women's cancers. The good news about women's cancers is that they are often preventable and treatable. Our greatest challenge now is to make sure that is the case for all women, not just those who are lucky enough to be born in the wealthiest parts of the world.

(Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Ayurvedic remedies to keep healthy eyes

By: Shahnaz Hussain

Now that summer is here, we're all ready to spend as much time as possible having fun in the sun.

Most of us know that too much sun can cause sunburn and skin damage. But did you know that the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can also harm your eyes?

UV radiation, whether from natural sunlight or indoor artificial rays, can damage the eye's surface tissues as well as the cornea and lens to almost all ocular structures. The sun releases energy (radiation) in many forms.

The sunlight we see is one form. The heat we feel from the sun is another. Ultraviolet (UV) rays, a third type, are also invisible to the eye. UV rays cause sunburn. They can also damage your eyes and hurt your vision.

UV rays exposure can cause painful short-term damage to your eyes in the form of sunburn. However, UV's long-term, cumulative effects—cataracts, pterygium and macular degeneration—can dramatically impact your ability to see clearly and enjoy healthy vision in the long term.

Our unprotected eyes are most exposed to UV radiation in the mornings and afternoons, and not just at noon-time, as is commonly assumed. At noon, the sun is overhead, shining down on us and not directly into our eyes. Minimizing UV rays exposure can help maintain your healthy vision for as long as possible.

Stay cool and safeguard your eyes:

Aloe Vera Juice

There are numerous benefits of aloe vera, including your eye health. You can apply chilled aloe vera juice to your eyes with the help of cotton balls. This will help reduce eye strain and give your eyes a soothing effect. If you have dry skin around your eyes, the sugars in aloe vera can keep your skin moisturized.

The amino acids in it will make your skin soft while the zinc tightens your pores. Aloe vera extract contains properties that can help reduce eye inflammation and

dryness. Aloe vera, at low concentrations, does not hurt eye cells. It's important to avoid putting aloe vera gel directly into your eyes. Doing so can cause burning, irritation, redness, and other side effects.

Amla

Amla helps to improve and preserve the eyesight. Amla is rich in vitamin C and antioxidants, thus, helping you attain a better vision. Amla's potent antioxidants neutralize free radicals, protecting the eyes from their harmful effects. Consuming Amla or using Amla-based eye drops can help maintain eye health. You should drink amla juice to improve your eye vision and keep them healthy. You can even try massaging amla oil around your eyes to promote eyesight.

This Vitamin-rich berry also strengthens the eye muscles. It protects your vision by strengthening the muscles in your eyes. Another major benefit of Amla is that it prevents cataracts.

Amla powerfully inhibits the free radicals, which are one of the sources of cataracts. Regular consumption of Amla can help prevent cellular damage and maintain the long-term health of your eyes.

Dry eyes are a common condition during summer. Amla contains cooling properties that can help soothe and hydrate the eyes, providing relief from dryness, itching, and discomfort. Regular consumption of Amla or using Amla-based eye drops may alleviate the symptoms of dry eyes.

In today's digital age, many people spend prolonged periods looking at screens, leading to eye strain. Regular consumption of Amla juice can cure eye problems such as eye strain, fatigue, discomfort, redness, swelling and puffiness. Amla juice is high in essential vitamins, which help our eyes to be stronger and healthier.

Papaya

Papaya is a juicy and nutritious tropical fruit with a distinct flavour that is not usually preferred by many. Papayas are a soft, fleshy fruit that can be used in a wide

variety of culinary ways.

Papaya is good for healthy eyes due to the presence of nutrients that help support healthy eyes. It contains antioxidants like vitamins A, C, and E, carotenoids, lutein and Zeaxanthin that protect the eye from harmful high-energy blue light that can damage the retina of your eyes. They also protect against developing cataracts, glaucoma and other chronic eye diseases.

Antioxidants help to prevent retinal degeneration that can cause various eye diseases, while vitamin A strengthens your cornea. Consuming this nutritious fruit every day can improve your overall vision and protect it from infections

Blueberries

Dubbed as nature's superheroes, these mighty, violet-hued gems are a powerhouse of antioxidants, particularly anthocyanins, as well as vitamin C and E, all of which are renowned for their potential to protect eyesight and slow the progression of sight loss.

Their deep blue hue is a result of anthocyanins, potent compounds that assist in maintaining healthy blood vessels in the eyes and strengthen the retina – and provide extra vision protection. A regular intake of blueberries for few months improve ocular blood flow and visual field defects.

Blueberries, with their vasodilatory effects and ability to improve blood flow, contribute to this crucial aspect of ocular wellness. By enhancing circulation to the eyes, these berries promote overall eye function and may even help alleviate symptoms of conditions like glaucoma, which involves impaired blood flow to the optic nerve.

Protecting the eyes from UV rays by wearing sunglasses and hats, getting regular eye exams, and effectively managing conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes are all important for maintaining optimal eye health during summertime. (The author is international fame beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)

Medical misogyny: We need to talk about obstetric violence

By: Vijayetta Sharma

Expectant mothers deserve proper care when giving birth. Instead, some face forced surgery, bullying, coercion and insufficient pain relief.

Women being threatened with beatings for screaming during labour. Women forced to deliver babies on the floor despite the availability of labour beds. Women handed plastic bags containing the unwashed bodies of their stillborn children.

These are just some of the horrific stories that have emerged from investigations into abuse and mistreatment of expectant mothers in several parts of India.

The deplorable condition of primary health centres and lack of facilities in rural areas are breeding grounds of obstetric violence at the hands of doctors, midwives and others, which has been compared to rape.

An accredited social health activist from Ropar district in Punjab told this researcher how one woman pretended to go to the toilet and fled a primary health centre out of fear of the treatment she'd receive.

"When she did not return from the toilet after 10 minutes, I rushed to the village," the social worker said.

"To my surprise, I found her with the lady sarpanch (elected head of the village). The baby's

head was out when she reached home."

Obstetric violence – defined as mistreatment, disrespect and abuse or dehumanised care of women during childbirth – is a public health problem that directly affects rates of maternal mortality.

Forced surgery, lack of consent for procedures such as episiotomies and vaginal examinations during birth, bullying, coercion and non-cooperative attitudes are common.

Gendered shame, insufficient pain relief and unethical medical practices are other crude manifestations of this medical malpractice. Across the world, there is an under-recognised history of obstetric violence.

These obstetric practices mirror the attitudes of abusive men in that they attempt to coercively control women through manipulation and violence, name-calling and character attacks.

Obstetric violence can also be directed towards women by other women or be marked by aspects of violence that deviate from protocol. These practices all infringe on the basic principles of autonomy, justice, dignity and the obligation of a physician not to harm the patient.

Women's subordinate social position in many countries enables this practice to silently continue behind closed doors.



A culture of impunity gives health providers a free hand.

The irony is that many medical professionals consider labour-room abuse justified as a delivery strategy. They argue about what degree of violence can be considered gentle, justifying certain acts as "non-violent".

Passive submission to obstetric violence, dismissal of women's voices in labour, normalisation of violence, power dynamics between health professionals and patients, and training models that ignore obstetric violence practices all exacerbate the situation in labour rooms.

Abortion-related obstetric violence has been more frequent in settings that legally restrict abortions.

Threats and violence at the hands of midwives during birthing has been compared to rape.

Indeed, obstetric violence is also sometimes termed "birth rape".

Qualitative studies show that such abusive experiences exacerbate victims' anxiety, helplessness, anger and fear, with many lapsing into postpartum depression or post-traumatic stress disorders.

While there is no specific law against obstetric violence under Indian law, it is considered a human rights violation under international law.

In January 2023, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognised obstetric violence as a human rights violation after a pregnant woman in Argentina, who was found to have a dead foetus in her ninth month of pregnancy, died of cardiac arrest after she was hospitalised to induce labour.

The court found she had not

received appropriate medical treatment considering known risk factors of her pregnancy which led to death of the foetus, and wasn't given necessary information on treatment alternatives.

In 2022, the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women found that a forced C-section delivery without informed consent was performed on a Spanish woman – who was also forbidden from eating during labour – had been subjected to obstetric violence and violation of her human rights.

Some countries do recognise obstetric violence in national laws.

Obstetric violence as a legal term was introduced in Venezuela in 2007 when the "Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence" came into force. Several other countries in South and Central America have recognised obstetric violence as a legal concept, including Argentina, Mexico, and Uruguay.

Despite concerns about different types of obstetric violence raised by human rights organisations, social movements and academics, there is a dearth of investigations, evidence-based record creation and legislation.

Clear statistical data on the prevalence of obstetric violence worldwide is missing, despite

campaigns and living in an age marked by digitisation, artificial intelligence and ethical governance.

Governments have largely ignored the issue, and this medical malpractice has been overlooked and loosely defined by public and private healthcare institutions. This can be pinned to the failure of the medical establishment to confront maternal health issues.

Healthcare institutions and professionals could be first to be held responsible for episodes of obstetric violence on their premises.

Carefully chartered management and policy strategies to identify obstetric violence – and track how it applies along lines of class, gender, race, and medical power – would help offer respite to expecting mothers.

If these practices are not treated, progress by women's reproductive rights movements, which have fought hard for dignity of care and bodily integrity, could backslide.

Healthcare institutions and professionals could be made fully accountable for unethical practices inside or outside the labour room which diminish the women's dignity during delivery.

The judicial system's role in recognising and punishing obstetric violence in India needs strengthening. The law could in-

roduce safeguards for women's rights and choices in obstetric care – ensuring each mother can choose her birthing position, support person and pain control (including non-pharmacological methods) – and that she is given equitable treatment irrespective of caste and socio-economic status.

Obstetric violence legislation in India could clearly lay down the authority, definitions and remedies for physical abuse, verbal abuse, non-confidential and non-consented care, negligent and discriminatory care, and non-dignified care towards women in all stages of pregnancy, childbirth and new motherhood.

These laws could cover private and public births, as well as home births.

Adoption and use of birth plans by public and private healthcare organisations could help reduce, control or eradicate obstetric violence and misogyny in birth practices.

Women feeling safe and cared for during their pregnancy will result in better maternal and child health.

Ultimately, a flourishing care regime that prioritises women's concerns, pain management and dignity requires that women are given the right to participate in decisions concerning their labour. (Courtesy: The Wire)

US campus protests escalate after students suspended, while dozens arrested in Texas, Utah and Virginia

Protesters take over Columbia University's Hamilton Hall in escalation of anti-war demonstrations

NEW YORK, April 30: Dozens of protesters took over a building at Columbia University in New York early on Tuesday, barricading the entrances and unfurling a Palestinian flag out of a window in the latest escalation of demonstrations against the Israel-Hamas war that have spread to college campuses nationwide.

Video footage showed protesters on Columbia's Manhattan campus locking arms in front of Hamilton Hall early on Tuesday and carrying furniture and metal barricades to the building, one of several that was occupied during a 1968 civil rights and anti-Vietnam War protest on the campus. Posts on an Instagram page for protest organizers shortly after midnight urged people to protect the encampment and join them at Hamilton Hall.

"An autonomous group reclaimed Hind's Hall, previously known as 'Hamilton Hall,' in honor of Hind Rajab, a martyr murdered at the hands of the genocidal Israeli state at the age of six years old," CU Apartheid Direct posted on X, formerly known as Twitter, early Tuesday.

The student radio station, WKCR-FM, broadcasted a play-by-play of the hall's takeover — which occurred nearly 12 hours after Monday's 2 p.m. deadline for the protesters to leave an encampment of around 120 tents or face suspension.

Representatives for the university did not immediately respond to emails requesting comment early on Tuesday.

In the X post, protesters said they planned to remain at the hall until the university conceded to the CUAD's three demands: divestment, financial transparency and amnesty.

A gunman kills 6 worshippers inside a Shiite mosque in western Afghanistan, the Taliban say

ISLAMABAD, April 30: A gunman stormed a mosque in western Afghanistan, opening fire and killing six people as they were praying, a Taliban official said on Tuesday. Local media reports and a former president of Afghanistan said the mosque was targeted because it was a place of worship for members of the country's Shiite Muslim minority.

According to Abdul Mateen Qani, a spokesman for the Taliban Interior Ministry, the attack happened on Monday night in the district of Guzara in Herat province. He said in a post on the social media platform X, formerly Twitter, that an investigation was underway.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, which also wounded another worshipper, and the attacker fled the scene. Local media reported that the mosque's imam was among those killed.

"I strongly condemn the attack on the Imam Zaman Mosque," former Afghan President Hamid Karzai said on X. "I consider this terrorist act against all religious and human standards."

The Islamic State group's affiliate in Afghanistan is a major Taliban rival and frequently targets schools, hospitals, mosques and Shiite areas throughout the country.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021, during the last weeks of the chaotic departure of US and NATO troops from the country after 20 years of war.

Despite initial promises of a more moderate stance, the Taliban gradually reimposed a harsh interpretation of Islamic law, or Shariah, as they did during their previous rule of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. (AP)



Universities across the US are grappling with how to clear out encampments as commencement ceremonies approach, with some continuing negotiations and others turning to force and ultimatums that have resulted in clashes with police.

Dozens of people were arrested Monday during protests at universities in Texas, Utah and Virginia, while Columbia said hours before the takeover of Hamilton Hall that it had started suspending students.

Demonstrators are sparring over the Israel-Hamas war and its mounting death toll, and the number of arrests at campuses nationwide is approaching 1,000 as the final days of class wrap up. The outcry is forcing colleges to reckon with their financial ties to Israel, as well as their support for free speech.

Some Jewish students say the protests have veered into antisemitism and made them afraid to set foot on campus.

At the University of Texas at Austin, an attorney said at least 40 demonstrators were arrested Monday. The confrontation was an escalation on the 53,000-student campus in the state's capital, where more than 50 protesters were arrested last

week.

Later Monday, dozens of officers in riot gear at the University of Utah sought to break up an encampment outside the university president's office that went up in the afternoon.

Police dragged students off by their hands and feet, snapping the poles holding up tents and zipping those who refused to disperse. Seventeen people were arrested. The university says it's against code to camp overnight on school property and that the students were given several warnings to disperse before police were called in.

The plight of students who have been arrested has become a central part of protests, with the students and a growing number of faculty demanding amnesty for protesters.

At issue is whether the suspensions and legal records will follow students through their adult lives.

The Texas protest and others — including in Canada and Europe — grew out of Columbia's early demonstrations that have continued. On Monday, student activists defied the 2 p.m. deadline to leave the encampment. Instead, hundreds of protesters remained. A handful of counter-demonstrators waved Israeli flags, and one held a sign reading, "Where are the anti-Hamas chants?"

While the university didn't call police to roust the demonstrators, school spokesperson Ben Chang said suspensions had started but could provide few details. Protest organizers said they were not aware of any suspensions as of Monday evening.

Columbia's handling of the demonstrations also has prompted federal complaints. (AP)

Missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels damages a ship in the Red Sea

JERUSALEM, April 30: A missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels damaged a ship in the Red Sea on Monday, authorities said, the latest assault in their campaign against shipping in the crucial maritime route.

The attack happened off the coast of Mokha, Yemen, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said. The ship was damaged in the attack, the UKMTO said, though its crew was safe and heading to its next port of call. The agency urged vessels to exercise caution in the area. There was "an explosion in close proximity to a merchant vessel," the UKMTO said. "Vessel and crew are reported safe."

The US military's Central Command identified the ship damaged as the Cyclades, a Malta-flagged, Greece-owned bulk carrier. The military separately shot down a drone on a flight path toward the USS Philippine Sea and USS Laboon, the military said Tuesday.

Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed the attack on the Cyclades and targeting the US warships in a statement early Tuesday.

Meanwhile Monday, the Italian Defence Ministry said its frigate

Virgino Fasan shot down a Houthi drone that morning near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

"A missile exploded in the water in the vicinity of the escorted vessel, causing only minor superficial damage," the Italian Defence Ministry said, not identifying the commercial vessel being escorted. "The frigate Fasan and the protected merchant vessel are continuing their southward route as planned to exit the Red Sea."

Saree did not acknowledge that attack, though he claimed the Houthis also targeted a ship in the Indian Ocean. There was no immediate report or evidence to support that claim.

The Houthis say their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are aimed at pressuring Israel to end its war against Hamas in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the US Maritime Administration. (AP)

US military ships are working to build a pier for Gaza aid. It's going to cost at least \$320 mn

JERUSALEM, April 30: A U.S. Navy ship and several Army vessels involved in an American-led effort to bring more aid into the besieged Gaza Strip are offshore of the enclave and building out a floating platform for the operation that the Pentagon has said will cost at least \$320 million.

Sabrina Singh, Pentagon spokeswoman, told reporters the cost is a rough estimate for the project and includes the transportation of the equipment and pier sections from the United States to the coast of Gaza, as well as the construction and aid delivery operations.

Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press on Tuesday

show the USNS Roy P. Benavidez about 11 kilometers (6.8 miles) from the port on shore, where the base of operations for the project is being built by the Israeli military. The USAV General Frank S. Besson Jr., an Army logistics vessel, and several other Army boats are with the Benavidez and working on the construction of what the military calls the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS, system.

Satellite images from Sunday and Monday by Planet Labs PBC

showed pieces of the floating pier in the Mediterranean Sea, alongside the Benavidez. Measurements of the vessel match known features of the Benavidez, a Bob Hope-class vehicle cargo ship operated by the Military Sealift Command.

A U.S. military official confirmed late last week that the Benavidez had begun construction and that it was far enough off shore to ensure that the troops building the platform would be safe. Singh said on Monday that next will

come the construction of the causeway, which will then be anchored to the beach.

The U.S. military's Central Command early Tuesday published images of the floating pier's construction online, after the AP's publication of the satellite photos.

"The pier will support USAID and humanitarian partners to receive and deliver humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza," the statement on the social platform X said.

U.S. and Israeli officials have said they hope to have the floating pier in place, the causeway attached to the shore and operations underway by early May. (AP)



NATO chief chides members as Ukraine's allies say slow arms deliveries have helped Russia

KYIV, April 30: NATO countries haven't delivered what they promised to Ukraine in time, the alliance's chief said on Monday, allowing Russia to press its advantage while Kyiv's depleted forces wait for military supplies to arrive from the U.S. and Europe.

"Serious delays in support have meant serious consequences on the battlefield" for Ukraine, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told a news conference in Kyiv with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Outgunned, Ukraine's troops have struggled to fend off Russian advances on the battlefield. They were recently compelled to make a tactical retreat from three villages in the east, where the Kremlin's forces have been making incremental gains, Ukraine's army chief said Sunday. The Russian Defense Ministry claimed Monday its forces had also taken the village of Semenivka. "The lack of ammunition has allowed the Russians to push forward along the front line. Lack of air defense has made it possible for more Russian missiles to hit their targets, and the lack of deep strike capabilities has made it possible for the Russians to concentrate more forces," Stoltenberg said.

Kyiv's Western partners have repeatedly vowed to stand with Ukraine "for as long as it takes." But vital U.S. military help was held up for six months by political differences in Washington, and Europe's military hardware production has not kept up with demand. Ukraine's own manufacturing of heavy weapons is only now starting to gain traction.

Now, Ukraine and its Western partners are racing to deploy critical new military aid that can help check the slow and costly but steady Russian advance across eastern areas, as well as thwart drone and missile attacks.

Zelenskyy said new Western supplies have started arriving, but slowly. "This process must be speeded up," he said at the news conference with Stoltenberg.

Though the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line has shifted little since early in the war, the Kremlin's forces in recent weeks have edged forward, especially in the Donetsk region, with sheer numbers and massive fire-

power used to bludgeon defensive positions.

Russia also continues to launch missiles, drones and bombs at cities across Ukraine. At least four people were killed and 27 injured in a Russian missile strike on residential buildings and "civil infrastructure" in the southern Ukrainian port city of Odesa on Monday, regional governor Oleh Kiper said on the Telegram messaging site.

A turreted Gothic-style building known locally as the "Harry Potter Castle," was seen in flames after the strike. Russia is a far bigger country than Ukraine, with greater resources. It has also received weapons support from Iran and North Korea, the U.S. government says.

Drawn-out Ukrainian efforts to mobilize more troops, and the belated building of battlefield fortifications, are other factors undermining Ukraine's war effort, military analysts say.

Nick Reynolds, a research fellow for land warfare at the London-based Royal United Services Institute, said the war "is still largely an artillery duel."

He said he did not expect to see major movement of the front lines in the near term, but that "the conditions are being set for which side has military advantage at the front line. The Russian military is in a better position at the moment."

"When we see one side or the other being in a position to move the front line, at some stage, maneuver will be restored to the battlefield. Not in the next few weeks, maybe not even in the next few months. But it will happen," he told The Associated Press.

Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh, at a briefing with reporters Monday, also acknowledged Russia's recent battlefield gains, noting that a delay in congressional approval for additional spending "set the Ukrainians back."

NATO chief Stoltenberg, however, said more weapons and ammunition for Ukraine are on the way, including Patriot missile systems to defend against heavy Russian barrages that smash into the power grid and urban areas. (AP)

Ahead of visit to Israel, US's Blinken presses Hamas to accept new proposal for Gaza cease-fire

CAIRO, April 30: The United States stepped up pressure on Monday for a cease-fire deal in Gaza as the secretary of state said a new proposal had been put to Hamas, whose officials were in Cairo talking to Egyptian mediators. Israeli airstrikes killed 26 people in Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah, according to hospital records.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, ahead of a visit to Israel this week, urged Hamas to accept the latest proposal, calling it "extraordinarily generous" on Israel's part.

The terms were not made public. But according to an Egyptian official and Israeli media, Israel has softened its position, lowering the number of hostages it demands that Hamas free during the initial six-week phase of the cease-fire in return for the release of hundreds of Palestinians from Israeli prisons.

One question is whether that will be enough to overcome Hamas concerns over the cease-fire's second phase.

Hamas has demanded assurances that an eventual release of all hostages would bring a complete end to Israel's nearly seven-month assault in Gaza and a withdrawal of its troops from the devastated territory. Israel has offered only an extended pause, vowing to resume its offensive once it is over. The issue has repeatedly obstructed efforts by US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators during

months of talks.

Some Israeli commentators depicted Israel as at a crossroads: Go for a deal with a potential end to the war, bringing benefits that could include normalization of ties with Saudi Arabia, or push ahead with plans including an attack on Rafah in the hope of crushing Hamas and risk international isolation.

Israel's closest ally, the United States, and others have repeatedly warned against an offensive on Rafah, saying it would bring a surge in casualties and worsen a humanitarian catastrophe. More than 1 million Palestinians have sought shelter in Rafah after fleeing fighting elsewhere.

Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed more than 34,000 people.

Overnight and Monday morning, Israeli strikes flattened at least three homes where extended families of Palestinians were gathered. The dead included nine women and six children, one them just five days old, according to hospital records and an Associated Press reporter.

"Everyone was sleeping in their beds," said Mahmoud Abu Taha, whose cousin was killed with his wife and their year-old baby in a house where at least 10 died. "They have nothing to do with anything."

Egypt has stepped up mediation efforts for a cease-fire deal in hopes of averting an assault on Rafah, on Gaza's border with Egypt. An Egyptian official said Israel has



lowered the number of hostages it wants freed in the first stage, down from earlier demands for 40. He did not specify the new number. Israeli media said it now seeks the release of 33 hostages in return for the release of some 900 Palestinian prisoners. Hamas is believed to hold around 100 Israelis in Gaza.

Israel has also shown flexibility on allowing residents to return to northern Gaza, the Egyptian official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the internal talks.

There was no immediate comment from Hamas or Israeli officials.

Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected stopping the war in return for hostage releases and says an offensive on Rafah is crucial to destroying the militants after their October 7 attacks on Israel that triggered the fighting. His government could be threatened if he agrees to a deal, since hardline Cabinet members demand an attack on Rafah. (AP)

Japan's PM Kishida denies he will step down over his party's loss in special elections

TOKYO, April 30: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Tuesday his governing party's major defeat in last weekend's by-elections was largely due to a political fundraising scandal and that he would not step down or replace party executives to take responsibility.

Instead, Kishida said he will push anti-corruption measures and political reforms.

"As I take the results seriously, I believe as president of the governing party we must tackle the challenges we face one by one and achieve results, and this is the way I will take responsibility," Kishida said. "By doing so, I will regain the people's

trust." Kishida said the scandal dealt "a big and heavy hinderance" to the party. The scandal centres on dozens of lawmakers in Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party who allegedly pocketed profits from ticket sales to political events by falsifying accounting reports.

Asked if he would take responsibility for the election loss, Kishida denied he would step down or replace top LDP posts, and pledged to pursue party and political reforms, including a revision to the political funds laws. He also vowed to tackle economic issues.

The conservative Liberal Democratic Party lost all three seats in Sun-

day's parliamentary by-elections in Nagasaki, Shimane and Tokyo. Kishida's party only fielded its own candidate in Shimane, a conservative stronghold, while the liberal-leaning main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan clinched all three seats previously held by LDP.

The loss is seen as a punishment by voters for the governing party's scandal, which erupted last year and has undermined Kishida's leadership.

The party is unlikely to lose power because the opposition is fractured. But Sunday's defeat marks a further setback for Kishida, who will seek reelection as his party's leader in the fall. (AP)

Imran Khan's party not holding 'backdoor talks' with anyone, says chairman Gohar Khan

LAHORE, April 30: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf is not holding "backdoor talks" with anyone, its chairman Barrister Gohar Khan has said, amid reports that jailed former prime minister Imran Khan had green-lit negotiations with the establishment and political forces.

Addressing a press conference following a meeting with the 71-year-old PTI founder at Adiala jail, Gohar on Monday suggested that the ex-premier only sought names for holding negotiations. No talks were being held right now, he added.

"Today, the PTI founder was barred from addressing the media by the jail administration, while several of our legal representatives were denied entry into the jail," Gohar was quoted as saying by the Express Trib-



une newspaper.

He said that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif had been "exonerated of all charges, while the PTI founder was being punished in fabricated cases."

"The police are being used against our party, Maryam Nawaz, dressed in police attire, sends a message that the police are subordinate to them," Gohar quoted the PTI founder as saying during their meet-

ing.

PTI leader Sher Afzal Marwat, who was alongside Gohar during the conference, said Imran Khan criticised Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's appointment as deputy prime minister and termed him Nawaz's "frontman".

"Consultations are ongoing for the selection of the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and a final decision will be announced tomorrow," said Marwat, whose name is

also doing the rounds for the position.

Addressing reports of former PTI leaders rejoining the party, the leader maintained that only Imran would have a final say.

On Sunday, reports said the cricketer-turned-politician had given his party the green light for negotiations with the establishment and political adversaries.

However, the PTI founder made it clear that any talks must play by the rulebook, stressing the party's willingness to sit down with both the powers that be and political adversaries for the greater good.

"How the negotiations will take place and in what environment should be decided first, only then will the way for the negotiations be paved with those who are the stakeholders," he added. (PTI)

The Taliban are working to woo tourists to Afghanistan

KABUL, April 30: Around 30 men are crammed into a Kabul classroom, part of the debut student cohort at a Taliban-run institute training tourism and hospitality professionals.

It's a motley crew. One student is a model. Another is 17 and has no job history.

The students vary in age, education level and professional experience. They're all men — Afghan women are banned from studying beyond sixth grade — and they don't know anything about tourism or hospitality. But they are all eager to promote a different side of Afghanistan. And the Taliban are happy to help.

Afghanistan's rulers are pariahs on the global stage, largely because of their restrictions on women and girls. The economy is struggling, infrastructure is poor, and poverty is rife. And yet, foreigners are visiting the country, encouraged by the sharp drop in violence, increased flight connections with hubs like Dubai, and the bragging rights that come with vacationing in an unusual destination. The numbers aren't huge — they never were — but there's a buzz around Afghan tourism.

In 2021, there were 691 foreign tourists. In 2022, that figure rose to 2,300. Last year, there were 7,000.

Mohammad Saeed, the head of the Tourism Directorate in Kabul, said the biggest foreign visitor market is China because of its proxim-



ity and large population. Afghanistan also has advantages over some of its neighbours.

"They've told me they don't want to go to Pakistan because it's dangerous and they get attacked. The Japanese have said this to me also," Saeed said. "This is good for us."

But there are disadvantages, too. Visas are difficult and expensive to access. Many countries severed ties with Afghanistan after the Taliban returned to power, and no country recognizes them as the legitimate rulers of the country.

Afghan embassies either closed or suspended their operations. There's an ongoing power struggle between Afghanistan's embassies and consulates staffed by people from the former Western-backed administration, and those under the Taliban administration's full control. Saeed concedes there are obstacles for Afghan tourism to develop but said he was

working with ministries to overcome them.

His ultimate aim is to have a visa on arrival for tourists, but that could be years away. There are problems with the road network, which is half-paved or non-existent in some parts of the country, and airlines largely avoid Afghan airspace.

The capital Kabul has the most international flights, but no Afghan airport has direct routes with major tourist markets like China, Europe, or India.

Despite the challenges, Saeed wants Afghanistan to become a tourism powerhouse, an ambition that appears to be backed by the Taliban's top leaders.

"I have been sent to this department on the instructions of the elders (ministers). They must trust me because they've sent me to this important place."

The students also have aspirations. The model, Ahmed Massoud Talash, wants to learn about Afghanistan's picturesque spots for Instagram posts and its history for media appearances.

Business school graduate Samir Ahmadzai wants to open a hotel but thinks he should know more about tourism and hospitality first.

"They hear that Afghanistan is backwards, poverty and all about war," said Ahmadzai. "We have 5,000 years of history. There should be a new page of Afghanistan." (AP)

Polling in these stations were disrupted on April 26 due to damage of EVMs, VVPATs, threat by miscreants

81.16 % voters' turnout recorded in repolling in Outer Manipur LS seat



IMPHAL, April 30: A voter turnout of 81.16 per cent was recorded at six polling stations in Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat,

where repolling was held on Tuesday, election officials said. No untoward incident was reported and voting, which com-

menced at 7 am, was held peacefully under tight security arrangements, they said. A voter turnout of 81.16 per cent

was recorded till the end of polling at 4 pm, the officials said.

Repolling was necessitated as unidentified persons had damaged EVMs and VVPATs before the completion of voting at four of these six polling stations on April 26, while EVM malfunctioning was reported at one polling station, and voting could not be completed at another due to "threat and intimidation by unknown miscreants", they said.

Voting at four polling stations in Ukhrul assembly segment, and one each in Chingai assembly seat in Ukhrul and Karong in Senapati was declared null and void, a notification issued by the office of Manipur's chief electoral officer had earlier said. Five of the polling stations are in Ukhrul district and have a total of 4,156 voters.

Around 76.06 per cent of 4.84 lakh voters exercised their franchise during polling in 13 of 28 assembly segments of Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency on April 26. Voting was held in the remaining 15 segments, along with the entire Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat, in the first phase on April 19. (PTI)

NFR cancels, reschedules, regulates trains due to safety related works

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 30: In view of temporary restriction on train movement from 18:00 hours to 06:00 hours between Jatinga Lampur and New Harangajao stations under Lumding division of the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), for undertaking track safety related works and traffic block between Jatinga Lampur and New Harangajao a few trains have been cancelled, rescheduled and regulated.

The following trains have been cancelled, regulated and rescheduled from 09:00 hours to 15:00 hours on May 1.

The Guwahati - Silchar Express, the Silchar - Guwahati Express, the Guwahati - Dullabcherra Express, the Dullabcherra - Guwahati Express, the Guwahati - Badarpur Tourist Express and the Badarpur - Guwahati Tourist Express are scheduled to leave on May 1.

Meanwhile, the Sealdah - Agartala Kanchununga Express commencing journey on April 30 will be regulated for four hours between Guwahati and Lumding.

On the other hand, the Agartala - Kolkata Express commencing journey on May 1 has been rescheduled to start at 08:35 hours instead of 07:35 hours. The Silchar - Secunderabad Express commencing journey on May 1 has been rescheduled to start at 23:50 hours instead of 19:50 hours.

MeECL trying to reduce load shedding in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, April 30: The Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) has informed that it is trying its best to cut down on load shedding in the state.

Informing this on Monday, Meghalaya power minister AT Mondal said, "As of now, we have not gone for any load shedding and we are working to see that as far as possible we will not go for it."

He said that the MeECL has been able to provide uninterrupted power supply during the board examinations and also during the just concluded Lok Sabha elections in the state.

"We are happy that we have been able to provide uninterrupted power supply," Mondal said while assuring, "Now, we are trying our level best to see that we don't go for any load shedding."

Stating that the state totally rely on hydro power projects for supply of electricity, the minister said, "We are dependent on the rains for the generation of hydro power. This year the rains have been delayed and we hope they arrive within the next few days. We can avoid load shedding if adequate power is generated."

"The mandate from the chief minister is that we have to provide uninterrupted power supply. We are working on that line and let us hope we achieve that," he added.

Last year, the state had witnessed long hours of load shedding, about seven hours in urban areas and almost nine hours in rural areas. "This year, till now we have not gone for any such scheduled load shedding," Mondal said. (NNN)

Army stopped by women protestors from taking away seized arms, ammunition



IMPHAL, April 30: The Army was stopped from taking away the arms and ammunition they seized in Manipur's Bishnupur district on Tuesday by women-led protestors, officials said.

During patrolling in the Kumbi area in the early hours, personnel of the Army's 2 Mahar regiment intercepted two SUVs, they said.

"On seeing the Army personnel, the occupants of the two vehicles fled, leaving behind their arms," an official said.

A while later, 'Meira Paibis' -- civilian group of Meitei women -- gathered at the spot, and demanded

that the weapons be handed over to them, he said.

They also demanded that no weapons be confiscated till the conflict, which broke out in May last year, is over, he added.

Hundreds of women blocked the road and prevented the Army convoy from leaving the area, officials said.

To disperse the mob, the Army fired in the air but that too bore no result, they said.

Upon getting to know about the incident, state police forces rushed to the area. It was then agreed that the Army would later hand the

arms to the police, they said.

"Confiscating weapons from village volunteers guarding a fringe area like Kumbi leaves us exposed to possible attacks by armed militants from adjacent hill areas of Churachandpur district," said Jaya Khanbam, a leader of the protestors.

"Security forces should remember that their inability to protect villages located at the periphery of the Valley led to the emergence of the village volunteers," she said.

The situation is now normal, and the Army personnel have withdrawn from the spot, officials said. (PTI)

Miscreants torch two police vehicles in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, April 30: Unidentified miscreants torched two police vehicles in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills district on Tuesday, an officer said.

The vehicles were parked in a police reserve compound and no casualty was reported.

The incident took place in the early hours of Tuesday, a senior police officer told PTI.

He said unidentified miscreants may have lobbed petrol bombs at the two vehicles owned by a policeman which was completely burnt and a police minibus with minor damages. A case was registered and investigations are on. (PTI)

day, a senior police officer told PTI. He said unidentified miscreants may have lobbed petrol bombs at the two vehicles owned by a policeman which was completely burnt and a police minibus with minor damages. A case was registered and investigations are on. (PTI)

Surveillance cameras expected to prompt detection and prevention of wildlife crimes

Aaranyak assists operation of surveillance cameras in wildlife protected areas in Sikkim

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 30: Biodiversity conservation organization, Aaranyak has provided assistance the forest department of Sikkim on installation and operation of wildlife surveillance cameras in Khangchendzongkha National Park and Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary in the bordering Himalayan state.

The surveillance cameras are expected to prompt detection and prevention of wildlife crimes to achieve the larger goal of biodiversity conservation. Wildlife crime analyst and a project officer from Aaranyak's Legal and Advocacy Division (LAD) Ivy Farheen Hussain planned and coordinated the entire process with Sikkim forest department.

She started the process with a meeting with the secretary cum APCC Fof the forest and wildlife, department, Pradip Kumar in Gangtok and conducted an orientation about the wildlife surveillance cameras and how those function in presence of chief wildlife warden (CWW), Sandeep Tambe and the DFOs of Khangchendzongkha NP and Pangolakha WLS.

She discussed various customization and multi-purpose use of wireless 4G camera, important for quick information and real-time surveillance. The goal of this programme was to form a core team who would be responsible for deploying



these wildlife surveillance cameras- for both illegal wildlife crime cases and addressing other conservation issues such as human wildlife conflict (HWC) and assist the authorities to be quick with their responses.

The first field orientation was conducted at Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary (PWLS) located over 50 kms from Gangtok to the

East Sikkim's Pakyong district, which was attended by nine forest field staffs, including range officers of the WLS, the ACF and newly recruited graduate foresters cum researchers of the forest department, who will form the core team there.

The field staff were trained how to operate, deploy and monitor the camera and its data. The pressing issues in PWLS are

Nagaland civic body polls on June 26

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 30: The Nagaland State Election Commission announced the schedule for elections to the civic bodies in the state.

According to a notification issued by state election commissioner TJ Longkumer, the elections to the three municipal councils and 36 town councils in the state will be held on June 26.

The notification said the period for filing of nomination is from June 7 to June 11. The list of validly presented nomination papers will be posted on June 12. While the scrutiny of nomination

papers will be done June 13, the list of nominated candidates will be posted on June 14.

Application for revision of the order of the authority scrutinising the nomination has been fixed from June 15 to June 18 and the revision application filed will be decided on June 19. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is June 20 and the lists of contesting candidates and polling stations will be posted on June 20 after 3 pm.

While the date of poll is June 26, the date of repoll, if any, is June 28 and counting and declaration of results will take place on

June 29. In another notification, the State Election Commission has informed that in exercise of the provisions, as provided for under sub-rule (3) and sub-rule (4) of Rule 20 of the Nagaland Municipal Election Rules, 2023, the list of officers designated as returning officers and assistant returning officers against their respective municipalities by the deputy commissioner concerned has been approved by it.

Meanwhile, with the announcement of poll, the model code of conduct (MCC) has come into force till the completion of the poll process.

Principals from CBSE schools gather at USTM for exposure visit



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 30: A two-day-long 'Exposure Visit Program' for CBSE school principals concluded at the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) on Tuesday.

34 school principals from various renowned CBSE schools from across the country participated in the programme. The visit has been organized by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in collaboration with USTM. The programme has been supported by the Department of Skill Education, CBSE under the skill education sector.

Addressing the school principals in an interactive session on Tuesday, Mahbubul Hoque, chancellor of USTM said that the role of a school principal is multifaceted and essential for creating an environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. He welcomed all the participants and said that USTM is always open to extending all kinds of support to uplift school education.

In the inaugural session on Monday, GD Sharma, vice-chancellor of USTM welcomed all the school principals and said that the National Education Policy 2020 has emphasized on skill education being integral to school and higher education. Accordingly, CBSE has envisioned promoting skill education from Class VI onwards in all its affiliated schools. He said that an added benefit of such an expo-

sure visit is that it gives the principals a chance to meet other like-minded school leaders, share stories, and gain a lot in the process.

Speaking on this occasion, Jagdish Barman, joint secretary of CBSE Centre of Excellence Guwahati said, "This exposure visit is expected to leverage the synergies between schools and higher educational institutions and create a positive platform for cohesive interaction in the future learning ecosystem."

These principals may, in turn, mentor the teachers of schools in their neighborhood and thus, unfold unlimited opportunities for educator empowerment, he added.

In this context, Amit Choudhury, dean of the School of Technology and Management at USTM said that this year CBSE has selected the university for principals' exposure visit apart from six other institutions including TERI School Of Advanced Studies New Delhi, Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar, Asian Academy of Film Television Noida, Indian Institute of Technology Tirupati, Whistling Woods International Mumbai, and Indian Institute of Management-Raipur.

The resource persons from USTM were E Karim, Azmol H Barbhuiya, Monalisa Bora Deka, Alika Borgohain, Baharul Islam, K Aye, S Gazi, Nitu Borgohain, Deboja Sharma, Moutushi Das, Mehjabin Rahman, Papiya Dutta and Palme Borthakur.

Nirmaljit Singh Kalsi, chairman of the National Council for Vocational Education and Training took an online session on 'Up-scaling of Skill Education in line with NEP 2020'. Several sessions took place on both days.

The participating schools in the program were Christ International School Bangalore, Mahavir Senior Model School Delhi, RS Jhunjhuna International School Gujarat, Poddar International School Maharashtra, Manipal School, Brahmani Public School Odisha, DPS Ahomgaon Guwahati, Faculty HS School North Guwahati, Sharada Vidyaniketan Public School Mangalore, Kendriya Vidyalaya Kungjaban, KV NFR Maligaon, Ideal English Senior Secondary School Manipur, Livingstone Foundation International, PM Shri KV Khanapara, Holy Brook Sr. Sec. School, North East Public School Udalguri, Army Public School PRTC Bangalore, SBOA Public School Guwahati, The Priceton School, Sree Swami Vivekananda Higher Primary School, Kendriya Vidyalaya NEHU Shillong, Army Public School Shillong, SJ Patel Eng School Gujarat, Delhi World Public School Haryana, Jnana Ganga Central School, Dr. M Ramanna Shetty Memorial English Medium High School, Kendriya Vidyalaya ONGC Agartala, Kendriya Vidyalaya Assam University, Kendriya Vidyalaya Aizawl, Buhai School Sikkim and Kingcup Public School Itanagar.

more related to human-wildlife conflicts (HWC).

The camera can be used for quick surveillance in the 124 sq. km. of notified PA within its boundaries. Due to the presence of the international border with China touching its core zone, it is crucial for proper and constant monitoring of this PA while also being receptive towards its wild inhabitants.

The Aaranyak official conducted second field orientation in Khangchendzongkha NP located over 150 km from Gangtok at Yuksom in West Sikkim's Gyalshing district. This was attended by a group of seven participants comprising forest department staff and EDC members who will form the core team there. Representatives from Khongtay EDC, forest territorial staff, members from Himal Rakshak NGO were trained for the purpose.

The current issues in the national park are related to wildlife poaching and illegal smuggling of the highly endangered musk deer. The park also hosts many high value wildlife species such as the snow leopard and other rarities.

Being a mixed UNESCO World Heritage Site, its area is also riddled with sacred lake sand culturally significant hotspots- other than the famous trek of Goech La to view Mount Kanchenjunga, India's highest peak.

These cameras would be extremely use-

ful for monitoring movement inside the protected area that stretches over 1700 square kms making it one of the largest wildlife protection areas in Northeast India. Overall, two teams were established in the two PAs with the immense support and coordination of the CWW, Sikkim.

"Aaranyak believes these collaborations can prove to be very beneficial- in order to fill those small yet significant gaps in effective conservation. Supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, this is just the first step on part of Aaranyak to work for the greater goal of conservation in Sikkim which has been awarded an Oscar by the United Nations for Best Policies towards Environment and Culture," said CEO and secretary general of Aaranyak, Bibhab Kumar Talukdar.

Aaranyak's senior manager in LAD, Jimmy Borah informed that the Sikkim forest department came to know about Aaranyak's involvement in deterring wildlife crimes through various sources. Accordingly, CWW contacted Aaranyak team to check if it could provide support for surveillance cameras to help them check unwanted elements inside their PAs.

"After various calls between them and Wildlife Protection Solutions who makes the cameras, we agreed for an initial involvement and after that we can see the potential engagement for long term," said Borah.

Congress women's wing urges NCW to conduct thorough probe into Karnataka 'sex scandal'

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Congress women's wing on Tuesday called on the National Commission for Women to conduct a thorough probe into the allegations of sexual misconduct against JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna and ensure that all those involved are held accountable.

In a letter to National Commission for Women (NCW) chief Rekha Sharma, All India Mahila Congress chief Alka Lamba expressed "deep concern" and sought immediate intervention from the panel on the serious allegations of sexual misconduct involving Revanna.

"It has been brought to our attention that a pen drive, allegedly released in Hassan, contains videos that implicate the sexual exploitation of more than 500 women of all ages and seeking mental pleasure by harassing them. This act not only violates the privacy and dignity of the women involved but also poses a significant threat to their safety and well-being," she said.

Lamba said that a complaint has been filed against Revanna, alleging sexual harassment by his former domestic helper.

"The complaint also mentions the involvement of Mr H D Revanna, his father and a prominent

leader of the Janata Dal (Secular) in objectionable videos," she said.

"It has been alleged that political motivations may be influencing the situation as Devaraj Gowda has also mentioned the denial of an MP ticket to a JD(S) candidate. This adds a layer of complexity to the case that requires your esteemed body's unbiased scrutiny," Lamba said.

The Congress leader also listed the violations of provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in the case.

"In light of these disturbing revelations, I urge the Commission to provide immediate protection to the women affected by this breach of privacy. Register a formal case against the individuals responsible for the creation and dissemination of these videos," Lamba said.

"Conduct a comprehensive investigation into the allegations and ensure that all parties involved are held accountable," she added.

Lamba stressed that the All India Mahila Congress is committed to supporting the NCW in any capacity to safeguard the rights and dignity of these women and to ensure that justice is served without delay.

"I trust that the National Women's Commission will take prompt and decisive action in this regard," she said. (PTI)

We hit terrorists in their homes, don't send dossiers on them: PM Modi

'Opponents are using artificial intelligence to distort quotes of leaders like me'

LATUR/SOLAPUR/DHARASHI, April 30: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday asserted his government has adopted a bold new approach on national security and believes in hitting terrorists by entering their homes instead of sending dossiers on them which was the practice under the Congress rule.

Addressing three election rallies on the trot for the second consecutive day in Maharashtra, the BJP's star campaigner once again targeted NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar, and accused the Congress-led opposition of circulating artificial intelligence-powered fake videos on social media in its fight against the saffron party.

He noted the BJP-led government's approach on tackling terror has seen a sea change to what was followed during the Congress regime.

Unlike the practice during the Congress rule of sending dossiers to Pakistan after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the BJP-led government takes terrorists head on, Modi emphasised.

"During the Congress regime, the news headlines were about India handing over another dossier to Pakistan about terror activities. It used to be big news. Some of our friends in the media used to clap after any such dossier was sent," the PM said at an election rally in central Maharashtra's Latur.

"Today, India doesn't send dossiers. 'Aaj Bharat ghar mein



ghus ke martha hai' (Today, India enters homes of terrorists and hits them hard)," Modi said.

The BJP stalwart highlighted anti-terror operations undertaken by his government after assuming office in 2014 and added this approach marks the rise of a 'New Bharat'.

"The headlines in Naya Bharat are: Mission LOC, India punishes Pakistan through surgical strikes," Modi told the gathering.

The BJP leader claimed the INDIA bloc has come up with a "formula" whereby the parties in the opposition alliance will get the PM's post for one year each if they come to power.

"Some people want to make the PM in instalments. They have decided to have a PM each year," he

said.

Modi alleged the Congress destroyed India's economy during its rule.

Targeting Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, he said, "When I speak of 'EK Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' (One India, Best India), the Prince of Congress suffers from fever. Those who looted the country are in jail. Those who looted the country will have to pay back. And this is Modi's guarantee."

The Congress thought about only one family, but Modi thinks about every family of Bharat, he said.

"In 2014 and 2019, you gave us a huge mandate. We utilised it not to snatch anything from anyone, but to provide benefits and ensure welfare. Ours is a government that truly gives strength to social justice," he

Modi emphasised.

The PM said the Congress and problems were like "twin brothers", and alleged that except poverty, the grand old party did not give anything to the country while it was in power.

"The Congress and problems are like twin brothers. They never tried to end people's problems. Latur has been facing a water crisis, but did they try to address the issue? Congress kept the water schemes hanging and hurdles were created in the water grid scheme," he noted.

On the issue of reservation, he pointed out that the provision of quota in jobs and education made in the Constitution for underprivileged sections of society cannot be scrapped.

"Reservation cannot be taken away even if (chief Constitution framer) Babasaheb Ambedkar were to appear in person. But Congress wants to curtail the SC, ST reservation and give it to their vote bank," he alleged.

Speaking at another rally in Dharsahi, the PM said political rivals who are unable to take on the BJP-led government are now misusing technology to circulate fake videos on social media.

"Now their condition is such that as their lies aren't working, they are using my face and with the help of artificial intelligence technology, selling fake videos in their 'mohabat ki dukaan' (shop of love - a slogan given by Rahul Gandhi). This shop of lies must be shut down,"

Modi said.

"Opponents are using artificial intelligence to distort quotes of leaders like me," he said.

The PM stressed a weak government can not build a strong nation.

The ongoing Lok Sabha elections are about the country's self-respect, Modi said and asked "Will a weak government, which can collapse any moment, build a strong nation?"

"Today, India is providing pace to the development of the world. Chandrayaan-3 landed on the spot on lunar surface where no one else could reach. The anti-coronavirus vaccine manufactured in India saved the lives of crores of people across the globe. Now, India brings back its people safely even when there is heavy shelling (in war-torn countries)," asserted PM.

At his rally in Malshiras town of Solapur district, Modi, a day after terming Sharad Pawar as a "wandering soul", continued his attack on the veteran politician, saying he did not do much for farmers as Union agriculture minister (2004-14), and added it was now time to punish him.

He taunted the opposition Congress, saying it was not able to field even 275 candidates in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, and appealed to people not to waste their vote by supporting the grand old party.

Voting in Latur, Solapur and Dharsahi (Osmanabad) Lok Sabha seats will take place in the third phase on May 7. (PTI)

POCSO charges among 20 cases against Independent candidate from Anantnag-Rajouri

SRINAGAR, April 30: Imran Sheikh, an Independent candidate from Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha constituency, has 20 cases, including one under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, registered against him over the past nine years.

This is the maximum number of cases against any of the 20 contestants from the constituency.

According to the affidavit filed by Sheikh along with his nomination papers, the cases are registered in nine different police stations in five districts of the union territory.

The first criminal case against Sheikh, who hails from Anantnag district, was registered in 2015 in Pampore police station of Pulwama district.

One of the criminal cases filed last year against the 37-year-old candidate include charges under section 11 (enticing a child for pornographic purposes or giving gratification there for) and section 12 (committing sexual harassment upon a child) of the POCSO Act.

Sheikh has also been booked in 2022 under

section 309 (attempt to commit suicide and any act towards the commission of such offence) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Most of the cases registered against Sheikh are under section 420 (cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property) of the IPC but several of these cases have additional charges, including under section 201 (hiding or destroying evidence of a crime, knowing or believing that the offense has been committed, with the intention of protecting the offender from punishment) and section 380 (theft in dwelling house) of the IPC.

The other two cases are booked under sections 454 (offence in respect of lurking house-trespass or house-breaking in order to commit offence) and section 419 (cheating by personation). Seven of the 20 cases against the Independent candidate have been registered in Sadder police station in Anantnag with six of those filed in 2022.

Sheikh is accused of committing criminal offences in Banihal area of Ramban district, Ram Munshi Bagh area of Srinagar district as well

as Qaimoh area of Kulgam district.

According to the affidavit, charges have not been framed in court in any of the cases against Sheikh so far.

The affidavit also showed that both he and his spouse have PAN cards but none of them has filed income tax returns for the past nine years.

Sheikh has claimed that he works as a labourer and has an income of ₹ 12,000 but has not specified whether it is his monthly or annual income. He has declared ₹ 50,000 cash in hand, while his wife holds ₹ 10,000.

Interestingly, he also owns two vehicles with a cumulative declared value of ₹ 4 lakh.

There are two other candidates - both Independents - who have criminal cases registered against them. Sajad Ahmad Dar from Kulgam had a case registered against for rioting in 2014 but charges have not been framed so far.

Dalip Kumar Pandita had a case under sections 353 and 506 of the IPC registered against him in 2019 for alleged intemperate behaviour with the complainant in the case. (PTI)

Congress having 'vicious and divisive design', alleges BJP President Nadda

SHIVAMOGGA (KARNATAKA), April 30: Accusing the Congress of supporting the idea of religion-based reservation, despite the fact that it cannot be done as per the Constitution, BJP President J P Nadda on Tuesday charged the grand old party with having "vicious and divisive designs".

He said this while addressing a "professionals meet" organised here as part of the BJP's campaign for Shimoga Lok Sabha candidate B Y Raghavendra.

"In the Constitution, it is very clearly written that there is no place for religious reservation, but what they (Congress) did -- 4 per cent reservation to Muslims, from OBC quota (in Karnataka). Who is against the OBC? They are neither friends of Muslim brethren nor sympathisers of OBC," Nadda said.

Addressing the gathering, he noted that in undivided Andhra Pradesh, Congress came out with a law four times, where they tried to take reservation of SC/ST and OBCs, to give it to the Muslim community.

"We are not against the Muslim community, but we have to understand that the Constitution clearly says that there will be no reservation based on religion, and it is a very deep thought...but these people (Congress) the kind of vicious and divisive designs they have. Are we going to support them?" he asked.

Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyappa, Raghavendra and other party leaders were present.

Accusing opposition parties of indulging in 'divisive politics', Nadda said, "a few days ago there was a video and they were trying to create an impression and environment that BJP is against SC/ST and OBC, and if we (BJP) come to power the reservations for these communities will go."

"They came out with a fabricated video... people and media



exposed the INDI Alliance's deep fake video, the sad part of it is that the fake video was uploaded on social media from Telangana CM Revanth Reddy's phone, and all partners of the INDI Alliance tried to make it viral...they are in deep depression about BJP and NDA crossing 400 seats under PM's leadership. This shows their mentality," he added.

Nadda said on the one hand there is BJP, which is being led by PM Modi, under whom India was becoming stronger by the day and things have changed. He said it was sad to note on the other hand was the INDI Alliance, which has got "no perspective, no objective and no direction."

"They (INDIA bloc) are so frustrated that they are trying to build divisive forces and encourage divisive forces, they want to create a north and south divide. When PM speaks about 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas Sabka Prayaas', they talk about division of north and south," he added.

Claiming that the country has undergone a sea change in the last 10 years, Nadda said, "10 years ago the political discourse was--nothing is going to change, full of depression, there was no enthusi-

asm and nothing is going to change; but today we can say with confidence that here is a country which is aspiring to become a developed nation under PM Modi."

Speaking about India's growth on the global stage and the country having its say in the multilateral forums and "neighborhood first" policy under Modi rule, he said the PM paid more than a hundred overseas visits and ensured that the voice of India and its people should echo in every part of the world in the right perspective.

Shimoga goes to polls along with 13 other Lok Sabha segments in the state on May 7.

Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah always talks about Karnataka not getting its due, Nadda said. "Siddaramaiah will never get his due, because they (Congress) don't believe in mission, they believe in commission, that they are not going to get."

"There is a raise of 275 per cent from the UPA era, as far as allocating funds to Karnataka (from Centre during NDA) is concerned," he said, highlighting several centrally sponsored developmental and infrastructure projects in the state. (PTI)

My soul is 'restless' for common man and farmers: Pawar hits back at Modi

PUNE, April 30: NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Tuesday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the "bhaktati aatma" jibe, saying his soul is "asvatha" for the cause of farmers and the common man, and ready to be restless "100 times" to highlight their plight.

"There is a 'bhaktati atma' (wandering soul) in Maharashtra. If it does not manage success it spoils others' good work. Maharashtra has been a victim of it," Modi had said at a rally on Monday, hitting out at Sharad Pawar without taking his name. Addressing an election meeting on Tuesday, Pawar recalled PM Modi's 2016 statement about having come into politics holding the former's finger, and said "Modi is angry with me of late".

"Some years ago, PM Modi had delivered a speech in Pune stating that he (Modi) had come into politics by holding the finger of Pawar saheb. Yesterday, he said a 'restless' soul in Maharashtra has been causing restlessness across the state for the last 45 years.

"Modi had also said this soul was creating obstacles for the government. He also spoke about the need to safeguard against this soul," Pawar said while addressing an election meeting in Junnar tehsil for NCP (SP)'s Shirur Lok Sabha candidate Amol Kolhe.

Pawar further said he has read Modi's speech

and the ("bhaktati aatma") statement.

"It is correct that the soul is 'asvatha' (restless) but not for the self but to highlight the hardships faced by farmers. I am restless to put forward the plight of the common man suffering from inflation. I am ready to be restless 100 times to highlight the woes of the people," the veteran politician said.

Pawar also criticised the prime minister for dubbing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi a 'shehzada' (prince), saying three generations of his family had served the country and sacrificed their lives. The Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) chief further said that hardships faced by the common people and other issues should be raised.

"I imbibed these values from the first chief minister Yashwantrao Chavan. We will not compromise on these values," said Pawar.

He said Modi had promised to bring down the prices of fuel and LPG cylinders after coming to power (in 2014). "But check the prevailing prices of these commodities," he said.

"Modi asked what he (Pawar) has done all these years. Rather, he (Modi) should answer these questions because he has been in power for the last 10 years. He doesn't answer (these questions) but has only one-point agenda to criticise others," the former Union minister said. (PTI)

Congress appoints Devender Yadav as interim chief of Delhi unit

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Congress on Tuesday appointed former MLA Devender Yadav as interim president of its Delhi unit, two days after Arvinder Singh Lovely resigned from the post while criticising the alliance with AAP and statements of the party's candidates in the national capital.

Yadav, who won from the Badli assembly constituency in Delhi in 2008 and 2013 and lost to Ajesh Yadav of AAP in 2015, is currently the All India Congress Committee's (AICC) Punjab in-charge.

"My heartfelt thanks to Sh Kharge ji, Smt Sonia Gandhi ji, Rahul Gandhi ji, KC Venugopal ji and Smt Priyanka Gandhi ji and all senior leaders of the Congress, for the faith they have bestowed in me yet again!" Yadav said in a post on X.

"Will try my best to treat the coveted and ideological vision party has laid for me and give my 100 per cent!" he said.

According to a statement issued by the party, "Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has appointed Yadav as the interim president of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) with immediate effect."

Yadav will continue in his role as AICC in-charge for Punjab, the statement added.

The development comes as the Congress and AAP prepare for the May 25 election to the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. (PTI)

Indian aluminum industry requires additional ₹ 2.2 lakh crore to become net-zero emitter

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Indian aluminium industry would require an additional capital expenditure of nearly ₹ 2.2 lakh crore (USD 29 billion) to achieve net-zero carbon emission, according to a new study.

The study by independent think-tank Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) said renewable energy power sources could abate 49 per cent of the total emissions from the industry.

However, fully switching to renewable energy is not feasible right now because it is not always available. So a backup plan is needed, it added.

India has committed to achieving net-zero emissions (a balance between greenhouse gases emitted and removed from the atmosphere) by 2070 and 50 per cent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030.

Aluminum is widely used, especially in the power sector, and it is one of India's fastest-growing industries. But achieving net-zero emissions could make it 61 per cent more expensive, with a yearly operational cost of about Rs 26,049 crore (USD 3.5 billion).

Even though India does not use a lot of aluminum per person (2.5 kilograms) compared to the global average (11 kilograms), the industry emitted a whopping 77 million tonnes of CO2 in 2019-20. Most of this comes from electricity used by the plants.



The study suggests that improving energy efficiency in aluminum production and using waste heat recovery can help cut emissions without making aluminum more expensive. However, most other ways to cut emissions, like using more renewable energy or capturing carbon, will make aluminum production more costly.

CEEW also launched a study on what it would take for the fertiliser industry to achieve net-zero emissions.

India is the second-largest fertiliser producer in the world, accounting for around 20 per cent of global produc-

tion. However, it is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions (around 25 MtCO2 annually) due to energy-intensive production processes and extensive fossil fuel use, particularly natural gas.

Because fertiliser production does not require much electricity, the CEEW study found that switching to renewable energy power would result in a mere 2 per cent reduction in emissions from the industry.

Ammonia (urea) production accounts for ~95 per cent of the emissions in this sector and, therefore, switching from grey to green ammonia can result in a 151 per cent emissions reduction. This would result in net negative emissions for the sector.

Carbon management options such as carbon capture and sequestration (CCS), carbon capture and utilisation (CCU), and afforestation may also be adopted by the industry.

Hemant Mallya, a fellow at CEEW, said the studies give a clear emerging message about the requirement of large amounts of capital and scale-up from various solution providers, including the renewable power, alternative fuels, and carbon storage and utilisation sectors.

"Aluminum and fertiliser are key industries for India's economic growth, and significant government support will be necessary to build the necessary infrastructure, such as power grid and pipelines, to decarbonise them and meet India's climate goals," he said. (PTI)

NDA manifesto for Andhra assembly polls promises ₹ 1500 pension to women



AMRAVATI, April 30: The National Democratic Alliance in Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday released its joint manifesto for the upcoming polls in the state wherein they promised to offer ₹ 1500 monthly pension to eligible women.

The Telugu Desam Party, Jana Sena and BJP combine also promised to offer Rs 3000 monthly financial assistance to unemployed youth.

Releasing the manifesto, Janasena chief Pawana Kalyan said the manifesto is an amalgamation of TDP's "super six" and his party's "Shanmukha Vyuham".

The TDP had earlier announced "super six" which promised to offer free bus travel to women, three free

cooking gas cylinders to every household per year and Rs 15,000 to every school-going child per annum, among others.

Janasena, TDP and BJP are NDA alliance partners in the southern state. As part of a seat sharing deal among NDA partners, TDP was allocated 144 Assembly and 17 Lok Sabha constituencies while BJP will contest from six Lok Sabha and 10 Assembly seats.

Janasena will contest two Lok Sabha and 21 Assembly seats.

Elections for the 175-member Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh are scheduled on May 13 and the counting of votes will be held on June 4. (PTI)

Self-reliance key to deal with future security challenges: Army chief



NEW DELHI, April 30: Warfare has transcended into new domains, such as space, cyber, electromagnetic spectrum and information systems, and India must develop indigenous capabilities to deal with future security challenges, Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande said on Tuesday.

The Army chief especially underlined the importance of "technology infusion" and "self-reliance" in the armed forces, saying both are distinct yet interconnected.

Gen Pande said India must develop its indigenous military capabilities as no country will share the latest, advanced and critical technology with it.

"Warfare has transcended into new domains, such as space, cyber, electromagnetic spectrum and information. Consequent to these developments, conventional force ratios, which was the measure of military strength and superiority in the past, stand blunted today," he said.

Gen Pande made the remarks at the fourth Gen K Sundarji memorial lecture.

He highlighted the need for embracing technology in order to maintain a competitive edge on the battlefield.

"The imperative of technology infusion into warfighting systems and to keep pace with technological progression, remains enduring to this day," he said.

"The impact of external dependency for critical components, supply chain disruptions and weaponisation of denial regimes came to the fore, during the (Covid-19) pandemic and also from the lessons of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict," he said.

"We need to recognise that no country will share the latest, advanced and critical technology with us," he said.

The Army chief said being import dependent for critical

technologies entails the risk of remaining behind in niche areas.

"The answer, therefore, lies in being self-reliant and achieving self-sufficiency in critical technologies through indigenous research and development," he said.

Gen Pande said the growing centrality of cyber domain in critical infrastructure has resulted in it emerging as a new battleground of digital confrontation.

"Information operations today have gained new dimensions," he said.

"When we talk about digitisation of the battlefield, we are witness to a manifold increase in the lethality and accuracy of kinetic instruments and increased proliferation of technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics and nano-technology," he said.

The Army chief said disruptive and dual use technologies and their proliferation at unprecedented scale are transforming the character of modern wars.

"A suite of digital technologies, encompassing electronic warfare, micro-electronics, drones, precision attack systems, loiter munitions and star link terminals are challenging traditional force multipliers," he said.

"Swarming is contesting surging, surveillance and precision are scoring over fire and manoeuvre, and the light and small are prevailing over the large and heavy," he added.

Gen Pande said his force has been focusing on developing indigenous capabilities.

"The Indian Army on its part, stands committed to achieve its capability development and sustenance needs through Atmanirbharta," he said.

"Modernisation and technology infusion forms one of the five pillars of the transformation roadmap, which we had put into effect, almost two years ago," he added.

The Army chief, while underscoring the thoughts of Gen Sundarji on transformation, asserted that his force is alive to the imperative of transformation.

"It is with a progressive outlook that we intend to not only change, but to change at a good pace too. The holistic transformation of the Indian Army, that we put into effect two years ago, is part of our efforts to give shape to a modern, agile, adaptive, technology enabled and self-reliant future ready force," he said.

Gen Sundarji was the Army chief from February 1, 1986 to May 31, 1988. He is known for his deep insights and strategic foresights into future warfare and security paradigms. (PTI)

India-Bangladesh ties could be valuable contributor to regional connectivity: Envoy

'The government of Bangladesh is currently focusing on economic diplomacy with the ambitious goal of establishing Dhaka as the centre of transit and trade in Asia'

NEW DELHI, April 30: The destinies of India and Bangladesh are intertwined and the relationship between the two countries could be a valuable contributor to regional connectivity, Bangladeshi envoy Mustafizur Rahman said on Tuesday.

In an interactive session at a think-tank here, Rahman also said South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world and a "synergistic approach" could ensure regional integration.

"The destinies of our two countries and people are intertwined, not only due to our geographical proximity, shared history, culture, heritage and value system, but also because of the indelible bond that was forged when we stood together, shedding blood together in 1971 for the independence of Bangladesh," he said.

The Bangladeshi high commissioner also referred to the common vision of India and Bangladesh to build a stronger South Asia.



"In recent years, the leaders of Bangladesh and India have emphasised the significance of building a stronger South Asia," he said at the Ananta Centre.

"The government of Bangladesh is currently focusing on economic diplomacy with the ambitious goal of establishing Dhaka as the centre of transit and trade in Asia," he

added. "Bangladesh aims to serve as the gateway to landlocked Nepal, Bhutan and Northeast India," he added.

Rahman said efforts are underway to establish Bangladesh as a hub of connectivity encompassing roads, railways, waterways, air linkages and power transmission.

"South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world. A synergistic approach to fostering regional integration is possible," he said.

The envoy said connectivity stands out as a vital element for regional cooperation.

"I believe, Bangladesh-India relationship is a valuable contributor to regional connectivity and regional integration," he said.

Rahman also lauded India's 'neighbourhood first policy'.

"India's 'neighbourhood first policy' is also committed to creating mutually beneficial relationships with all the countries in the region," he said.

"However, it is important to explore more sub-regional and regional connectivity initiatives to promote regional integration," he added. The high commissioner said Bangladesh could be a significant partner for the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway project to further enhance connectivity in the region. (PTI)

Jharkhand: Severe heatwave, Baharagora records 47.1 degree Celsius

RANCHI/DUMKA, April 30: Severe heatwave conditions gripped parts of Jharkhand on Tuesday with Baharagora in East Singhbhum district recording a maximum temperature of 47.1 degrees Celsius.

The weather department issued an 'Orange Alert' for severe heatwave in 11 Jharkhand districts for Wednesday as mercury may go up by two to three degrees Celsius above the existing, an official said.

Amid the severe heatwave, two persons were found lying unconscious near the Dumka bus stand on Tuesday afternoon.

Dumka town police station in-charge Amit Kumar Lakra said, "They were brought to Phulo Jhano Medical College and Hospital, where one person was declared brought dead. The other person is undergoing treatment," he said.

The deceased was identified as 32-year-old Shiv Kumar Mandal.

The hospital superintendent Dr Anukaran Purty told PTI, "Whether the person died in heatstroke or some other reasons could be known only after the postmortem. The blood sample of another person, who is under treatment, will also be taken to ascertain the cause of his unconsciousness. (PTI)

Chhattisgarh: ED arrests ex MARKFED MD in rice milling 'scam'

RAIPUR, April 30: The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday arrested former Chhattisgarh MARKFED managing director Manoj Soni in a money laundering case linked to an alleged rice milling scam worth Rs 175 crore, official sources said.

Soni was taken into custody and produced before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Raipur where the agency will seek his custody for interrogation. The federal agency had last year said in a statement that Rs 175 crore bribes were generated through this alleged scam for the "benefit of higher powers".

It last raided Soni, some officers bearers of the state rice millers association, including treasurer Roshan Chandrakar, district marketing officers (DMOs) and a few rice millers in October last year as part of a custom rice milling special incentive 'scam' in the central Indian state.

The agency has earlier said in a statement that its case stems from a complaint filed by the Income Tax department before a court Raipur where the tax department had alleged that the office bearers of the Chhattisgarh rice millers association "colluded" with officers of the state marketing federation Ltd (MARKFED) and "hatched a conspiracy to misuse the special incentive where Rs 40 per quintal of paddy was paid by the state government to rice millers for custom milling of rice".

The state is known as the rice

bowl of the country due to its high volume of paddy production.

The ED said this amount of Rs 40 was "exorbitantly" increased to Rs 120 per quintal of paddy and this was paid in two instalments of Rs 60 each.

"The office bearers of Chhattisgarh state rice millers association under the leadership of its Treasurer Roshan Chandrakar, in connivance with Manoj Soni MD of MARKFED, started collecting kickbacks amount of Rs 20 per instalment for each quintal of paddy milled from the rice millers."

"The details of rice millers who have paid the cash amounts were sent by the district rice millers association to the concerned DMO," the ED found.

The DMOs, upon receiving the bills of rice millers, cross-checked them with the details received from the concerned district rice millers association and this information was then passed on to the head office of MARKFED, it said.

The bills of "only those rice millers who have paid cash amount" to the association were cleared by the MD, MARKFED for payment, it alleged.

Probe found, the ED said, the increase in the special allowance from Rs 40 to Rs 120 per quintal, payments of Rs 500 crore were released, generating "kickbacks" of Rs 175 crore which were collected by Roshan Chandrakar with active assistance of MD MARKFED (Soni), for the benefit of 'higher powers'. (PTI)

Unauthorised construction in Waqf properties going on galore, need monitoring: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Delhi High Court on Tuesday observed that unauthorised constructions were going on galore in disputed Waqf properties and no one was looking after them, as it stressed the need for proper monitoring.

The high court flagged the issue relating to the dispute about 123 properties, on which the Delhi Waqf Board lays its claim while the Centre has de-listed them, and said some of them are very lucrative properties in Delhi and are in the heart of the city.

A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora referred to one of the cases dealt by it in which the property in Nizamuddin East, branded as a Waqf property, was sold multiple times after which a hotel was constructed on it without any permissions.

"When we asked the authorities what they were doing and how this happened? We were told that a dispute was going on between the Waqf board and the DDA as to whom the property belonged.

"In this dispute, no one is looking after the properties and they are virtually encroached or someone from these two departments is facilitating multiple purchases and unauthorised construction is going on galore. We don't know if Waqf is being involved," the bench said.

The court said the institution was being "misused totally today" and no one was looking after the properties and that someone would have to monitor it.

The court's oral observations came while hearing a plea that sought the removal of Ashwani Kumar, Principal Secretary (Home) of the city government, as the administrator of the Delhi Waqf Board accusing him of acting against



the interest of Waqf properties.

As the court was informed that a petition with a similar prayer challenging the appointment of the administrator of the Delhi Waqf Board was pending before a single judge who had reserved its order, the division bench asked the counsel for the authorities to seek instructions on the issue.

The bench listed the matter for further hearing on May 8. The plea said the administrator of the Waqf Board is also the chairperson of the religious committee which has recommended the "removal and demolition" of several Waqf properties.

"The administrator in an organisation is appointed for the welfare and betterment of the organisation and such person has to protect the interest of that organisation.

"However, in the present case, the administrator of the Delhi Waqf Board is acting totally against the Waqf properties. Instead of protecting them, he is sitting to destroy the Waqf properties," the plea, filed by Secular Front of Lawyers, alleged.

The petitioner, represented by senior advocate Salman Khurshid and lawyers Imran Ahmad and Rohit Sharma, said in the last one year, the religious committee has recommended the "removal/demolition" of several Waqf properties including

Dargah Mamu Bhanja, Sunehri Bagh Masjid, Masjid Madarsa Kangal Shah and Akhoondji Masjid.

The petition said a major portion of Dargah Mamu Bhanja has been demolished and Akhoondji Masjid, which was more than 600 years old, has been completely razed on the "erroneous recommendation" of the religious committee. It said the Delhi Waqf Board was dissolved on August 26, 2023, as its statutory term of five years had expired.

Ashwani Kumar was appointed as the administrator of the board on January 10, 2024. "As a chairman/head of the religious committee, he is passing orders for removal/demolition of Waqf properties which are outside his jurisdiction.

"In the capacity of administrator, Respondent No.3 (Kumar) is sitting over the Delhi Waqf Board interfering in policy matters and in the capacity of Additional Chief Secretary, Revenue, he is the head of the Revenue Department from which the board receives Grant-in-aid for its expenses," the plea said.

The plea claimed that Waqf properties are out of the purview of the religious committee as its domain is to recommend the removal of only unauthorised and illegal religious structures on public land. (PTI)

Manufacturing licenses of 14 products of Patanjali, Divya Pharmacy suspended: U'khand SLA to SC

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Uttarakhand State Licensing Authority (SLA) on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that manufacturing licenses of 14 products of Patanjali Ayurved Ltd and Divya Pharmacy have been "suspended with immediate effect".

The authority told the apex court that on April 16, the drug inspector/district ayurvedic and unani officer, Haridwar, had filed a criminal complaint before the chief judicial magistrate against Yoga Guru Ramdev, his aide Balkrishna, Divya Pharmacy and Patanjali Ayurved Ltd under sections 3, 4 and 7 of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act.

The apex court is hearing a matter relating to misleading advertisements by Patanjali Ayurved Ltd.

In an affidavit filed in the top court, the SLA has given details of the steps taken by it against Patanjali and Divya Pharmacy.

During the hearing on Tuesday, a bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah came down heavily on the SLA for its "inaction" for six years in the matter, saying it has to be honest with the court if it wanted "sympathy and compassion".

The affidavit was filed through Dr Mithilesh Kumar, the joint director of SLA, Ayurvedic and Unani Services, Dehradun.

"The SLA issued order dated April 15, 2024 to Divya Pharmacy and ... Patanjali Ayurved Ltd, stating therein that the manufacturing licenses for 14 of their products namely are suspended with immediate effect under Rule 159(1) of The Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1954 for repeated violations under the said Acts and Rules," the affidavit said.

It said the order was also marked to the drug inspector/district ayurvedic and unani officer, Haridwar, to ensure strict compliance.

"On April 16, 2024, the drug inspector/district ayurvedic and unani officer, Haridwar, filed criminal complaint ... before the chief judicial magistrate, Haridwar against Swami Ramdev, Acharya Balkrishna, Divya Pharmacy and Patanjali Ayurved Limited under sections 3, 4 and 7 of the DMR Act," it said.

The affidavit said the SLA tenders an "unconditional and unqualified apology" for any "inadvertent and unintentional non-compliance" with the orders of the apex court.

It said the SLA had addressed a letter dated April 23 to all ayurvedic/unani medicine factories in Uttarakhand directing that they shall strictly comply the Drug and Magic Remedies Act, 1954 and no pharmaceutical factory will use claims like approved/certified by the Ministry of Ayush on the label of its product.

"The SLA herein is completely aware of the gravity of the situation and seriousness of the matter at hand and has always endeavored to discharge its duties to the best of his capacity and in accordance with law," the affidavit said. (PTI)

Why not detect sex of foetus, then protect girl child: IMA chief Asokan

NEW DELHI, April 30: A ban on sex determination tests through a law may stop female foeticide but female infanticide will happen, Indian Medical Association chief Dr R V Asokan has said, arguing that a social evil cannot have a medical solution.

In an interaction with PTI editors, Asokan said IMA is working on a document to revamp the existing Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (PC-PNDT) Act, which prohibits pre-natal diagnostic techniques for determination of the sex of the foetus and holds doctors accountable. "And one suggestion would be why not detect the sex of the foetus and then protect the girl child," he said.

"For a social evil you cannot have a medical solution. Is it workable or practical? Let us discuss that. What will happen is that if you don't correct the social evil, female foeticide will disappear, female infanticide will happen," he explained.

In Asokan's view, the PC-PNDT Act is completely warped, short sighted and NGO driven.

"We have a stake in preventing female foeticide but we don't agree with the methodology PC-PNDT Act has taken. The methodology has caused so much difficulty for doctors," Asokan,



who is IMA's national president, said.

"If there is one law we want to be taken out of the statute that is PC-PNDT. It doesn't deserve its place," he said.

The doctors' body has been demanding re-envisioning of the PC-PNDT Act for quite some time.

According to Asokan, there are no differences of opinion about saving the girl child. "The common objective is one... presuming all the doctors to be culpable and anti-life is very wrong," he stressed.

The IMA, Asokan added, is aggrieved over certain rules in the act and with doctors being pulled up for technical lapses and incor-

rect filling of forms.

The regulations that have come up on the matter are very unfair, he said. For instance, the regulation states that machines cannot even be moved from one room to another room. "Moreover, not filling up 'Form F' is considered to be equal to female foeticide," he elaborated.

Form F under the PC-PNDT Act records the medical history of a pregnant woman and why the ultrasound is being done.

Under the present law, doctors not filling up Form F properly are given the same punishment as someone who does a sex determination test.

"An institution like the Honourable Supreme Court has said if

you do not fill up Form F you are committing female foeticide. How is this acceptable?" he asked.

The IMA chief cited an instance from Coimbatore 15 days ago when a gynaecologist was convicted and sentenced for three years for not filling up Form F properly.

"The law is NGO driven, initiated by the Supreme Court of India. There is a layman perspective in the law..."

"So we have been having brainstorming sessions and thinking why not detect the sex, detect the female child and then protect that child. It is possible... tag that child, see what happens to her, follow the mother and see that the girl child is delivered normally." Asokan lamented the fact that the entire medical profession is in the dock because of a few black sheep.

"Now I want the profession to be out of it. We are not saying that it (sex determination) should be allowed. If this is acceptable you accept it. Otherwise remove those harassment points."

Asokan said the document they are working on will come up in the central working committee of the IMA and the idea is to "provoke a discussion even in the Supreme Court" if necessary. (PTI)

Unwarranted, unsubstantiated imputations: India on Washington Post report on Pannun case

NEW DELHI, April 30: A day after The Washington Post named an Indian official for allegedly plotting to assassinate Sikh extremist Gurbatwatt Singh Pannun, India on Tuesday said the report made "unwarranted and unsubstantiated" imputations on a serious matter and that investigation into the case was underway.

The newspaper, citing unnamed sources, named a Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) officer in connection with the alleged plot to kill Pannun on American soil last year.

"The report in question makes unwarranted and unsubstantiated imputations on a serious matter," External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

He said a high-level inquiry committee set up by New Delhi to look into inputs provided by the US on the alleged plot was still probing the case.

"There is an ongoing investigation of the high level committee set up by the Government of India to look into the security concerns shared by the US government on networks of organised criminals, terrorists and others," he said.

Jaiswal was responding to media queries on the report. "Speculative and irresponsible comments on it are not helpful,"

Jaiswal said, slamming the report by the US daily.

The Washington Post report identified the RAW officer as Vikram Yadav and alleged that he was involved in the plot to assassinate Pannun.

In November last year, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta of working with an Indian government employee in the foiled plot to kill Pannun.

Pannun, wanted in India on terror charges, holds dual citizenship of the US and Canada. He has been designated as a terrorist by the Union home ministry under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

The allegations about the failed plot to kill Pannun came to fore weeks after the Canadian Prime Minister claimed in September of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on June 18 in British Columbia.

India had strongly rejected the charges.

On December 7, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in Parliament that India instituted an inquiry committee to look into the inputs received from the US in the Pannun case as the matter has a bearing on national security. (PTI)

NAME CHANGE

My actual and correct name is AZAD ALI my father's correct name is LT. Fazar Ali. But my name is wrongly recorded in my voter ID Card Vide No. DBH3641529 as AJAD ALI in stead of AZAD ALI. My father actual and correct name is LT. FAZAR ALI but in my VOTER ID CARD wrongly recorded LT. Fajar Ali in stead of LT. Fazar Ali. My SBI Bank Passbook, Dhing Branch, Vide A/C No. 11814529176 my father's name as Md fazar Ali in stead of LT. Fazar Ali. By an affidavit before the notary Nagaon court I, swear and declared correct name is as AZAD ALI and my father's name is LT. Fazar Ali.

AZAD ALI
S/O - LT. Fazar Ali
Vill&PO - Sonari Gaon
PS - DHING
Dist. Nagaon: Assam
PIN-782123

'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan', 'Maidaan' BO debacle impacts exhibition sector



MUMBAI, April 30: The box office failure of "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan" and "Maidaan", two high-profile festival releases from Bollywood, has had a cascading effect on the exhibition sector, say theatre owners impacted by the poor showing of the movies.

"Bade Miyan..." and "Maidaan", starring big stars like Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff and Ajay Devgn, respectively, released during the festival of Eid, a traditionally good period for theatrical releases, but failed to live up to expectations.

"An exhibitor earns money when a film runs houseful. Almost 90 per cent of the business is down. This year has been a complete washout. Exhibitors are in red. The cost of running a cinema hall daily comes to around ₹ 30,000. To just break even, we need sales of ₹ 1 lakh but currently the sales are rang-

ing from ₹ 5,000 to ₹ 15,000. So, you can imagine what the situation is like," Chauhan told PTI.

Not just these two releases, the first quarter of the year saw big-budget movies such as "Fighter" and "Yodha" also perform poorly. According to Chauhan, "Fighter" at least had a good opening in the range of ₹ 25 to ₹ 27 crore.

He said Eid, typically seen as a profitable period in the industry, has turned out to be "disastrous" due to the failure of "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan" and "Maidaan". The festive period is generally associated with a Salman Khan release but the superstar didn't have anything lined up this year.

"Eid was a disaster compared to last year. We've never had such a bad response during Eid, except in 2022, when we had Tiger Shroff ('Heropanti 2') and Ajay Devgn's films ('Runway

34') release," he added.

According to box office tracking website Sacnilk, "Bade Miyan..." reportedly made on a budget of over ₹ 300 crore, has earned ₹ 72 crore gross in India. Similarly, "Maidaan", made at a reported budget of over ₹ 200 crore, earned ₹ 51 crore (gross) in India. Akshay Rathi, who owns theatres in central India, says big-ticket movies, unlike last year which saw hits such as "Pathaan", "Jawan", "Gadar 2" and "Animal", have not fared well at the box office.

"Business has been drastically down. It is tough to measure in numbers. Compared to last year, it has been a ruthlessly bad scenario. Content, in general, has not been compelling enough for the audience to watch. Any film that has good content, be it 'Shaitaan' or 'Laapataa Ladies', audience has come for them. We need to get creative in the way

we put out content," Rathi told PTI.

Chauhan fears the situation will continue to be "grim" in the second quarter, despite summer vacation.

"This is a lucrative period to release films and it's being said that films are not releasing because of elections. I believe Bollywood producers are afraid of the box office. The situation is grim because of the poor performance of films this year, including the two disastrous Eid releases. It shows, despite having stars, budgets, festive dates, movies have tanked. In such a scenario, cinemas are suffering," he added.

Leading exhibitor and distributor Sunny Chandiramani, who runs 20 screens across Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, said the situation is so bad that he is thinking of shutting down some of the screens.

"Everyone is facing losses across the nation, maybe a little less in the South as regional films are doing well. We often say content is king but my observation is that the content is not good in Bollywood. Star power is (also) not working," Chandiramani told PTI.

"We are awaiting the release of the Marathi film 'Nach Ga Ghuma', which is on May 1. If that film performs well, we will continue our operations. If not, we will shut down 10 cinemas out of the 20 from May 7. This week, we are shutting down one screen out of the two in our multiplex," he added. Manoj Desai, the executive director of Mumbai's iconic Gaiety Galaxy, also lamented the lacklustre run of movies at the box office, compared to last year. (PTI)

KOREAN CULTURAL CENTRE INDIA TO ORGANISE 'ALL INDIA K-POP CONTEST 2024' FROM MAY 17



NEW DELHI, April 30: Korean Cultural Centre India is bringing back its annual competition 'All India K-POP Contest 2024', which aims to discover true fans of Korean pop music from across the country.

The first round is to be held online between May 17 to June 21, during which the participants would be judged on the basis of their skill, expression, pronunciation, similarity to the original song and stage presence, the KCCI announced on Tuesday at an event here.

The regional preliminaries will be held in 11 regions of India from July 27 to September 1. The contestants selected in the preliminaries will advance to attend the semi-finals that will take place in Mumbai on October 19.

The final round will be held in conjunction with the Korea Industrial Exhibition on November 23 at Yashobhoomi, a renowned exhibition hall in New Delhi, also the largest international exhibition and convention centre of India. The finalists will also get a chance to visit Korea. LG Electronics India will sponsor the event.

Hwang Il Yong, director of Korean Cultural Centre India, said, "In a survey held regarding the preference for Korean cultural content abroad, India ranked as one of the highest nations around the world."

"This year, in addition to the main event, we plan to hold various participatory events that everyone can enjoy, such as 'K-POP On Street'. I hope it will become a festival venue where Indians who love the 'Korean Wave'

can come out and enjoy," he added.

Jeon Hong Ju, MD LG Electronics, said the response for the contest last year was overwhelming and they are expecting a remarkable response this year too.

"We are proud to collaborate with Korean Cultural Centre India to launch the All India K-POP Contest 2024," he said of the competition which is in its 14th year.

The KCCI event also saw a presentation of the growing cultural exchange between India and South Korea, a performance of 'Samulnori', traditional Korean instrumental performance, a Taekwondo performance as well as a K-pop cover dance.

According to KCCI, the demand for learning the Korean language has also increased.

There has been a significant increase in the number of students enrolled in Korean language classes, which grew from 1,535 in 20 schools last year to 2,572 students in 32 schools this year.

"Korean is one of the fastest-growing foreign languages in India, and the demand to study the language has constantly been on the rise. Both Taekwondo and Korean language classes in Indian schools will further expand opportunities for students to experience Korean culture and will become a starting point for achieving their dreams," Hwang Il Yong said.

Last year, 11,071 teams — the highest ever — participated in the show-piece event, which brings together K-pop enthusiasts from across India. (PTI)

At Tony Award nominations, there's no clear juggernaut but opportunity for female directors

NEW YORK, April 30: After a final, frantic push to open the last raft of Broadway shows before the eligibility window closed, the final list of almost 40 plays and musicals vying for Tony Award nominations this year are ready and hoping for their closeups.

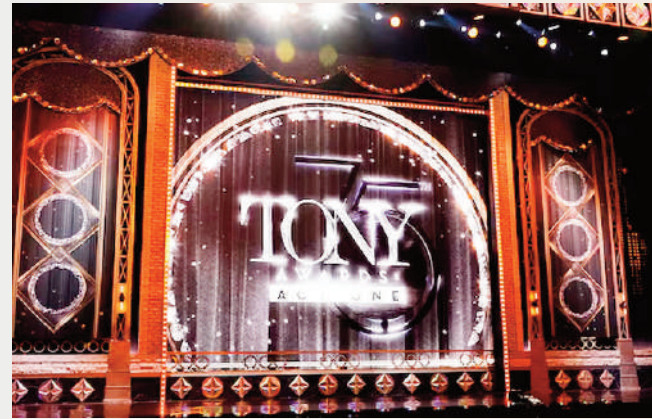
Jesse Tyler Ferguson and Renée Elise Goldsberry will announce nominees for the 26 competitive Tony Awards on Tuesday morning, the result of voting by the 60 members of the nominating committee.

The spring barrage — 14 shows opened in an 11-day span this year — is not unusual these days as producers hope their work will be fresh in the mind of voters ahead of the Tony Awards ceremony on June 16. But no clear single musical juggernaut has emerged, like the megahit "Hamilton" in 2016 or a critical darling like last year's "Kimberly Akino." One possible change this year indicates women may be poised

to outnumber the men for the first time in directing nominations. Nearly half of the 21 musicals — new and revivals — that opened this season were helmed by a woman or featured a team of co-directors where at least one was a woman. Five out of the season's 16 new plays and play revivals were also staged by women.

The 2022 Tony Awards currently holds the record for most female directing nominees, with four total across the two races. Only 10 women have gone on to win the directing crown.

Outsiders, "The Great Gatsby," "The Notebook," "Back to the Future" and "Water for Elephants" — and new works transferring over to Broadway, like the suffrage play "Suffs," the dance-heavy Sufjan Stevens-scored "Illinoise," the rock band imploding "Stereophonic" and "Hell's Kitchen," loosely based on Alicia Keys' life. There are some co-



incidences, like that Huey Lewis & The News songs are heard at both his jukebox show "The Heart of Rock and Roll" and an unconnected musical of "Back to the Future." Rachel McAdams, who made a breakthrough in the film version of "The Notebook," is competing against the musical version of that movie a few blocks away in the play "Mary Jane." Plus, "The Wiz" and "Wicked" now share Broadway, and Nazis are in both "Cabaret" and a musical about artist Tamara de Lempicka. (AP)

New York Indian Film Festival to celebrate Shabana Azmi's 50 years in cinema

NEW YORK, April 30: The landmark 50-year cinematic journey of veteran Indian actor Shabana Azmi will be celebrated here next month at the New York Indian Film Festival, the annual celebration of features and documentaries from the Indian subcontinent.

The 24th edition of the NYIFF, considered North America's longest running and most prestigious Indian film festival, will run from May 31-June 2 and showcase 49 narrative, documentaries and short films starring some of the biggest names in cinema, including Amitabh Bachchan and Naseeruddin Shah.

With the year 2024 marking Azmi's five decades in Indian and international cinema, the gala will celebrate this landmark anniversary with a special event that will include the screening of her 1996 film "Fire", directed by Deepa Mehta.

"I have been associated with the New York Indian Film Festival since its inception and I am heartened by the progress it has made over the years in leaps and bounds. I am happy that my 50th year is being celebrated at the

NYIFF and I look forward to it," a NYIFF statement quoted Azmi as saying.

Azmi, 73, who will attend this year's NYIFF, will delve into her "remarkable journey, from her groundbreaking debut in Shyam Benegal's 'Ankur', to her trailblazing roles that have earned her five National Film Awards and international accolades," the statement said.

It added that beyond her cinematic achievements, Azmi's "dedication to social activism, particularly for the rights of women and the underprivileged, is truly inspiring."

The Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan awardee has starred in over 140 Hindi films and 12 international productions such as Mehta's "Midnight's Children", Mira Nair's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" and Ismail Merchant's "In Custody".

"From her gripping portrayal in 'Ankur' to her recent roles in 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani' and 'Ghoomer', her collaborations transcend borders, with projects including Shekhar Kapur's 'What's Love Got to Do with It?' and Steven Spielberg's prestigious

mini-series 'Halo'.

"Azmi's repertoire is a testament to her unparalleled skill and diverse roles. As Shabana Azmi continues to illuminate screens and stages alike with her presence, her legacy as a trailblazer in Indian cinema remains unparalleled," the statement said.

The festival, presented by the Indo-American Arts Council, will open with the film "Dear Jassi", directed by Indian-American filmmaker Tarsem Singh, who has made films with Jennifer Lopez and Julia Roberts, besides directing videos for music legends like the bands R.E.M. and Lady Gaga. Closing the festival will be the Sanya Malhotra-starrer "Mrs", directed by Arati Kadav.

Highlights of this year's festival include the Bachchan and Vivek Gombert starrer "The Umesh Chronicles" by filmmaker Pooja Kaul; Naseeruddin Shah in the short film "Khidki", documentary "Merchant Ivory", and Tanishtha Chatterjee in American filmmaker Wendy Bednarz's debut film "Yellow Bus".

This year's festival line-up features

films that "showcase the depth and range of contemporary Indian cinema, including cutting-edge dramas, documentaries, and shorts, some that premiered at Cannes Film Festival and Toronto International Film Festival," said IAAC.

"NYIFF is a must-watch event for anyone interested in Indian cinema and its growing impact on global cinema. It offers a unique opportunity to explore and appreciate the diverse cinematic voices emerging from India today," added chairman of the Indo-American Arts Council Dr Nirmal Mattoo.

Festival director Aseem Chhabra underscored the gala's commitment to diversity and cultural representation in film. This year's NYIFF will feature films in 12 languages spoken across India such as Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi and Tamil, he said.

IAAC board member Poonam Khubani said the festival's "selection of films not only epitomises the artistic brilliance we champion but also mirrors the vibrant narratives we strive to share



with our community. This year, the amalgamation of cultural richness, outstanding narratives, and stellar performances is poised to make this edition of the festival unparalleled in its appeal."

The festival screens premieres of feature, documentary and short films made from, of, and about the Indian subcontinent in the independent, art-house, alternate and diaspora genres. It includes post-screening discussions, industry panels and award ceremonies. (PTI)

Samson, who has had a good IPL both as a batter and captain for Rajasthan Royals, was included as the second wicketkeeper-batter behind Rishabh Pant, pipping the likes of K L Rahul and Ishan Kishan

Samson, Chahal in; Gill, Rinku among reserves of India's T20 World Cup squad

NEW DELHI, April 30: Sanju Samson and Yuzvendra Chahal on Tuesday made it to India's provisional squad for the T20 World Cup thanks to strong IPL performances but Shubman Gill and the big-hitting Rinku Singh were relegated to the reserves group as selectors went with the tried and tested for the marquee event in June.

The BCCI announced the Rohit Sharma-led squad after a meeting between secretary Jay Shah and chief selector Ajit Agarkar in Ahmedabad. Rohit and Agarkar are expected to address the media in Mumbai on Thursday.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya was retained as vice-captain despite his poor recent form after taking over Mumbai Indians leadership in the ongoing IPL. Hard-hitting batter Shivam Dube also made the cut following a strong IPL showing for Chennai Super Kings.

"There was a lot of debate over Hardik's place in the squad while Samson was not debated much. Rinku was just unlucky. It was a toss-up between (Dube and Rinku with Hardik also in the squad," a BCCI source told PTL.

Samson, who has had a good IPL both as a batter and captain for Rajasthan Royals, was included as the second wicketkeeper-batter behind Rishabh Pant, pipping the likes of K L Rahul and Ishan Kishan.

Leg-spinner Chahal, who last played for India in August 2023, is the second wrist spinner in the team alongside Kuldeep Yadav.

However, Gill, who is enjoying a good run in the IPL as Gujarat Titans captain, found himself among the standbys along with Kolkata Knight Riders' big-hitter



Rinku Singh.

The selectors decided to show faith in Yashasvi Jaiswal, who had a slow start in the IPL but regained his touch with swashbuckling hundred recently for Rajasthan Royals. The redoubtable Virat Kohli completed the Indian top order after pulling off strong batting performances in the IPL.

The T20 World Cup begins on June 2 in the USA and the Caribbean. India will open their campaign against Ireland on June 5 in New York.

India, who have had disappointing campaigns in the previous two World Cups due to their conservative batting approach, needed to make a few bold calls to stake a claim for an elusive ICC trophy.

Picking Dube ahead of Rinku Singh is a bold call in that aspect considering the latter had done no wrong since making his India debut in August last year.

Before the IPL, Rinku, who has a strike rate of 176.23 in 15 T20Is, was considered a certainty in the India squad but selectors have preferred the six-hitting skills of Dube in the middle-order.

To be fair to the left-hander from Mumbai, he has been in sensational touch in the IPL and also flaunted his power hitting prowess in India's last T20 series in January.

On the wicket-keeper batters' front, India were spoilt for choice and eventually the selectors picked Pant and Samson.

Pant being chosen was on expected lines after the match-win-

ner proved his form and fitness in the IPL after coming back from a horrific car accident in December 2022. His comeback to the game has been nothing short of sensational after being on crutches for several months.

It will be interesting to see how the management uses Samson, who has been playing in the top-order for Royals. Should he turn up for India, Samson will need to move down the order.

India's top-order has come under a lot of criticism for its outdated approach in previous editions.

Considering the core remains the same, it remains to be seen how giants like Virat Kohli and Rohit fare in probably their last appearance in the biennial event. Jaiswal has added much-needed

freshness to the top-order and will be expected to build on his recent performances for India at the T20 showpiece.

India will need wickets in the middle overs if they are to go deep in the tournament and that could come from the wrist spin duo of Kuldeep and Chahal, who have been reunited once again.

Playing for Rajasthan Royals, Chahal has picked up 13 wickets so far in the IPL and recently reached the 200-wicket mark in the competition. Ravi Bishnoi was also in the race but was overlooked.

Ravindra Jadeja will be the spin all-rounder in the playing eleven and his back-up in the squad is Axar Patel.

Questions remain over the pace attack with selectors picking Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh to assist spearhead Jasprit Bumrah.

Both Siraj and Arshdeep have not had the best of IPLs but are proven performers on the international stage.

Avesh Khan, who has shown remarkable accuracy in the death overs this IPL, is among the reserves and so is left-arm pacer Khaleel Ahmed.

Indian Squad for T20 World Cup:

Rohit Sharma (Captain), Hardik Pandya (Vice Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant (WK), Sanju Samson (WK), Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohd. Siraj.

Reserves: Shubman Gill, Rinku Singh, Khaleel Ahmed and Avesh Khan. (PTI)

CSK eye all-round stability against unpredictable PBKS



CHENNAI, April 30: An inconsistent Chennai Super Kings will have to display all-round solidity when they face an unpredictable Punjab Kings in their Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday.

The Super Kings have 10 points from nine matches, similar figures as that of Lucknow Super Giants, Sunrisers Hyderabad and Delhi Capitals, and the defending champions would certainly like to breakaway from that mid-table gridlock with a win.

However, the defending champions will be a worried lot as Punjab Kings, who have six points from nine games, are coming to this match after scaling down 262 against Kolkata Knight Riders, the highest chase in the history of T20 cricket.

But the Chepauk deck is a different beast, offering a semblance of assistance to the bowlers and it was evident in CSK's impressive 78-run win over SRH in their previous match.

There was no dew in Chennai on that night, and the CSK bowlers defanged SRH's potent batting unit with their accuracy and variations after their batters put on board a 200-plus total.

They need an encore against Punjab, and all eyes will be on skipper Rituraj Gaikwad, who is on a hot streak.

Gaikwad has registered scores of 108 and 98 in his last two innings and New Zealand man Daryl Mitchell too seemed to have regained his touch at just the right time with a 32-ball 52 against Hyderabad.

However, the real storm-force in the CSK line-up is Shivam Dube, who has pulverised the opposition bowlers while coming as an Impact Sub.

While Dube has always been a spin-basher, the left-hander has now added another angle to his batting with his effective tackling of pacers.

Dube so far has made 350 runs, second highest for CSK behind Gaikwad's 447, and those runs came at a strike-rate of 172.41, second only to MS Dhoni's 259.45.

However, the CSK opening combination continues to be a bit iffy. Gaikwad has been a solid presence but both now-dropped Rachin Ravindra and Ajinkya Rahane have not been able to play the

support role to their skipper.

Rahane's last four outings as opener produced scores of 5, 36, 1, 9, and those numbers don't reflect his experience or skill-level.

However, CSK in all likelihood will continue to back him.

Batting coach Michael Hussey had remarked that the 35-year-old was close to getting a big knock under his belt.

On the other hand, PBKS will be desperate to carry the momentum after that record chase and climb up the ladder from the current eighth place.

For that, their batters need to fire in unison once again and the onus is on Jonny Bairstow, who made a hundred against KKR, Shashank Singh and Prabhsimran Singh.

But they will eye a more impact

outing from wicketkeeper batter Jitesh Sharma.

However, PBKS' bowling department looks a bit shaky despite having experienced campaigners such as Kagiso Rabada, Harshal Patel, Arshdeep Singh and Sam Curran in their ranks.

The visitors will also require a

much-improved effort from their spinners -- Harpreet Brar and Rahul Chahar -- as they have scalped just seven wickets among them this season.

Teams:
CSK: Rituraj Gaikwad (c), MS Dhoni (wk), Aravely Avaneish, Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Moeen Ali, Shivam Dube, RS Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Jadav Mandal, Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Nishant Sinhu, Deepak Chahar, Tuskar Deshpande, Mukesh Choudhary, Mustafizur Rahman, Matheesha Pathirana, Simarjeet Singh, Prashant Solanki, Shardul Thakur, Maheesh Theekshana and Sameer Rizvi.

PBKS: Shikhar Dhawan (c), Matthew Short, Jonny Bairstow (wk), Prabhsimran Singh (wk), Jitesh Sharma (wk), Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidvath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.

Match starts: 7:30 PM. (PTI)

EU legal adviser says some FIFA player transfer rules may breach EU law

BRUSSELS, April 30: FIFA rules on transfers can conflict with European Union legislation relating to competition and freedom of movement because they limit possibilities for players to change clubs, and for clubs to hire, a senior EU legal adviser said on Tuesday.

Advocate General Maciej Szpunar gave his opinion after French soccer player Lassana Diarra legally challenged FIFA rules.

The Diarra case went through FIFA judicial bodies before the 2016 election of FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who has made it a priority to modernize transfer market rules. Former France international Diarra signed a four-year contract with Lokomotiv Moscow in 2013. The deal was terminated a year later after Diarra was unhappy with alleged pay cuts.

Lokomotiv Moscow applied to the FIFA dispute resolution chamber for compensation and the player submitted a counterclaim seeking compensation for unpaid wages. The Court of Arbitration for Sport found the Russian club terminated the contract with Diarra "with just cause" and the player was condemned to pay 10.5 million euros (\$11.2 million).

Diarra claimed his search for a new club was hampered by FIFA rules stipulating that any new side would be jointly responsible with him for paying compensation to Lokomotiv.

The former Real Madrid player also argued that a potential deal with Belgian club Charleroi fell through because of the FIFA rules, and sued FIFA and the Belgian federation at a Belgian court for damages and loss of earnings of six million euros (\$7 million). Szpunar proposed the European Court of Justice should reply to the questions referred by the Belgian tribunal "by finding that the FIFA rules governing contractual relations between players and clubs may prove to be contrary to the European rules on competition and freedom of movement of persons."

"He finds that there can be no doubt as to the restrictive nature of (FIFA transfer regulations) with regard to freedom of movement," the court said in a statement, noting the restrictive rules can be justified only in specific circumstances.

"These provisions are such as to discourage and dissuade clubs from hiring the player for fear of financial risk. The sporting sanctions faced by clubs hiring the player can effectively prevent a player from exercising his or her profession with a club located in another member state." (AP)

India to host next year's BWF World Junior Championships in Guwahati

NEW DELHI, April 30: India will host next year's World Junior Badminton Championships at the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati, the sport's global governing body BWF said on Tuesday.

It will be the first time since 2008 that the prestigious Badminton World Federation (BWF) event will be held in India.

"Both the team and individual events will be held at the Badminton Association of India's (BAI) National Centre of Excellence in the northeast region of the country," the BWF said in a release.

India last hosted the event in Pune.

"India's production line of elite badminton talent is booming, and it is of great significance for the BWF to bring our World Juniors to India for just the second time," BWF President Poul-Erik Hoyer said.

"BAI's brand new National



Centre of Excellence is a state-of-the-art facility for badminton and will be the perfect arena for our next generation talent to battle it

out for team and individual glory." Dates for the 2025 event are yet to be confirmed.

The next edition of the BWF Thomas & Uber Cup Finals will head in Horsens, Denmark.

It is just the second time that Denmark will stage the BWF world men's and women's team championships following Aarhus in 2021.

"Horsens is renowned for its cultural and entertainment events, and we are excited to be bringing the prestigious BWF Thomas & Uber Cup Finals 2026 to the badminton-loving local community," said Hoyer.

"Badminton Denmark has a long tradition of staging world-class badminton championships and we have full confidence that they along with the City of Horsens will deliver a tournament to remember."

The hosting rights were confirmed at the BWF Council meeting on April 28. (PTI)

Medical report on soccer legend Maradona's death aims to undercut homicide case against medics

The prosecutor's office criticized the expert's report as hastily cobbled together in 72 hours and accused Ferrari of neglecting four years of evidence in favor of 'a minimal slice of evidence offered by the defense.'

BUENOS AIRES, April 30: A medical examiner's report into the death of Argentine soccer legend Diego Maradona injected uncertainty into the criminal negligence case brought against eight medical workers involved in his case a month before they are set to stand trial for homicide.

A forensic expert conducted the study at the behest of one of the main defendants, Maradona's neurosurgeon Leopoldo Luque, in an effort to challenge the 2021 medical examination that held Luque and other doctors responsible for what it described as the soccer star's otherwise avoidable death. The defendants have denied any violations or irregularities in Maradona's treatment.

Maradona, famous for leading Argentina to victory in the 1986 World Cup and back to the final four years later, died from a heart attack in 2020 while recovering from brain surgery.

His death at age 60 stunned and



devastated a generation of soccer fans and sent all of Argentina into mourning. Within days, the country became consumed by questions about his final, perplexing hours, a frenzy of suspicion that intensified as police officers raided his doctors' homes and offices and

Maradona's family pressed the judiciary to intervene.

Prosecutors ultimately charged the eight medical workers with homicide — a serious accusation that leaves open the possibility of presumed intent and carries possible prison sentences from eight to 25 years. The trial is set to start June 4.

Medical examiner Pablo Ferrari's report, released Monday, concluded that Maradona's rapid, erratic heartbeat was either of natural origin or stemmed from an "external" factor, possibly a drug like cocaine that Maradona was known to have abused in the past. Ferrari said he couldn't do a toxicology report based on Maradona's insufficient urine sample.

The findings contradict those of a 20-member medical panel appointed to investigate Maradona's death.

That 2021 report accused Maradona's medical team of act-

ing in an "inappropriate, deficient and reckless manner," leaving the soccer player in agony and without help for more than 12 hours before his death.

Ferrari's report disputed the severity of that episode, contending the arrhythmia could not have triggered agony for more than "a few minutes or at most a few hours."

"This marks a radical turn in the case," Vadim Mischanchuk, the defense lawyer representing Maradona's psychiatrist, Agustina Cosachov, told local media. "The account goes from being a cardiac event that lasts many days to one that lasts minutes."

The prosecutor's office criticized the expert's report as hastily cobbled together in 72 hours and accused Ferrari of neglecting four years of evidence in favor of "a minimal slice of evidence offered by the defense."

"There is no twist in the case," prosecutors said. (AP)

South African boxer Dingaana Thobela, 'The Rose of Soweto,' dies aged 57

JOHANNESBURG, April 30: South African boxer Dingaana Thobela, a two-weight world champion known as "The Rose of Soweto," has died, the ministry of sports said on Tuesday. He was 57.

Thobela won the WBO lightweight title in 1990 and the WBA lightweight title in 1993, when he beat American Tony Lopez in a rematch. He moved up to super-middleweight and beat Britain's Glenn Catley for the WBC belt with a 12th-round stoppage in 2000, his finest moment.

He finished with a professional record of 40 wins, 14 losses and two draws.

Thobela hailed from the famed Johannesburg township of Soweto and was widely popular in his home country as his rise coincided with South African boxing's heyday in the 1980s and 1990s.

He was one of several world-class Black fighters to emerge during the last years of apartheid, when boxing was one of the few South African sports to allow Black athletes to compete on the world stage and gain international recognition. (AP)

Nadal tested in a 3-hour win over Cachin at Madrid; Swiatek reaches the women's quarterfinals



MADRID, April 30: After spending more than three hours on the court and earning a hard-fought victory, Rafael Nadal was feeling optimistic again.

Nadal's body withstood its toughest test yet at this Madrid Open in a 6-1, 6-7 (5), 6-3 win over 91st-ranked Pedro Cachin on Monday.

He didn't show any signs of physical limitations in a victory that earned him a spot in the round of 16 at the clay-court tournament where he is the record five-time champion.

"It's positive, now I don't feel that some-

thing went wrong on my body, but I need to wait until tomorrow, being 100% honest," he said. "I am trying my best to keep dreaming. Tomorrow is another day to keep dreaming. To keep playing in front of this amazing crowd and, to me, that means everything."

Nadal will next face 31st-ranked Jiri Lehecka. He said he needs "to find a way to be able to play days in a row and still be competitive."

"I don't know if I am in that moment yet," the 22-time Grand Slam champion said. "Let's see what can happen tomorrow."

The 37-year-old Nadal is trying to get in

shape for next month's French Open. Since his latest injury layoff, he's had two matches in Barcelona and was pessimistic about his physical condition after arriving in Madrid. But he's won three more times in the capital.

Nadal again looked comfortable early on against Cachin. The Argentine rallied in the second but was broken twice while serving for the set before eventually prevailing in the tiebreaker.

Nadal didn't look as loose in the final set, but did look tired. He wasn't as consistent with his shots but picked up three breaks to seal the victory to the delight of the local crowd in the Caja Magica.

"I took more risks in the third set, but it's hard after so many months without competing," Nadal said. "I hadn't played a match like this in a long time. I don't know how I'm going to wake up. But I'm already happy for having won three matches in a row."

Cachin asked for Nadal's shirt after congratulating him at the net, and received the gift moments later.

Top-seeded Jannik Sinner was not at his best but had enough to defeat Pavel Kotov 6-2, 7-5. Sinner, who has been dealing with a hip issue, will face 16th-seeded Karen Khachanov.

"I have been struggling a little bit with my right hip," Sinner said. "We're trying to find a solution and I don't think it's anything serious. Sometimes I feel it more like today and some days are a little bit better."

Third-seeded Daniil Medvedev was two points from defeat before he rallied to beat Sebastian Korda 5-7, 7-6 (4), 6-3.

Fifth-seeded Casper Ruud beat Cameron Norrie 6-2, 6-4.

KEYS DOWNS GAUFF

Madison Keys rallied after trailing in the first and second sets to beat Coco Gauff 7-6 (4), 4-6, 6-4 in an all-American fourth-round meeting.

It will be the 20th-ranked Keys' first quarterfinal appearance in Madrid. She lost in the first round in seven of her nine previous trips to the Spanish capital. The third-seeded Gauff undermined herself with 38 unforced errors, including 13 double faults.

Keys will face eighth-seeded Ons Jabeur, who eased past Jelena Ostapenko 6-0, 6-4.

SWIATEK ADVANCES

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek remained on track for a first Madrid title with a 6-1, 6-0 win over Sara Sorribes Tormo.

Swiatek dropped just five points in the second set en route to the quarterfinals of the only high-profile European clay tournament she is yet to win.

The 27th-ranked Sorribes Tormo was the last Spanish woman in the draw.

Swiatek, who lost last year's Madrid final to Aryna Sabalenka, will next face 11th-seeded Beatriz Haddad Maia, who defeated fifth-seeded Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-4.

Sabalenka, the champion in Madrid in 2021 and 2023, advanced by beating No. 15 Danielle Collins 4-6, 6-4, 6-3. The result ended Collins' 15-match winning streak, and sent Sabalenka into her first WTA 1000 quarterfinal of the season.

Mirra Andrejeva celebrated her 17th birthday with a 7-6 (2), 6-4 win over 12th-seeded Jasmine Paolini. The Russian teenager rallied from 5-2 down in the first set to reach the quarterfinals, a round further than she managed in Madrid a year ago.

Fourth-seeded Elena Rybakina defeated teenage qualifier Sara Bejlek 6-1, 6-3. (AP)

India recalls Rishabh Pant for T20 World Cup after near-fatal car crash



NEW DELHI, April 30: Rishabh Pant was restored to the T20 World Cup on Tuesday, 16 months after a near-fatal car crash.

Allrounder Shivam Dube, recalled by India last August after more than two years out, also made the cut, and star batters Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli were confirmed for the tournament in June in the Caribbean and the United States.

Pant was India's first-choice wicketkeeper across all three formats until December 2022 when he crashed and dislocated his right knee. He was pulled out by passersby before the car caught fire. Pant feared amputation. He returned to competitive cricket last month for the ongoing Indian Premier League and has proved himself.

Pant has 398 runs in 11 innings — good for fourth overall — at a strike rate of 158.56.

Dube has also lit up the IPL with 350 runs in nine innings at a strike rate of 172.41.

Wrist spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, the only bowler to take 200 wickets in IPL history, was a surprise inclusion because he wasn't used at the Cricket World Cup that India hosted late last year. Chahal has 13 wickets in nine IPL games at an economy of 9.

India has picked three other spinners; left-arm unorthodox wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav, and left-arm spin allrounders Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel.

Sharma and Kohli were informally announced as selections in February by Jay Shah, the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

"In the 2023 (final) at Ahmedabad, even though we did not win the World Cup after 10 straight wins, we won hearts," Shah said then. "I want to promise you that in 2024, under Rohit Sharma's captaincy, we will hoist the Indian flag in Barbados (in the final on June 29)." Sharma and Kohli are in good form in the IPL. Kohli leads the run-scorers' charts with 500 in 10 innings, including one hundred and four half-centuries. Sharma has 311 in nine games at a strike rate of 160.30.

Despite Kohli opening the innings in the IPL, he should bat at number three while left-handed youngster Yashasvi Jaiswal opens with Sharma.

The world No. 1-ranked T20 batter, Suryakumar Yadav, will be at number four.

Nine of the 15-man squad were at the 2022 T20 World Cup, where India lost in the semifinals to eventual champion England.

India begins the World Cup on June 5 against Ireland. It will also play Pakistan and tournament host the U.S.; all three games will be at the purpose-built Nassau County International Cricket Stadium on Long Island. India will meet Canada in Florida. (AP)

Nagaon shines in all Assam Amateur Kickboxing Championship



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 30: Among 10 kickboxers, 7 bagged gold while other 3 secured silver from Nagaon Amateur Kickboxing Association in the 5th All Assam Kickboxing Championship held at Nehru Indoor stadium in Guwahati.

The event was organised on April 27-28 by Amateur Kickboxing Association, Assam. The team was led by Jyotirmoy Bodo, the president of Nagaon Amateur Kickboxing Association and Nabajyoti Baruah as head coach, a press note asserted here.

Indian women blanked 0-5 by China in Uber Cup

CHENGDU (CHINA), April 30: Teenage sensation Anmol Kharb left the badminton court in tears owing to an ankle injury as an under-strength Indian women's team suffered a 0-5 defeat to the mighty China in its final group A fixture of the Uber Cup here on Tuesday.

Having already qualified for the quarterfinals by picking up successive wins against Canada and Singapore, Ashmita Chaliha sat out the contest against the 15-time champions. The team is competing without double Olympic-medallist P V Sindhu, who opted out of the tournament.

It was a reality check for the young Indian team as it could not take a single game from the Chinese during the five-match tie.

To add to India's woes, 17-year-old Anmol was forced to retire after twisting her ankle during the second singles contest.

Olympic champion and world no.2 Chen Yu Fei started off the proceedings for China with an easy 21-12 21-10 win over 83rd ranked Isharani Baruah.

"A little disappointed in my game because I made too many errors, I thought I would play good with her but it was an easy win for her...the pace was really high, I had to increase my speed," Isharani said after her match.

"Her variations were good, and all her strokes were going in the third court and it wasn't comfortable to hit well. It was a tough game but it was a good experience," she added.



National champions Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra, ranked 67, were no match for reigning world champions Chen Qing Chen and Jia Yi Fan, who doubled China's lead with a 21-13 21-12 win.

After losing the first game 9-21 and trailing 1-4 in the second against Han Yue, Anmol rolled her right ankle while trying to defend a point.

She received medical attention but the pain

didn't seem to subside and the ankle looked swollen, forcing her to retire from the match giving China a 3-0 unassailable lead.

In the next two matches, Liu Shen Shu and Tan Ning defeated Simran Singh and Ritika Thaker 21-9 21-10, while Tanvi Sharma lost 7-21 16-21 to Wang Zhi Yi as China completed the 5-0 drubbing of India.

India will end the group stage proceedings in second place behind China. (PTI)

Radha leads way as India bowl out Bangladesh for 119

SYLHET (BANGLADESH), April 30: Led by left-arm spinner Radha Yadav's splendid show, Indian bowlers bundled out Bangladesh for 119 in the second T20 International here on Tuesday.

Radha finished with excellent figures of 3/19, while there were two wickets apiece for Deepti Sharma (2/14) and Shreyanka Patil (2/24).

For Bangladesh, opener Murshida Khatun top-scored with 46 off 489 balls.

Opting to bat first, Dilara Akter got the Bangladesh innings underway when she pulled Renuka Singh, the star of the five-match series opener, over mid-wicket for a four in only the second ball of the match.

Akter got into a good position and whipped off her pads a swinging Renuka delivery over backward

square leg for a boundary.

An 11-run first over was followed by the wicket of Akter as experienced spinner Deepti Sharma struck with one that was drifting in, which prompted the batter to go for a sweep but she could not get the elevation and ended up giving a catch to Renuka in the deep.

Renuka conceded another boundary when Murshida Khatun came down the track to smash her over mid-off. India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur then made a mess of a straightforward chance off Renuka after getting both her hands to it, giving Murshida reprieve on 6 after the batter mistimed her shot. One-down bat Sobhana Mostary opened her account with a boundary as she drove a Renuka delivery past backward point. (PTI)

SAIL Football Academy shortlists six youngsters for pre trial camp at Bokaro

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Apr. 30: Six youngsters of Karbi Anglong were called up by Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) Football Academy, Bokaro Steel Plant, Jharkhand to participate in the final induction selection trials for SAIL - Football Academy for the session 2024-25. Earlier the ten teenage boys were shortlisted by SAIL - Football Academy in the preliminary trial camp held here in the first week of April. The final induction selection trials will be conducted on May 2 to 3 at Bokaro steel city, Jharkhand.

SAIL Football Academy officials held a preliminary selection trial on April 2 and 3 at Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) Stadium at Diphu. The SAIL has conducted similar trial camps at Jharkhand, Kalyani, Sukna and Darjeeling in West Bengal, Gangtok in Sikkim and Gogamukh in Assam.

The selected boys for the final trial camp are Derasarat Basumatari (16) and Sarbilong Engti (16) of Howraghat, Jirjar Rongpi (14) of Phuloni, Sarbabom Tisso (15) and Enush Teron (15) of Diphu and Divison Bey (15) of Kasomari.



This IPL is different, need to mentally accept challenge: KKR's Varun Chakravarthy

KOLKATA, April 30: Kolkata Knight Riders spinner Varun Chakravarthy said the teams have understood the concept of Impact Player better in this iteration of IPL and now bowlers will have to find ways to counter the ultra-aggressive approach of batsmen to make an impact on the game.

Chakravarthy's spell of three for 16 played a vital role in KKR's thumping seven-wicket win over Delhi Capitals on Monday.

"The Impact Player rule was there last year also. The teams have now understood how to use the impact player rule better. So, they know that there is extra batting and they want to charge from the first ball. That's how it's going," Chakravarthy said in the post-match press meet.

"However much the bowlers cry, that's how it is. We've to accept that this IPL is different and mentally accept that challenge. You can't change the side of the ground or you can't change anything," Chakravarthy also said the Eden Gardens pitch offered a good amount of help to the bowlers against Delhi.

"The last two matches before this, we didn't defend that well because the wickets have become very placid in the second innings. But this pitch was a little bit more turning.

"That was the difference. The length

is basically the same for all the matches. It's just how the wicket behaves," Chakravarthy said the KKR players and management went into a huddle to find solutions after Punjab Kings managed to chase a record 262 in their previous match.

"Definitely, the last match (vs PBKS) was a very hard pill to swallow. We had many conversations with the management, everyone chipped in. We spoke with the coaches.

Carl Crowe, Bharat Arun sir, (Gautam) Gambhir, Chandrakant (Pandit) sir, Abhishek Nair."

The 32-year-old said even the KKR owner Shah Rukh Khan pepped them up with a quick motivational talk.

"Even Shah Rukh bhai, he came up to us yesterday and spoke to me a lot he said 'don't take it personally, whatever is happening this IPL is just going at a crazy rate, just don't self-doubt yourself'."

After their defeat against KKR, Delhi have slipped to sixth with three just matches left for them, and bowling coach James Hopes said they are optimistic of making the playoffs.

Delhi next face Rajasthan Royals at home on May 7, before travelling to Bengaluru (May 12). Their last fixture in the league is against Lucknow Super Giants at home on



May 14. "We have a week off now. Our destiny is still in our own hands, you might say," Hopes said.

"If we can win three games and get to 16 points, that should be good enough.

But we do have a week off now where we can readjust and see if we need to think a little different about anything.

"Yeah, tonight was a missed opportunity, and we won't hide behind any excuses there," he said.

Hopes said they could have recalibrated the target on a slow pitch.

"This has been a high-scoring venue, and even though we'd lost three wickets in the power play, we had no reason to really think it wasn't going to be anything other than that.

"We were still going 11 and half an over. So, we were still thinking 200-220. But I think once the spinners started to grip the ball, we saw it in Sunil (Narine) first over, it gripped a bit for him in the sixth over.

"So our mistake probably lay in that we didn't recalibrate our sights on something slightly lower. I think everyone assumed that it was going to be a 240 game.

"The trick is understanding that it's not that way sometimes, and you have to actually put a defensible score on the board and not go too hard."

Crediting the KKR bowling, Hopes said: "You saw a slight shift in (bowling) tactics today. Mitch (Starc) almost tried yorkers every ball. I think he (Jack Fraser-McGurk) only faced yorkers, bouncers and slower balls." (PTI)