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WORLD
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REGION/NE



● US, China seek to draw other countries into their orbits: Singapore PM

● IMF agreement not possible without Beijing's support: Sharif



● Cong protest outside ED office in Guwahati over charge sheet against Rahul, Sonia

● M'laya's picturesque highway claims 25 lives in 100 days



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Government of Assam
Public Works Department

Pioneering Infrastructure for a
Progressive Karbi Anglong

**Inauguration Ceremony
of completed projects under
various schemes**



Chief Guest

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

In the august presence of

Dr Tuliram Ronghang
CEM, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council



17 April 2025



Near Rengbonghom Higher
Secondary School, Diphu

List of projects for inauguration under various schemes

Project Description	Project Cost (₹ in Lakh)	Project Description	Project Cost (₹ in Lakh)
Improvement of road from NH329 to KAPTA Office via Rengbonghom School	725	Construction of 4-lane road from Rongtharve to Taralangso and Rongchingrum, Diphu	320
Improvement of road from Amiaputty to NH329 and UC Church via Mount Culvary School	347.69	Construction of road from Pirbi Market to Mentila, TV-Centre and Geeta Ashram, Diphu	750
Widening of road from NH329 to UC School via Jirsong Asong	338.51	Construction of Karbi Anglong welcome gate at Lahorijan	172
Widening of road from Rongmonjir to AG Church	530.53	Construction of Rongpharpi Rongbe statue at 5th mile, Diphu	64
Construction of road from Birola (Taralangso) to Rongkimi near NH-36 Including RCC Bridge	4415	Construction of Rengbonghom statue at Renebonghom School Tiniali, Diphu	38
Construction of road from NH329 to Aturkimi School and UC School	500	Upgradation of Roads from MRL17 DAV to Monlom	293.58
Construction of road from Fishery Office to Rongtheang via Home Academy School	180	Construction of RCC Bridge on Disagedeba to Manja via Terang gaon Road	413.22
Construction of road from NH-329 to Taralangso via Rongkanelang and Garo Basti	260	Construction of RCC Bridge on 5th Mile Diphu Manja Road to Nihang Rongkethe Road and RCC Bridge on Diphu Dillai Saharijan (DDS) Road	810.12
Upgradation of road from NH-329 to Home Academy via Rongthean-B, Diphu	325		



Total Project Cost

₹10,482.65 Lakh

US top trading partner of India for 4th straight year in FY25

Trade gap with china widens to USD 99.2 bn

NEW DELHI, April 16: The US remained India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25 with bilateral trade valued at USD 131.84 billion, while the country's trade deficit with China widened to USD 99.2 billion during the same period, government data showed.

In the last fiscal, India's exports to China contracted 14.5 per cent to USD 14.25 billion as against USD 16.66 billion in 2023-24. The imports, however, rose by 11.52 per cent in 2024-25 to USD 113.45 billion against USD 101.73 billion in 2023-24.

The trade deficit with China has widened by about 17 per cent to USD 99.2 billion in the last fiscal from USD 85.07 billion in 2023-24. China continued to be the second largest trading partner of India with USD 127.7 billion two-way commerce in 2024-25 as compared to USD 118.4 billion in 2023-24.

According to the commerce ministry data, China was India's top trading partner from 2013-14 till 2017-18 and also in 2020-21. Before China, the UAE was the country's largest trading partner. The US has been the largest partner since 2021-22.

Commenting on the data, think tank GTRI (Global Trade Research Initiative) said India's trade deficit with China hit a "staggering" USD



99.2 billion in FY25, which is a "record gap" that reflects deeper structural dependencies, not just trade imbalances.

"Imports surged by 11.5 per cent to USD 113.4 billion, driven by rising demand for electronics, EV batteries, solar cells, and key industrial inputs -- sectors where China dominates India's supply chains. China is India's top supplier in all eight major industrial product categories," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

The PLI (production linked incentive) schemes are fuelling import growth due to their heavy reliance on imported components, he said. "What's more alarming is

that India's exports to China fell 14.5 per cent, dipping to USD 14.2 billion -- now lower than they were in FY2014, when the rupee was significantly stronger. This signals more than a trade issue; it's a competitiveness crisis. These numbers are a wake-up call. India needs to fix its internal manufacturing gaps and invest in deep industrial capabilities. Without that, the deficit will only grow, and so will our dependency," he added.

During the last fiscal, the UAE with USD 100.5 billion was the third largest trading partner of India. In the last fiscal, India's exports to the US rose by 11.6 per cent to USD 86.51 billion as

against USD 77.52 billion in 2023-24. The imports were up by 7.44 per cent in 2024-25 to USD 45.33 billion against USD 42.2 billion in 2023-24.

The trade surplus with America touched USD 41.18 billion in the last fiscal from USD 35.32 billion in 2023-24.

In 2024, India's main exports to the US included drug formulations and biologicals (USD 8.1 billion), telecom instruments (USD 6.5 billion), precious and semi-precious stones (USD 5.3 billion), petroleum products (USD 4.1 billion), gold and other precious metal jewellery (USD 3.2 billion), ready-made garments of cotton, including accessories (USD 2.8 billion), and products of iron and steel (USD 2.7 billion). Imports included crude oil (USD 4.5 billion), petroleum products (USD 3.6 billion), coal, coke (USD 3.4 billion), cut and polished diamonds (USD 2.6 billion), electric machinery (USD 1.4 billion), aircraft, spacecraft and parts (USD 1.3 billion), and gold (USD 1.3 billion).

The bilateral trade between India and the US is expected to get a boost in the coming years as both are negotiating a trade agreement. The aim is to increase two-way commerce in goods and services to USD 500 billion by 2030 from USD 191 billion at present. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

Cong protests against ED

up for public good. But the facts suggest otherwise," Saikia said. "This is a case registered in 2013 during Congress rule. Their protests now seem like an attempt to obstruct and intimidate investigative agencies." Hitting out at the Congress for protesting the ED's actions, CM Sarma said, "Ordinary Congress workers are the real losers. They sit in crumbling offices while their leaders enjoy ₹2,000 crore. If anything, Congress workers should ask Sonia and Rahul Gandhi to return the money to the people."

"I feel pity for them," Sarma added. "Rahul Gandhi always says he fights corruption. Well, now both mother and son must prove their innocence in court. They are out on bail, they have been chargesheeted -- the time has come for them to answer." Both Sarma and Saikia dismissed Congress's claim of political vendetta. "The BJP has never misused any investigative agency. The case is being pursued as per court orders," Saikia said, adding, "India will never support the loot committed by the Gandhi family." (With inputs from PTI)

Mizoram delegation to

districts -- Aizawl, Kolasib and Mamit -- share a 164.6-km border with Assam's Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts. The decades-old border dispute mainly stemmed from two conflicting colonial-era demarcations -- one from 1875 under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) and another from 1933. Mizoram claims that 509 square miles of the Inner Line Reserved Forest (ILRF) delineated in 1875 under the BEFR as its legitimate area or boundary. In contrast, Assam asserts the border defined by a 1933 map prepared by the Survey of India in 1933 as its constitutional boundary. As a result, both states lay claim to overlapping areas, with no ground demarcation conducted till date, officials said. Since August 2021, both states have held four rounds of ministerial-level talks to resolve the decades-old border dispute. (PTI)

GMCH to become one

Inspecting the development of Guwahati's second medical college -- Pragjyotishpur Medical College and Hospital -- the chief minister said the hospital, which currently offers limited OPD services, is expected to be fully operational by August 15 this year. "With 600 beds and an intake capacity of 100 MBBS students, the new college will also offer postgraduate courses including obstetrics and orthopaedics. It will have 100 paying cabins to cater to the needs of a diverse patient base," Sarma noted.

He further revealed that plans are already underway for the construction of another 500-bed facility within the Pragjyotishpur Medical College campus in the future, further enhancing Guwahati's healthcare landscape. Chief Minister Sarma was accompanied by top officials including Siddharth Singh, Commissioner and Secretary, Medical Education and Research, and Chandan Sharma, Commissioner and Special Secretary, Public Works Department, during the review visit.

The developments signal the Assam government's focused push toward expanding quality healthcare and medical education infrastructure in the state, the official statement said.

Drugs worth ₹ 5 crore

of the seized drugs will be around ₹ 4.8 crore as per Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) standards. Yaba or 'crazy medicine' in Thai is a tablet form of a mixture of methamphetamine (a powerful and addictive stimulant) and caffeine. (PTI)

BJP's Topin Ete rejects

2012. It has withstood scrutiny by both the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court, which have allowed the case to proceed," Ete stated.

According to the official BJP statement, the ED began its investigation in 2021 and filed a chargesheet under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on April 15, 2025. The case alleges a criminal conspiracy to misappropriate properties worth over ₹2,000 crore belonging to Associated Journals Ltd. (AJL), which were originally meant for media operations and public interest. Ete explained that these assets were transferred to Young Indian Pvt. Ltd., a company incorporated in 2010 by Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, who together hold a 76% stake. The transfer, according to the chargesheet, was made for a nominal sum of ₹50 lakh.

He further added that AJL had received loans from the Indian National Congress, which were later waived off without repayment after Young Indian took control of AJL. "This case is not politically motivated, as alleged by Congress. It is a judicially sanctioned inquiry into serious financial fraud and misuse of public assets," Ete reiterated. Dismissing the Congress' protests as "diversionary tactics aimed at evading accountability," Ete emphasised the BJP's trust in India's judicial and investigative institutions. "We have full faith in the independence and professionalism of our judiciary and law enforcement agencies," he said. The BJP Arunachal Pradesh, in the statement, reaffirmed its "unwavering commitment to transparency, accountability, and justice," and expressed full support for the rule of law and the constitutional framework.

SC proposes to stay

of the provision-wise objections to the Act and expressed reservations on several aspects of the legislation, including the inclusion of non-Muslims in the central waqf council and state waqf boards. It also objected to empowering district collectors to adjudicate disputes related to waqf properties and the provisions allowing de-notification of properties declared as waqf by competent courts.

"Ordinarily, courts do not interfere at the admission stage when a law is passed. But this case may warrant an exception. If a property declared as waqf by user is denotified, it can have grave ramifications," the CJI said. The hearing saw sharp exchanges between the bench and the solicitor general when the judges questioned the logic behind permitting non-Muslims in waqf governance, while a similar reciprocity did not apply to Hindu religious endowments. "Are you suggesting that Muslims could now be part of Hindu endowment boards as well? Please state it openly," it told Mehta.

The law officer said not more than two non-Muslim members, apart from ex officio ones, would be included in the waqf council, and offered to state it in an affidavit. The bench, however, said under the new Act, only eight of the 22 members of the Central Waqf Council would be Muslims.

"If eight are Muslims, two may be judges' who might not be Muslims. That leaves a majority of non-Muslims. How is this consistent with the religious character of the institution?" the bench asked.

The tensions briefly escalated when the law officer appeared to question the neutrality of the all-Hindu judicial bench. "When we sit here, we shed our personal identities. For us, all parties are equal before the law. That comparison is entirely misplaced," the bench said. "Why not allow non-Hindus in the advisory boards of Hindu temples, then?" it asked. The bench, which did not issue a formal notice as of now, said it would not consider staying the law at the present stage.

The apex court questioned Mehta on how "waqf by user" could be disallowed as many would not have requisite documents to get such waqfs registered. "Waqf by user" refers to a practice where a property is recognised as a religious or charitable endowment (waqf) based on its long-term, uninterrupted use for such purposes, even if there isn't a formal, written declaration of waqf by the owner.

The amended provision states, "Provided that the existing waqf by user properties registered on or before the commencement of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 as waqf by user will remain as waqf properties except that the property, wholly or in part, is in dispute or is a government property."

The bench during the hearing asked, "How will you register such waqfs by user? What documents will they have? It will lead to undoing something. Yes, there is some misuse. But there are genuine ones also. I have gone through privy council judgments also. Waqf by user is recognised. If you undo it then it will be a problem. Legislation cannot declare a judgment, order or decree as void. You can only take the basis."

Mehta submitted there was a large section of Muslims who did not want to be governed by the Waqf Act. The bench then asked Mehta, "Are you saying that from now on you will allow Muslims to be part of the Hindu endowment boards? Say it openly."

When a public trust was declared to be a waqf 100 or 200 years ago, it couldn't suddenly be taken over by the waqf board and declared otherwise, it added. "You cannot rewrite the past," the bench said.

Mehta said a joint parliamentary committee had 38 sittings and examined 98.2 lakh memorandums before Parliament's both houses passed the law. The CJI wanted the parties to address the court on whether a high court could hear the matter and asked for the crux of their prayers. (PTI)

CM Sarma to attend Karbi

a high-level meeting with representatives from six former armed groups that have signed Memoranda of Settlement (MoS) with the government. He will also interact with Karbi organizations from the plains districts of Assam. In a significant boost to infrastructure, Sarma will inaugurate Public Works Department (PWD) road projects worth ₹100 crore, aimed at improving connectivity in the region. The following day, April 18, Sarma will attend the Karbi Aron Barim Chingrum Amei as the chief guest. The event will begin with a traditional ritual invoking indigenous deities, followed by the singing of the Karbi faith anthem. In his address, the Chief Minister is expected to underscore the importance of preserving Karbi cultural heritage and highlight the government's commitment to the socio-cultural and economic upliftment of the region.

Local organisations from both Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong are also scheduled to meet with the Chief Minister to discuss pressing community concerns and future aspirations. Additionally, Sarma will hold a comprehensive meeting with all KAAC department heads to assess ongoing projects and formulate forward-looking development strategies. The Chief Minister's visit, coupled with the vibrant cultural congregation, marks a significant step toward fostering unity, development, and cultural pride among the Karbi people.

US Vice President Vance

meet with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni before meeting with the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin to participate in ceremonies ahead of Easter Sunday. The spokesperson said the Second Family will also travel to Jaipur and Agra, where they are expected to participate in cultural events. The visit by US Vice President Vance is taking place weeks after US Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Tulsi Gabbard travelled to India. The DNI held separate meetings with Prime Minister Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and NSA Ajit Doval. The US president's tariff tussle has stoked fears of a global trade war. Following talks between Modi and Trump in Washington DC in February, the two sides announced that they would negotiate the first tranche of the BTA by the fall of 2025. (PTI)

India to grow by 6.5%

by escalating trade tensions and persistent uncertainty. Rising trade tensions are impacting global trade, with UNCTAD noting that recent tariff measures are disrupting supply chains and undermining predictability.

"Trade policy uncertainty is at a historical high", the report notes, "and this is already translating into delayed investment decisions and reduced hiring". The slowdown will affect all nations, but UNCTAD remains concerned about developing countries and especially the most vulnerable economies. Many low-income countries face a "perfect storm" of worsening external financial conditions, unsustainable debt and weakening domestic growth. UNCTAD underlines the real threat to economic growth, investment, and development progress, particularly for the most vulnerable economies. The UN agency pointed to the growth of trade among developing countries (South-South trade) as a source of resilience. Already accounting for about one-third of global trade, "the potential of South-South economic integration offers opportunities for many developing countries", the report noted. (PTI)

PhonePe launches UPI circle

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 16: PhonePe, on Wednesday announced the launch of UPI Circle on its app, allowing its users to create a circle and make payments on behalf of their family, friends or trusted contacts. UPI Circle enables dependents to generate their own UPI ID without needing a linked bank account, opening up secure online payment solutions for those with limited access to digital financial services. With UPI Circle on PhonePe, a UPI account holder (primary user), can add their family/trusted individuals (secondary user) to their circle using UPI ID or QR code and seamlessly authorize payments for them from anywhere. The primary user retains complete control over the usage, including the ability to review payment requests, track secondary user expenses, get secure access to detailed payment records within each circle and delink access from their UPI Circle, as needed.

NAME CORRECTION

BY AFFIDAVIT BEFORE HOJAI EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE I DECLARED THAT MY ACTUAL NAME IS MOHAMMED KABIR UDDIN AHMED. BY PRINT MISTAKE MY NAME INSERTED IN MY PASSPORT AS MOHAMMED KABIR UDDN AHMED. MOHAMMED KABIR UDDIN AHMED S/O MOHAMMED ABDUL MANNAN.

AFFIDAVIT FOR NAME CORRECTION

In pursuance to declaration made on 16/4/2025 sworn in before Additional District Magistrate, Nafra, District-Bichom, Arunachal Pradesh as per written request made by Shri. Bagrey Siongju, S/O Sh. Leikharu Siongju presently residing in village Dibbin, Circle- Sirilang, P.O/P.S.-Nafra, District-Bichom (A.P)790001 to change his name from Shri. Bagrey Siongju to Shri. Bagru Siongju. His name has been changed and will be known and distinguished here after as Shri Bagru Siongju for all purposes. Shri Bagru Siongju and Shri Bagrey Siongju is one and the same person.

AFFIDAVIT FOR NAME CORRECTION

In pursuance to declaration made on 16/4/2025 sworn in before Additional District Magistrate, Nafra, District-Bichom, Arunachal Pradesh as per written request made by Shri. Khonju Chongroju, S/O Sh. Norbu Chongroju resident of village Dibbin, Circle- Sirilang, P.O/P.S.-Nafra, District-Bichom (A.P)790001 to change his name from Shri. Khonju Chongroju to Shri. Gunjo Chongroju. His name has been changed and will be known and distinguished hereafter as Shri Gunjo Chongroju for all purposes. Shri Gunjo Chongroju and Shri Khonju Chongroju is one and the same person.

AFFIDAVIT FOR NAME CORRECTION

In pursuance to declaration made on 16/4/2025 sworn in before Additional District Magistrate, Nafra, District-Bichom, Arunachal Pradesh as per written request made by Shri. Talo Siongju, S/O Lt. Kesang Miji Siongju resident of village Dibbin, Circle- Sirilang, P.O/P.S.-Nafra, District-Bichom (A.P) 790001 to change his name from Shri. Talo Siongju to Shri. Talo Miji Siongju. His name has been changed and will be known and distinguished hereafter as Shri Talo Miji Siongju for all purposes. Shri Talo Miji Siongju and Shri Talo Siongju is one and the same person.

Sensex rallies for 3rd day to regain 77,000-mark; Nifty climbs 108.65 points

MUMBAI, April 16: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher for the third straight day on Wednesday following buying in banking stocks and fresh foreign fund inflows as retail inflation slipping to near six-year lows raised hopes of further rate cuts.

Defying a weak global market trend, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 309.40 points or 0.40 per cent to settle at a two-week high of 77,044.29 in a volatile session. After a weak start, the index moved between gains and losses during the session. It hit a high of 77,110.23 and a low of 76,543.77, gyrating 566.46 points.

The NSE Nifty rallied 108.65 points or 0.47 per cent to 23,437.20.

Positive macro data and forecast of normal monsoon boosted investor sentiment, analysts said.

IndusInd Bank rose the most by 7.12 per cent among Sensex shares. The bank stated that external agency PwC has assessed a negative impact of ₹1,979 crore on the bank's networth due to accounting lapses in the derivatives portfolio.

Axis Bank jumped 4.26 per cent while Adani Ports rose by 1.81 per cent. Asian Paints, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India and ITC were among the gainers.

Maruti was the biggest loser, falling by 1.51 per cent. Infosys, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, NTPC and Bajaj Finance were

among the laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers after days of selling as they bought equities worth ₹6,065.78 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

"Globally, markets are undergoing fresh consolidation as tariff tensions intensify... Amidst global weakness, the Indian market exhibited a mild positive sentiment in anticipation that the trade fight between the US & China will not harm but benefit India, and March's CPI inflation which is at a nearly 6-year low is indicative of further rate cuts in the near future," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Domestically, the Q4 FY25 earnings season has started on a weak note. Overall expectations remain subdued, suggesting potential profit booking at higher levels, Nair added.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.91 per cent and midcap index rallied 0.62 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, oil & gas climbed the most by 1.78 per cent, followed by bankex (1.45 per cent), energy (1.25 per cent), telecommunication (1.08 per cent), financial services (1.07 per cent) and services (0.73 per cent).

IT, auto, capital goods and BSE Focused IT were the laggards.

As many as 2,636 stocks advanced while 1,309 declined and 133 remained unchanged on the

Gold soars ₹ 1,650 to scale fresh peak of ₹ 98,100 per 10 g; silver jumps ₹ 1,900

NEW DELHI, April 16: Gold prices soared by ₹ 1,650 to hit an all-time high of ₹ 98,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a global rush for the safe-haven asset triggered by an escalated trade war between the US and China.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had finished at ₹ 96,450 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Gold prices logged the highest single-day gain since April 11 when the spot rates skyrocketed by ₹ 6,250 per 10 grams -- the record steepest single day rise so far -- in the local markets.

So far this year, the yellow metal prices have risen by ₹ 18,710 or 23.56 per cent. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also appreciated by ₹ 1,650 to hit a fresh peak of ₹ 97,650 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹ 96,000 per 10 grams. Silver prices also climbed by ₹ 1,900 to ₹ 99,400 per kg. The white metal had closed at ₹ 97,500 per kg on Tuesday.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, gold futures for June delivery surged by ₹ 1,984 or 2.12 per cent to touch a record high of ₹ 95,435 per 10 grams.

"Gold showed a solid rally once again...as MCX gold hit landmark levels of ₹ 95,000, while Comex gold surpassed USD 3,300, reflecting strong safe-haven demand," Jaateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

The rally was driven by geopolitical uncertainty and the absence of any constructive progress in tariff negotiations between the US



and China. Until there is a concrete update indicating de-escalation, gold is likely to remain elevated, Trivedi added.

On the global front, spot gold rose to touch a record high of USD 3,318 per ounce. Later, it pared some gains to trade at USD 3,299.99 per ounce. "Gold surged to a record high, driven by growing trade war concerns after the US government tightened export rules to China," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP-Commodity Research, Kotak Securities, said. President Donald Trump has announced an investigation into whether tariffs are needed on critical minerals, further fuelling market anxiety. On Wednesday, the US administration further raised tariffs on most goods from China to 245 per cent.

According to Abans Financial Services' Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta, gold prices hit record highs as the US dollar index slipped below the 100-mark, nearing three-year lows.

He said the upswing in gold is fuelled by rising expectations of a potential interest rate cut, with mar-

BSE.

"Participants responded positively to favourable cues, including the update on a normal monsoon, further easing of retail inflation, and, importantly, the absence of any negative surprises from global markets. Notably, the sustained strength in banking and financial stocks, along with rotational buying in other sectoral heavyweights, played a significant role in driving the momentum," Ajit Mishra -- SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

In the border market, shares of Gensol Engineering tumbled 5 per cent to hit the lower circuit limit after Sebi barred the firm and its promoters -- Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi -- from securities markets till further orders in a fund diversion and governance lapses case.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower. Shanghai SSE Composite index ended higher. European markets were quoting lower. US markets ended in the negative territory on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 0.91 per cent to USD 65.22 a barrel.

Rallying for the second straight session on Tuesday, the Sensex jumped 1,577.63 points or 2.10 per cent to settle at 76,734.89. The Nifty surged 500 points or 2.19 per cent to 23,328.55. (PTI)

Kets closely watching US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's speech to come later in the day. Experts said the Powell's commentary would provide more clues on the interest rate path, which will play a key role in influencing the US dollar price dynamics.

"As the Federal Reserve navigates the twin challenges of supporting economic growth while managing tariff-driven inflation, the current macro environment continues to offer strong support for gold. "Adding to the bullish momentum, major banks remain positive on gold's outlook, citing continued inflows into gold-backed ETFs and sustained central bank buying," Mehta said.

Spot silver in the Asian market hours rose nearly 2 per cent to USD 32.86 per ounce. Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said the market participants are now looking for macroeconomic data, including US retail sales and industrial production for further insights on the US Federal Reserve's interest rate cycle. (PTI)

CM Himanta Biswa Sarma urges Gandhis to face the law as BJP slams Congress protests over National Herald case

Cong protests against ED chargesheet in National Herald case condemnable: BJP

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 16: The Assam unit of the BJP and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the Congress party over its nationwide protests against the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) chargesheet in the National Herald case, calling the demonstrations "condemnable" and a diversion from serious corruption allegations involving Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia said that the Congress's reaction to the ED's chargesheet "goes against the spirit of a stable society" and reflects an unwillingness to face legal scrutiny.

"The National Herald case is proceeding legally. Both Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, despite not being jailed, remain under legal examination," Saikia said.

He alleged that for the past four years, the Gandhis had failed to provide satisfactory answers to the investigating agencies.

"Protest is a democratic right, but no one has the right to loot the



nation's land and capital," he added.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, echoing similar sentiments at a press interaction in Guwahati, alleged that the Gandhi family had fraudulently taken over a non-profit company and minted money, depriving even their own party workers of resources.

"There was an initial capital of ₹50 lakh. After the company was

taken over by the Gandhi family, its worth skyrocketed to ₹2,000 crore. And this in a Section 8 company, where profit-making is legally prohibited," Sarma said.

Referring to Rahul Gandhi's frequent criticisms of industrialists like Adani and Ambani, Sarma retorted, "My question is, from where did Rahul Gandhi learn the business trick to convert ₹50 lakh into ₹2,000 crore? If he teaches me

that, I can reverse the fate of Assam."

According to the ED's chargesheet filed before a special court, Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, along with others, have been accused of laundering ₹988 crore in the National Herald case. The case stems from a 2012 complaint by Subramanian Swamy and has since been cleared for investigation by both the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court.

Saikia explained that the Congress had granted a ₹90 crore loan to Associated Journals Ltd. (AJL), the original publisher of National Herald. When AJL failed to repay it, a company called Young Indian — where Sonia and Rahul Gandhi each held 38% stakes — acquired the assets.

"These included prime real estate across cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bhopal, Lucknow, and Patna," Saikia alleged, adding that Young Indian has failed to show any visible charitable work.

"The Congress wants people to believe that Young Indian is a non-profit set (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP's Topin Ete rejects Congress' vendetta claims in National Herald case

HT Bureau
ITANAGAR, April 16: State BJP spokesperson and MLA Topin Ete on Tuesday strongly refuted allegations of political vendetta made by the Congress party following the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) chargesheet against senior Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case.

Addressing the media at the BJP headquarters in Itanagar, Ete asserted that the investigation is a legal process overseen by the courts, and not politically driven.

"The BJP has no role in this legal process — the matter is sub judice

and the ED is acting on the basis of court directives," he said, quoting from an official party statement.

Ete criticised the Congress party's nationwide protests over the ED action, calling them an attempt to "politicise a legal matter and divert public attention from serious financial irregularities."

He maintained that the charges were the result of a long-standing judicial process and not a recent political development.

"The National Herald case was initiated over a decade ago based on a complaint filed by Subramanian Swamy in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Drugs worth ₹ 5 crore seized, three held

GUWAHATI, April 16: In a major drug haul, Yaba tablets valued at ₹ 5 crore were seized in Assam's Sribhum district and three peddlers arrested, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday.

"Dealing with the drug nexus. Last evening, @sribhumipolice conducted an anti-narcotics operation in Baliabazar where a vehicle was intercepted and 16,000 YABA tablets were seized," Sarma said in a post on X.

During the operation, three drug peddlers were also apprehended, he added. A senior official said that the total value (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Mizoram delegation to leave for Assam on April 24 for official-level boundary talks



AIZAWL, April 16: A seven-member Mizoram delegation will leave for Guwahati on April 24 to engage in official-level discussions with Assam to resolve the long-standing boundary dispute between the two northeastern states, a senior official said on Wednesday.

The delegation will be headed by Home Secretary Vanlalmaria, while the Assam team is likely to be led by a principal secretary or secretary of the neighbouring state's

Border Protection and Development Department, he said.

The meeting is scheduled to be held in Guwahati on April 25.

The official said the meeting will focus on preparing and finalising the groundwork and modalities for the next round of ministerial-level talks.

It will also deal with technicalities related to the border issue, he said. The last and fourth round of ministerial-level talks was held in

Aizawl on August 9 last year.

In the meeting, which was attended by Mizoram Home Minister K Sapdanga and Assam's Border Protection and Development Minister Atul Bora, the delegations agreed to continue to observe conditions agreed in the previous parleys, including maintaining peace along the interstate border.

The two states had also agreed to hold the next round of ministerial-level meeting in Guwahati before March 31 this year, which, however, did not happen.

Meanwhile, Sapdanga on Wednesday chaired a meeting of the Mizoram boundary committee ahead of forthcoming official-level talks.

It reviewed necessary documents to be tabled during the April 25 talks. Sapdanga said the state government's top priority is to ensure that Mizoram's border is secure.

He also said "massive efforts" are underway to ensure that Mizoram does not lose its territory. Three Mizoram (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GMCH to become one of India's largest hospitals, says CM Sarma

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has announced that the Assam government is taking comprehensive steps to transform Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) into one of the largest and most advanced hospitals in the country.

The statement was made during a site visit and review of major healthcare infrastructure projects on the second day of the Assamese New Year, according to an official statement.

Reviewing the ongoing construction of the upcoming Pragyoitshpur Medical College and Hospital and the 800-bed Mother and Child Care Hospital on the GMCH campus, the chief minister emphasised the state's commitment to expanding and modernising healthcare facilities.

"We are committed to transforming GMCH into one of the



country's largest and best-equipped hospitals, with state-of-the-art infrastructure and treatment facilities," Sarma said during the inspection.

The 800-bed Mother and Child Care Hospital, currently under construction within the GMCH premises, is scheduled for completion by October this year. Sarma stated

that the hospital will offer advanced paediatric and maternal care, and will also house the GMCH Principal's office once operational.

Additionally, key super-specialty services such as neurology, cardiology, and kidney transplant units will be shifted to this new hospital. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SC proposes to stay key provisions of Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025

NEW DELHI, April 16: In a significant development, the Supreme Court on Wednesday proposed to stay certain key provisions of the contentious Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, including the power to denotify properties declared as waqf by courts and inclusion of non-Muslims in central Waqf councils and boards.

The top court proposed to pass the order, which was opposed by the Centre as it sought a detailed hearing before any such interim order.

The hearing relating to 72 petitions against the constitutionality of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 took place before a bench of Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V

Viswanathan.

The bench, which will continue with the hearing on Thursday, was miffed over the inclusion of non-Muslims in the central waqf councils and boards and asked the Centre whether it was willing to include Muslims in Hindu religious trusts.

After hearing solicitor general Tushar Mehta for the Centre and senior lawyers including Kapil Sibal, Rajeev Dhavan, Abhishek Singhvi, C U Singh for Muslim bodies and individual petitioners, the CJJ proposed to issue the notice and to pass an interim order, saying it will "balance the equities".

Observing some provisions could have "grave ramifications", particularly those that potentially

undermine judicially recognised waqf properties, the CJJ proposed the order.

"The properties declared as waqfs by the courts should not be de-notified, whether they are by waqf-by-wser or waqf by deed while the court is hearing the challenge to the Waqf Amendment Act 2025," the CJJ proposed.

The bench also hinted to stay a provision of the amended law, which says a waqf property will not be treated as waqf during the inquiry of the collector to decide if the property is a government land.

"All members of waqf boards and the central waqf council must be Muslims, except the ex-officio members," the CJJ said. The bench took note (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM Sarma to attend Karbi Indigenous Faith meet ₹100 cr projects to be inaugurated

HT Correspondent
KHERONI, April 16: In a significant development ahead of the 2nd Karbi Aron Barim Chingrum Amei, Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), conducted a detailed review of the ongoing preparations on Monday night.

The high-profile event, a major congregation of Karbi indigenous faith practitioners, will be held at the Karbi People's Hall in Taralanso, Diphu.

Meticulous arrangements, including the construction of a grand pandal and other essential infrastructure, are currently underway

to ensure the successful hosting of the event.

The two-day congregation is expected to draw nearly two lakh participants from Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, Silchar, Sonitpur, and other regions.

A major highlight of the event will be the presence of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who is scheduled to attend the congregation over two days, April 17 and 18. His visit aims to boost ongoing efforts in regional development, cultural preservation, and peacebuilding in Karbi Anglong.

On April 17, the Chief Minister will convene (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Seven held for clashing with police during anti-Waqf Act protest in Silchar

SILCHAR, April 16: Seven people have been arrested in connection with protests against the Waqf (Amendment) Act leading to a clash between agitators and police in Assam's Cachar district, an officer said on Wednesday.

The protest march was taken out on Sunday without permission from Berenga Village towards Silchar town and the agitators threw stones at the police with the latter resorting to a mild lathi charge, Superintendent of Police Numal Mahatta said.

Prohibitory orders were clamped in the district to prevent further outbreak of violence, Mahatta told reporters here.

A case was registered in Silchar police station and an operation was conducted in Bagadahar and Kashipur area on Tuesday leading to the arrest of seven people, he said.

A local court remanded the arrested people to judicial custody. Mahatta said that investigations were on and there was a possibility of more arrests being made in near future.

Prohibitory orders in the district will continue to be in force to prevent any violence and anyone attempting to take the law into their hands will not be tolerated, the SP said.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said no protest against the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 will be allowed in the state and suggested that the agitators go to the Supreme Court for the redressal of their grievances.

After its enactment earlier this month, several individuals and groups have expressed reservations about the legislation, which seeks to improve the functioning of Waqf properties, address complexities, ensure transparency and introduce technology-driven management. (PTI)

US Vice President Vance, Second Lady Usha to meet PM Modi next week

NEW DELHI, April 16: US Vice President JD Vance and his wife Usha, the first Indian-American Second Lady, are set to visit India early next week that will see him hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The US vice president will travel to Italy this week and then to India, a spokesperson of Vance told CBS News.

The Vancses are expected to bring their three young children -- Ewan, Vivek, and Mirabel -- to India and the family is expected to travel to Jaipur and Agra besides visiting New Delhi.

The US vice president is travelling to India against the backdrop of Trump's policy on tariffs that triggered massive trade disruptions and fears of a global economic recession.

Days after his reciprocal tariff kicked in this month, Trump announced a 90-day pause on it on

all countries, except China as countries around the world wilted under the impact of the seismic action.

US National Security Adviser Michael Waltz had also planned to visit India early next week but the trip has been postponed, people familiar with the matter said.

Vance's visit is likely to be more of a private trip though it will have official components, the people cited above said.

It is learnt that the US Vice President will hold talks with Prime Minister Modi on April 21 which will cover various aspects of India-US ties including the issue of tariff and the ongoing negotiations between the two sides for a bilateral trade agreement.

CBS News said Vance is undertaking a seven-day visit to Italy and India that will begin Thursday.

It said Vance will travel to Rome to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Food price volatility will remain a risk and complex debt dynamics will continue to burden economies'

India to grow by 6.5% in 2025, maintain status as fastest-growing major economy: UN report

UNITED NATIONS, April 16: India is expected to grow by 6.5 per cent in 2025 on the back of continued robust public spending and ongoing monetary easing, even as the world economy is on a recessionary trajectory, driven by escalating trade tensions and persistent uncertainty, a UN report said.

The UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in its new report, "Trade and Development Foresights 2025 - Under pressure: Uncertainty reshapes global economic prospects", said that global growth is projected to slow to 2.3 per cent in 2025, placing the world economy on a recessionary path.

The report released on Wednesday cites mounting threats, including trade policy shocks, financial



volatility and a surge in uncertainty that risk derailing the global outlook.

India is projected to grow by 6.5 per cent in 2025, slightly lower than the 6.9 per cent growth of 2024 but

still maintaining its status as the fastest-growing major economy, the report said.

UNCTAD "estimates that India will grow by 6.5 per cent in 2025 on the back of continued robust public

spending and ongoing monetary easing. The decision of the central bank to cut the interest rate by 25 basis points for the first time in five years in early February will support household consumption as well as provide a boost to private investment plans," it said.

UNCTAD projects that the South Asia region will expand by 5.6 per cent in 2025, as declining inflation opens the way for monetary loosening across most of the region.

"Nevertheless, food price volatility will remain a risk and complex debt dynamics will continue to burden economies such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka," it added.

The report said that the world economy is on a recessionary trajectory, driven (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen. — Michael Jordan

Trump's 90-day pause?

Donald Trump's 90-day tariff reprieve spells 90 days of geopolitical turbulence, US bullying and the threat of war. All three have been constant features of the period of US "unipolar" power, especially since the beginning of what even US presidents have termed the "forever wars." But Trump's aggression is global. That is not changed by the 90-day pause on tariffs (above a 10 per cent base line) on everyone except China, on whose products tariffs are now being hiked well above 100 per cent. Yes, it identifies China as his main target. Yes, it is an affronted response to the one big country which has met his threats with defiance. But the escalation against China and suspension — not removal — of threatened tariffs elsewhere are part of the same strategy. Trump is trying to browbeat the world into siding with the United States against China in a conflict the US, not China, has decided on. Successive US governments have slapped sanctions (which, not being UN-authorised, have no international legal standing) on Chinese products. But the universal tariff threat ratchets up the pressure. Align with our demands, the US says, or we have already identified the level of economic pain we are going to inflict on you. Those demands are intended to force all markets open to whatever the US wants. Economist Michael Roberts points to the catch-all list of supposedly unfair practices the US objects to, including "currency manipulation, 'opaque' licensing, 'discriminatory' product standards, 'burdensome' customs procedures, data localisation and so-called 'lawfare' of taxes and regulation."

This is the extraterritorial imposition of US power writ large. Other countries may not decide their own policies on procurement, the quality or safety of goods, tariffs (!), protecting their citizens' data from US acquisition, or how to tax and regulate US companies operating on their territory. It is outrageous. The US has interfered in other countries' external affairs for decades. It has always been ready to inflict economic suffering to achieve political subordination — as the economic war on Venezuela and the crippling six-decade illegal blockade of Cuba show. But now, despairing of its ability to compete with its "peer competitor" China without brute force, it threatens these policies on everyone at once. Trump has already backed up economic with military threats. His bid for control of the Panama Canal, effectively forcing a Hong Kong-based company there to sell infrastructure to a US-based one, was accompanied by such threats.

Whether Trump's strategy can work is unclear. China is the biggest trading partner of a majority of countries: falling in with Trump carries heavy economic penalties as well. Many US manufacturing firms themselves depend on supply chains including China, and, as analyst Malcom Kyeune observes, the US has shown none of the joined-up thinking China does in providing assistance to industries affected by foreign trade disruption. What is clear is that it will be painful and carries the threat of war — quite possibly world war, if the US deploys its military to cut Chinese supply lines or seize its assets.

Hezbollah should wake up to the new reality of military and economic weakness

US Deputy Envoy to the Middle East Morgan Ortagus, recently visited Lebanon. During an interview with the LBCI news outlet, Ortagus stressed the importance of disarming Hezbollah. This statement from a senior US diplomat has sparked a new debate about the disarmament of Hezbollah, which has been demanded for a long time. In January this year, the Lebanese parliament elected a new president, former army chief Joseph Aoun.

The new President in his inaugural speech, clearly said that he wanted the state to have the monopoly of force. He wanted the state to be the one with the weapons. It should be remembered that Hezbollah was the only Lebanese armed group that refused to surrender its weapons following a 1975-1990 civil war, arguing that its arms were necessary to fight against occupying Israeli troops in south Lebanon. The international community, through the UN Security Council, has demanded multiple times that Hezbollah should disarm. Instead, Hezbollah has continually ignored these demands. They ignored UN Resolution 1701, which called for a zone free of armed personnel besides the army of Lebanon. They ignored UN Resolution 1559 and the Lebanese Taif Agreement, which ended the Lebanese Civil War and called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. Hezbollah in the past has clearly shown it has no intention of ever laying down its arms.

But now the time has changed, with the group weakened militarily and economically, critics see this as a unique opportunity to disarm it. More than a year of fighting with Israel has left the Iran-backed Shia group, once renowned as the world's strongest non-state actor, reeling. The group's near-total dominance of the Lebanese state for the past two decades has been weakened by the losses it has suffered in the past year of war.

Most of Hezbollah's senior leadership was killed in the fighting, along with

thousands of its fighters, and many of its weapon caches were destroyed. Hezbollah has also lost control of key assets such as the Beirut airport and smuggling routes along the Syrian border.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Manish Rai

der, both historically key for its cash flow. They no longer have a territorial link between Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, which was crucial for getting arms supplies from Iran. This also hinders their logistics about obtaining weapons, which were stored in Syrian underground tunnels. Moreover, the main backer of Hezbollah, the Iranians, are themselves under immense pressure from the United States right now, and they are not in a position to provide any major assistance to Hezbollah.

As a condition of the ceasefire with Israel, which was agreed in November last year, Hezbollah has withdrawn its weaponry from its historical heartland south of the Litani River, about 18 miles from the Israeli border. The Lebanese army has been active in enforcing the terms of the ceasefire deal. It has been dismantling military assets belonging to the group in south Lebanon and conducting raids in the southern suburbs of Beirut, something unthinkable just six months earlier.

Hezbollah is assessing the ground realities, that's why the group is in "wait and see mode", as it recovers from the war and adjusts to a new political reality in Lebanon and the wider region. Many analysts believe that at present, Hezbollah

is internally split into two factions. One faction acknowledges the group's defeat by Israel and is willing to turn their weapons over and integrate into Lebanon as a political party. On the

other hand, another faction believes Hezbollah's sole legitimacy lies in fighting Israel, and that if they stop doing so, they have no right to exist as a movement. But this group, which has been running a state within a state for decades, must realise that it can no longer unilaterally drag Lebanon into foreign conflicts and can't blackmail the Lebanese state through its large arsenal. But any effort to disarm Hezbollah forcefully can prompt a new conflict in Lebanon.

To avoid this kind of situation, the Lebanese top leadership must convince Hezbollah to give up arms and solely be a political force. Any negotiations about Hezbollah's disarmament are likely to be difficult and long. The central objective should be convincing Hezbollah that disarmament need not amount to the party's complete demise. One of the options that can be put forward for Hezbollah's consideration is that its arsenal, believed to still include long-range missiles, be put under the control of the state, while its fighters, estimated to be several thousand, could be integrated into the Lebanese army. Alternatively, a new defence strategy can also be negotiated under which Hezbollah fighters would join a paramilitary force within the Lebanese Army.

Hezbollah will remain an important player in Lebanese politics, but not a hegemon. The old order marked by Iranian influence and Shia ascendancy has crumbled. Lebanon now stands at a crossroads: the chance to reclaim sovereignty and pluralistic politics or the risk of another descent into fragmentation and chaos. Lebanon can sink further into chaos or use Hezbollah's defeat as a catalyst for change. Hezbollah's disarmament can also open doors for long-overdue political and economic reforms in Lebanon. (IPA Service)

Trump-Barack Obama spat on Harvard funding has caught global attention



By: Sushil Kutty

The President Donald Trump is going after Harvard University with a vengeance after Harvard chose to reject Trump's "reforms". In the process, Harvard is losing loads of dollars but is also drawing admiration and encouragement from Trump's bete noire, former President Barack Hussein Obama. Trump and Obama are always daggers drawn and share a mutual dislike spanning several presidential terms. It started with Trump questioning Obama's 'birth' in Obama's first term, also the legitimacy of his presidency, and Obama cracking jokes at Trump at a White House dinner. Barack Obama didn't forget the dogged stalking. First, when Obama was President and then when Trump became POTUS. Came April 2011 and President Obama was doing the roasting and private citizen Donald Trump smarting under the roasting. People at Trump's dinner table at the White House Correspondents' Dinner said it was then and there that Trump decided he would be POTUS!

Blame it on Obama, who to this day hasn't forgotten the 'Birther Movement' led against him by Trump, the 'You're Fired' star of 'The Apprentice', the hit reality show. Real-estate tycoon and wrestling enthusiast Donald Trump questioned Obama's birthplace, Obama's nationality; his very identity. Obama extracted revenge by cracking jokes at the expense of Trump, jokes which made dinner tables rock on their legs!

Everybody laughed except Donald Trump. In 2015, Trump "came down the elevator" and Trump beat Hillary Clinton for the big Prize. Fifteen years on, Obama got another chance to dig Trump into the ground. This time, after the failed attempt to derail Trump's 2024 Presidential run and Kamala Harris was Obama's choice for US President.

It didn't work out quite like how Obama wanted it to. Barack Obama rode roughshod over President Joe Biden's feelings. Biden could have been a tougher contestant. But then, Obama's vanity shone through and Donald Trump's 2024 win was a personal defeat for Barack Obama.

On April 14, 2025, Obama got yet another chance to get back at Trump when the President put Harvard University on notice and cut off its funds flow, \$2 billion in federal funds, for refusing to toe the Trump administration's line. President Trump asked the varsity to act on DEI and curb anti-Semitism in the campus. Harvard refused and Obama congratulated Harvard with a heartfelt post on 'X'.

Compared to President Trump, the ex-President is not only Left and Liberal, he is also a progressive. His shirt tails are properly tucked in. Obama said Monday that Harvard University has "set an example" by standing up to President Trump's dictat to "limit activism on campus." The University said it would not "bend to the government's demands" including changes to Harvard's admissions policies.

"Harvard has set an example for other higher-ed institutions - rejecting an unlawful and ham-handed attempt to stifle academic freedom, while taking concrete steps to make sure all students at Harvard can benefit from an environment of intellectual inquiry, rigorous debate and mutual respect. Let's hope other institutions follow suit," Obama posted on 'X'.

Obama took the battle home to President Trump and asked Harvard to take concrete steps to ensure all students of Harvard benefited, renewing his fight with Trump which it appears was only lying low for the right opportunity to present itself.

The feud apart, President Trump is not letting the dust of his disruptions settle down; his actions remain the focus at home and abroad, disrupting both humans and institutions. Try as much, people can't get a wrap on what this President of the United States is up to and what's the picture of the world he carries in his mind?

To reiterate, blame it on Barack Hussein Obama. Trump's path to the White House started from a White House dinner and ridicule at his expense. The story drifted to "revenge and redemption" and Obama doesn't seem to have learned anything. He should have left Trump to whatever was on the menu on that night in April 2011!

A reality TV star and real estate mogul couldn't have been in a position to harassing Harvard if Obama hadn't underestimated Trump. Now, it is up to Harvard and other Ivy League institutions of learning to pick up the pieces and start life afresh, short on dollars if not on spirit.

Last, but not the least, ex-President Barack Hussein Obama should get off his moral high horse and stop prodding President Trump, and consider Trump his equal, which is what 'DEI' - diversity, equity and inclusion - is supposed to all about. Also, very presidential! (IPA Service)

Spain's ruling govt partner Leftwing Sumar facing serious credibility crisis

By: Eoghan Gilmartin

Spain's left-wing Sumar held its second national conference on March 29-30, with its future already in doubt. In two recent polls, the junior partner in the country's coalition government had lost over half its support since the 2023 general election (down from 12.3 percent to around 6). Even more worryingly, Público calculates that this would mean Sumar keeping only one-third of its seats — making it hard to see how one of Europe's few broad-left governments could secure reelection.

The speed of Sumar's unravelling is staggering, with Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Diaz's project to reorganize the radical left imploding after its initial solid election result in 2023. This collapse can partially be explained by internal contradictions. Sumar's capacity to operate as a broad-left unity platform, intended to bring together scattered forces, was undermined from the start by factional warfare between Diaz and Podemos, the previously hegemonic force on the Spanish left.

Much of the political capital Diaz accumulated as a pro-worker labour minister has been squandered over the last two years on a high-stakes standoff with Podemos's current leadership. In particular, her decision not to offer either Podemos' Ione Belarra or Irene Montero a ministerial role in the coalition government's second term gave their party the excuse it had been seeking to break with Sumar, just months after running under its banner in the 2023 election.

After this demoralizing split and a series of heavy losses in regional and European elections, Sumar suffered a body blow last October when a sexual misconduct scandal erupted around its key strategist Inigo Errejón. His resignation and acknowledgement of abusive behaviour toward female activists saw Sumar struggle to answer questions about what and when it had known about the allegations. As a subsequent allegation of rape emerged (which Errejón denies), the Spanish right went on the attack, decrying the Left's hypocritical moralizing around feminism. Podemos saw an opportunity to further undermine Diaz's standing.

Yet the Errejón case was also the first time since the general election that a news story involving Sumar had really captured national attention. As the junior partner in a ruling coalition now without a parliamentary majority, it has struggled to maintain relevance across over eighteen months of institutional deadlock. This is in sharp contrast to the radical left's experience in Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's first coalition government from 2020 to 2023. Operating under the previous Unidas Podemos electoral alliance, it had forced targeted but substantial concessions from Sánchez's center-left Partido Socialista (PSOE) — ranging from measures tackling the cost-of-living crisis and a strengthening of labour laws to a raft of feminist legislation.

But now faced with a far worse balance of forces in parliament, the four new Sumar ministers Diaz brought into the cabinet have remained marginal figures, whose limited briefs have not provided them with the means to intervene in the political agenda over the last eighteen months. This is particularly devastating since Diaz's leadership profile is premised on delivering in office

— and her reputation for securing progressive policy gains. No longer able to point to its institutional influence, and lacking extra-parliamentary structures of its own or even a strong media presence, Sumar has faded into the background.

This, in turn, points to the narrow basis around which Diaz had sought to reorganize the Spanish left from mid-2022 onward. Drawing on the coalition government's experience managing the pandemic as well as her legislative achievements strengthening workers' rights, Sumar looked to broaden the Left's electoral appeal by presenting itself as a credible party of government — one capable of delivering concrete policy advances. In this respect, its profile chimed with the technocratic spirit of the early 2020s. This was a moment when Bidenomics and the European Union's COVID-19 rescue fund appeared to open up the possibility of a new progressive state interventionism and when — very briefly — far-right populism was on the retreat.

As Sumar was rolled out across a series of public events in late 2022 and early 2023, Diaz struck a note of pragmatic reformism. Pointing to the coalition's successful cap on energy prices and her reform cracking down on bogus self-employment in the gig economy, she insisted that through institutional negotiation and social partnership a new social contract for the twenty-first century could be achieved that would go beyond neoliberalism. Missing, however, was any role for grassroots organizing or a clear anti-elite discourse — with Diaz's more managerial profile and her platform's softer messaging striking a distinct note to Podemos's combative left populism.

Podemos founder Pablo Iglesias had in fact also failed to effectively combine his ministerial role with an oppositional discourse during his eighteen months in the cabinet, engaging in highly charged controversies around lawfare and media bias that alienated voters at the height of the pandemic. By contrast, Diaz became the highest-rated political leader in Spain after successfully overseeing the Spanish state's COVID-19 furlough scheme and pushing through repeated increases in the minimum wage. Quickly becoming a household name on the back of these measures, she was able to appeal to a substantive part of PSOE's vote despite being a member of the Spanish Communist Party and a Unidas Podemos minister. As Iglesias resigned and named Diaz deputy prime minister in 2021, many on the Spanish left believed her candidacy could see the parliamentary left expand its profile and weight in cabinet.

Reorganizing the Left to exploit this window of opportunity was core to Sumar's tactical hypothesis. Yet ultimately Diaz and her inner circle were not able to build on this initial promise, failing to expand out from her popularity as a pandemic-era minister to construct a sustainable electoral brand or organization. Like Podemos before it, Sumar was built as a lean, top-down platform, but one which unlike its predecessor did not have its origins in a movement wave beyond the institutions but rather was built from office. This has further reinforced the sense that it is defined more by its promise of "effective" progressive governance than by any clear social or political identity.

Initially, Sumar struck a labourist line, playing up Diaz's links to trade unionism, before pivoting to a pop-infused green discourse during the 2023 snap election and then slowly moving back to

ward a certain social and labourist message in recent months, after Errejón's exit. But these discursive shifts occurred without it ever articulating a broader political project that went beyond its participation in government.

Even in the 2023 general election campaign, the first time Sumar's machine was put into action, the platform struggled to cut through, with its policy-focused campaign lacking a clear narrative and coming across as overly technical to many voters. Though Diaz had made her name delivering bread-and-butter labour and welfare reforms, her green-aligned campaign advisers changed tack and instead focused Sumar's campaign on innovative policies linked to free time, equality of opportunity, and mental health. In part, this was a means to distinguish Sumar from Sánchez's pitch for social democratic stability, but proposals such as his Thomas Piketty-inspired universal inheritance scheme (under which every eighteen-year-old in Spain would receive €20,000 to "kick-start a life project") failed to engage the Left's base — with the young academics and professional consultants staffing the campaign unable to sell their policies.

Diaz's strong performance in the final stretch of the campaign, particularly in the leaders' debate, was enough to repeat the result obtained by the Unidas Podemos alliance in 2019 but not to win over PSOE voters in the earlier-predicted numbers. Indeed, amid a global reactionary wave, Sánchez bucked the wider trend of incumbents being punished over the cost-of-living crisis, not least because of the Spanish government's more robust protection of working people's living standards — which pressure from the Left had been key in securing.

Relief at avoiding a hard-right Partido Popular-Vox government was soon tempered, however, by the weakness of the second coalition's numbers in parliament — with the administration now depending on the support of the center-right Catalan-nationalist Junts to have a majority to pass legislation. Over the last eighteen months, this pro-independence party has used its effective veto to stall most of the government's agenda, including blocking the coalition from passing any government budget since the election. At the same time, the limits of the first coalition's reform agenda have also become apparent, particularly in terms of its toothless housing law — with Spain's largest cities facing rent hikes of 10-14 percent in 2024.

Ultimately, without the Left's previous institutional momentum and Diaz's ability to win high-profile policy concessions in the cabinet, Sumar has not been able to maintain a distinct political profile from PSOE over the last eighteen months. Junts has refused to support Diaz's star policy proposal for a reduction in the working week from 40 to 37.5 hours while it has also voted down measures such as the renewal of the windfall tax on electricity companies' profits and a vital reform that would have allowed for rent controls on short-term leases.

Political analyst Mario Rios doubts whether such measures alone could ever have sustained Sumar given the political direction of travel in post-pandemic Europe. "In the current political landscape, governance is necessary, but it is not the main tool for attracting voters and winning elections," he explains in relation to Sumar's po-

sitioning. "Today's politics is based on the confrontation of models, values, and worldviews," he continues. "In contrast, Sumar is based on the idea that voters simply want solutions to the problems they face. Focusing solely on policies like the minimum wage or the reduction of the working week without framing them as part of a broader vision can only lead to electoral defeat."

Yet Sumar's failure to flesh out its project and its lack of results in the cabinet cannot alone explain the collapse in Diaz's popularity among the Left's own electorate. Over the last eighteen months, she has gone from being the preferred choice for prime minister of two-thirds of Sumar's 2023 voters to that of just 23 percent. There are now also considerably more Sumar voters from the last election who would prefer Pedro Sánchez to lead the government than her. Though her broader approval ratings are still much stronger than those of Iglesias when he stood down, only 40.9 percent of voters now give her a pass mark or higher, compared to 54.9 percent two years ago.

In this respect, her declining numbers with her own base and the platform's disastrous European election results last year must also be seen in terms of Sumar's descent into a spiral of internal crises and scandals. The platform seemed to have hit rock bottom the night of the European elections last June as Diaz resigned as its leader after it had only won 4.6 percent of the vote and three seats. She later clarified she would stay on as deputy prime minister and remain the Left's figurehead in the government, but she would no longer lead the construction of a left-unity project. At that point, however, her authority was already shot. The Communist-led Izquierda Unida, which had been Sumar's most vocal backer only a year earlier, was now denouncing its "hyper leadership" structure and lack of internal democracy after it had been left without a seat in the European Parliament for the first time since its creation in 1986. "The time when Sumar set the agenda and other forces followed is over," Izquierda Unida coordinator Antonio Maíllo insisted. Then Errejón's resignation deprived the platform of its only other figure with national name recognition and opened up a firestorm of recriminations on the Left.

More broadly, however, the speed with which Sumar imploded has to be seen in terms of two factors relating to its internal development. First, it was constructed in opposition to Podemos. Second, reorganizing the Spanish left around such a personality-centered platform left it dependent on Diaz's continued popularity, with Sumar, like Podemos before it, skipping the hard work of on-the-ground organizing during its initial surge, when it still had momentum.

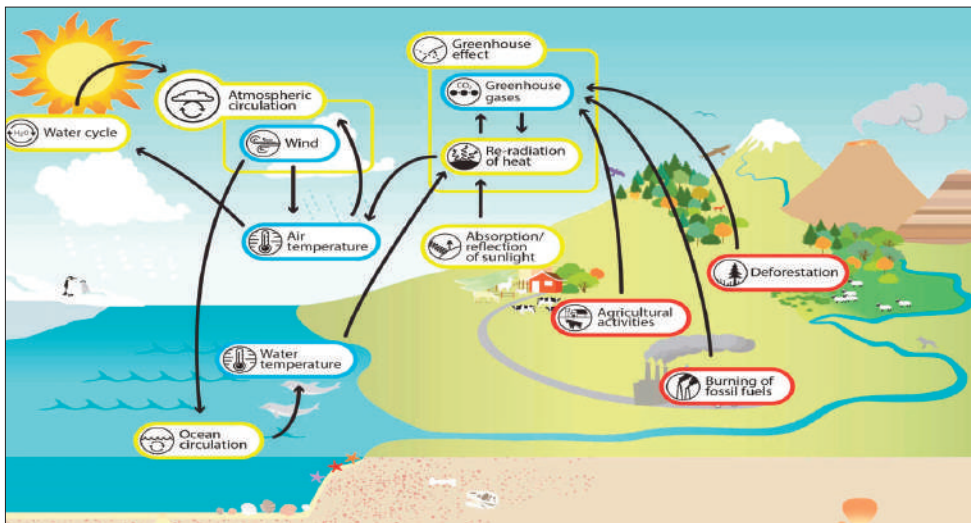
In reality, this is a familiar story on the Spanish left. A series of internally diverse left-wing projects have experienced initial electoral surges over the last decade — from Podemos at a national level and municipal platforms like Ahora Madrid and Zaragoza en Común to Diaz's previous En Marea vehicle in Galicia. But operating in an organizational void, most have very quickly come undone under external pressures and internal tensions. Any sustainable future project for Spain's left will need to transcend this "electoral war machine" model. It seems unlikely that Diaz will be leading it. (IPA Service)

The challenge is increasing temperature and changing atmospheric patterns

By: Priyanka Saurabh

An important factor controlling the Earth's climate is the amount of sea ice floating in the polar regions. However, due to changing atmospheric patterns and rising temperatures, this has declined to a record low of 15-76 million square kilometres. Global temperatures are rising, ocean currents are becoming turbulent, and extreme weather events are becoming worse as a result of this decline. Extreme weather events around the world are being affected by changes in the Earth's climate. The frequency and intensity of devastating wildfires, years-long droughts, heavy rainfall, severe flooding, record-breaking heat waves on land and at sea, and widespread flooding during storms are all increasing. Since the Industrial Revolution, human activities, particularly the burning of fossil fuels, have caused a rapid increase in the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases. Methane, carbon dioxide, and other gases act like a blanket, trapping heat and warming the Earth as their concentrations increase. As a result, the air and oceans on Earth become warmer. Ice on land melts, weather patterns change, and the water cycle is affected by this temperature rise, making extreme weather conditions worse. Climate change affects our society in many ways.

Droughts can affect human health and food production. Floods can damage infrastructure and ecosystems and spread disease. In addition to changing food availability and limiting worker productivity, human health problems caused by droughts, floods and other weather events also increase mortality. The physical infrastructure of our transportation and communication systems includes roads, bridges, ports, electric grids, broadband internet and other components. It is often designed to last for many years. Therefore, the infrastructure



in most communities was built without considering climate change. Current infrastructure may not be able to handle severe weather conditions such as wind, snow, flooding, heavy rain or temperature fluctuations. The impacts of these events can take many different forms. For example, higher temperatures cause indoor cooling needs, which can put pressure on the energy grid. Flooding caused by unexpectedly excessive rainfall that exceeds stormwater drainage capacity can close major routes, businesses and highways.

Coastal infrastructure, such as water supplies, roads, bridges and more, are at risk due to sea level rise. Since much of the population lives in coastal areas, millions of people will be affected by the risks. In addition, sea level rise can lead to coastal erosion and flooding due to high tides. Research suggests that some communities will reach or be at sea level by the year 2100. Now it will be up to them to decide what to do. During a process

called managed retreat, communities will likely move away from the shoreline and make changes to their infrastructure. Ocean heat transport is primarily responsible for the global decline in sea ice. When warm ocean currents enter the polar regions, sea ice melts faster at the base. Warmer water is brought into the Arctic by the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), which reduces the stability of the ice. These climate patterns affect oceanic and atmospheric conditions as well as the rate of ice formation and melting. The 2015-2016 El Niño event increased ocean temperatures and reduced Antarctica's sea ice to record lows. Large volcanic eruptions release aerosols, which have the potential to temporarily cool the atmosphere, but they can also be a contributing factor to warming oceans in the long term.

The 2022 Hunga Tonga eruption released water vapor into the stratosphere, potentially increasing the warming effect over time.

More powerful storms cause fragile sea ice to break up, making it more likely to melt and be affected by ocean currents. Storms in the Barents and Bering Seas will cause ice to break up in 2024, resulting in record lows of Arctic sea ice cover. Methane and carbon dioxide trap heat in the atmosphere, raising global temperatures and accelerating polar ice melt. Arctic sea ice has been declining at a rate of 12-20% per decade since 1981, due to the dramatic increase in carbon dioxide levels caused by the Industrial Revolution.

Ocean acidification and atmospheric temperature rise are caused by pollutants released from the burning of coal, oil, and gas. Arctic amplification is the process whereby the Arctic warms up to four times faster than the global average due to heat-absorbing emissions from industrial activities. When forests are destroyed, less carbon is absorbed and when cities grow, more heat is retained, which affects atmospheric circulation. Sea ice degradation and global warming are indirectly caused by deforestation in the Amazon, which reduces carbon absorption. Drilling and increasing marine activities in the Arctic region disrupt the sea ice ecosystem and generate pollution and heat, which contribute to local temperature rise. The rapid migratory activity in the Arctic region following the discovery of natural resources in the region has further reinforced this mechanism, resulting in greater loss of polar ice.

As sea ice on Earth decreases, oceans absorb more heat, which reduces albedo, or reflectivity, and warms even more. Climate change is accelerated by the Arctic's declining albedo effect, causing polar regions to warm twice as fast as the rest of the world. Freshwater released from melting ice reduces salinity and slows deep-ocean circulation, which has an impact on climate regulation. A weakening Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) is likely to alter weather patterns in the Indian Ocean region, Europe, and North America. Indirectly, melting sea ice speeds up the melting of land-based ice sheets, raising sea levels worldwide. When all the ice melts, the Greenland ice sheet will raise sea levels by about 23 feet. Temperature changes are increasing storms, droughts, and heat waves, affecting atmospheric circulation. The jet stream is affected by melting Arctic ice, leading to longer heat waves across North America and Europe. Melting sea ice disrupts food chains, endangering fisheries and marine life that depend on cold-water habitats. Entire ecosystems are affected, as krill populations in Antarctica decline and polar bears and seals lose their hunting grounds.

Climate action must be decisive to prevent dangerous declines in global sea ice. Ice loss can be reduced by strengthening global climate pledges such as the Polar Code, promoting the clean energy transition, and funding geoengineering initiatives. Adaptive policies and improved polar monitoring will increase climate resilience. A sustainable future depends on everyone's determination to reduce emissions and protect the planet's fragile cryosphere. Many communities lack preparation to deal with the threats of climate change. Scientists are researching how communities are affected by climate change now and in the future, and can suggest best practices. Investing in resilient infrastructure that can withstand future climate risks is important for communities. All members of our society, including teachers, risk communicators, emergency managers, and city planners, should receive environmental education about this. Through environmental education, anyone can learn how to prepare for climate change.

(The author is a Research Scholar in Political Science, Poet, freelance journalist and columnist)

Sustainable living and eco-friendly choices

By: Himaneshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Sustainable living is a lifestyle choice that prioritizes environmental conservation while meeting human needs in a balanced and responsible manner. It involves making conscious decisions that reduce our carbon footprint, minimize waste, and promote harmony with nature. As the effects of climate change and environmental degradation become more evident, adopting sustainable practices is no longer an option but a necessity. Eco-friendly choices, from daily habits to long-term commitments, play a crucial role in shaping a healthier planet for present and future generations.

One of the fundamental aspects of sustainable living is reducing reliance on non-renewable resources. Fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial waste contribute significantly to pollution and climate change. Choosing renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power can significantly cut down carbon emissions. Similarly, reducing energy consumption through simple actions like switching off unused lights, using energy-efficient appliances, and insulating homes can make a significant difference.

Water conservation is another critical element of sustainable living. Freshwater is a limited resource, and excessive use leads to depletion and environmental imbalances. Simple measures such as fixing leaks, using water-efficient fixtures, rainwater harvesting, and opting for drought-resistant plants in gardens help in reducing water wastage. Additionally, mindful consumption of products that require large amounts of water in their production, such as fast fashion and meat-based diets, can contribute to long-term conservation efforts.

Waste management is an essential component of an eco-friendly lifestyle. The global waste crisis, fueled by excessive consumerism and single-use plastics, has led to landfills overflowing with non-biodegradable materials. Practicing the three Rs—reduce, reuse, and recycle—helps mitigate the damage. Reducing unnecessary purchases, opting for durable products, and supporting brands with sustainable packaging reduce waste generation. Reusing items such as glass containers, cloth bags, and old furniture extends their lifespan and prevents unnecessary disposal. Recycling, when done correctly, ensures that materials like paper, plastic, and metal are repurposed instead of polluting the environment. Composting organic waste is another excellent way to reduce landfill waste

while enriching soil for agricultural use.

Sustainable living also extends to food choices. Industrial agriculture, excessive pesticide use, and food wastage contribute significantly to environmental problems. Adopting plant-based diets or reducing meat consumption can lower greenhouse gas emissions and conserve natural resources. Supporting local and organic farmers reduces the carbon footprint associated with transportation and chemical-intensive farming practices. Additionally, mindful eating habits, such as buying only what is needed and utilizing leftovers creatively, help in reducing food waste.

Transportation choices play a crucial role in eco-friendly living. The reliance on fossil fuel-based vehicles is one of the leading contributors to air pollution and climate change. Opting for public transportation, carpooling, cycling, or walking can significantly reduce emissions. The rise of electric vehicles and improved fuel efficiency in cars offers a promising solution to reducing environmental damage caused by transportation. Encouraging policies and infrastructure that support non-motorized transport and sustainable commuting options further enhance green living.

Sustainable fashion is another important consideration in the pursuit of an eco-friendly lifestyle. The fast fashion industry is notorious for excessive waste, unethical labor practices, and environmental harm. Choosing sustainable clothing brands, thrifting, repairing old clothes, and participating in clothing swaps are effective ways to counteract the negative impact of the fashion industry. Supporting brands that use organic, recycled, or upcycled materials promotes ethical consumerism.

Building and home designs also play a significant role in sustainable living. Green architecture emphasizes energy efficiency, natural ventilation, and eco-friendly materials to minimize environmental impact. Constructing homes with sustainable materials such as bamboo, reclaimed wood, and recycled metal reduces the demand for virgin resources. Additionally, integrating solar panels, rainwater harvesting systems, and green roofs enhances energy and water efficiency in residential and commercial buildings.

Community engagement is crucial in fostering a culture of sustainability. While individual actions are important, collective efforts amplify the impact of eco-friendly initiatives. Participating in local environmental programs, advocating for policies that protect natural resources, and educating others

about sustainability contribute to broader change. Schools, workplaces, and local governments play an essential role in promoting sustainable practices through policies, incentives, and awareness campaigns.

The psychological and social benefits of sustainable living are also noteworthy. Leading an eco-friendly lifestyle fosters a deeper connection with nature, reducing stress and promoting overall well-being. It encourages mindfulness and intentional living, where individuals focus on quality over quantity. Sustainable choices often lead to financial savings in the long run, as reducing waste, conserving energy, and choosing durable products lower overall expenses. Additionally, sustainable communities promote inclusivity and cooperation, strengthening social bonds and improving quality of life.

Sustainable living is not about making drastic changes overnight but about adopting small, consistent habits that collectively create a positive impact. Every choice, from the products we buy to the way we travel and consume resources, affects the environment. By embracing eco-friendly practices and advocating for sustainability in our communities, we can work towards a healthier planet. The responsibility of preserving the Earth lies with each individual, and through conscious decisions, a sustainable and harmonious future can be achieved. (The writer is the Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIG. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

Thar desert is greening, thanks to higher rainfall, excessive groundwater pumping

By: Shagun

The Thar Desert in India saw a striking 38 per cent rise in greening annually over the last two decades, driven by a significant increase in monsoon rainfall and agricultural expansion, a new study showed. It has shed light on how the landscape of the Great Indian Desert has changed, impacted by both climate change and anthropogenic pressures.

Groundwater resources have also contributed significantly to vegetation growth, the report Greening of the Thar Desert driven by climate change and human interventions highlighted. At the annual scale, groundwater accounted for 55 per cent contribution and precipitation for 45 per cent, it indicated. In fact, Thar was the only desert in the world with the highest concurrent increase in population, precipitation and vegetation during the last few decades, scientists from IIT Gandhinagar and Bay Area Environmental Research Institute, NASA Research Park in the US established.

Thar region, which hosts the world's highest population density for a desert, spans 200,000 square kilometres across northwestern India (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana) and southeastern Pakistan. The scientists analysed all the 14 major deserts across the globe during 2000-2020 and found that the region experienced the highest population growth.

Abnormal increase in rainfall
Defying the trend of expansion of arid areas, the desert experienced a 64 per cent rise in precipitation between 2001 and 2023 — increasing at a rate of 4.4 millimetres / year after 2000, the report showed. The annual rainfall increased across the Thar region, particularly in the northwest and primarily during the summer monsoon.

The analysis was based on data from Climate Hazards Group InfraRed Precipitation with Station (CHIRPS), which combines in-situ and satellite-based precipitation observations. Among the 14 major deserts, only four (Thar, Arabian, Negev and Eastern Gobi) showed a significant increase in precipitation and one (Namib) experienced a

substantial decline in precipitation during 2001-2023, the study found. The remaining nine major deserts did not experience a significant change in mean annual precipitation. The researchers termed the increased precipitation as "opposing effects of climate change". These changes contributed significantly in vegetation growth in the deserts — all four major deserts with a significant increase in precipitation also experienced a significant increase in vegetation during 2001-2023, according to the study.

Greening of desert
Thar's extensive greening was driven by large-scale monsoon changes coupled with groundwater pumping for irrigation purposes, government interventions in building irrigation infrastructure and power supply. "For instance, climate change can limit water availability, while human interventions associated with irrigation and groundwater pumping can sustain crops in water-limiting environments," the authors wrote.

During the summer monsoon season, precipitation accounted for 66 per cent of the greening, while groundwater contributed 34 per cent. However, in the non-monsoon season, groundwater was the major driver of vegetation growth (67 per cent). Annually, the contributions were more balanced, with groundwater accounting for 55 per cent and precipitation for 45 per cent. Comparing the seasonal cycle of mean monthly greening for the 2001-2010 and 2011-2020 periods, the team found that the region experienced a substantial increase in vegetation greenness during the summer monsoon (June-September) and non-monsoon (October-May) seasons.

Large-scale agri expansion drives groundwater depletion
The region experienced a significant agricultural expansion, with crop area increas-

ing by a major 74 per cent and irrigated area by 24 per cent during 1980-2015. Similarly, there was a significant expansion in the gross (95 per cent) and net (58 per cent) irrigated areas during the same period.

The summer monsoon season overlaps with the Kharif season, the major crop-growing period for the region. "While Kharif season crops meet a large fraction of the total water requirement from the summer monsoon rainfall, crop growth during the Rabi season largely depends on irrigation from surface water and groundwater resources," the authors wrote.

The scientists used in-situ observations of well levels from the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) and satellite observations from Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) for the 2002-2021 period to examine the potential impacts of groundwater pumping on its storage variability in the Thar region. As agriculture activities expanded, the intensive use of groundwater has caused groundwater depletion in the Thar, reflecting an imbalance between water extraction and recharge rates.

Most groundwater wells showed a decline in water levels, especially in the north-central region, where vegetation greening had increased significantly during the monsoon and winter seasons.

Rapid urbanisation
Several regions within Thar showed a 50 per cent to even 800 per cent rise in urban areas during 1985-2020, the report showed.

The Thar region's population growth during 2000-2020, was followed by the Arabian Desert, while most other deserts did not experience a considerable increase in population, the study showed. "This population growth in the Thar region is evident from the expansion of urban areas and cropland, likely driven by cultivation potential and relatively lower land prices. Water availability also played a crucial role in urban settlement and agricultural expansion.

For instance, the Indira Gandhi Canal surface water sourced from north India and enhanced water availability in the northwest parts of the Thar Desert," it said. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

Enhancing food security through SRI: A path to sustainable agriculture

By: Mowsam Hazarika

The Green Revolution of the mid-1960s transformed India's agricultural landscape, increasing food production fivefold and significantly reducing poverty from over 60% to about 25%. This transformation was driven by modern technology, genetic crop improvements, agrochemicals, and supportive policies like Minimum Support Pricing (MSP) and irrigation infrastructure. Despite these achievements, India continues to face serious food security challenges. The per capita food availability (currently around 70 kg annually) remains below the ICMR's recommended 84 kg. Additionally, 350-400 million people still live below the poverty line, with rural Assam experiencing similar hardships. Issues like hunger, malnutrition, agrarian distress, and farmer suicides threaten social stability. To address these challenges, enhancing food production at the household level is crucial. This requires innovative, farmer-friendly, and cost-effective technologies. One such promising solution is the System of Rice Intensification (SRI).
System of Rice Intensification (SRI): A Game Changer
SRI is a low-cost, eco-friendly, and pro-poor innovation for rice cultivation that can also be applied to other crops like wheat, maize, sugarcane, and vegetables. The system is based on five simple yet transformative principles:
1. Transplanting young, single seedlings — Using 10-12-day-old seedlings instead of the conventional 30+ days.
2. Wide, square spacing — Plants are arranged in 25x25 cm grids, preventing overcrowding.
3. Alternate wetting and drying (AWD) — Fields are irri-

gated intermittently rather than kept continuously flooded.
4. Regular weeding with cono-weeders — Weeds are incorporated into the soil to enhance fertility.
5. Use of organic manure — Vermicompost is prioritized, reducing dependence on agrochemicals.

Benefits of SRI
Tangible Benefits: • Higher Yields — Productivity increases to 5-6 tons/ha, compared to the national average of 2.2 tons/ha. • Significant Resource Savings: • Water — 40-49% less water required. • Seeds — Up to 90% reduction in seed usage. • Fertilizers & Agrochemicals — Reduced dependency lowers production costs. • Enhanced Soil Health — Increased microbial activity and improved nutrient retention.

Intangible Benefits: • Reduced greenhouse gas emissions — Less methane release from flooded fields. • Greater climate resilience — Better adaptability to drought and erratic rainfall. • Livelihood security — A NABARD study in Jharkhand found that SRI adoption increased homegrown food availability by 120-300 days annually. Institutional and Policy Support for Scaling SRI
Since SRI relies on knowledge-intensive practices, widespread adoption requires stronger farmer education programs. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in training and extension services. Expanding SRI to 10 million hectares—about 20% of irrigated and 25% of rainfed rice-growing areas—could add 15 million tons of rice annually. To

achieve this, collaboration between agricultural research, development, and education (R&D&E) is essential.

Proposed Mission-Mode Strategy: 1. Scientific Validation — Strengthen research to refine SRI protocols. 2. Adaptation Insights — Customize SRI methods for different ecological conditions. 3. Policy Support — Implement policies that encourage large-scale adoption.

Challenges and the Way Forward
While India has transitioned from a food-deficit to a food-surplus nation, disparities persist. Rural Assam continues to struggle with low income levels, deep poverty, and high unemployment, making food security a pressing issue. Instead of relying solely on subsidies, empowering small and marginal farmers with sustainable solutions like SRI is key.

SRI as a Scalable Solution:
SRI follows the "more with less" philosophy—enhancing productivity while conserving resources. However, for large-scale success, the following steps are crucial:
• Intensive farmer training — Regular capacity-building initiatives. • Robust knowledge dissemination — Promoting awareness through extension services. • Multi-stakeholder involvement — Collaboration between farmers, policymakers, and researchers.
A bottom-up approach that prioritizes hunger and poverty reduction is critical. By empowering rural youth and small farmers, SRI can become a cornerstone of sustainable agriculture and livelihood security, aligning with the government's vision of doubling farmer incomes.

US, China seek to draw other countries into their respective orbits: Singapore PM

SINGAPORE, April 16: Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on Wednesday said the US and China claim they do not wish to force countries to choose sides but seek to draw other countries into their respective orbits, local media reported.

"America and China are now locked in a fierce contest for global supremacy. Neither country wants an open conflict, but there is a deep mistrust and suspicion on both sides," Wong said, in an apparent reference to the tariff war between the two countries.

"Both powers claim they do not wish to force countries to choose sides, but, in reality, each seeks to draw the other closer into their respective orbits. This rivalry is already reshaping the world and will continue to define the geo-political landscape for years to come," Wong said.

"We are in the midst of a messy transition globally. To what? Nobody can tell," Wong told an audience of about 900 at the annual S. Rajaratnam Lecture.

Wong, in a speech at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, said Singapore thrived for the past 60 years in a post-World War II rules-based international order -- one that was shaped and written by American leadership, The Straits Times reported.

"Today, unfortunately, this international order has failed. The conditions it sustained no longer hold. Within America, the support for global engagement has declined, and Americans feel left behind by globalisation," he said.

"There is a growing sense that other countries are benefitting disproportionately from America's security umbrella and access to its markets while contributing little in return," said Wong, who is also the finance minister of Singapore.

"So there is now a strong and growing impulse within America to turn inward to focus on its domestic priority and scale back costly overseas commitments."

"This sentiment reflects deeper structural changes in the US society that America can no longer af-



ford to lead the world in resolving every problem and now needs to cut back on what it does abroad. This is not a temporary policy change. This reflects the new normal in the US for some time to come," Wong said.

"China has emerged as a near-peer competitor of the US. America is stepping back from its traditional role as the guarantor of order as the world's policeman, but neither China nor any other coun-

try is willing or able to fill the vacuum. So nations are turning inward, prioritising their narrow interests," he said, adding there was growing turbulence in the international economic system alongside the rising geopolitical unease.

"Geopolitical competition has returned with a vengeance, and the major powers no longer feel economically secure," he said.

Wong said that economic instru-

ments such as tariffs, export controls and sanctions were being used not for market purposes but as instruments of statecraft to advance national interests.

"These trends are not new, but they have reached a new intensity with the latest US tariff moves," he said. The US on April 2 announced wide-ranging tariffs on a host of nations, with Asian countries particularly hit hard.

US President Donald Trump later paused most of the "reciprocal" tariffs but announced further levies up to 145 per cent on China. Beijing responded with tariffs up to 125 per cent on US products.

"These changes have already created great uncertainty for businesses everywhere," Wong said.

"What we are witnessing is the remaking of the global economy -- not as one integrated system, but as bifurcated ecosystems centred around America and China," he said. In this environment, countries everywhere are re-examining strategic assumptions and recalibrating their policies, said Wong. (PTI)

IMF agreement not possible without Beijing's support: Sharif



ISLAMABAD, April 16: Terming China as Pakistan's "most sincere friend", Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that the recent agreement with the IMF would not have been possible without Beijing's support.

He was addressing a ceremony here for agriculture graduates selected for training in China. Under the programme, 1,000 Pakistani agriculture graduates will receive training in China in modern farming techniques, digital crop management and climate-resilient practices.

The first group of 300 graduates is set to depart soon for a three-month programme, followed by two additional batches in phased training over the next year.

Prime Minister Sharif acknowledged China's continued economic partnership, particularly noting the one-year extension of a USD 2 billion loan repayment last month, which provided much-needed relief for Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves.

The support by China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE helped to get a USD 7 billion bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September 2024 to avert a balance of payments crisis and the prime minister highlighted the role of China during the ceremony.

"China is Pakistan's most sincere friend and it played a decisive role in stabilising Pakistan's strug-

gling economy," he said, adding that the recent loan extended by the IMF was not possible "without support of China".

Recalling his last visit to China, Sharif said that he was much inspired by the research work in various fields of the agriculture sector during his visit to Chinese universities.

"I decided then to send 1,000 young Pakistani agri graduates to benefit from this great experience," he said.

He also said that China had consistently supported Pakistan's economy through investments in infrastructure, energy and industrial projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which he once again described as a "lifeline" for the country.

Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong, in his address on the occasion, praised Pakistan's economic progress over the past year and reaffirmed Beijing's commitment to bilateral cooperation.

He said that China under CPEC had made a direct investment of around USD 35.4 billion, reflecting the strong relationship between the two countries.

The ambassador also said China would continue to work closely with Pakistan, particularly in modernising its agricultural sector, adding that President Xi Jinping attached great importance to Pakistan's development and the long-standing partnership. (PTI)

Berlin doctor charged with killings of 15 patients under palliative care



BERLIN, April 16: A doctor in Berlin has been charged with murder over the deaths of 15 patients under palliative care, prosecutors said on Wednesday. He is also accused of trying to cover up the evidence by starting fires in their homes.

The doctor was part of a nursing service's end-of-life care team and was initially suspected in the deaths of just four patients. That number has crept higher since last summer, and investigators now say they've found evidence linking him to the deaths of 15 people between September 22, 2021, and July 24 last year.

The victims' ages ranged from 25 to 94. Most died in their own homes.

He allegedly administered an anesthetic and a muscle relaxer to the patients without their knowledge or consent. The drug cocktail then allegedly paralysed the respiratory muscles. Respiratory arrest and death followed within minutes, prosecutors said.

The doctor -- a 40-year-old man whose name hasn't been released, in line with German privacy rules -- has been in custody since August 6. Prosecutors said Wednesday that he has not yet responded to the case against him.

The charges were filed to the Berlin state court, which will now have to decide whether to bring the case to trial and if so, when.

Murder charges carry a maximum sentence of life in prison. Prosecutors said they aim to ask the court to establish that the suspect bears particularly severe guilt, meaning that he wouldn't be eligible for release after 15 years as is usually the case in Germany. They also want him to be banned from his profession for life. (AP)

US federal judge temporarily blocks Trump administration from deporting Indian student

NEW YORK, April 16: A US federal judge has temporarily blocked the Trump administration from deporting a 21-year-old undergraduate Indian whose student visa was cancelled.

Krish Lal Isserdasani has been pursuing a bachelor's degree in computer engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with an F-1 student visa since 2021.

Court documents, as seen by PTI, said that "having maintained full-time enrollment and good academic standing, Isserdasani is now in the final semester of his senior year with less than 30 days remaining until an expected graduation on May 10, 2025." The documents filed in the US District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin said Tuesday that Isserdasani "acknowledges that he was arrested on November

22, 2024, after he and his friends got into a verbal argument with another group while walking home late at night from a bar.

"Although Isserdasani was arrested for disorderly conduct, the District Attorney declined to pursue charges after reviewing the case. As a result, Isserdasani never had to appear in court and believed the matter was completely resolved with no possible immigration consequences," the court documents said adding that aside from this encounter, Isserdasani has had no other interactions with law enforcement.

However, on April 4, 2025, the University of Wisconsin-Madison's International Student Services (ISS) office informed Isserdasani by email that his Student and Exchange Visitor System (SEVIS) record had been terminated.

The SEVIS has been terminated by the US Student and Exchange Visitor Programme operated by the Department of Homeland Security for "Otherwise failing to maintain status- Individual identified in criminal records check and/or has had their VISA revoked. SEVIS record has been terminated."

The court papers state that Isserdasani received no communication from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the university, or the State Department regarding any revocation of his visa.

"He was given no warning, no opportunity to explain or defend himself, and no chance to correct any potential misunderstanding before his F-1 student visa record was terminated in SEVIS," it said. (PTI)

One dead, nine wounded in Russian strikes on Ukraine's Kherson

KYIV, April 16: Russian glide bombs and artillery struck a city in southern Ukraine on Wednesday, killing one person and wounding nine others as Moscow forces continued daily attacks across the country.

The city of Kherson was struck with glide bombs on Wednesday morning, and when rescue teams arrived at the scene, Russian forces launched an artillery barrage, said the region's head, Oleksandr Prokudin. "This is a deliberate tactic by Russia to hinder the rescue of the injured and harm doctors, rescuers, and police," he said.

The attack damaged a sports facility, a supermarket, residential buildings and civilian vehicles, Prokudin added.

The strike on Kherson followed other deadly attacks in recent days. On Palm Sunday, two Russian ballistic missile hit the northeastern city of Sumy near the Russian border, killing 35 people and injuring more than 100 others in the deadliest attack on Ukrainian civilians this year. The Russian military said that the strike targeted a gathering of senior military officers, but did not offer evidence.

The attack on Sumy and other areas came even as Moscow and Kyiv both agreed last month to implement a 30-day halt on strikes on energy facilities. Both parties have differed on the start time for stop-

ping strikes and alleged daily breaches by the other side.

The Russian military said it downed 26 Ukrainian drones over several Russian regions early Wednesday. Asked Wednesday if Russia is going to stop abiding by the limited ceasefire after 30 days, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov demurred, saying the decision will be made later.

Moscow has effectively refused to accept a comprehensive ceasefire that President Donald Trump has sought and Ukraine has endorsed. Russian President Vladimir Putin has made it conditional on a halt in Ukraine's mobilisation efforts and Western arms supplies, the demands rejected by Ukraine. Kyiv believes Moscow's forces are gearing up for a fresh offensive. Russian forces hold the battlefield advantage in Ukraine, pressing attacks in several sectors of the 1,000-kilometre frontline, and Kyiv has warned Moscow is planning a new offensive to improve its negotiating position.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff will travel to Paris on Thursday for "talks with European counterparts to advance President Trump's goal to end the Russia-Ukraine war and stop the bloodshed." Rubio will also "discuss ways to advance shared interests in the region," State

Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement.

Witkoff, who visited Russia on Friday for his third meeting with Putin that lasted nearly five hours, told Fox News earlier this week that the Russian leader wants a "permanent peace," noting that a prospective peace deal would focus on Russian claims for five Ukrainian regions.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy criticized Witkoff's comment, emphasising that Ukraine will never recognise any temporarily occupied territories as Russian. Commenting on ongoing negotiations with the US over a prospective agreement that would give the US access to Ukraine's valuable mineral resources, Ukraine's Economy Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko said the US and Ukrainians have achieved "significant progress."

She said that both sides are working on a "memorandum of intent" that would reflect positive developments in the talks, adding that "we are preparing to complete the formalisation of the agreement in the near future." The deal, which needs to be ratified by the Ukrainian parliament, "will provide opportunities for investment and development in Ukraine, and will also provide conditions for tangible economic growth for both Ukraine and the United States," Svyrydenko said. (AP)

Trump admin sues Maine over participation of transgender athletes in girls sports

WASHINGTON, April 16: The Trump administration said Wednesday it is suing Maine's education department for not complying with the government's push to ban transgender athletes in girls sports, escalating a dispute over whether the state is abiding by a federal law that bars discrimination in education based on sex.

The lawsuit follows weeks of feuding between the Republican administration and Democratic Gov Janet Mills that has led to threats to cut off crucial federal funding and a clash at the White House when she told the president: "We'll see you in court."

"We are going to continue to fight for women," Attorney General Pam Bondi said at a news conference alongside former University of Kentucky swimmer Riley Gaines, who has emerged as a public face of the opposition to transgender athletes.

Trump's departments of Education and Health and Human Services have said the Maine agency is violating the federal Title IX antidiscrimination law by allowing transgenders to participate on girls teams.

The lawsuit reflects a stark philosophical turnabout from the position on gender identity issues taken during Democratic administrations.

Under President Joe Biden, the government tried to extend civil rights policies to protect transgender people. In 2016, the Justice Department, then led by Attorney General Loretta Lynch, sued North Carolina over a law that required transgender people to use public restrooms and showers that corresponded to their birth certificate.

Maine officials have refused to agree with a settlement that would have banned transgender students from sports, arguing that the law does not prevent schools from letting transgender athletes participate.

Trump signed an executive order in February, "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports," that gave federal agencies wide latitude to ensure entities that receive federal funding abide by Title IX in alignment

with his administration's interpretation of "sex" as the gender someone was assigned at birth.

Trump was joined at the signing of that order by Gaines and other female athletes who were in support of a ban. Gaines tied with a transgender athlete for fifth place in a 2022 NCAA championship and has testified before lawmakers across the country on the issue. She and others frame the issue as women's rights.

During a February meeting with governors, Trump threatened to pull federal funding from Maine if the state did not comply with his executive order. Mills responded: "We'll see you in court."

Maine sued the administration this month after the Department of Agriculture said it was pausing some money for the state's educational programmes because of what the administration contended was Maine's failure to comply with the Title IX law.

A federal judge on Friday ordered the administration to unfreeze funds intended for a Maine child nutrition programme.

Sarah Foster, Maine's assistant attorney general, said last week in a letter to the Education Department that nothing in the law "prohibits schools from allowing transgender girls and women to participate on girls' and women's sports teams."

Questions over the rights of transgender people have become a major political issue in the past five years. Twenty-six US states have laws or policies barring transgender girls from girls school sports. GOP-controlled states have also been banning gender-affirming health care for transgender minors and restricting bathroom use in schools and sometimes other public buildings.

In his 2024 race, Trump campaigned against the participation of transgender athletes in sports. As president, he has signed executive orders to do that and to use a rigid definition of the sexes, rather than gender, for federal government purposes. (AP)

Israeli defence minister says troops will remain in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria indefinitely

JERUSALEM, April 16: Israel's defence minister said Wednesday that troops will remain in so-called security zones in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Syria indefinitely, remarks that could further complicate talks with Hamas over a ceasefire and hostage release.

Israeli strikes across Gaza meanwhile killed another 22 people, according to local health officials, including a girl who was not yet a year old. The girl's mother, who was wounded in the strike, embraced her daughter, still wearing a bloodied blue and white dress, before she was taken for burial.

Israeli forces have taken over more than half of Gaza in a renewed campaign to pressure Hamas to release hostages after Israel ended their ceasefire last month. Israel has also refused to withdraw from some areas in Lebanon following a ceasefire with the Hezbollah militant group last year, and it seized a buffer zone in southern Syria after rebels overthrew President Bashar Assad in December.

"Unlike in the past, the (Israeli military) is not evacuating areas that have been cleared and seized," Defence Minister Israel Katz said in a statement. The military "will remain in the security zones as a buffer between the enemy and (Israeli) communities in any temporary or permanent situation in Gaza -- as in Lebanon and Syria."

The Palestinians and both neighbouring countries view the presence of Israeli troops as military occupation in violation of international law. Hamas has said it will not release dozens of remaining hostages without a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a lasting ceasefire.

"They promised that the hostages come first. In practice, Israel is choosing to seize territory before the hostages," the main organisation representing families of the hostages said in a statement.

"There is one solution that is desirable and feasible, and that is the release of all the hostages at once as part of an agreement, even at the cost of ending the war," it said.

Israel says it must maintain control of what it refers to as security zones to prevent a repeat of Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack, in which thousands of militants stormed into southern Israel from Gaza, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251.

Israel's offensive has killed over 51,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants but says women and children make up more than half of the dead. Israel says it has killed some 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Every day -- children

Ahlan Seiam's family had planned to celebrate her first birthday later this month. Then the Israeli strike hit the building where they had pitched a tent on the roof. Her grandfather, Nashat, said Wednesday that the family was awakened by a loud blast overnight. When he raced up to the roof, he found his son, Mohammed, sobbing.

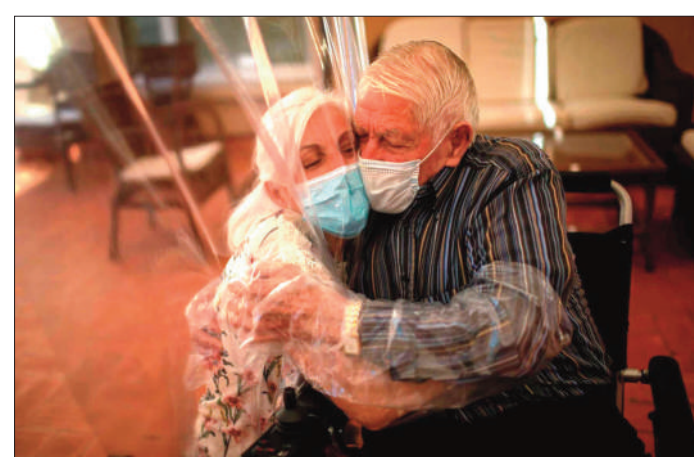
"I found her like this," he said as he held the body of his granddaughter. Associated Press footage showed the mother, wrapped in bandages after being wounded in the strike, cradling her daughter one last time in the hospital bed. (AP)

WHO member countries agree on draft 'pandemic treaty' to try to avoid COVID-19 mistakes

LONDON, April 16: Five years after COVID-19 triggered national lockdowns, economic uncertainty and killed millions, the World Health Organisation's member countries agreed on a draft "pandemic treaty" that sets guidelines for how the international community might confront the next global health crisis.

After the world's largely disastrous response to the coronavirus, countries tasked the WHO with overseeing a pandemic treaty in 2021; negotiations concluded early Wednesday on an agreement expected to be adopted next month at the UN health agency's annual meeting in Geneva.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus heralded it as a historic moment, saying countries have proven that "in our divided world, nations can still work together to find common ground and a shared response."



are not expected to sign the treaty. During COVID-19, it was largely American research and development that produced the most effective vaccines and medicines.

Weeks after Trump's decision, Argentina's President Javier Milei also exited the WHO, citing "profound differences" with the UN agency.

Rachael Crockett, of the advocacy group Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative, described the

draft pandemic treaty as "a product of compromise".

She said it contained strong provisions, but only if countries chose to implement them. "This could change what we saw in COVID, when some populations didn't get access to what they needed."

The draft treaty notably includes a provision to guarantee that countries that share critical virus samples receive any resulting tests, medicines and vaccines, with the

WHO to hold up to 20 per cent of such products to ensure poorer countries get supplies.

Negotiations on this provision are expected to continue after the treaty is likely accepted by member countries in May.

Crockett acknowledged that as is often the case with international law, there are few consequences for countries that don't comply: "There's not much that can be done if countries choose not to ratify or abide by it."

Yuanqiong Hu, of aid organization Doctors Without Borders, said that if disputes arise between countries, the treaty includes a mechanism for them to use diplomatic channels, followed by arbitration.

Countries are already legally bound by the International Health Regulations to do things like quickly report dangerous new outbreaks. But those have been flouted repeatedly, including by African countries during Ebola and other outbreaks. China in the early stages of COVID-19 and arguably the US amid its ongoing bird flu epidemic. (AP)

LGBRIMH Tezpur concludes Swachhta Pakhwada

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 16: The Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH), Tezpur, concluded its fortnight-long Swachhta Pakhwada initiative with a vibrant closing ceremony on Wednesday.

The programme, held from April 1 to April 15, 2025, was part of the Government of India's Swachh Bharat Mission and aimed at promoting cleanliness and hygiene across the institute.

Organised by the Department of Psychiatry, the ceremony began with a welcome address by Dr Suranjan Majumdar and was hosted by Dr Jui Gupta.

Deputy Director Dr Hemanta Datta presented an overview of the wide range of activities conducted during the campaign.

"These activities have not only improved the physical environment of the institute but have also contributed to mental well-being by fostering a sense of order and community," said Dr Datta.

Director of LGBRIMH, Dr Jyoti Hazarika, expressed her appreciation for the enthusiastic involvement of staff, campus residents' children, and patients.

"Cleanliness is a shared responsibility. I'm thankful to everyone who participated and made this initiative meaningful," she said.

Key activities during the Swachhta Pakhwada included a Swachhta pledge, voluntary shramdaan, pamphlet distribution, office file reorganisation, and a listing of obsolete items.

The institute also organised creative contests like drawing and craft-making for patients, along with quiz competitions, and celebrated World Health Day as part of the campaign.

Notably, biomedical waste (BMW) segregation and disposal were carried out systematically.

Swachhta kits were distributed to underprivileged, homeless, mentally ill female patients—highlighting the institute's commitment to inclusive care.

The event concluded with the distribution of Kayakalp certificates to individuals recognised as 'Swachhta Heroes' for their exceptional contributions to the campaign.

Cong protest outside ED office in Guwahati over charge sheet against Rahul, Sonia

GUWAHATI, April 16: Congress workers demonstrated outside the office of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in Guwahati to protest the charge sheet against party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case.

Led by state Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah, senior leaders like Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi, former Rajya Sabha MP Ripun Bora and MLA Jakir Hussain Sikdar, along with scores of party workers, marched to the ED office on GS Road.

The Congress workers were detained outside the ED office and taken to the 10th Assam Police Battalion camp, from where



they were later released, a senior official told PTI.

"Congress has always been

protesting the BJP's increasing attacks on the press. The other day, it sought to attach the as-

sets of the National Herald newspaper and implicate our leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi," Borah said.

The Assam Congress unequivocally condemns the latest draconian move by the Narendra Modi government -- the arbitrary and unjust seizure of the assets of National Herald and filing of a charge sheet against party leadership, he added.

"This is not a matter of legal procedure, it is a state-sponsored crime masquerading as the rule of law. It represents a grotesque misuse of state power. It is a direct assault on the idea of democratic opposition, a crude attempt at political intimidation by the ruling

regime, which has gone completely berserk," Borah alleged. Terming the move as vendetta politics at its worst, he said that the Congress and its leadership will never be silenced.

Bordoloi said, "Targeting Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi is a desperate move by a fearful government. While agencies shield the corrupt in power, they attack those who speak up. We stand for the people, the Constitution and fearless leadership."

The ED has filed a charge sheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, and others before a special court in the National Herald case, accusing them of laundering Rs 988 crore. (PTI)

Rongjali Bwisagu celebrated with unity and tradition in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 16: Rongjali Bwisagu, the traditional spring festival marking the Bodo New Year, was celebrated with cultural fervour and unity across Kokrajhar and other parts of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) on Tuesday.

People from diverse communities came together to mark the last day of Choitra and the first day of Baisakh with festive programmes, dances, and songs. In Kokrajhar, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) organized an open Rongjali Bwisagu celebration at the Kokrajhar Government HS & MP School playground, drawing large crowds. The event showcased traditional Bodo customs, music, and dance. ABSU

president Dipen Boro unfurled the student union and Bwisagu flags to open the festivities. "Rongjali Bwisagu is a festival of culture and language, a time when people come together and celebrate with traditional values," Boro said, extending warm greetings to citizens of the region and the state.

Assam Cabinet Minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma, MLAs Lawrence Isly and Jiron Basumatary, ABSU advisor Khungkha Swargiary, and several senior citizens also joined the celebrations, participating in community dances and songs that emphasized unity and integration in the region. Bodo women adorned in traditional attire such as Dhokona and Jwmgra added vibrant colour to

the celebrations, drawing admiration from attendees and enhancing the festive spirit.

Pramod Boro, Chief Executive Member of the BTR, also extended his greetings on the occasion.

"I'm delighted to extend my heartfelt greetings to all citizens on the joyous occasion of Rongjali Bwisagu. May this festive season, which embodies renewed hope, happiness, and harmony, bring peace and prosperity to every home across our region and the state," he said in a message.

The celebration not only highlighted the rich cultural heritage of the Bodo people but also served as a reminder of the region's unity in diversity.

M'laya's picturesque highway claims 25 lives in 100 days

SHILLONG, April 16: A 60-km stretch of a highway that connects Guwahati to Shillong has claimed the lives of 25 people in the last 100 days, according to official data.

Most of these accidents on the scenic Umiam-Jorabat Expressway have happened due to speeding, with about 50 per cent of the victims from outside the state, VS

Rathore, the SP of Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district, said on Wednesday.

Besides speeding, drunk driving is also a cause for a number of accidents on the four-lane highway, he said. Police are in constant touch with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and have requested it to install speed limit boards along the highway, he

added. Rathore said the police were also planning to install barricades on stretches where drivers tend to speed. He said the police are conducting regular checks to curb speeding and reckless driving.

Truckers using the highway are also being alerted to follow lane driving, and strict measures are being taken to regulate safe parking of trucks, the SP said. (PTI)

Freedom fighter Taranath Sarma remembered on 108th birth anniversary

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARALI, April 16: Taranath Sarma, the revered freedom fighter, social reformer, and former Mouja Panchayat representative, was fondly remembered on his 108th birth anniversary at a commemorative event held in Samar Dalani on Tuesday.

The occasion was organized by the Taranath Sarma Smriti Pustakalaya, which hosted a public meeting at the conference hall of Dakshin Nagsankar High School.

The day-long programme began with the hoisting of the institutional flag by Hem Sagar Samar, Vice President of the library committee, who also presided over the meeting.

A ceremonial lamp was lit by Bhabani Sarma in front of a portrait of the late Taranath Sarma, while Hemlal Sarma, a long-time associate of the late leader, offered floral tributes. Inaugurating the open session, Purna Kumar Sarma, recipient of the Sahitya Akademi's Transla-

tion Prize, paid homage to Sarma's enduring legacy.

"Taranath Sarma was not just a freedom fighter but also a torchbearer of social reform whose contribution continues to inspire generations," he said.

Appointed speakers for the session included retired teacher Narad Upadhyaya, Bhuban Lamsal, and Damodar Baral, who reflected on Sarma's life, work, and his role in uplifting marginalized communities. Poets Pushpa Dahal and Kamal Sarma presented self-composed poems dedicated to the memory of the iconic figure. The session also featured addresses from local cultural figures including Punya Nirola, Umesh Dhakal, Gopal Sarma, and Anjan Baskota. Community members such as Gupta Sarma, Harilal Siruwal, Amit Baskota, Indra Sarma, Saroj Baskota, and Arun Baskota were present, underscoring Sarma's continued relevance and respect in the region.

Tripura government's 'Aamar Sarkar' portal receives good response: Official

AGARTALA, April 16: The 'Aamar Sarkar' portal, conceived as a digital solution to bridge the gap between rural citizens and government authorities, has received a positive response from the public, an official said on Wednesday.

Launched in November 2022 by Chief Minister Manik Saha, the dig-

ital platform has so far recorded 63,129 grievances from rural citizens and resolved 95 per cent of the issues as of February this year.

In the state's difficult terrains, 'Aamar Sarkar' uses village walks to reach remote areas, ensuring on-the-spot grievance reporting via its mobile app, the Director of the Pan-

chayat Department, Prasun De, told PTI. Every Thursday officials and PRI body members conduct the village walks, talk to the residents of the villages, identify issues and upload those through the mobile app addressing the concerned department, thus enabling faster resolutions, he said. "People have started

trusting the system and feel that they are being heard, respected, and empowered by the government. It will go up with time," De said. He said the primary objectives of the 'Aamar Sarkar' portal are to enhance accessibility by rural residents to lodge complaints through weekly initiatives like village walks and

'Aamar Sarkar' days, to ensure transparency and accountability through a structured complaint-tracking system.

Altogether 4,365 officials from 1193 GPs/VCs and 81 departments at the block, district, and state levels were imparted training to implement the innovative project. (PTI)

Baukhungri Festival concludes in Kokrajhar with vibrant cultural display and mass participation

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 16: The 12th edition of the Baukhungri Festival, one of the largest and most anticipated events in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), concluded on Monday with colourful celebrations at Baukhungri Hill, Haringnaguri in Kokrajhar. The three-day festival featured a blend of indigenous sports, cultural showcases, and traditional food, drawing massive participation from across communities and states.

Organised by the Bodoland Territorial Region government and the Department of Tourism, the festival coincided with the Rongjali Bwisagu celebrations and concluded on the last day of Choitra month, April 14, with the signature mass hill trekking event.

"The festival is not just a celebration of our culture, but also a symbol of unity and identity for the people of Bodoland," said Daobaisa Boro, Executive Member of BTR, who was present at the closing ceremony along with other dignitaries.

One of the highlights was the mass hill trekking event that saw thousands of people from diverse backgrounds scale the scenic

Baukhungri Hill. The festival also hosted several competitions, including mountain bike cycling, hill trekking, indigenous games, and traditional food contests.

In the women's hill trekking competition, Sabina Rai and Shyamali Singh from West Bengal secured the first and second positions, while Sangmir Terongpi from Karbi Anglong stood third. In the men's category, Vivek Chetry (West Bengal) clinched first place, followed

by Lapynkhrav Thabab and Jemon Makri from Meghalaya.

Cycling competitions were held for both men and women, and winners were honoured during a grand prize distribution ceremony attended by senior officials and festival visitors.

"This is my first time here, and I'm amazed by the scale of the event and the enthusiasm of the participants," said a visitor from Meghalaya. Cultural performances representing various ethnic communities, along with traditional food exhibitions including the preparation of Gwkha-Gwkhi (hundred-herb dish) and 'Jwo Bidwi' competitions, added a rich cultural dimension to the festival.



Sikkim govt, UNESCO come together to preserve Lepcha cane bridge tradition



GANGTOK, April 16: The Sikkim government and UNESCO have joined hands to preserve the art of the traditional Lepcha cane bridge or 'Ru-Soam', officials said on Wednesday.

The indigenous bridge-making tradition is still practised by Lepcha communities in the Dzongu Tribal Reserve within the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve in the northeastern state, they said.

During a meeting held at Tashiling Secretariat with Science and Technology Department offi-

cials here, UNESCO Regional Director Tim Curtis hailed the collaboration and offered support for technical documentation and heritage recognition in line with global standards for the Lepchacane bridge art.

Science and Technology Department Minister Pinto Namgyal Lepcha chaired the meeting where experts, artisans and community leaders came together to showcase 'Ru-Soam', crafted entirely from natural materials like wild cane and bamboo, the officials said.

The indigenous structure's value has been further highlighted in recent times as a symbol of sustainable and disaster-resilient infrastructure, they said.

Benno Boer, Chief of Natural Sciences, UNESCO, is likely to visit Sikkim in May to take the initiative forward.

"This collaboration marks a powerful commitment to safeguarding Sikkim's intangible heritage, and aligns with UNESCO's goal of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage," an official said. (PTI)

BSF seizes Yaba tablets worth ₹ 4.5 crore in Tripura

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, April 16: In a major success against trans-border narcotics trafficking, troops of Border Out Post (BOP) NC Nagar under Sepahijala district, Tripura, thwarted an attempt by Indian smugglers to smuggle contraband across the Indo-Bangladesh border and seized Yaba worth Rs 4.5 Crore. According to a press release shared by BSF, acting on specific intelligence, vigilant BSF personnel observed suspicious movement near the international border. On being challenged, the smugglers fled, aban-

doning the consignment on Indian soil. "A thorough search of the area resulted in the recovery of 21 packets containing 43,800 Yaba tablets, valued at approximately Rs 4.38 crore. In addition, BSF troops seized other contraband items worth Rs 3,68,604 from different locations along the Tripura border on the same day. This successful operation is part of the BSF's intensified efforts to curb cross-border smuggling and ensure national security," said BSF. BSF said that the seized items have been handed over to concerned agencies for further legal action.

Nagaland Cong holds protests over ED chargesheet against Sonia, Rahul Gandhi

DIMAPUR, April 16: Members of the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) on Wednesday joined the nationwide protests called by the All India Congress Committee (AICC) over the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) chargesheet against party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case.

Protests were held at Congress Bhavan in Kohima and outside the office of the additional commissioner of Income Tax in Dimapur.

NPCC working president C. Apok Jamir said the demonstration was not just a protest, but a "mass movement to protect democracy and uphold the Constitution."

He accused the BJP-led government and the RSS of systematically eroding constitutional principles.

Jamir alleged that the ED was being "misused as a political tool" to target Congress leaders without substantial evidence, and said the party was being selectively targeted because "it stands with the poor, the minorities and the marginalised."

The Congress, he said, reaffirmed its pledge to continue fighting for justice, democracy and the rights of the people of India.

NPCC president S. Supongmeren Jamir added that Congress leaders are raising their voices for the rights of minorities and other backward castes.

He accused the BJP government of trying to divert attention from critical issues.

"Despite the challenges, the Congress remains committed to working for the people," he asserted. (PTI)

Two labourers killed after tree falls on them

AGARTALA, April 16: Two labourers died and two others were injured when a tree fell on them in Tripura's Dhalai district on Wednesday, police said.

According to police, 22-year-old Robert Malsom died on the spot, while Jue Malsom (18) succumbed to her injuries later at Kuali Hospital.

"A group of labourers was engaged in constructing an embankment on the slopes of two hilly sides under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme when the incident occurred," a police officer said.

"Suddenly, a full-grown tree fell on them at Nailahabari, resulting in one death on the spot and injuries to three others. Later, one more succumbed to her injuries. Two injured workers have been admitted to a nearby health facility," he added. (PTI)

Bat size check doesn't make any difference, wish they'd done it when I was playing: Vettori

MUMBAI, April 16: Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori on Wednesday said umpires checking for the bat sizes with a gauge in the IPL doesn't make any difference and wished the same parameters were in place during his playing days.

Umpires have been checking the bats with a gauge through which the willow must pass in order to eradicate the use of oversized bats.

The checks are being carried out by on-field umpires this season and in the latest instance, Kolkata Knight Riders' Anrich Nortje's bat did not pass

the test on Tuesday and he had to change it in the game against Punjab Kings.

"I wish they'd checked the bats when I was playing," Vettori quipped during SRH's press conference here at the Wankhede Stadium.

"No, I don't think it makes any difference. The guys get tested regularly. The umpires go through the dressing rooms a lot of the time, so (the) guys know that their bats are compliant, so it's just a quick one second, and everyone moves on." "It'll reset anyone trying to have a bigger bat, but it's pretty easy to get your bat through that gauge," he

added. Vettori said this hasn't been a topic of discussion among the SRH batters and added that he doesn't think a reduction in bat size is on the cards.

"Not really. I suppose the way that bats have been able to get bigger without an increase in weight, that's a skill (to be credited) to the bat manufacturers and a demand for what batting groups or batters want these days," he said.

"It's just part of the game, part of the evolution. Everyone seems to enjoy sixes and fours, so I don't think we're going to get a reduction in bat size and it

doesn't really worry me," he added. Vettori said his side will look to tap into Ishan Kishan's knowledge of his previous franchise and the Wankhede Stadium. "It would be foolish not to tap into some of that knowledge and understanding around the Mumbai mentality and how they deal with certain situations, and also understanding the surface, how it plays, the dew factor, all those little things," he said.

"He has a wealth of knowledge for myself and the rest of the coaches for this time, but mainly because he's a fantastic player," Vettori said the pair of

Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head remains crucial to their success but acknowledged that the opposition teams have planned well.

"Some people have done some good research on and around the amount of false shots they've had, leading to wickets, and it's a very high rate; normally batsmen get away with those sorts of things," he said.

"There's an element of luck. Abhishek had a run earlier on, there's an element of teams scouting really well, there's an element of understanding of how those two are going to go

about it." "All that combines to a couple of performances where we didn't get the runs that we're used to getting from them, and their opening partnership has been critical to our success," he added. Vettori did not read much into teams exploiting Rohit Sharma's struggles against left-arm pace this IPL season.

"We're always fluid, but it would be hard to take away from Pat (Cummins) and (Mohammed) Shami, who have proven themselves for a long, long period of time, especially with the new ball," he said.

"One of those few times that you actually get conditions in

your favour, we'd like to utilise two of the best in the world to exploit it, that's our thinking at the moment."

Meanwhile, Mumbai Indians' Naman Dhir said he is trying to make most of the opportunity of batting in the death overs. "Right after the auction, I was told by MJ (Mahela Jayawardene) that I will be batting at 6th or 7th (spots). I have been preparing mentally since then. (Kieron) Pollard and Hardik (Pandya) always talk to me. The main thing is how to remain calm and what shots I should play and I am learning that," he said. (PTI)

Bumrah's form in spotlight as MI, SRH search for consistency



MUMBAI, April 16: An inconsistent Mumbai Indians will hope that ace pacer Jasprit Bumrah returns to his menacing best, which is essential for them to stop an explosive Sunrisers Hyderabad batting unit in its tracks in a potentially high-scoring IPL match here on Thursday.

Coming off a three-month long injury layoff, Bumrah is yet to find the accuracy which makes him a tough customer to deal with.

After a rather tidy outing against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Bumrah struggled to nail his yorkers and was taken apart by Delhi Capitals' Karun Nair as he leaked 44 runs in that game.

The 31-year-old will face stern test against a Sunrisers' fearsome line-up comprising Travis Head, Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen.

But the five-time champions will also want former captain Rohit Sharma to get back to his run-making ways at the earliest as his current tally is an underwhelming 56 runs from five matches at an average of 11.20. It has played a massive role in them languishing at the seventh place in the points table with just two wins, and those results were largely built around the contributions of Suryakumar Yadav and

Tilak Varma.

Rohit, who has persisted with his ultra-aggressive approach, has struggled against left-arm pace but there could be some respite given SRH don't have any front-line left-arm seamer unless they bring in Jaydev Unadkat.

While Suryakumar has still not been at his brutal best, being retired out against Lucknow Super Giants served as a wake-up call for Tilak.

After that difficult outing in Lucknow, Tilak has responded with scores of 56 (29b) and 59 (33b) to indicate his return to form.

Naman Dhir remains a vital cog for MI as he has been given the role of an aggressor with the bat in the death overs, but otherwise he has been their best fielder this season.

The way MI clinched a win from Delhi with accurate fielding might just ignite the missing spark in their camp. Interestingly, both MI and SRH were able to snap their disappointing run with impressive wins in their previous outings. But it remains to be seen if they are able to attain consistency, which will define their future in the competition.

Nearing the halfway mark, the Sunrisers are also struggling to find their range, tottering at ninth

on the table with only net run rate separating the two teams after four losses and two wins in six matches each. MI has a NRR of +0.10 while SRH's run-rate stands at -1.24.

But MI will have to be wary of SRH's batters who have given signs of finding back their mojo after a lull. Each of the top four — Head, Abhishek, Klaasen and Kishan — fired on all cylinders to stun Punjab Kings to give SRH their second win of the season.

Chasing, SRH scored nearly 250 runs to beat PBKS by eight wickets with their batters, especially Abhishek, finding their lost rhythm collectively after the 2016 winners lost four matches on the trot.

Coming off a splendid 55-ball 141, Abhishek will look to draw confidence from his last outing here at the Wankhede Stadium in February this year when he took apart England's bowling to score 135 in the fifth T20I for India.

Kishan too would be eager to make this outing against his former franchise count on what had been his home ground for several seasons. The nature of the Wankhede Stadium pitch often ensures tall totals here, but the bowlers can look forward to some bounce off the surface. (PTI)

India face competition from Canada, Nigeria in bid to host 2030 CWG

LONDON, April 16: India will face competition from Canada, Nigeria and two other countries in its bid to host the centenary Commonwealth Games in 2030, Commonwealth Sport (CWS) announced on Wednesday.

The confirmation from CWS comes less than a month after PTI, quoting a top sports ministry source, reported that India, also aiming to host the 2036 Olympics, submitted its bid to organise the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Gujarat.

CWS said that it had received 'Expression of Interests' (EOIs) from Canada and Nigeria, besides two more unnamed countries, to host the 2030 edition of the Games.

In all, seven countries have expressed interest in hosting future Commonwealth Games with five of those focused on staging the centenary edition. CWS also added that New Zealand are one of two nations that want to host the 2034 edition.

"Africa, Americas, Asia, and Oceania make up the regions from which the EOIs have been submitted. Canada, India, and Nigeria have already publicly confirmed that they have lodged an EOI for the 2030 Commonwealth Games, with two additional nations also confirming their interest in 2030.

"Two EOIs are focused on the future Games pipeline, including New Zealand who have previously signalled their interest in hosting 2034, Commonwealth Sport said in a statement.

Commonwealth Sport CEO Katie Sadleir said the CWS is "thrilled with the incredible interest" in hosting the Games. "This positive response from four of our six regions under-

lines the importance and significance of the Commonwealth Games and its position as the major multi-sport event in the world sporting calendar alongside the Olympic Games and Paralympics and shows the strength and appeal of our reimagined Games model."

The future of CWG had looked uncertain in recent years with the Australian state of Victoria withdrawing as hosts for the 2026 Games due to budget constraints. Glasgow stepped in to salvage the event, but after making many alterations to the games programme.

The initial estimate for hosting the Games in Victoria was 2.6 billion Australian dollars.

"We cannot understate the hugely significant role Scotland has played in this change, having the foresight, tenacity and innovative thinking to step forward and host the Games in Glasgow in 2026 within an incredibly tight timeframe, building on their legacy of Glasgow 2014," Sadleir said.

"Glasgow 2026 will be a bridge to the Games of tomorrow — an important first step in our journey to reimagine and redefine the Games as a truly collaborative, flexible and sustainable model for the future of major events," she added.

All the bids are single rather than multi-nation, and India last hosted the Games in 2010 in New Delhi.

The last date to submit the 'Expression of Interest' to host the Games was March 31 and India's letter was sent by the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

This was after sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya asserted that the country was interested in hosting the Games in 2030. (PTI)

South California's Pomona city to host cricket during LA 2028 Olympics

DUBAI, April 16: The South Californian city of Pomona will host the cricket competition during the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, the ICC has announced.

Cricket, which is returning to the Olympics after 128 years, will feature six teams each in the men's and women's competitions and will be held at the Fairgrounds in Pomona. The city is located 48km from Los Angeles, which is the main venue of the Games.

Fairgrounds or Fairplex, as it is more popularly known, is a facility that is used for conventions, and commercial, educational and sports (primarily motorsports) events through the year. There is no designated cricket ground at the venue.

"We welcome the announcement of the venue for cricket at Los Angeles 2028 as it is a significant step towards the preparation for our sport's return to the Olympics," ICC chairman Jay Shah said in a release on Tuesday

night. "Although cricket is a hugely popular sport, it will be a fantastic opportunity to expand traditional boundaries when it features in the Olympics in the fast-paced, exciting T20 format that should appeal to new audiences."

Cricket, which made its only appearance in the Olympics at the Paris Games in 1900, was included in the Los Angeles Olympics programme after the International Olympic Committee's 141st Session at Mumbai in October 2023.

Cricket joined five new sports at LA28, including baseball/softball, flag football, lacrosse (sixes) and squash. The T20 format, recognised as the vehicle for the growth of the game by the ICC, has also featured in other multi-sport events in recent years.

The Asian Games in 2010, 2014 and 2023 featured both men's and women's T20 competitions while the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games staged a women's competition. (PTI)

Suruchi Singh wins back-to-back WC Gold, Silver for Manu

LIMA (PERU), April 16: Teenaged shooter Suruchi Inder Singh produced yet another sterling performance in the 10m air pistol event here to clinch her second consecutive ISSF World Cup gold, while Paris Olympics medallist Manu Bhaker bagged the silver to ensure India's domination in the competition.

The Jhajjar-based Suruchi, 18, who had won her maiden World Cup gold in the season's inaugural global event recently, tallied 243.6 in the 24-shot final, to leave Manu 1.3 points behind her. China's Yao Qianxun took the bronze.

Suruchi and Manu's podium finish meant that India collected one medal of each colour on the day, with men's 10m air pistol marksman Saurabh Chaudhary earlier winning a bronze.

India's exploits in the women's 10m air pistol competition in the Peruvian capital has

taken the country to the top of the standings with three medals, followed by China, which has won the men's air pistol gold.

There were clear indications during the 60-shot qualification round that the Indian duo would comfortably make it to the finals from a 28-strong field. Sur-

ond after the first series of five shots.

Yao had taken an early lead and Manu was fourth with Uruguay's Julieta Jimenez, who shot a good final, in third at that stage.

After the second five-shot series, Yao had compatriot Meng Yufei breathing down her neck, just 0.1 behind, while Suruchi moved down to third with Manu holding on to her fourth position.

The Indians, Suruchi in particular, then came into their elements as Meng had a meltdown of sorts. A couple of high 10s ensured that after the 13th single shot, it was an Indian 1-2 with the Chinese falling out of the top-two contention.

Manu then had a couple of mid to low 9s for her 16th and 17th shots, which probably cost her the gold in the end. Suruchi emerged as the more consistent shooter on the day. (PTI)



Suruchi took the second spot with a regulation 582, while Manu was fourth with 578.

Sainyam, the third Indian in the fray, was 11th with 571.

Suruchi was at a different level in the final, carrying on her superb form in the last few months to quickly move to sec-

Rohit on dropping himself: Had an argument with head coach and selector, tried putting team first

NEW DELHI, April 16: India skipper Rohit Sharma has revealed that his decision to opt out of the Sydney Test against Australia earlier this year was not an unanimous one and involved an "argument" with head coach Gautam Gambhir and chief selector Ajit Agarkar.

The captain, who played at Adelaide, Brisbane and Melbourne during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, failed in five consecutive innings before deciding to sit out to accommodate Shubman Gill, who missed the Boxing Day Test at MCG.

"We somehow wanted Gill to play, he's such a good player. He missed out in the previous Test match. I'm like... okay, if I'm not

hitting the ball well, it is right now. Things can change five days later, ten days later," Rohit told former Australian skipper Michael Clarke during Beyond23 Cricket podcast.

"I spoke to the coach and the selector, and they kind of agreed, not agreed, there was an argument around it," he disclosed.

Known for his team-first leadership approach, the Indian skipper's logic was simple.

"You try and put the team first, you just look at what the team wants, and make the decision accordingly. Sometimes it will work, sometimes it may not. That's how it goes. Every decision you try and make, you aren't guaranteed success," said Rohit.



The great batter also gave a logical reasoning as to how he arrived at the decision to drop himself. "I didn't have a great game (in Adelaide). Then I went back to the room, and I was like, I should

have opened man. I would rather fail doing what I do and where I do it. That's my place, that's my position. I would rather go there and bat, whether I get success or not, it's a different story. But I'm

in my natural position for the team," he said.

In fact, he thought, he should give himself another game in Brisbane. "And I said, no. It's only one game. Let's not overthink, let's give it another game. It's 1-1. We can try and change things around in Brisbane. And then, it was a draw. When we got back to Melbourne, we changed our mind. I went back to open the innings." Rohit admitted that he had to drop himself as there were multiple players, who were out of form at the same time, including star batter Virat Kohli. Barring his hundred in the opener in Perth, Kohli struggled through the series. (PTI)

Sports secretary says India must anchor its sporting ambition with robust anti-doping system

NEW DELHI, April 16: Sports secretary Sujata Chaturvedi on Wednesday emphasised that as India is bidding to host the Commonwealth Games in 2030, the country must anchor its sporting ambition with a robust anti-doping system to ensure fairness, integrity, and commitment to clean sport.

The top sports ministry official expressed her views after the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) organised a conference on 'Building Together a Clean Sport Ecosystem' at the India International Centre (IIC) here.

The event, held as part of Play True Week 2025, brought together a wide spectrum of stakeholders committed to fostering a clean, fair, and values-based sporting environment in India.

Mayumi Yaya Yamamoto, director, Asia/Oceania office, World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), commended NADA India's and national stakeholders' efforts in this year's global Play True campaign.

She underscored the importance of the 'It Starts With Me' campaign and highlighted the shared responsibility and unity

required to build a clean sport ecosystem together.

One of the key moments of the inaugural session was the unveiling of 'NADA India's Fair Play Guide' in 10 different regional languages, aimed at making clean sport education more accessible to athletes and stakeholders across the nation.

Participants also engaged in a pledge signing ceremony to reaffirm their commitment to fair play and doping-free sport.

The conference featured engaging panel discussions on critical themes including anti-doping policy, enhancing education and testing, and increasing awareness about athlete rights & responsibilities, particularly in the context of Therapeutic Use Exemptions (TUEs).

Experts from national sports federations, medical institutions, and international organisations shared practical insights and actionable strategies to strengthen India's anti-doping system.

The event witnessed participation from sport administrators, athletes, coaches, educators, and medical experts, and created a space for collaboration, idea exchange, and future-oriented planning. (PTI)