

6 **WORLD**

● Ukraine sees openings as Russia fixed on besieged Mariupol

● Pakistan President dissolves Parliament at PM's request

8 **NATION**

● Court rejects CBI's closure report filed in urea scam case after 22 years

● BJP, CPI(M) hope to give a 'good fight' to TMC's Babul Surpiyo

IOC to pump in ₹ 840 cr to set up POL plant



GUWAHATI, April 3 (PTI): PSU major Indian Oil Corporation on Sunday said it will invest nearly ₹ 840 crore in expanding its Petroleum, Oil and Lubricant (POL) storage capacities, including setting up a greenfield facility, in the Northeast.

The company is planning to take its POL capacities to 5,530 Thousand Metric Tonnes Per Annum (TMTPA) by 2030 from the existing 3,160 TMTPA, Indian Oil Corporation executive director (IndianOil-AOD) G Ramesh told PTI.

"We have two major projects coming up in the POL segment. The first one is the setting up of a greenfield depot at Sekerkote in

Tripura. This will entail an investment of around ₹ 540 crore and will be completed by 2024," he said.

At present, land clearing works are going on and the construction shall commence subsequently, the official said.

"Another major project that we will undertake is the expansion of the Betkuchi POL depot in Guwahati. We have earmarked ₹ 298 crore to increase the storage intake to 54,000 KL from 25,000 KL now, install new fire water tanks and other facilities," Ramesh said. He said the company has already acquired an additional 10.67 acres of land to expand the Betkuchi plant.

The company has also completed construction of a greenfield POL unit at Moinarbond near Silchar in Assam and now railway tracks are being aligned for facilitating bulk movement of fuel. "At the Silchar plant, we have invested ₹ 5-4 crore. This is a major greenfield unit and it will be commissioned within the next few months," Ramesh said.

He further said that once the greenfield units are operationalised, more than 800 people will be hired at Moinarbond and Sekerkote through (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Buragohain dangoriyas left a lasting imprint in the socio-political life of Assam: CM

CM attends 139th session of 'Sadou Buragohain Bongkhawali' at Sadiya

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 3: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the Buragohain dangoriyas, who were the senior most ministers during Ahom rule played a very significant role in strengthening the foundation of Ahom dynasty. The wise and duty-bound Buragohain dangoriyas left an indelible mark in the administration, social system and economic sphere of the Ahom rule. The chief minister said this while speaking at the 139th session of 'Sadou Buragohain Bongkhawali' at Sadiya in Tinsukia district on Sunday.

The chief minister said that during the 600-year long Ahom regime, the role played by the Buragohain dangoriyas in solving all external and internal problems fortified the foundation of Ahom rule. With patience, courage, tol-



erance and liberal outlook, they made unprecedented contributions which would always be remembered by the

people of Assam. Sarma said that the Assamese people are always proud of the Buragohain dangoriyas who have

left a lasting imprint in the socio-political life of Assam with their diligence and political prudence. Chief minister Sarma said that in 1253 AD, Swargadeo Chaolung Siu-Ka-Pha established his capital at Charaideo and built a permanent foundation of the Ahom administration by creating the designations of Buragohain and Borgohain. From that time onwards, the Buragohains who were appointed as the senior most ministers during 600-year-old Ahom administration played a historic role with dedication and responsibility for their motherland.

Stating that apart from ministerial positions, the Buragohains were appointed on different posts as well, CM Sarma said that with their sense of duty and ingenuity, they immensely contributed to the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

HT BRIEFS

Khansing Rongpi faces people's ire

HT Bureau

HOWRAGHAT, April 3: Gorokhiya Pukhuri Development Committee opposed the laying of the foundation stone for an ITI in the village by executive member (EM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Khansing Rongpi.

In a meeting held in the premises of village Namghar, the president of Gorokhiya Pukhuri Development Committee Sandan Brahma said that the EM of KAAC had laid the foundation stone without the consent of the villagers.

He said the particular place where the ITI is supposed to be built is used by the villagers for grazing cattle and the place has been used as a playground for a very long time and the place was cleared for the purpose.

Secretary, Dhruva Brahma said Khansing Rongpi would be boycotted in the coming Member of Autonomous Council election.

NIA conducts searches in Assam, arrests CPI (Maoist) member

GUWAHATI, April 3 (PTI): The NIA on Sunday conducted searches at 17 locations in Assam and arrested a member of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) for allegedly spreading its network in the northeast region of the country. The searches were carried out in places in Cachar, Karimganj, Dibrugarh and Dhubri districts, according to an official spokesperson of the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Reema Orang of Cachar has been arrested from Dibrugarh, he said. The case relates to the arrest of Arun Kumar Bhat-tacharjee, a member of the CPI (Maoist) central committee, along with his associate Akash Orang, a member of the outlawed outfit's Assam State Organising Committee, from the Patimara Tea Garden in (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

India's export touches record high of USD 418 bn in FY22

NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): India's merchandise exports spurt to a record high of USD 418 billion in the 2021-22 fiscal on higher shipments of petroleum products, engineering goods, gem and jewellery and chemicals, according to official data released on Sunday.

Outbound shipments touched an all-time monthly high of USD 40.38 billion in March 2022, Commerce and Industry minister Piyush Goyal told reporters here. Exports stood at USD 35.26 billion in March 2021.

Merchandise exports were worth USD 292 billion in 2020-21.

India's merchandise exports had breached the targeted USD 400 billion mark on March 21 this year. The key export sectors, which contributed to record healthy growth, include petroleum products, engineering, gems and jewellery, chem-

icals and pharmaceuticals. The top export destinations are the US, the UAE, Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Singapore, Hong Kong, the UK, Belgium and Germany.

"Merchandise exports from India have reached USD 417.8 billion in the current financial year. This figure excludes the figures from non-EDI Ports and adding that, it is likely to exceed USD 418 billion, an all-time high in India's export history," the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement.

Goyal said that efforts by exporters and industry associations, coordination among different departments and state governments have resulted in this achievement. Commodities that recorded a positive growth in exports during April 2021-March 2022 over the previous fiscal (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

India's position on Russia-Ukraine conflict steadfast and consistent: Prez

ASHGABAT, April 3 (PTI): India's position on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has been steadfast and consistent, President Ram Nath Kovind has said, emphasising that the current global order is anchored in international law, UN Charter, and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of states.

Unlike many other leading powers, India has not yet criticised Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and it abstained from the votes at the UN platforms in condemning the Russian aggression.

India has been pressing for the resolution of the crisis through diplomacy and dialogue.

Interacting with young students at the prestigious Institute of International Relations here, President Kovind said that India is deeply concerned about the worsening hu-



manitarian situation in Ukraine.

"India's position on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has been steadfast and consistent," he said.

"We have emphasised that the current global order is anchored in international law, the UN Charter, and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of states.

"We are deeply concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation. We have called for immediate

cessation of violence and hostilities and return to the path of dialogue and diplomacy. We have also provided humanitarian assistance to Ukraine," Kovind said.

His comments came in the backdrop of increasing disquiet in the West over India not criticising Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and abstaining from the votes at the UN Security Council.

Last month, External Affairs minister S Jaishankar said in Parliament that India's position on the Ukraine conflict has been 'steadfast and consistent' and that it has been seeking immediate cessation of violence.

On Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveyed to visiting Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov that India stands ready to contribute in any way to the peace efforts to resolve the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Ukraine documents alleged atrocities by retreating Russians

BUCHA (UKRAINE), April 3 (AP): Ukrainian troops are finding brutalised bodies and widespread destruction in suburbs of the capital as Russian soldiers withdraw and Moscow focuses its attacks elsewhere, including missile strikes on Sunday that targeted fuel and ammunition supplies in southern and eastern Ukraine. Associated Press journalists in Bucha, a small city northwest of Kyiv, saw the bodies of at least nine people in civilian clothes who appeared to have been killed at close range. At least two had their hands tied behind their backs. The AP also saw two bodies wrapped in plastic, bound with tape and thrown into a ditch.

Authorities said they were documenting evidence as Ukraine's military reclaims territory and discovers indications of execution-style slayings to add to their case for prosecuting Russian officials for war crimes.

Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said scores of killed civilians were found on the streets of Bucha and the Kyiv suburbs of Irpin and Hostomel in what looked like a "scene from a horror movie". Arestovych said some people were shot in the head and had their hands bound, and some bodies showed signs of torture, rape and burning. The capital city's mayor, Vitali



Klitschko, said civilians were "shot with joint hands" and told German newspaper Bild that "what happened in Bucha and other suburbs of Kyiv can only be described as genocide".

A day earlier, AP journalists witnessed Ukrainian soldiers gingerly removing at least six bodies from a street in Bucha with cables in case the Russians had booby-trapped corpses with explosives before their withdrawal. Local residents said the dead people were civilians killed without provocation, a claim that could not be independently verified. Klitschko called on other nations to immediately end Russian gas imports, saying they (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

CM grants 26 ambulances for tea gardens of Lahowal

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 3: In a bid to provide an advanced, accountable and accessible health care delivery system to the people living in the tea garden areas of the State, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma handed over one ambulance each to 26 tea gardens of Lahowal Legislative assembly constituency in a programme held at Matak Tea Estate, Lahowal in Dibrugarh district on Sunday.

The ambulances have been provided under MLA local area development funds for the years 2019-20 and 2020-21. These ambulances will greatly help in meeting any kind of medical emergencies by swiftly shifting the patients to hospitals having advanced treatment facilities.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma said that the State government has undertaken several development initiatives in fulfilling its commitment for tea garden areas since

coming to power. He said that the State government with a view to ensuring better health care facilities at the tea gardens will take steps for modernisation of the hospitals in tea garden areas. The chief minister also informed that the State government will develop a water supply scheme in each tea garden for providing safe drinking water.

Further highlighting the State government's pro-people initiatives, Sarma said that issuance of caste certificates for the students living in the tea gardens would be simplified. Moreover, the State government would add six thousand more beneficiaries under the Orunodoi scheme in Lahowal constituency. He also informed that flood and erosion management in Rohmaria will be fortified and Burhidihing flood management project will be intensified. The chief minister also announced that the state government would construct Jagannath Community Centre (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Himanta asks AGCL to strengthen its grid network

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 3: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has urged Assam Gas Company Limited (AGCL) to strengthen its gas grid network and increase its capacity and reach to transport gas to neighbouring states and countries. He made this call while taking part in the diamond jubilee celebration of Assam Gas Company Limited at Duliajan in Dibrugarh district on Sunday.

Sarma also called upon AGCL to enter into the business of setting up electric vehicle charging stations in the state. He also said that AGCL should venture into tapping energy generated from electricity other than energy produced from fossil fuel in view of growing importance of innovation and diversification in today's business world.

Underlining the contributions of AGCL in the industrial landscape of the state during the last six decades, the chief minister congratulated its past and present executives and officials and paid tributes to those whose vision and initiatives were instrumental in setting up this industry. He also recalled the invaluable contributions of noted technocrat and engineer Debendra Nath Acharya who played a crucial role in the consolidation of AGCL during its fledgling stage.

Stating that AGCL has emerged as a reliable and technically sound industry in terms of supply and distribution of natural gas, the chief minister said that AGCL now has become a notable company in supplying natural gas to the vast area covering various natural gas based industries in Upper Assam.

"Assam Gas Company has played a major role in tea production by providing gas in about 420 tea gardens and tea factories located in districts like Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat. In addition, the use of natural gas supplied by AGCL at Power Sector Industries has also (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Karbi Customary Law Court to be inaugurated soon

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 3: The Karbi Customary Court at the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Secretariat will be inaugurated and the Customary Court at the village level will also be set up, said the chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang. He was speaking at the Open Session of the concluding day of the 49th Annual General Conference of Karbi Students Association (KSA Thangsing Timung) held at Amlong Apam, Kolonga here on Sunday.

The CEM said, "The Governor has given notification and very soon Karbi Customary Law Court at KAAC Secretariat will be inaugurated and the same will also be set-up at the village level. The traditional village headman at village level will settle all disputes and law and order authority will have no interference in it."

The conference was held on April 2 and 3 with the theme, "Strengthening of the 6th Schedule and implementation of Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution".

The CEM also said, "Rs 3 crore budget allocation has been made for setting up of free coaching facilities for UPSC and APSC aspir-



ants. An expert team will come from Delhi to conduct the coaching, and those interested can take the coaching. They need not pay anything as all requirements will be borne by the KAAC." The CEM said that the KSA should not be divided and need to be united. KSA should not be in favour of any political party and should be bold to point out the right and wrong of any political party. He also released the KSA souvenir 'Klirdap'.

MP Horensing Bey said the only way to strengthen the 6th Schedule is the implementation of article 244 (A) of the Constitution of India or granting of Autonomous state for the hill districts of Assam. He advised the KSA to take the initiative for development of human resources so that the young generation of educated youths can compete in various competitive exams.

General secretary of Karbi Lammet Amei,

Longsing Tokbi urged the KSA to encourage the educated youth to come forward in the development and promotion of Karbi language. He also clarified that there is no decision by KLA to adopt the Devanagari script so that the Karbi language be included in 8th Schedule of the Constitution.

It may be mentioned here that Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during the 30th general conference of KLA on March 25 at Donka Sarpo had said, "To include Karbi language in the 8th Schedule Devanagari script should be adopted."

"Romans script was taken as a form of writing in the Karbi language in 1978. The KLA has not taken the decision of accepting the Devanagari script and is not going to accept it in the near future," Tokbi said.

President of Karbi Cultural Society, Chandrasing Kro said it is unfortunate the KSA has factions. KCS has taken the initiative for the unification of KSA. But instead of uniting them, more factions have come up.

President of KSA, Thangsing Timing in his presidential speech urged the KAAC authority to oppose the inclusion of Karbi villages inside Karbi Anglong (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Jorhat to host conclave to promote entrepreneurial endeavours

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 3: The Jorhat district administration will organise a 3-day conclave named Swa Niyojan at the Court Field here from April 7 to 9 to promote entrepreneurship development and self employment generation.

Addressing media persons at the conference hall of the deputy commissioner's office complex, Jorhat deputy commissioner Ashok Barman said that the conclave has been organised to have exchange of ideas and to motivate young minds to enter into the world of entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

Barman said a series of activities have been lined up for the event, which include interactive sessions by successful entrepreneurs and resource persons from renowned educational and research institutions.

He said that an interactive session with the youth on career guidance

too will be held in the conclave.

The deputy commissioner also informed that another highlight of the event would be the hosting of an exhibition in which different departments like agriculture, agriculture, agroforestry, veterinary and animal husbandry, handloom and textile, etc., will participate showcasing products of entrepreneurs under their aegis, to give them a platform to market their products besides connecting them with prospective investors.

Barman further said that a souvenir will be released in the conclave keeping in line with the theme of the event.

He said that the souvenir will have a trajectory of entrepreneurship in the region highlighting the stories of successful entrepreneurs and sketching a road map for creating avenues for budding businesspeople.

India on cusp of major economic recovery; talks of stagflation 'overhyped': Niti Aayog VC

NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): India is on the cusp of a major economic recovery and talks of possible stagflation are "overhyped" as a strong economic foundation is being laid with the reforms carried out by the government over the last seven years, Niti Aayog vice chairman Rajiv Kumar said on Sunday.

Notwithstanding economic uncertainties triggered by the Russia-Ukraine war that is also impacting global supply chains, Kumar asserted that it was quite clear from all accounts that India will remain the fastest growing economy in the world.

"Given all the reforms that we have done in the last seven years, and given that we are seeing the end of the Covid-19 pandemic hopefully, and the 7.8 per cent rate of growth that we will get this year (2022-23), a very strong foundation is now being laid for further rapid increase in economic growth in the coming years," Kumar told PTI in an interview.

Asia's third-largest economy is

FPIs continue selling, withdrew ₹ 41,123 cr from Indian equity in March

NEW DELHI, April 3 (IANS): Continuing the aggressive selling spree for the sixth straight month, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pulled out ₹ 41,123 crore from the Indian equity segment in March, National Securities Depository data revealed.

The sell-off by the FPIs in March is way more than they pulled out in January and February of ₹ 33,303 crore and ₹ 35,592 crore, respectively.

The recent sell-off was triggered by policy rate hike by the US Federal Reserve which made the country more attractive for investments.

Inflationary pressure led by rising commodity prices, including crude oil, was also a hurdle for the investors. Reportedly, FPIs pulled out a net ₹ 1.48 lakh crore between October 2021 and March 2022. During January-March 2022, FPIs withdrew around ₹ 1.1 lakh crore from the equity segment, data showed.



projected to grow 8.9 per cent in 2021-22, according to recent government data. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has pegged the economic growth rate for 2022-23 at 7.8 per cent. "So, I think India is on the cusp of a major economic recovery and economic growth," Kumar said even as he acknowledged that because of the Russia-Ukraine war, India's GDP growth projection could be revised. "But even then,

India will remain the fastest growing economy and all the other economic parameters are actually quite within the range," he said.

Russia started its military offensive against Ukraine on February 24. Western nations, including the US, have imposed major economic and various other sanctions on Russia following the offensive.

On rising inflation, the Niti Aayog vice chairman said that RBI

is keeping a close watch as per its mandate. "I am sure that the RBI is well in control of it (inflation) and will take the necessary steps if and when required," he said.

Retail inflation hit an eight-month high of 6.07 per cent in February, remaining above the RBI's comfort level for the second month in a row while wholesale price-based inflation soared to 13.11 per cent on account of hardening of crude oil and non-food item prices. The RBI keeps a close watch on the CPI inflation while deciding on its bi-monthly monetary policy. The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has been given the mandate to maintain annual inflation at 4 per cent until March 31, 2026, with an upper tolerance of 6 per cent and a lower tolerance of 2 per cent.

Regarding concerns over possible risk of stagflation, Kumar said the Indian economy is projected to grow 7.8 per cent in the current fiscal and this is nowhere near the definition of stagflation.

"I think this has been overhyped,

because when you talk about stagflation, we talk about growth rates which are much below your rate of growth or potential output, which is not true at all for this time," he emphasised. Stagflation is defined as a situation where inflation as well as unemployment are high and demand also remains stagnant in the economy. About the government meeting the target of raising ₹ 88,000 crore from asset monetisation in 2021-22 financial year ended March 31, Kumar said, "I have heard this (target) will be achieved or if not, (then we will be) very close to the target. We have a number of things in the pipeline, and a number of ministries have taken initiatives. So, I think this will be well on track."

Last year, Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced a ₹ 6 lakh crore-National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) over a four-year period that will look to unlock value in infrastructure assets across sectors ranging from power to road and railways.

RBI likely to maintain status quo on rates to support growth, say analysts

MUMBAI, April 3 (PTI): The Reserve Bank is likely to maintain status quo on interest rates in its forthcoming monetary policy review but may change the stance in view of retail inflation piercing its upper tolerance limit, global uncertainties created by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, and the urgency to protect and boost growth, feel experts. The RBI Governor-headed rate setting panel -- Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) -- will be holding its first meeting of the 2022-23 fiscal from April 6 to 8. The outcome will be announced on April 8. Aditi Nayar, chief economist of ICRA Limited, said in the April 2022 policy review, the MPC is expected to revise up its Consumer Price Index-based inflation forecast, whereas the growth projections for 2022-23 would be pared.

"Nevertheless, the MPC is unlikely to sacrifice growth to control imported inflation. With the upper



threshold of the medium-term inflation target range being as high as 6 per cent, the MPC is likely to remain growth supportive for longer than other central banks. Overall, we expect a status quo policy in April 2022," she said. Given the current uncertainties, Suman Chowdhury, chief analytical officer, Acuité Ratings & Research, opined that RBI "has limited scope to tighten monetary policy". Amidst the deleterious

impact of the war, the RBI will be walking a tightrope on its monetary policy decisions, striving to control inflation within the tolerance band while at the same time supporting nascent growth impulses, he said.

"Going forward, we expect the RBI to restore the width of the LAF corridor to its pre-pandemic levels by hiking the reverse repo rate by 40 bps over Jun-Aug 2022 policy review, followed by a cumulative 50

bps hike in the repo rate in the rest of 2022-23," Chowdhury said. On the other hand, Dhruv Agarwala, group CEO, Housing.com, Makaan.com & PropTiger.com, opined that given the increase in inflationary pressure due to the war in Ukraine, it will be difficult for the RBI to continue maintaining a status quo on key policy rates in its upcoming monetary policy.

"While this would hurt the recovery process in India post the disruptions caused by the various waves of the coronavirus pandemic, the RBI may not have the flexibility to avoid a rate hike," he said. Agarwala further said any upward tweak at this stage might have an impact on real estate as well, but the numbers for the March quarter, show that the real estate sector is on a strong footing and may continue to cover the lost ground due to the pandemic on the back of strong pent-up demand.

Petrol above ₹ 100 in major cities

NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): Petrol prices on Sunday were above ₹ 100 a litre mark in all major cities across the country after its rates and that of diesel were hiked by 80 paise a litre each - the 11th increase in less than two weeks that took the total to a record ₹ 8 per litre. Petrol in Delhi will now cost ₹ 103.41 per litre as against ₹ 102.61 previously while diesel rates have gone up from ₹ 93.87 per litre to ₹ 94.67, according to a price notification of state fuel retailers. Rates have been increased across the country and vary from state to state, depending upon the incidence of local taxation.

This is the 11th increase in prices since the ending of a four-and-half-month long hiatus in rate revision on March 22. In all, petrol prices have gone up by ₹ 8.00 per litre. Petrol prices are above ₹ 100 a litre mark in all major cities from Srinagar to Kochi. Diesel is above that mark in Thiruvananthapuram (₹ 101.83 a litre), Hyderabad (₹ 103.3), Mumbai (₹ 102.62), Bhubaneswar (₹ 100.1), Raipur (₹ 100.74) and several cities of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Diesel rates in Chennai and Bhopal are above Rs 99 per litre. Diesel is the costliest in Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh (₹ 105.52 a litre), while petrol at ₹ 120.65 a litre is the costliest at the border town of Sri Ganganagar in Rajasthan. Prices had been on a freeze since November 4 ahead of the assembly elections in states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab -- a period during which the cost of raw material (crude oil) soared by about USD 30 per barrel.

The rate revision was expected soon after the counting of votes on March 10 but it was put off by a couple of weeks. The increase in retail price warranted by crude oil prices rising during the 137-day hiatus is huge, but state-owned fuel retailers Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) are passing on the required increase in stages. Moody's Investors Services last month stated that state retailers together lost around USD 2.25 billion (₹ 19,000 crore) in revenue for keeping petrol and diesel prices on hold during the election period. Oil companies "will need to raise diesel prices by ₹ 13.1-24.9 per litre and ₹ 10.6-22.3 a litre on gasoline (petrol) at an underlying crude price of USD 100-120 per barrel," according to Kotak Institutional Equities.

Rising demand: CERC orders power exchanges to cap bid prices at ₹ 12 per kWh

NEW DELHI, April 3 (IANS): The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) has asked the power exchanges to cap the bid price range to ₹ 12 per kWh for the 'Day Ahead Market' (DAM) and 'Real Time Market' (RTM) segments. The CERC has directed the power exchanges to re-design the bidding software to allow bids in the price range of ₹ 0-12 per kWh.

As per the Commission, power exchanges have designed the bidding software in such a way that members can submit their bids in the price range of ₹ 0-20 per kWh. "The Commission in exercise of powers under Regulation 51 (1) of PMR 2021 directs the power exchanges until further orders to re-design, with immediate effect, the bidding software in such a way that members can submit their bids in the price range of ₹ 0 per kWh to ₹ 12 per kWh for DAM and RTM," CERC said in an order dated April 1.

"The Commission is of the view

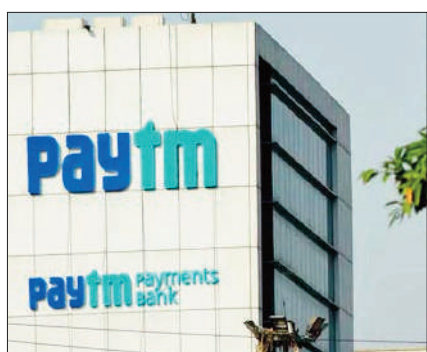
that this price moderation will be in keeping with the present market realities and shall not have any significant impact on the volume transacted and safeguard the consumer interests."

According to the Commission, the prices discovered at the power exchanges have remained significantly high during the last few days. "The factors like rise in temperature causing early onset of summers and increase in economic activities with lifting of Covid-related restrictions, have contributed significantly to the increase in electricity demand," it said. On the other hand, it cited that increase in supply has been limited. "The situation has been further aggravated due to geo-political factors affecting the fuel supply and certain domestic supply constraints."

This has widened the gap between demand and supply, with average buy to sell bid ratio reaching more than 2 and market clearing price (MCP) frequently touching ₹ 20 per kWh.

OCL shareholders fully approve its related party transactions with Paytm Payments Bank

NEW DELHI, April 3 (IANS): One97 Communications Limited (OCL) recently shared its postal ballot results with stock exchanges, where two resolutions were passed. The two resolutions - approval of material related party transactions with its associate Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) and approval for right to nominate directors as required under Article 113 of Article of Association of the Company - found the support of its shareholders. OCL and PPBL material related party transactions got over 71 per cent approval from shareholders, with over 26 crore votes showing as 'abstained' as they are related party members. As per regulations, related party members can either abstain or vote against the resolution. The strong approval to the resolution reinforces the confidence and constant support of all shareholders towards the company. The particulars of OCL's resolution on material related party transactions was shared with all member shareholders in a detailed note that has also been filed with the stock exchanges on February 24, 2022 in order to maintain full transparency. The company emphasised in the note that the related party transactions with PPBL shall not, in any manner, be detrimental to the interest of minority shareholders and will be in the best interest of the company. OCL's shareholding in Paytm Payments Bank is governed by a shareholder agreement. All new business arrangements, or changes to existing business arrangements, between the company and Paytm Payments



Bank are done at arm's length basis, and are subject to approval by the audit committee and board. The company's founder, who owns 51 per cent in Paytm Payments Bank, is not on the audit committee, and recuses himself for voting on these matters at board and shareholder meetings. Paytm's strong business fundamentals is seen in its accelerated growth in revenues - which in the last quarter itself grew 89 per cent y-o-y to Rs 1,456 crore. In the first two months of the current quarter, the company continues to show dominance across its businesses - scaled to 4.1 million loan disbursements during the first two months of the quarter (y-o-y growth of 449 per cent), which aggregates to a total loan value of ₹ 2,095 crore (y-o-y growth of 366 per cent), 105 per cent Y-o-Y increase in GMV at ₹ 1,65,333 crore (USD 22.2 billion) and 41 per cent growth in monthly transacting users to 69.5 million.

DERC has no jurisdiction in power allocation from CGS: MoP

NEW DELHI, April 3 (IANS): The Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) has no jurisdiction in allocation of power from central generating stations by the Central government to the states, the Union Ministry of Power said on Saturday.

"The power from the central generating stations (CGS) is allotted by the Central government to the states on their request. The DERC has no jurisdiction in the matter. If any reallocation is to be done, it is only on the request of the state government; and that also in case any other state is willing to take the surrendered power," the Power ministry said in a statement. The ministry said that Delhi Power Minister Satyendar Jain vide a letter dated July 6, 2015 had surrendered power from 11 central generating stations which also includes Dadri stage-II thermal power plant of NTPC, with immediate effect, and to reallocate the same to other needy states, the statement said.

The ministry added that the balance power from Dadri stage-II to an extent of 728 MW was available for reallocation and, accordingly, on March 28, 2022, the same has been given to Haryana based on their request.

No request for withdrawal of the surrendered share had been received from the government of Delhi till March 28, 2022. It was only after reallocation of this power that the government of NCT of Delhi woke up on March 30 and wrote to the MoP to restore Delhi's share from Dadri stage II, added the Power ministry.

"It may also be noted that Delhi has relinquished its share of 756 MW from Dadri-I indicating that this power is surplus. Thus, if Delhi is really under crisis and has concern about their consumers, they should not have surrendered their share from Dadri-I," said the statement.

IDFC Mutual Fund pioneers SIP registration through UPI AutoPay

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 3: In an industry-first initiative, IDFC Mutual Fund enabled UPI AutoPay, an NPCI initiative, allowing mutual fund investors to use their existing UPI applications to create a mandate for autopay facility for their Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) investments, encouraging savers to invest regularly through a convenient platform. Investors can initiate the SIP registration on the IDFC Mutual Fund portal. Highlighting the relevance of UPI AutoPay in the Mutual Fund industry, Vishal Kapoor, CEO, IDFC AMC said, "The mutual fund industry aims to reach 10 crore investors by the end of this decade, to achieve this, it is critical to on-board investors in a hassle-free manner. IDFC Mutual Fund is glad to pioneer UPI AutoPay in the mutual fund industry, aimed at reducing the wait time between registration and commencement of investments via SIP. Additionally, investors can easily pause, modify, or cancel the mandate through the application, as the need arises. This will stop potential investors from losing interest or deferring their investments." Notably, the SIP instalment could commence after five calendar days of registering the mandate. In addition, the instruction to debit the investor's account would be sent on the date of the instalment for the immediate realisation of funds in the scheme account with the NAV of the same day. At present, an investor can invest up to Rs 5000 per transaction using UPI AutoPay. Nalin Bansal, chief of Corporate and Fintech Relationships and Key Initiatives, NPCI said, "With the integration of UPI AutoPay, IDFC Mutual Fund investors can now set e-mandates within a few seconds, which in turn will completely transform the consumer experience in terms of their SIP payments. UPI AutoPay has the potential to create a valuable user engagement journey and we are confident that the addition of this unique feature is going to be a game-changer in the Mutual Fund space. With UPI AutoPay, we at NPCI are on a mission to offer a streamlined, secure, and automated payments experience to customers." Hemant Agrawal, head of Operations and Information Technology, IDFC AMC added, "UPI AutoPay is a convenient way for investors to register their SIP, which outweighs the earlier mechanism of registering standing instructions on the net banking portal. The time between the SIP registration date and commencement of instalments has been reduced from two weeks to a week, making it a time-saving facility."

India exports rise to record high of USD 418 bn in FY22

NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): India's merchandise exports spurt to a record high of USD 418 billion in the 2021-22 fiscal on higher shipments of petroleum products, engineering goods, gem and jewellery and chemicals, according to official data released on Sunday.

Outbound shipments touched an all-time high of USD 40 billion in a month in March 2022, Commerce and Industry minister Piyush Goyal told reporters here. Exports stood at USD 34 billion in March 2021. Merchandise exports were worth USD 292 billion in FY 2020-21. India's merchandise exports had breached the targeted USD 400 billion mark on March 23 this year.

The key export sectors, which contributed to record healthy growth, include petroleum products, engineering, gems and jewellery, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. The top five export destinations are the US, UAE, China, Bangladesh and the Netherlands. Hailing the country's success in achieving the goods export target, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that this is a key milestone in India's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' journey.

Mcap of top-10 valued firms soars ₹ 2.61 lakh cr; HDFC Bank, RIL lead gainers

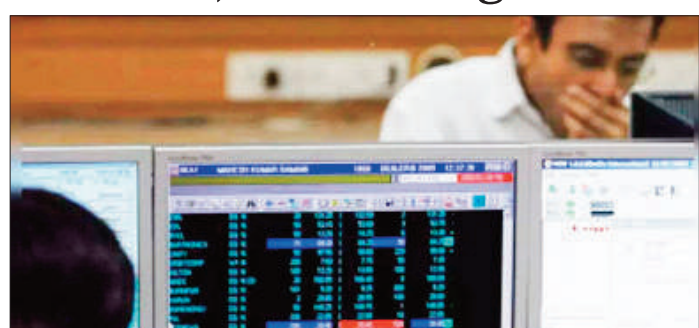
NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): The top 10 valued domestic firms added a whopping ₹ 2,61,767.61 crore to their total market valuation last week in tandem with a buoyant trend in equities, with HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest gainers.

Last week, the Sensex zoomed 1,914.49 points or 3.33 per cent.

From the top-10 pack, the market valuation of HDFC Bank zoomed ₹ 41,469.24 crore to reach ₹ 8,35,324.84 crore.

Reliance Industries added ₹ 39,073.7 crore to take its valuation to ₹ 17,95,709.10 crore.

The market valuation of Hindustan Unilever Limited jumped ₹ 29,687.09 crore to ₹ 4,88,808.97 crore and that of Bharti Airtel zoomed ₹ 27,103.16 crore to ₹ 4,16,625.19 crore. HDFC added ₹ 26,851.9 crore



to ₹ 4,44,363.28 crore in its valuation. The market capitalisation (mcap) of Bajaj Finance climbed ₹ 26,672.18 crore to ₹ 4,48,810.74 crore and that of ICICI Bank gained ₹ 25,975.05 crore to ₹ 5,11,777.01 crore. The mcap of Tata Consultancy Services went higher by ₹ 18,088.37 crore to reach ₹ 13,89,678.12 crore. The market cap of State Bank of India jumped ₹

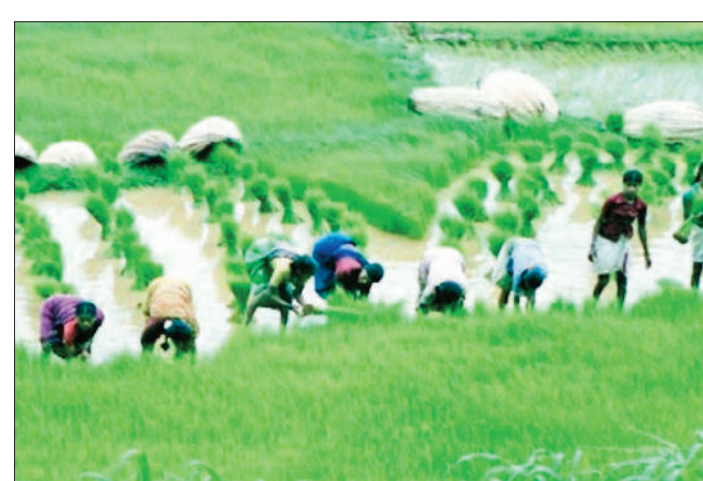
15,930.43 crore to ₹ 4,53,548.76 crore and that of Infosys advanced by ₹ 10,916.49 crore to ₹ 8,00,268.93 crore.

In the ranking of top-10 firms, Reliance Industries retained the most valued company tag, followed by Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, Infosys, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finance, HDFC and Bharti Airtel.

MSP distorts mkt prices of farm produce, planting decisions of farmers: US

NEW DELHI, April 3 (IANS): The Centre's Minimum Support Price (MSP) results in overproduction of farm produce and limited demand for imports besides distorting market prices of the produce and planting decisions among the farming community, said United States Trade Representative's 2022 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers (NTE Report).

The report provided a comprehensive review of significant foreign barriers to the US exports of goods and services. Besides MSP, India provides a broad range of assistance to its large agricultural sector, including credit subsidies, debt waivers, crop insurance, and subsidies for inputs (such as fertiliser, fuel, electricity, and seeds) at both the Central government and



state government levels. These subsidies, which are of substantial cost to the government, lower the cost of production for India's pro-

ducers benefit from the government's Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme, which helps ensure that farmers receive minimum prices that are announced before the planting season, the report said.

Rice and wheat account for the largest share of products procured under the MSP program and are typically distributed through the government public distribution system.

"In addition, in certain years and for specific products, states have provided additional incentives in the form of 'bonuses' above the MSPs announced by the government of India," the report said.

Also, the Indian government procures pulses and oilseeds when market prices typically fall below the MSP, it added.

Producers of 25 agricultural

House in Henam village completely gutted



HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, April 3: In a tragic fire incident, a dwelling house belonging to one Njebuung Newme was completely burnt to ashes at Boro Henam village (around 15 km away from district HQ Haflong) under Haflong police station. No casualties were reported. The incident took place at around 12.30 pm on Saturday while the families were working on their jhum cultivation. Sources said that the fire was caught due to forest burning in the nearby village, however the exact cause of the fire is yet to ascertain and a police team is investigating the matter. The district disaster management authority (DDMA) and Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS), Dima Hasao are on their way to deliver relief material such as blanket, tarpaulin, mosquito net, hygiene kit, utensil, etc., while assessing the damages.

CCBTRO holds meeting with BTR CEM Pramod Boro

KOKRAJHAR, April 3: A meeting of the coordination committee of Bodoland Territorial Region Organisation (BTR) with BTR chief executive member Pramod Boro and government officials of BTR government was held at the conference hall of BTC Legislative Assembly in Kokrajhar on Sunday.

A total 30 member organisations of CCBTRO like students' union, social organisations including All Bodo Students Union, AAMSU, ABMSU, ASSU participated in the meeting and participated in the discussion over the welfare and development aspects of the citizens in the region.

BTR CEM Pramod Boro, BTR principal secretary Anurag Goel, and several BTR executive members were present in the meeting.

The meeting discussed social integration, all round development of the society and different strategies that were prepared



for carrying out welfare initiatives in the days to come.

BTR CEM Pramod Boro said that they had a discussion over the social integration

and developmental aspects of the region. He also informed that all students' union, social organisations from the BTR districts participated during the meeting and shared their remarks and views.

"The meeting was held between the BTR government and 30 organisations of CCBTRO (Coordination Committee BTR Organisations). During the meeting, we had a discussion about the issues relating to their organisation and community and were also assured to work together in coming days," Boro added.

The students' union and social organisations expressed their happiness over the meeting held in the BTC assembly house conference hall.

The leaders said that they are hopeful and that those who are living in the BTR region are getting a new ray of hope with integration and development under the leadership of BTR CEM Pramod Boro in days to come.

Chirang district administration launches 'Alok Yatra'

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, APRIL 3: The Chirang district administration on Saturday launched an exposure tour programme named 'Alok Yatra- In search of light' in the district.

The Alok Yatra, which was launched for two-day from Saturday to Sunday was flagged off by deputy commissioner, Chirang, Narendra Kumar Shah in the presence of Rahul Gupta, additional deputy commissioner and in-charge sub-divisional officer (Civil), Bijni at the premises of Chirang deputy commissioner's office at Kajalgaon.

It was organised by Chirang district administration in collaboration with the District Child Protection Office with an aim at giving an exposure tour to the children residing in various child care



institutions registered under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015 of the district.

The team comprising of 78 children from four child care institutions of Chirang district like

Nichima Orphanage Home Society of Koilamoila, Ratnapeet Sewa Samiti of Chapaguri, Child Care and Protection Centre of Hasrao-bari, Kripalaya Hahnen Girls' Home of Simaluguri will visit Planetarium, Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra, Regional Science Centre and State Zoo in Guwahati.

While talking to media, deputy commissioner Narendra Kumar Shah informed that district administration had taken this kind of initiative with the intention of stabilising the minds and building knowledge of children, especially of the orphans and some children of the district rescued from outer state Sikkim last year.

The team was led by three executive magistrates and district child protection officers under the supervision of Bijni sub-divisional officer (Civil) Rahul Gupta.

Bihu workshop under way in Nitaipukhuri

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, April 3: A 'Dhol Badan' and Bihu dance workshop was organised by the Facebook page 'Amar Prayakh: A Platform for Positive' in collaboration with Extension Cell, HCDG College, Nitaipukhuri from Friday. Bijoy Borgohain inaugurated the 'Dhol Badan' and Bihu dance workshop. Kushal Bharali, Pranjal Chutia, Biswajit Sonowal and Mukunda Changmai are the experts present for the 'Dhol Badan' workshop. Moni Singh, Girimolika Borgohain, Dimpee Gogoi and Banasmita Borah are training the participants of Bihu dance workshop. The workshop will conclude on April 10.



Legal awareness program organised in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 3: A legal awareness on tribal rights was organised at Commerce College auditorium in Kokrajhar on Sunday with a day-long program. The program was carried out with special reference to the "prevention of SC/ST ATROCITIES act, 1989 in sixth scheduled areas". The awareness was organised by Bodo National Students Union (BNSU) to create awareness of tribal rights among the tribal council as well as indigenous peoples in the state. Rights activists Raju Deori, tribal leader Bhogeswar Shyam, and social activist Janaklal Basumatary were present as resource persons at the event. Deori emphasised the tribal rights that are deprived of their due rights due to insincerity attitudes from the government. He said that the tribal communities across the state are deprived of their due rights and welfare aspects due to the stepmotherly attitudes of the government itself.

e-Sewa Kendra inaugurated in District Judicial Court Complex, Baksa

HT Correspondent

BAKSA, April 3: An "e-Sewa Kendra" dedicated to the common litigants was inaugurated inside the district judicial court complex at Baksa by Justice Hitesh Kr. Sama, Judge, Gauhati High Court in the presence of Aminur Rahman, District and Sessions Judge, Baksa, and other judicial officers. "The e-Sewa Kendra is dedicated to enabling the litigant public to get the case status as well as the copies of judgment and orders which will indeed save the time of the public. Moreover, booking of e-Mulakat appointments for meeting relatives in jail is another facility that is available in the e-Sewa Kendra. The people of Baksa and Tamulpur will now have a one-stop center for getting various legal information of court-related matters in the districts of Baksa and Tamulpur," said Justice Sama while inaugurating the center. "The e-Sewa Kendra will facilitate information on the development of the cases, e-filing of the petition, to assist the online purchase of e-stamp, guide people on how to avail free legal services from the Legal Services Authorities, etc," added Aminur Rahman, the District & Sessions, Judge-cum-Chairman, District Legal Services Authority, Baksa.

Cancer awareness programme held at Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, April 3: A Cancer awareness programme was held at India Club Margherita which was organised by Indian Red Cross Society, Margherita sub-district branch in association with Seva Foundation, Margherita. They were supported by Pratisruti Cancer and Palliative Trust Dibrugarh. The programme was presided by Anand Sharma where Pabitra Buragohain, secretary of Indian Red Cross Society, Margherita sub-district branch delivered the aims and objectives of the programme.

Cyclone: DDMA Cachar issues advisory

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, April 3: The Cachar District Disaster Management Authority has informed about the do's and don'ts of the time before and after the onset of the cyclone.

The Cachar district administration and the district disaster management authority have urged the government to abide by the rules to protect the lives and property of the people. Before the onset of the cyclone season, it is important to inspect your home thoroughly, secure loose tiles, and repair doors and windows.

The branches of the tree next to the house should be cut off. The tin sheets that have become loose in the house should be repaired and brought to a strong position. Loose bricks, signboards, etc., on the wall which can be damaged by strong winds should be removed. The house should have a few wooden boards so that the glass windows

can be covered as needed. The house has been asked to have a battery-powered torch, adequate dry cell, and kerosene-filled hurricane lights. Dry food should be stored indoors for use in the event of a disaster. Listen to the warnings broadcast on the radio when the cyclone starts and stay alert. Share this message with others as well. Under no circumstances you should listen to rumours and refrain from spreading rumours. Government data must be trusted. After the cyclone warning has been issued, evacuate the area around the river or a large body of water. It is also advised not to take shelter in an open space and under trees during cyclones as there is a high risk of accidents. At that time there should be a strong building or shelter. The outside doors of the house should be kept well closed. It is advisable to provide dry food and drinking water. Turn off the switch on the mainline of the electrical circuit during a cyclone. Stay with your family members during cyclones, keep dry food, drinking water, baby food, essential medicines, etc., with you. If necessary, they have been asked to take shelter in the shelter identified by the disaster management authority.

After the cyclone, they have been asked not to leave the shelter until further notice. Hurricanes can break trees and break electrical wires, leaving them in a dangerous position, so it is advisable to move with caution and drive. In addition, it has been asked not to touch any electrical wires that are torn or hanging. Accurate information on the damage caused by the cyclone has been asked to be provided to the concerned disaster management authorities. This was stated in a press release issued from the Regional Office of Information and Public Relations Barak valley zone Assam.

Drugs seized

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 3: A police team on Saturday recovered 1100 Sam-pex Plus capsules and 500 Nitrazepam 10 mg tablets from a person at Rajabari Sonowal village under Borholla police station in Titabar sub-division of Jorhat district.

A police source stated that the person has been identified as Pratap Sonowal and legal action was initiated against him under the relevant sections of the NDPS Act.

National footballer Swadhin Dekaraja kicks off centenary celebrations of JDSA



HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 3: Former Indian footballer Swadhin Dekaraja inaugurated the year-long centenary celebrations of the Jorhat

District Sports Association (JDSA) at the Jorhat Stadium on Saturday. Dekaraja who has represented Assam State Football Team in Santosh Trophy from

1975 to 1978 and represented The Indian football team in several international football matches said that students should play games and be engaged in different sports activities for holistic development. Notably, Dekaraja who was an officer of Oil India Ltd. added that along with academic studies children should be encouraged to play so that they remained physically fit in mind and body.

Rajya Sabha MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa and former JDSA secretary and noted sports organiser Noni Dutta and Santanu Pujari also addressed the gathering. Later, it was also informed that JDSA is also set to organise a marathon run for men and women which will start from the Jorhat Stadium to Kaziranga University and back on April 10 next. This will further coincide with the final match of the ATPA football shield to be played at the Stadium on the same day.

'NGO Mandal, a boon for the Adivasi people in Sonitpur district'



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 3: "For make the learning process easy for the Adivasi children, under the aegis of NCERT and SCERT a number of primary level books in Sadri language were published by us which attracted the Adivasi children towards school/formal education," vice president and general secretary of the NGO, Mandal, a frontline NGO of the district respectively Anjali Devi and Bishnu Munda said while talking to The Hills Times. They mentioned that it is a part of their exclusive activities which is being carried out to uplift the Adivasi community in the district. It is to be mentioned here that 'Mandal' has been able to become a boon to bring in changes among the Adivasis in many tea garden and ex-tea garden areas in Sonitpur district through several welfare activities. The NGO headquartered in Tezpur Horigaon area came into being in 2003 and since its inception it has been providing yeoman's service to the people aiming at creating awareness in the field of creating awareness on education, health, sanitation, superstitious believe, etc., among the educationally backward section of the Adivasi living both in tea garden and ex-tea garden areas in the Sonitpur district. The NGO has till date organised a number of awareness programmes in total 33 tea gardens under

the Balipara Education Block to create opinion against consumption of country liquor, witch-hunting and to enhance educational environment, etc. Under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan, a flagship programme of the ministry of Education, many other programmes have been conducted till date. The duo said, "Horigaon is one of the adopted villages of Tezpur University under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan that in collaboration with the village bodies and NGO Mandal conducts various developmental activities in such villages. Horigaon, recently acquired a skill development project to start a sewing machine training centre to empower the women of the village with tailoring skills to augment job prospects and promote entrepreneurial endeavours."

"At present, around 30 women are undergoing training at the centre. We organised International Women's Day to usher up the sense of belongingness wherein Professor Deben Chandra Baruah, coordinator Unnat Bharat Abhiyan of Tezpur University greeted the trainee and emphasised on the importance of women in the society and said that Tezpur University is committed to take necessary steps to address various issues faced by women and promote empowerment of women. With the help of the university, we are also planning to arrange training programme on digital literacy for the women participants, especially on proper use of smartphones to empower the women of the village which will hopefully help in learning how to make optimum use of a smartphone and teach the same to their children and supervise the children while they use the smartphone. We are happy that Tezpur University is also planning a series of programmes in collaboration with Mandal and other village bodies which will be conducted throughout the year," The duo office bearers of the NGO added.

CM Himanta assures to be the chief patron of Narayanpur session of Assam Sahitya Sabha

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 3: State chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma assured to be the chief patron of the Narayanpur session of Assam Sahitya Sabha which is to be held in Narayanpur-Barkhat Pathar Manikanchan Kheta under Tezpur Lok Sabha Constituency to be held with a four day-long event from January 31 to February 4 next year (2023) while a group of 19 member central committee delegation of the apex literary body on behalf of the Reception Committee headed by Jadab Chandra Sarma met the chief minister at



his residence on Friday. In a press note issued here,

general secretary of the highest literary body Jadab Chandra

Sarma mentioned that chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma assured to extend every possible help to make the mega event a grand success.

"For a facelift in the venue of the conference essential facilities like drinking water, road communication, electrification, etc., will be done very shortly along with building of a guest house in the area by the government," Jadab Chandra Sarma said in the release and added that for monitoring the site the government would very shortly send two cabinet ministers to the area.

Controlling rise in fuel prices

In the last few days, petrol and diesel prices in the country have been hiked multiple times, with more such daily hikes in the offing. The explanation for these hikes is that the prices for the companies had remained frozen for some time, even as the international oil prices were rising, with the companies absorbing the rise. Now that they have been allowed to raise their prices, they are catching up, and the burden has to be borne by the consumer since the government cannot afford to lose any revenue by reducing taxes per liter. The last time that petro-product prices had been hiked by the oil companies was on November 4, 2021. For 137 days after that, it is argued, there had been no price increase for the companies. During this period, however, there had been a rise in crude oil price in the international market from USD 82 per barrel to USD 117 per barrel, which meant a loss of revenue for the public sector oil companies alone of USD 2.25 billion; the companies now have to adjust their prices upward to prevent such revenue losses.

The act of increasing petro-product prices in short does not remain confined to the oil companies alone. It has a multiplier effect: it is necessarily followed, down the line, by all those entities that claim a share of the retail price of petro-products. The rise in inflation then is much larger. Prices can at all reach a plateau in such a situation only if some people's money incomes do not rise to compensate them for the price rise, that is if some are only "price-takers" and not "price-makers". These can only be the working people. Hurting the working people, therefore, is the raison d'être of this entire strategy. To adopt such a fiscal strategy and at the same time shed tears for the working people, is the height of hypocrisy. Interestingly, there is no automaticity about the rise in the retail prices of petro-products just because world crude oil prices have risen; one is not the inevitable consequence of the other. The rise in retail prices of petro-products is a fiscal strategy; these retail prices have to rise if there is a rise in world crude prices only because of this fiscal strategy. To talk about the inevitability of the rise in the retail prices of petro-products is to take this fiscal strategy itself as inevitable, and therefore to conceal from the people the fact that it is a chosen strategy, a deliberate act of choice.

The case of the state governments is understandable: they have very few sources of revenue that they can tap at their discretion. After the introduction of the GST, the area of discretion has shrunk quite sharply, and petro-products happen to be one of the three commodities where the rates are not fixed by the GST Council but can be fixed at the state government's discretion. State governments' taxing petro-products, therefore, is quite understandable; they have little choice in the matter since they cannot impose direct taxes. But the Central government has ample scope for raising resources through other means, which it is deliberately not using. Its resort to taxing petro-products instead of imposing direct taxes on the rich is, therefore, a choice made on its part. It is a class bias; there is nothing inevitable about it.

Covid intensity has lessened but the challenges still remain

By Dr. Gvan Pathak

General decline in Covid-19 cases in India has emboldened several states in the country to remove curbs, even as in the morning of April 1, 2022 a slight increase in new infection were reported in the last 24 hours to 1335 from 1225 a day earlier, which is a clear indication that we are not too far from the underlying danger, and hence precautions are still needed, and lessons from the past must not be forgotten so soon, rather must be taken forward as being suggested by a group of experts. Though the Centre had announced last week that all containment measures in the country will end on March 31, it was officially advised that people should wear masks and maintain social distancing. The advisory is important and seems to be wise, even though some of the states in the country have decided to withdraw all curbs including the mandatory rule of wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, and the provisions of penalty for their violations. Reduction of 635 cases has been recorded in the active case load with only 52 deaths in the last 24 hours. No doubt it is a significant decline, with reported recovery of 1918 which is much larger than the daily new cases, but we must not forget so soon the Covid-19 death toll of 5,21,181, and the total cases 4,30,25,775. We also must not forget that the fatality rate is still at 1.21 per cent, and the cumulative doses administered has just exceeded 184.31 crore, and we are testing only about six lakh people daily and only about 78.97 crore tests have been done so far.

WHO Covid-19 Technical Lead Maria Van Kerkhove's opinion is worth remembering here who indicated that it was important to consider a drop in testing that could be the reason behind the noticeable decline in number of new infections world over. "We are concerned about these trends, so it's possible we are missing a large number of cases because omicron is so much more transmissible than any variant we have seen so far," she said while stressing on the fact that the pandemic is not over yet and that we still need to use the tools to save the lives. Moreover, India accounts for the second highest caseload only after the United States. The dangers from the new variant of Omicron are also looming large and fresh surge is being witnessed in China and elsewhere in the world, and there is no guarantee that other more infectious variants would not emerge.

However, due to significant decline in Covid-19 new cases and deaths, Maharashtra, Delhi, Telangana, and West Bengal have already announced complete relaxation of Covid-19 related curbs starting from April 1.

Wearing masks is the first line of precautionary defence against the Covid-19 infection. There was a time when mask was even made mandatory and violation of this was made punishable with fine. Now Delhi, Maharashtra, and Telangana has removed their mandatory orders and done away with the penalty provision for not wearing masks in public places. The West Bengal government has lifted all restrictions imposed but has decided to continue the mask mandate.

Almost all states across the country are yet to do away with the mandatory mask, since they are not sure about the wisdom of taking such a decision, though they have already removed many of the Covid-19 curbs.

It is clear that the states along with the experts are divided over doing away with the mandatory provisions of wearing masks. Many experts believe that doing away with the mandatory rule for wearing mask would have been implemented with great caution for several reasons.

First there are many people who are yet to be vaccinated and are therefore vulnerable for infection. Secondly, there are Covid-19 variants of concern which are able to bypass immunity of even the vaccinated, and such infected people can infect others, including the vulnerable ones. And third, withdrawing the mandatory provision and penalty would have encouraging effect on all to not wear masks and hence will be exposed for infection leading to chaos. Many experts believe that it is not a right time to do away with mandatory wearing of masks and maintaining social distancing, since Omicron BA.2 has already emerged as fresh concern across the world. Even the major cities in China have resorted to quarantine once again. At this point of time both the symptomatic and asymptomatic persons must wear masks for their own safety and for safety of others. Precisely for this reason, maintaining physical distance, use of sanitizers, hand washing, and avoiding exposure to crowds should be continued until we come clear out of the danger. Making these basic precautionary measures optional is not wise since these provisions may prevent not only Covid-19 infection but also others. These are, in fact, general precautions, a cover for good health and hygiene. (IPA Service)

Europe is replacing energy dependence on Russia with reliance on Africa



scale. A report from German think tank Agora Energiewende notes, "Meeting estimated hydrogen demand in the EU purely with [domestic] wind and solar would require eight times as much electricity to be produced from these sources by 2050 than was produced in 2020," with over half of that total electricity being "dedicated towards hydrogen production."

The answer comes from the outside. This same report also notes that "North Africa, owing to its excellent solar potential, could be supplying just under half of the EU's hydrogen demand at prices well below the European average [by 2050] — and at low transport costs due to pipelines." In recent months, an initial series of green hydrogen megaprojects have been unveiled in the region: French corporation Total Eren has announced a \$10.7 billion facility to be built at a giant 170,000 hectare site in Morocco, which will be operational by 2025, while Norwegian Statkraft has signed a deal for one of the largest green hydrogen plants on the African continent in Egypt, which will begin production by 2024 in a deal worth an initial \$5 billion.

Within the EU, Germany in particular has pursued an import-led strategy, looking both to Southern European states such as Spain as potential sources while also earmarking €2 billion in public funds toward hydrogen partnerships beyond the EU. These include a strategic bilateral venture in Morocco as well as agreements further afield with countries such as Namibia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, and Australia — though questions remain about the cost and viability of the long-distance shipping of the fuel. German giant Siemens has also been very active, signing a memorandum of understanding in 2021 with Egypt to develop large-scale green hydrogen projects in the country with an estimated total cost of \$23 billion, as well as being involved in pilot schemes in Morocco.

But this is all being driven from outside by foreign corporations. The pressures coming from Europe are huge, but if we start by producing for exports, this will delay our own green transition in Africa. We should get our electricity mix up to 70 to 80 percent renewable before we even start thinking about exporting to the EU. But unfortunately, this is not where the profits are. Beyond delaying the African green transition, these European-led megaprojects are also likely to displace a series of other costs onto local populations through the forced dispossession of large tracts of land from agrarian and pastoral communities and by diverting scarce water supplies away from drinking and agriculture. This type of "green

grabbing" of resources has already been seen in relation to the construction of the Ouarzazate solar plants in Morocco, the world's largest concentrated plant, where farmers were subject to "compulsory [land] sales at extraordinarily low rates" while the plant now consumes between two to three million cubic meters of water per year cooling the solar panels.

A December 2020 report from Corporate Europe Observatory notes that it no accident that the energy industry "has sought authoritarian regimes with which to broker deals" on large-scale green projects, since they can be pushed through with little say from locals and or similar obstacles from environmental, labor, and social regulations. As an international green hydrogen market begins to take shape amid a new scramble for Africa, Hamouche argues these relations of exploitation, underdevelopment, and land grabbing "follow a familiar colonial scheme where you have the free flow of cheap natural resources from the Global South to the rich North, in this case renewables, while the costs associated with their extraction are imposed on the peoples of the South." He continues:

In order to meet Europe's hydrogen demand, Morocco would need to install sixty-two times the capacity of the Ouarzazate solar plant. You also have to remember the amount of water that will be required to produce this hydrogen. Where is that going to come from? There is a lot of talk about desalination plants, on top of all this, to purify seawater, but this would then necessitate further energy production to power these plants. I don't see how any of this is sustainable.

But that is what happens when you only think in terms of exports and simply see the Sahara as an empty space from which to extract value — you don't take into account local communities, their livelihoods or welfare.

These export-led projects also tend to be developed in alliance with the local ruling classes through public-private partnerships, under which government-backed loans minimize the risk associated with the investments for European multinationals and corrupt local elites alike.

In the case of Morocco, which is likely to become the EU's largest hydrogen supplier in the coming decades and potentially the location for a regional hub for processing hydrogen from other African countries, renewable megaprojects in solar and wind are already translating into the enrichment of the Moroccan royal family through the participation of its own private renewable energy company, Nareva, as well as that of companies and financial interest associated with its inner circle.

Yet tying Europe's future energy security to another ultranationalist authoritarian kleptocracy is not without its challenges. It risks potentially leaving the EU "as dependent on hydrogen imports from Morocco as it is today on gas imports from Russia," according to a recent report from Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. It adds, "The price to pay for cheaper hydrogen supplies will be the possibility of reproducing past energy dependence patterns and security of supply risks. . . . While shifting the geopolitical center of gravity from East to South would have major implications, it would do little to enhance the Union's strategic autonomy on energy."

Morocco has already shown its willingness to flex its diplomatic muscle with respect to the EU, including in its role as an outsourced border guard for the bloc. In early 2021, Mohammed VI's government broke off diplomatic relations with both Spain and Germany after the two countries condemned Donald Trump's last-minute recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the occupied Western Sahara. In a further escalation of the crisis, Morocco then opened the border crossing with Ceuta — a Spanish enclave in North Africa — allowing a record six thousand immigrants to cross in one day last May. Tellingly, it also simultaneously froze its hydrogen agreement with Germany.

Western Sahara also figures heavily in the current shift in EU energy policy. Known as "Africa's last colony," this resource-rich territory the size of Britain was denied its independence upon the end of Spanish colonial rule in 1975, as Moroccan troops rapidly invaded in their stead. In the decades since, Morocco has installed what Freedom House describes as one of the most unfree political regimes on the planet, where journalists, human rights activists, and pro-independence supporters face police harassment, torture, and lengthy jail sentences.

Moroccan pressure has ultimately had its desired effect, as the EU shifted its position on Western Sahara over the last year. Early in 2022, the new German coalition government signaled it was abandoning the United Nations' stated policy, which calls for decolonization and a referendum on self-determination for the Saharawi people, to back plans for the territory's incorporation as an autonomous region within the Moroccan state. This has been followed, since the beginning of the Ukrainian war, by similar moves from French president Emmanuel Macron.

For Europe to even meet its more limited domestic targets for green hydrogen by 2030 risks consuming a substantive portion of the new wind and solar energy produced in the EU, according to the report, while the ramp-up of imports from North Africa over the next decade will slow the green transition in the Maghreb.

A more efficient way to phase out gas in the near term, the report argues, would be to reallocate renewable energy that was to be deployed for the production of hydrogen and instead use it to maximize the phasing out of gas-fired electricity and to power heat pumps — then only turning to green hydrogen "as and when direct electrification potentials are maxed out."

This, however, does not fit with the priorities of the EU's corporate-centered green transition, in which behemoths like Total, Iberdrola, and Snam are determined to carve out significant shares of a global hydrogen market that Goldman Sachs estimates will be worth \$10 trillion by 2050. The ramping up of green hydrogen over the coming decade will not only be built on neocolonial extractivism but also represent an inefficient deployment of the available renewable energy resources within Europe. But, crucially, it will create the conditions for the consolidation and expansion of existing corporate power. (IPA Service)

Israel takes centre-stage of Middle East politics

By: James M Dorsey

A straightforward message emerged from this week's meeting in the Negev desert of the foreign ministers of four Arab countries, Israel and the United States: Israel is key to the security of Gulf autocracies and continued US engagement in the Middle East.

It may be a message that on the surface holds out the promise of reduced regional tension, the beginning of a rejiggering of the region's security architecture, and the Middle East's increased ability to fend for itself increasingly.

A look under the hood suggests that there may be less to the façade the foreign ministers of the United

Arab Emirates, Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, Israel, and the United States are erecting.

What emerges from the lifting of the hood is that Gulf states, including the UAE, once described as 'Little Sparta' by former US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis because of its military prowess, are unable to defend themselves against external threats despite being among the world's foremost buyers of the most sophisticated weaponry.

They are also less likely than Israel to keep the United States engaged in the Middle East when Washington sees its critical national security challenges elsewhere.

The UAE, like Saudi Arabia, has yet to launch a successful foreign

military venture or successfully impregnate its territory against attacks by foreign adversaries. The UAE partially withdrew from the seven-year-old Yemen war without achieving its military objectives despite leaving local proxies behind, while Saudi Arabia is looking for a face-saving end to the conflict.

The Saudi-led coalition on Tuesday declared a one-month ceasefire during the holy month of Ramadan during a summit of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council that groups Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. Yemen's Houthis rebels refused to join the meeting because it was held in Riyadh, the capital of one of the war's main protagonists.

Meanwhile, the two Gulf states have been unable to protect their infrastructure and oil facilities from missile and drone attacks by the rebels and potentially by Iran itself.

Israel's importance to the Arab states was highlighted by the fact that the first-ever such gathering, particularly on Israeli soil, was convened by the Jewish state rather than the UAE, for example, and held in the home of David Ben-Gurion, a founder and the first prime minister of Israel.

To be sure, the Ukraine crisis has brought the Middle East's significance back to the fore, whether it relates to the diversification of the supply of oil and gas to Europe, the Middle East's impact on security beyond its borders, or stability in an era

of defiance and dissent with the rise of the spectre of food riots in various Middle Eastern countries because of a spike in commodity prices.

By agreeing to attend a gathering in the home kibbutz of Ben-Gurion, whom Palestinians hold co-responsible for their plight, Arab foreign ministers were further underlining Israeli power in the region.

They also ignored the fact that the series of killings in recent days of Israelis by apparent Palestinian lone wolves suggests that the Palestinians are as much part of Israel and the region's security equation as is Iran, the Houthis, or Lebanon's Shiite militia-cum-political party, Hezbollah. The killings occurred on the eve of a month of major religious Muslim, Jewish, and Christian holidays that could spark emotions at sensitive sacred sites in Jerusalem.

Moreover, the Palestinians and others will have noted that at a time when Russia's invasion of Ukraine dominates headlines, three of the six participants in the summit — Israel, the UAE, and Morocco — occupy foreign lands and/or have intervened militarily in conflicts beyond their borders.

King Abdullah of Jordan, together with Sudan, the two other Arab countries that have recognized Israel, made a point of visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah on the West Bank on the day of the summit rather than joining the gathering. Israel conquered the West Bank during the 1967 Middle

East war.

Israel's importance is not simply its military and technological prowess and its ability and willingness, in contrast to the United States, to confront Iran in Israel itself as well as in Syria and cyberspace, but also that it is the only Middle Eastern country that can boast a significant grassroots popular base in the United States.

That gives Israel the kind of sway in Washington that cannot be obtained by spending millions of dollars on the services of public relations and lobbying firms.

It also means that amid the suggestion that the United States may be reducing its commitment to the Middle East to better focus on the Indo-Pacific and Europe in the wake of Ukraine, Israel is the one regional state that will retain Washington's full attention.

As a result, Israel is increasingly likely to play a part, and already frequently has, not only in regional security but in relations between the United States and various Arab states on multiple issues, including arms sales.

"Ben-Gurion would have been proud that, given Arab perceptions that the US is engaged in retrenching in the Mideast, it is Israel being welcomed by key Arab states, expanding its regional profile and at least partly filling that void," said Washington Institute for Near East Policy analyst and former US official David Makovsky. (IPA Service)



What are the stages of cancer?

By: Jenna Fletcher

Cancer stages refer to the type of cancer a person has, the size of the initial tumor, and whether or not the cancer has spread to other areas of the body.

Cancer staging can vary between types of cancer. However, there are staging systems that doctors frequently use to measure, describe, and treat a wide variety of cancers.

This article will examine what cancer stages mean and what the differences are between stages. It will also look at cancer grades and whether or not a cancer stage can change after diagnosis.

What can a cancer stage show?

Doctors use cancer stages to describe the cancer in terms of size and whether or not it has spread. According to the National Cancer Institute, cancer staging can help a doctor:

- Plan the best treatment for the person
- Recognize the severity and survivability of the cancer
- Help find clinical trials that may help with treatment

The American Cancer Society elaborate on the importance of staging for treatment. An early stage of cancer may respond well to radiation therapy or surgery, while a later stage of cancer may respond better to chemotherapy, targeted drug therapy, or immunotherapy.

Cancer stages

Many healthcare professionals use a simple series of five different stages to describe most cancers. As the number increases, the severity of the cancer also increases, and the survival rates decrease.

Once a doctor has made a cancer diagnosis, they will use several methods to classify and stage the cancer.

Healthcare professionals refer to the cancer by the initial stage given at diagnosis, even if it changes over time. Using the cancer stage at diagnosis is a starting point for understanding how well it will respond to treatment, as well as the overall survivability rate.

In addition to the numbered stages outlined below, healthcare professionals may also describe a cancer with one of the following terms:

- In situ, if abnormal cells are present but have not spread
- Localized, if cancer is present but only in the place where it first appeared
- Regional, if the cancer has spread to nearby tissue, organs, or lymph nodes
- Distant, if the cancer has spread to distant

parts of the body

• Unknown, if a healthcare professional does not have enough information to fully classify the cancer

Additionally, not all cancers have stages. For example, doctors do not stage leukemia since it is a cancer of the blood. Some cancers, such as brain cancer, have their own system of diagnosis.

Stage 0

Stage 0 cancer refers to when a doctor has found abnormal tissue that has not yet spread to other areas of the body. According to the National Cancer Institute, doctors often refer to this stage as carcinoma in situ.

The diagnosis of stage 0 cancer will vary based on where and how a doctor detects it.

At this point, the abnormal cells are not actually cancer, but they may become cancer if a person does not receive treatment.

Treatment

Treatment will vary, but it generally requires the removal of the cells and surrounding tissue. More targeted treatments may not be necessary.

Outlook

The survivability of stage 0 cancers is high but will vary between cancers. For example, stage 0 breast cancer has a 99% survival rate after 5 years.

Learn more about stage 0 cancer here.

Stage 1

Stage 1 is an early stage of cancer. The tumor is typically small and has not spread to nearby tissue or lymph nodes.

Treatment

Treatment for stage 1 cancers often involves surgical removal or radiation therapy to remove the cancerous cells. The exact treatment method will vary based on the type of cancer a person has.

Outlook

Stage 1 cancer is an early stage of cancer and generally has a higher survival rate than more advanced stages of cancer.

Stage 2

Stage 2 cancer indicates that the tumor is a little larger and has grown into nearby tissue.

Diagnosis will vary based on the type of cancer a person has. The cancer is still localized, but it may have spread to nearby tissue or lymph nodes.

Treatment

Treatment can vary based on the type of cancer a person has, as well as other factors, such as their age and overall health. Treatment may involve radiation therapy or surgery to remove the tumor.

Outlook

The exact outlook for a person with stage 2 cancer will vary based on their age, overall health,

and the type of cancer they have. Stage 2 cancer is often treatable and has a high survivability rate.

Stage 3

In stage 3 cancer, the tumor is still localized, but it is often larger than stages 1 or 2 and has invaded nearby tissue. It may also affect nearby lymph nodes.

The exact criteria of diagnosis will vary based on the type of cancer a person has.

Treatment

Treatment may be more aggressive than for stages 1 or 2. Treatments will also vary based on the location of the cancer.

Outlook

Stage 3 cancer has a generally lower survivability rate than cancers that doctors diagnose in stages 1 or 2. A person's overall health, age, and other factors can contribute to their overall chance of survival.

Stage 4

Stage 4 is the most severe stage of cancer. When a doctor diagnoses stage 4 cancer, the tumor is generally very large, and the cancer has spread to other areas of the body.

Treatment

A doctor will often recommend a more aggressive treatment plan for people with stage 4 cancer. The aim of treatment is to slow or stop the spread of the cancer and to help a person feel as comfortable as possible.

The treatment plan and recommendations will vary based on the type of cancer a person has and what is most effective against it. Options may include radiation therapy, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and surgery.

Outlook

Stage 4 cancer has a generally less favourable outlook than the other stages of cancer. A person's age, type of cancer, and overall health all factor into how likely they are to survive.

TNM stages

The TNM stages make up the most common cancer staging system across the world.

The American Joint Committee on Cancer and the International Union Against Cancer developed the system to describe most types of cancer in detail.

The TNM stages work as follows.

The T measures and describes the primary tumor. Scores include the following:

- TX: The doctor cannot evaluate the primary tumor.
- T0: There is no evidence of the primary tumor.
- T1–T4: These describe the size, extent, or both of the primary tumor, with larger numbers



indicating a bigger tumor.

The N describes whether or not the cancer has reached nearby lymph nodes. The N can be one of the following:

- NX: The doctor cannot evaluate the regional lymph nodes.
- N0: The cancer has not spread to any lymph nodes.
- N1–N3: The cancer has spread to regional lymph nodes, with each number describing the amount of lymph nodes affected and the extent of the spread.

The M describes whether or not the cancer has spread to other areas of the body. Possible scores include M0, in which the cancer has not spread to distant parts of the body, and M1, in which the cancer has spread to distant parts of the body.

Together, the TNM scores help determine the cancer's overall stage. In general, the higher the number following each letter, the worse the outlook and more involved the treatment will be.

Cancer grades

Cancer grades vary between cancer types. The grading system evaluates both the tumor and the cells within the tumor.

The National Cancer Institute indicate that there are generally four grades that a tumor may belong to, ranging from 1–4. The grades describe how close to the normal cells the cancer cells actually are.

To grade a tumor, a doctor will first remove a small piece of or the entire tumor. They will then send the sample to a laboratory, where technicians will examine it and determine the exact grade of the tumor cells.

For example, a tumor with a grade of 1 or 2 has cells that are mostly normal. Grade 1 and 2 tu-

mors are slow to grow and spread. Tumors with a grade of 3 or 4 have more abnormal cells, and they grow and spread faster.

The grading system will vary between different types of cancer. A person should ask a doctor about their tumor's specific grade.

In general, the higher the grade, the harder the cancer will be to treat, as it will grow and spread faster than lower grade tumors.

To discover more evidence-based information and resources for cancer, visit our dedicated hub.

Can stages change?

More often than not, cancer staging does not change. Healthcare professionals will refer to a cancer by the stage they gave at initial diagnosis, even if the cancer itself changes over time. If the cancer does change, the doctor will add more information to the original stage.

On some occasions, if a cancer comes back, a doctor may update the stage with the new stage. If this occurs, they will often repeat the same tests as before, when they first diagnosed it.

They will then add the new stage to the diagnosis, but this new stage does not replace the previous one.

Summary

Cancer staging can help doctors describe the severity of the cancer to a person and help guide the most effective treatment for them. Staging describes the size of the tumor and whether or not it has spread to other areas of the body.

There are several methods that doctors use to stage cancer, but the most common is known as TNM. Healthcare professionals often simplify the results of TNM, assigning a stage from 0–4 for many types of cancer. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

How well do you sleep?

By: Rajeev Khanna

How well do you sleep? It's a crucial question to ask in modern times. Add to it queries like - Do you sleep soundly yet feel sluggish through the day? Do you wake up often during the night? And of course - Do you snore?

Well, if the answer to any of these questions is in the affirmative one could be suffering from a condition known as Obstructive Sleep Apnea or OSA.

Medical experts underline that OSA is the mother of all major cardiac and other morbidities in adults as well children. Recent studies have placed the prevalence of OSA at an average of 22% in men and 17% in women.

The magnitude of the problem can be gauged from what Professor Sandeep Bansal who heads the Sleep Lab Department of Otolaryngology and Head Neck Surgery at the Post-graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) Chandigarh has to say.

On the occasion of World Sleep Day that falls on March 18, he said that while there can be multiple reasons for sleep apnea, being obese or overweight is the one of the main causes, and it is treatable. "We see around 30 new patients of OSA every month and undertake 15-20 sleep studies a month... It has been observed that obesity predisposes to OSA."

It was the recent demise of one of Bollywood's iconic music composers and singers Bappi Lahiri that had people asking, can a person succumb to death in their sleep? Experts say that the answer is yes if one is suffering from an undiagnosed sleep condition.

OSA is perhaps the most feared but untreated conditions in society. A poor quality of sleep at night is often sorted out by taking a pill. Thus, the cause often remains undiagnosed and untreated. But OSA is definitely not the sort of problem one can solve with a sleeping pill!

Dr Bansal explains what makes OSA different from other sleep disorders. "When we say a person is having difficulty to sleep at night, it could be due to two reasons: either the person is unable to fall asleep, or the person does fall asleep at night

but wakes up several times due to breathlessness. The two conditions are very different from each other - the first one is a case of insomnia in which you'll visit a psychiatrist, while the second one is a case of OSA."

Experts add that OSA was identified as an independent risk factor for covid infections that resulted in hospitalization. Hence the importance of diagnosing OSA has grown all the more during this pandemic.

"OSA usually happens because of repetitive narrowing of the airway during sleep despite breathing efforts. The person will unknowingly stop breathing repeatedly throughout sleep. Once the airway is opened or the breathing signal is received, the person may snore, take a deep breath, or awaken completely with a sensation of gasping, smothering, or choking," the experts shared.

Professor Naresh Panda who heads the ENT Department at the PGIMER said that untreated sleep apnea can lead to potentially serious health complications such as heart disease, blood pressure, diabetes and depression. It can also leave a person feeling drowsy, increasing the risk of accidents while driving or working and loss of concentration at work and subsequently poor productivity. So early recognition of the problem and getting it treated is of utmost importance.

They shared some fast facts on sleep apnea:

- Around 1 in 5 adults have mild symptoms of OSA while 1 in 15 have moderate to severe symptoms
- Approximately 1 billion people globally have this condition, but only 20 percent have been diagnosed and treated
- Menopausal and postmenopausal women have an increased risk of OSA
- Sleep apnea is an independent risk factor for hypertension (high blood pressure)

The problem has not spared even children, among whom the OSA rate is 1% to 3% on average, with obese and high risk children facing a 20-50% of falling prey to the malady. Experts say that enlargement of the tonsils and adenoids is the most common cause of OSA in children, and 85% of the children can be cured of their OSA by an adenotonsillectomy.

Signs and symptoms of sleep apnea among children might include snoring, pauses in breathing, restless sleep, snorting, coughing or choking, mouth breathing, bed wetting and sleep terrors.

According to experts, "During the day, children with sleep apnea might perform poorly in school, have difficulty paying attention, learning problems, behavioural problems, poor weight gain or even being hyperactive."

If you are diagnosed with OSA, it is the Apnea Hypopnea Index that determines which treatment is given. An AHI of less than 5 events per hour is considered normal, 5-15 is considered indicative of mild apnea, 16-30 moderate and more than 30 severe. An AHI exceeding 30 can be life threatening and immediate treatment is advised.

Dr Bansal said there can be medical as well as surgical treatment options in carefully selected patients, but lifestyle modifications like exercise and weight modification are the most useful adjunct in both treatment forms. CPAP or Continuous Positive Airway Pressure devices that use a hose connected to a mask or nose-piece to deliver constant and steady air pressure to help one breathe while sleeping should be the first line of treatment before surgery.

He explained that with improvement in understanding the disease pathology and with the use of drug-induced sleep endoscopy to evaluate the different levels of airway obstructions, ENT surgeons are able to offer much better surgical treatment plans for OSA patients, with a much better success rate among patients who are not able to tolerate CPAP or do not want to continue with CPAP for various reasons. The bottom line of course is that it is a highly specialized and challenging surgery which should be done only by a surgeon specially trained in these procedures.

Dr Bansal said that OSA affects an individual's productivity and is being neglected in spite of the fact that its treatment can prevent many co-morbidities in future. Studies show that OSA can increase the chances of road accidents. This is because people with OSA do not get enough sleep and so can become drowsy while driving. Further, a drop in oxygen level while sleeping can cause the body to release adrenaline to such a level that it causes a sudden cardiac arrest. About 19% of people with severe sleep apnea have died as mentioned in recent studies.

"So, snoring is not a regular event and should not be ignored. If you know someone who is snorer or someone who finds it difficult to sleep at night due to sudden choking sensation in the neck, you must refer the person to a sleep surgeon for management of this condition. We have and are carrying out many research projects so as to improve the surgical treatment options for OSA," he said. (Courtesy: The Citizen)

Fitness watch: You don't necessarily need to feel sore in the hours or days after exercise

By: David R Clark, Carl Langan-Evans & Robert M. Erskine

"No pain, no gain" is a commonly used expression when it comes to getting in shape. It may also be why many of us think that you need to feel sore after a workout to know that you've done enough.

There are many reasons why your muscles might get sore after a workout. But, contrary to popular belief, you don't necessarily need to feel sore in the hours or days after exercise to know you've had a good workout.

Delayed onset muscle soreness is the scientific term to describe the sore and tender feeling our muscles have after a workout. Typically, it happens after we've done particularly strenuous exercise, or if we do exercise we aren't used to. It can happen after any type of exercise, though it's more common after eccentric exercise. These are movements where the muscles resist a load as they're stretched (such as when you're running downhill or descending stairs). The smaller upper-limb muscles (such as your biceps and shoulders) can be more susceptible to DOMS as they may not be accustomed to eccentric exercise. While DOMS can happen even hours after a workout, it usually peaks about two days later, depending on the intensity and volume of exercise. But though DOMS is common, the reason it happens remains poorly understood - though researchers do have a few theories about what's going on.

The current scientific theory is that DOMS is linked to a combination of:

- Mechanical damage (to the protein structure of the muscle fibre),
- Damage to the membrane encasing the muscle fibre,
- Damage to the connective tissue surrounding the muscle fibres,

ing the muscle fibres,

• The body's inflammatory response, causing further muscle protein breakdown and stimulating certain nerves, causing pain.

A certain degree of exercise-induced muscle damage is probably necessary to help build larger, stronger muscles. In fact, while muscle damage from exercise may reduce how well muscles work after a workout (sometimes even for up to two weeks), you're less likely to experience DOMS to the same degree the next time you exercise. This may also explain why



people who exercise regularly don't experience DOMS as often. Regular weight training, focusing on eccentric exercises (such as squats, deadlifts and bench presses) have also been shown to reduce the damaging effect of exercise on the muscles after ten training sessions. There are probably a number of reasons for this, but it largely has to do with the muscle becoming better at protecting against damage.

How often and how severe a person experiences DOMS varies from person to person. However, older people may be more susceptible to both exercise-induced muscle damage and DOMS, possibly due to their muscles being less able to recover after strenuous exercise. Re-

search has also shown that people with a certain genetic makeup are better able to recover from eccentric exercise than other people who did the exact same workout.

If you're starting out a new exercise programme and your first workout is particularly intense or long-lasting, it's pretty difficult to avoid DOMS. Adding more eccentric exercises into your training programme may also lead to DOMS. But again, being sore doesn't necessarily mean you've had a more effective session - it just means you're doing something your muscles aren't used to.

So if you regularly exercise and find you aren't feeling as sore later in the day or even in the days after your workout, rest assured that your workout is still working - your muscles have just gotten better at dealing with the damage and recovering from it. If you want to get fitter and stronger, instead of feeling like you need to workout until you're sore, concentrate instead on a principle called "progressive overload". This is where you gradually increase how much exercise you do each time - such as performing extra reps on an exercise, or adding additional weight. Not only is progressive overload shown to be an effective way to build muscle and strength, it may also decrease how often you experience DOMS. Studies show even a few weeks of regularly using progressive overload during workouts is enough to see this effect.

So instead of measuring how effective your workout has been based on how sore you are, try instead to gradually increase either the number of reps you do each week, or the amount of weight you lift. These incremental gains in fitness and strength will show you just how effective your previous workouts have been. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Blue light and mental health: Turn off your screens to sleep & feel better

By: Rosheena Zehra

Blue light, an obsequious presence in urban lifestyle, might have a bigger role to play in our lives than we realise at first glance. From its effects on sleep to mental health, the speculations and research around it are more rife and endless, leading us to bring in an expert to comment on it. Before looking at blue light specifically, which is in galore in our screens, be it smartphones, televisions, or computers, as well as indoor LED lighting, it should be pointed out that light of any kind affects your circadian rhythm which has a direct control on your sleep, and therefore, in the process, on mental health and mood disorders.

Light, sleep and mental health

Light of any kind influences the secretion of melatonin in your body, the hormone that controls your sleep-wake cycle, but according to Harvard Health Publishing, blue light does it more significantly. The report reads:

"Scientists think nighttime exposure to blue light throws off your circadian rhythm, or sleep/wake cycle. This could lead to symptoms of depression. That's because your circadian rhythm plays a role in several brain and behavioural processes, like neurotransmission and hormone secretion."

Dr Bindu Menon, Professor and Head, Department of Psychiatry, Amrita Hospitals, Kochi, Kerala comments on the role of light in our mental health.

"All our body processes are cyclic in nature and dependant on the circadian rhythm or body clock. We are adapted to the solar cycle of day and night. This is done through many hormones of which the most well known are orexin and melatonin. When exposure to light is mistimed or nearly constant, biological and behavioural rhythms can become desynchronised, leading to negative consequences for health."

Dr Menon further points out that today over 80 percent of the popu-

lation, especially in urban areas, experience nightly light pollution. With technological advances, we encounter even more sources of light at night of which blue light is an integral part. According to the National Sleep Foundation, USA, 36 percent of parents and 34 percent of children leave an electronic device such as a television or computer switched on in their rooms while sleeping. In addition, 87 percent of women watch television in the hour before bedtime.

Pervasive exposure to nighttime lighting has blurred the boundaries of day and night, making it more difficult to synchronize biological processes, says Dr Menon. Many systems under circadian control, including sleep-wake behaviour, hormone secretion, cellular function and gene expression are altered because of this and are now believed to be associated with increasing incidence of certain cancers, metabolic dysfunction and mood disorders.

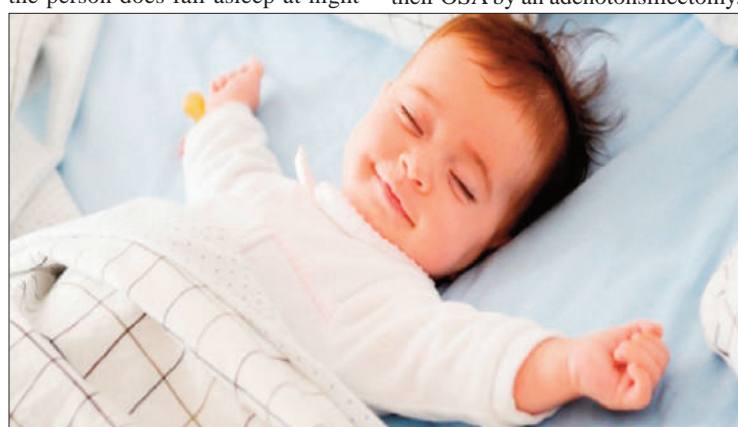
Blue light or not, listen to your

sleep cycle

The circadian disruption, underlines Dr Menon, alters the function of brain regions involved in emotion and mood regulation through direct neural input from the biological clock or indirect effects, including altered neuroplasticity (the way in which the neurons repair themselves), neurotransmission and gene expression.

Even though studies and research are ongoing on specifically the effects of blue light, we have sufficient evidence to conclude that it indeed has a significant role to play in our mental health.

There is no real scientific evidence to say that the hues or colour of light have any psychological effects on mood, though blue light has been shown to increase subjective alertness and performance on attention-based tasks in a few studies. The bottom line is - light is not bad, but the timing of exposure to it, which goes against our natural biological rhythm is what causes problems. (Courtesy: The Quint)



Ukraine sees openings as Russia fixed on besieged Mariupol

Zelenskyy called on all Ukrainians to do whatever they could "to foil the enemy's tactics and weaken its capabilities"

KYIV, April 3 (AP): Residents of Ukraine's besieged southeastern coast awaited possible evacuation Sunday as the country's president said Russia's obsession with capturing a key port city had left its forces weakened and created opportunities for his military. Two loud explosions were heard in Odesa on the Black Sea, and black smoke was seen rising above the city, which is where Ukraine's navy is headquartered. It is west of Mariupol, a smaller port that has been under attack for almost the entire war and rescuers are desperate to reach.

The Odesa city council said in a brief statement that a morning airstrike set off fires in some areas. The Russian military said hours later that it used ships and aircraft-fired missiles to strike an oil processing plant and fuel depots that were supplying Ukrainian troops.

The city council said Ukraine's air defense shot down some missiles before they hit the city. Ukrainian military spokesman Vladyslav Nazarov said there were no casualties from the attack.

In Mariupol, conditions remained dire and prospects for escape uncertain. The surrounded city, which has been brutalized by some of the war's worst attacks, reported weeks ago that water, food, fuel and medicine were running out. About 100,000 people are believed to still be there, less than a quarter of the city's pre-



war population of 430,000.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it hoped a team it sent to help evacuate residents would reach Mariupol on Sunday. Ukrainian authorities said Russia agreed days ago to allow safe passage from the city, but similar agreements have broken down repeatedly under continued shelling.

Mariupol is in the mostly Russian-speaking Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian troops for eight years. Its capture would create an unbroken land corridor from Russia to Crimea, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

With Mariupol squarely in Rus-

sia's crosshairs, Ukraine insists it has gained a leg up elsewhere in the country. As his country's troops retook territory north of the capital of Kyiv from departing Russian troops, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on all Ukrainians to do whatever they could "to foil the enemy's tactics and weaken its capabilities."

"Peace will not be the result of any decisions the enemy makes somewhere in Moscow. There is no need to entertain empty hopes that they will simply leave our land. We can only have peace by fighting," Zelenskyy said late Saturday.

Zelenskyy and Ukraine's Western allies believe Russia has shifted its forces from the capital region and

the country's north in order to build strength in the east and south. The Ukrainian leader again urged the West to supply his military with warplanes and more anti-missile systems.

"Every Russian missile that hits our cities and every bomb dropped on our people, on our children, only adds black paint to the history that will describe everyone on whom the decision depended - the decision of whether to help Ukraine with modern weapons," Zelenskyy said.

While the geography of the battlefield morphed, little changed for many Ukrainians more than five weeks into a war that has sent more than 4 million people fleeing the country as refugees and displaced millions more from their homes.

The regional governor in Kharkiv, said Sunday that Russian artillery and tanks performed over 20 strikes on Ukraine's second-largest city and its outskirts in the country's northeast over the past day. Gov. Oleh Synyehubov said a missile strike on the city of Loozovo wounded four people and that Russian tanks bombarded a hospital in the town of Balakliia. Zelenskyy alleged Saturday that Russian troops have left mines around homes, abandoned equipment and even the bodies of the dead as they withdraw from around Kyiv.

Those claims could not be independently verified, but Ukrainian troops were seen heeding the warning.

Pakistan Prez dissolves Parl at PM's request

ISLAMABAD, April 3 (AP): Pakistan's president dissolved Parliament on Sunday setting the stage for early elections after the prime minister sidestepped a no-confidence move earlier in the day.

Imran Khan asked President Arif Alvi to dissolve the National Assembly, or law-making lower house of Parliament, accusing his political opposition of working with the United States to overthrow his government.

The political chaos caused a constitutional crisis that was left to the country's Supreme Court to sort. The court must decide whether Khan defied the constitution when Parliament's deputy speaker, at the request of the minister of information, threw out the no-confidence resolution.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said opposition lawmakers violated the constitution's article 5 demanding loyalty of its citizens by colluding with a foreign power to stage a "regime change."

The opposition has challenged the deputy speaker's constitutional authority to throw out the no-confidence vote, which they said they had the numbers to win.

The chief justice of the Supreme Court, Umar Ata Bandial, has convened a hearing into the constitutional question later Sunday.

The battle between Khan, a cricket star turned conservative Islamic leader, and his political opposition has mired the nation in political turmoil.

Khan, who was not in Parliament on Sunday, went on national television to say he would ask Pakistan's president to dissolve the body and hold elections.

"I ask people to prepare for the next elections. Thank God, a conspiracy to topple the government has failed," Khan said in his address.

Pakistan's constitution calls for the establishment of an interim government to see the country toward elections, which are to be held within 90 days. According to the constitution the interim government is to be established with input from the opposition.

The opposition arrived in Parliament ready to vote Khan out of power. They needed a simple majority of 172 votes in Pakistan's 342-seat Parliament to unseat Khan, a cricket star turned conservative Islamic politician. Khan's small but key coalition partners along with 17 of his own party members joined the opposition to oust him.

The political turmoil also caused the country's security agencies to lock down the capital of Islamabad.



Giant metal containers blocked roads and entrances to the capital's diplomatic enclave and to Parliament and other sensitive government installations in the capital. A defiant Khan had called for supporters to stage demonstrations countrywide.

Khan has accused the opposition of being in cahoots with the United States to unseat him, saying America wants him gone over his foreign policy choices that often favor China and Russia. Khan has also been a strident opponent of America's war on terror and Pakistan's partnership in that war with Washington. Khan has circulated a memo which he insists provides proof that Washington conspired with Pakistan's opposition to unseat him because America wants "me, personally, gone ... and everything would be forgiven."

Political chaos also spread to the country's largest Punjab province where it is set to vote for a new chief minister. Khan's choice faced a tough challenge and his opponents claimed they had enough votes to install their choice. After a scuffle between lawmakers the provincial assembly was adjourned until April 6 without any vote.

Pakistan's main opposition parties, whose ideologies span the spectrum from left to right to radically religious, have been rallying for Khan's ouster almost since he was elected in 2018.

Khan's win was mired in controversy amid widespread accusations that Pakistan's powerful army helped his Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (Justice) Party to victory.

Sri Lanka military blocks social media platforms

COLOMBO, April 3 (IANS): Amidst the state of emergency and a 36-hour long curfew imposed in Sri Lanka, the island nation's military has blocked all social media platforms ahead of an anti-government protest planned for Sunday.

The Ministry of Technology announced that the social media platforms were blocked on the direction of Ministry of Defence. Calls for Sunday's protest was made via social media platforms, while the hashtags "#GoHome-Rajapaksa" and "#GoHome" trending for days. Director General of Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) also announced that it temporarily blocked the social media platforms on the request of the Defence Ministry.

Confirming the development that started on Saturday midnight, Net-Blocks, a watchdog group that monitors cyber security, said in a tweet: "Confirmed: Real-time network data show Sri Lanka has imposed a nationwide social media blackout, restricting access to platforms including Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram as emergency is declared amid widespread protests."

Meanwhile a social media activist and university student, Thisara Anuruddha Bandara who is said to have created the #GoGoHome hashtag, was arrested on Saturday. He was released later after a large number of social activists, lawyers and politicians surrounded the police station.

Burdened by the economic crisis

from multiple fronts including lack of fuel, LPG, 13-hour power cuts, shortage of food such as milk powder due to inflation and the dollar crisis, protests have erupted across the country demanding President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign.

With demands for his immediate resignation, protesters on Thursday night surrounded President Rajapaksa's house. The police used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators.

In the wake of the violence, the President imposed the state of emergency allowing the military to arrest people, while a 36-hour nationwide curfew also came into effect from Saturday evening.

While the opposition, civil rights groups and legal experts have condemned Rajapaksa's move, the government has alleged that the violence during Thursday's protest was introduced by an "extremist" group which wanted to enforce an 'Arab Spring' in Sri Lanka. At least 50 protesters were arrested in connection. In the wake of the violence, Hanaa Singer-Hamdy, the UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, tweeted: "We are monitoring developments and are concerned by reports of violence in Sri Lanka. Calling for restraint from all groups." Also in a tweet, the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Julie Chung said: "Sri Lankans have the right to protest peacefully-essential for democratic expression. I am watching the situation closely, and hope the coming days bring restraint from all sides, as well as much needed economic stability and relief for those suffering."

While the opposition, civil rights groups and legal experts have condemned Rajapaksa's move, the government has alleged that the violence during Thursday's protest was introduced by an "extremist" group which wanted to enforce an 'Arab Spring' in Sri Lanka. At least 50 protesters were arrested in connection. In the wake of the violence, Hanaa Singer-Hamdy, the UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, tweeted: "We are monitoring developments and are concerned by reports of violence in Sri Lanka. Calling for restraint from all groups." Also in a tweet, the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Julie Chung said: "Sri Lankans have the right to protest peacefully-essential for democratic expression. I am watching the situation closely, and hope the coming days bring restraint from all sides, as well as much needed economic stability and relief for those suffering."

Pope Francis prays for end to 'sacrilegious' war, refugee welcome



VALLETTA, April 3 (AP): Pope Francis prayed Sunday for an end to the "sacrilegious" war in Ukraine and for the world to show kindness and compassion to refugees as he concluded a two-day visit to Malta that was dominated by his concern for the devastation unleashed by Russia's invasion.

Though short, the trip has been particularly taxing for the 85-year-old pontiff, who is suffering from painful strained right knee ligaments. He struggled repeatedly Sunday to get out of his chair and his limping gait from sciatia was so pronounced that he frequently had to grab onto the arm of an aide.

Francis opened his second and final day in Malta by visiting the Grotto of St. Paul in Rabat, where the Apostle Paul stayed after being shipwrecked off Malta en route to Rome in AD 60. According to the biblical account of the period, the Maltese people showed Paul unusual kindness, and he responded

by preaching and healing, bringing Christianity to the islands.

Francis has used his visit to Malta to drive home his call for Europe to show the same welcome to migrants and refugees that the Maltese showed St. Paul. He has expanded that message to express his gratitude for the welcome Europe has shown Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian war and his hope that same generosity could be extended to others. "No one knew their names, their place of birth or their social status; they knew only one thing: that these were people in need of help," Francis said in a prayer in the grotto. "Help us to recognize from afar those in need, struggling amidst the waves of the sea, dashed against the reefs of unknown shores."

Current-day Malta has long been at the heart of the European debate over refugee policy. The country of a half-million is frequently criticized by humanitarian aid groups for refusing to let rescue ships

dock at its ports; The government argues it has one of the EU's highest rates in processing first-time asylum applications relative to the population, and says other, bigger European countries should do more to shoulder the burden.

Just this week, a German aid group urged Malta to take in 106 migrants rescued off Libya; Malta demurred and on Saturday the mayor of Palermo, Sicily, said the city was ready to welcome them.

Upon arriving in Valletta on Saturday, Francis thanked Malta for the welcome it has shown newcomers, and blasted as "sordid" the European Union policy that trains the Libyan coast guard to return smuggled migrants back to shore. Human rights groups have documented gross abuses at the Libyan detention centers where the returned migrants are then housed.

After praying at the St. Paul grotto, Francis celebrated an outdoor Mass in Valletta and planned an afternoon visit to a shelter run by volunteers that can house around 50 migrants and provide them with educational and medical services.

At the end of Mass, Francis asked for prayers for peace in Ukraine, a day after he blasted Russia's invasion as "infantile" and based on "anachronistic claims of nationalistic interests."

He urged the faithful to "think of the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in the martyred Ukraine, which continues to be bombarded in this sacrilegious war. May we be tireless in praying and in offering assistance to those who suffer."

Shanghai lockdown triggers complaints as Covid cases rise

BEIJING, April 3 (AP): Covid-19 cases in China's largest city of Shanghai are still rising with millions isolated at home under a sweeping lockdown, as the draconian "zero tolerance" approach to the pandemic increasingly draws complaints from residents fed up with the restrictions. Health officials on Sunday reported 438 confirmed cases over the previous 24 hours, along with 7,788 asymptomatic ones. Both figures were up slightly from the day before, while the northeastern province of Jilin posted a combined 4,455 cases Sunday, also marking an increase from Saturday. While small by the standards of some countries, the daily increases are some of the largest since the virus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Shanghai with its 26 million people last week began a two-stage lockdown, with residents of the eastern Pudong section supposed to be allowed to leave their homes Friday, while their neighbors in the western Puxi section underwent their own four-day isolation period.

Despite that assurance, millions in Pudong continue to be confined to their homes amid complaints over food deliveries and the availability of medications and health services.

Notices delivered to residents said they were required to self-test for Covid-19 daily and take precautions including wearing masks at home and avoiding contact with family members — measures not widely enforced since the early days of the pandemic. While Wuhan endured a 76-day lockdown in 2020 with relatively little complaint, Shanghai residents — many of whom were in

isolation even before last week's lockdown began — appear to be growing increasingly fed up with the measures and methods being used to enforce them. Although coverage in China's entirely state-controlled media remains overwhelmingly positive, complaints have been appearing online, including in the form of videos and sound recordings purporting to show heavy-handed practices by officials and volunteers and alleging that sound medical advice has been ignored in favour of political expediency. "Whereas there was little societal resistance to the lockdown once it was imposed in Wuhan, resistance in Shanghai is palpable now," Dali Yang, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago tweeted on Sunday.

Given that the vast majority of cases in Shanghai are not life threatening, "it is not surprising that the imposition of the lockdown and forced quarantine of the infected in harsh conditions are meeting resistance," Yang tweeted.

State media reports indicate president and Communist Party leader Xi Jinping is directing the continuing tough approach, while seeking to avoid further damage to the sputtering economy and ensure overall stability ahead of a key party congress expected for November. Despite the spike in infections, China has recorded no new Covid-19 deaths since March 20th, when two were added for a total 4,638. China's vaccination rate is above 87% — although significantly lower among seniors — and omicron is known to be more infectious while the illness it brings on is typically more mild than with the earlier delta variant.

Sri Lankan police arrest 664 for violating curfew

COLOMBO, April 3 (IANS): Sri Lankan police arrested 664 people in the Western Province for violating the curfew currently in effect, Senior SP Nihal Thaldudu said on Sunday. Thaldudu said the arrests were made between Saturday 10 p.m. and Sunday 6 a.m., reports Xinhua news agency. In the wake of mass protests planned for Sunday, the government imposed a 36-hour nationwide curfew from 6.00 p.m. Saturday until 6.00 a.m. on Monday, in addition to a state of emergency declared by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. A few hours after declaring the curfew, the President also issued a gazette, prohibiting people from public roads, parks, recreation or other grounds, railways, seashores and other such public places during the curfew period. The Sri Lankan government on Sunday also blocked commonly used social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and messaging platforms WhatsApp and Viber. The protests against the ongoing economic crisis in the island nation which has led to a severe shortage of fuel, LPG, electricity, food, as well as medicines, were planned through social media platforms.

Kim Jong-un's sister warns S.Korea of 'serious threat'

SEOUL, April 3 (IANS): Kim Yo-jong, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's sister, slammed the South Korean defence chief for his remarks of "pre-emptive strike" capabilities and warned that the Seoul may face a "serious threat" for being "senseless", Pyongyang's state media reported on Sunday.

In a rare press conference on Saturday, Kim Yo-jong called South Korean Defence Minister Suh Wook a "senseless and scum-like guy" for mentioning a pre-emptive strike at a "nuclear weapons state", reports Yonhap News Agency.

"South Korea may face a serious threat owing to the reckless remarks made by its Defence Minister," Kim Yo-jong was quoted as saying by Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

Last week, Suh publicly stressed that his troops have the capabilities to "accurately and swiftly" strike the origin of North Korea's missile firing as well as command and support facilities in the case of clear signs of a launch toward the South.

At the conference, Kim Yo-jong



described her message as a "warning upon authorization," suggesting that it was endorsed by her brother.

She added that Pyongyang will "reconsider a lot of things concerning South Korea."

The strongly worded statement against South Korea came as it is preparing for a power transition.

Outgoing President Moon Jae-in, who has sought hard to improve Seoul-Pyongyang ties, is ending his five-year term next month, with the conservative Yoon Suk-yeol elected as his successor.

Monkeys are known to routinely consume fruit containing alcohol, shedding light on our own taste for booze Did humans inherit love of alcohol from monkeys?

NEW YORK, April 3 (IANS): Monkeys are known to routinely consume fruit containing alcohol, shedding light on our own taste for booze, finds a study that supports the 'drunken monkey' hypothesis.

A University of California Berkeley biologist Robert Dudley, in his book The Drunken Monkey: Why We Drink and Abuse Alcohol, released in 2014, proposed that human attraction to booze arose millions of years ago, when our ape and monkey ancestors discovered that the scent of alcohol led them to ripe, fermenting and nutritious fruit.

To explore, researchers at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) collected fruit eaten and discarded by black-handed spider monkeys (Ateles geoffroyi) in Panama. They found that the alcohol concentration in the fruit was typically between 1 per cent and 2 per cent by volume, a by-product of natural fermentation by yeasts that eat sugar in ripening fruit.

Moreover, the researchers collected urine from these free-ranging monkeys and found that the urine contained secondary metabolites of alcohol. This result shows



that the animals were actually utilising the alcohol for energy - it wasn't just passing through their bodies. "For the first time, we have been able to show, without a shadow of a doubt, that wild primates, with no human interference, consume fruit-containing ethanol," said primatologist Christina Campbell, a CUSN professor of anthropology.

"This is just one study, and more need to be done, but it looks like there may be some truth to that 'drunken monkey' hypothesis - that

the proclivity of humans to consume alcohol stems from a deep-rooted affinity of frugivorous (fruit-eating) primates for naturally-occurring ethanol within ripe fruit," she added.

The study, which appeared in the journal Royal Society Open Science, showed that the fruit that spider monkeys collected were from the jobo tree Spondias mombin and were a major component of the spider monkey diet. But the fruit also has been used for millennia by indigenous human populations

throughout Central and South America to make chicha - a fermented alcoholic beverage.

Five of the urine samples from six spider monkeys contained secondary metabolites of ethanol or drinking alcohol.

"The monkeys were likely eating the fruit with ethanol for the calories," Campbell said. "They would get more calories from fermented fruit than they would from unfermented fruit. The higher calories mean more energy."

However, Dudley said he doubts that the monkeys feel the inebriating effects of alcohol that humans appreciate. "They're probably not getting drunk, because their guts are filling before they reach inebriating levels," he said. "But it is providing some physiological benefit. Maybe, also, there's an anti-microbial benefit within the food that they're consuming, or the activity of the yeast and the microbes may be predigesting the fruit. You can't rule that out."

The need for the monkeys' high caloric intake may similarly have influenced human ancestors' decisions when choosing which fruit to eat, Campbell said.

Once a Cong bastion, NE turns into a bleak house for the party

GUWAHATI/AGARTALA, April 3 (IANS): The prospects of Congress, which once governed seven of the eight northeastern states, appear to be bleak ahead of the Assembly elections in four northeastern states next year, especially after the recent drubbing it faced in the Rajya Sabha elections in the region.

The elections for the two Rajya Sabha seats in Assam and one each in Tripura and Nagaland were held recently, and the Congress, considering its allies' strength, was expected to win one seat in Assam, but cross-voting by Congress legislators led to the humiliating defeat of the combined opposition candidate and sitting Upper House member Ripun Bora.

Votes of two Congress MLAs were rejected due to procedural reasons.

Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah has suspended Karimganj South MLA Siddique Ahmed from the primary membership of the party for "deliberately disobeying" the three-line whip issued by Congress legislative party chief whip Wazed Ali Choudhury with regard to the Rajya Sabha elections.

After the outcome of the Rajya Sabha polls, Congress' representation in the Upper House of Parliament from the politically important northeast region is now nil.

Assam has seven Rajya Sabha seats while the remaining seven states in the northeast have one seat each, and these 14 Upper House seats are now held by the BJP and their allies.

Out of the 25 Lok Sabha seats in the eight northeastern states, highest number of 14 seats are with the BJP, while only four seats belong to the Congress and one is held by the Maulana Badruddin Ajmal-led All India United Democratic Front, a Muslim-based party in Assam.

The remaining five seats are held by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance's constituents Naga People's Front (NPF) in Manipur, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) in Nagaland, National People's Party (NPP) in Meghalaya, Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram, and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha in Sikkim.

Of the 14 Lok Sabha seats held by the BJP, nine are in Assam, two each in Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura and one in Manipur, while the Congress holds three seats in Assam and one in Meghalaya.

Amid the changing political situation in the northeastern region, especially after the BJP's return to power in Manipur for a second consecutive term with absolute majority, Assembly elections would be held in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura in early next year and in Mizoram in



November-December in 2023.

Political pundits feel that when the BJP and other local parties are grabbing the political base of the Congress, the party is making no serious efforts to keep its foot intact in one of its erstwhile strongholds.

"Except in Assam, the Congress is not even an opposition party in the remaining seven northeastern states. When their organisational strength weakened gradually, the central and state leadership remained indifferent over the party's future plan," said political commentator Apurba Kumar Dey.

Dey told IANS: "Due to their ideological stand and the political mindset of the erstwhile national

leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and community, people of the northeastern region overwhelmingly supported the Congress for many years. But over the years, the party's strength in all aspects has declined, which got reflected in elections over the years."

Political analyst Tapas Dey said that though the northeastern region consists of only 8 per cent of the country's total geographical area and 4 per cent of the country's population, its strategic importance is very significant as the region is home to 45.58 million people (2011 Census) and shares borders with China, Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

"Central leaders of the Congress are solely responsible for the party's almost non-existence in the region. The party appointed junior and inexperienced leaders as state in-charges in the northeast, leading to ineffective state organisations," he told IANS.

Of the 45.58 million population in the eight northeastern states, around 28 per cent are tribals, who are the overwhelming majority in Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.

Tapas Dey said that while people belonging to Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities are always supportive and caring towards the Con-

gress, during the last few decades, the party largely distanced itself from all the tribal and non-tribal communities, causing further erosion of the party.

Among the poll-bound states of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Mizoram, the BJP is in power in Tripura while its NDA partners -- NPP and MNF -- are governing in Meghalaya and Mizoram.

The BJP with 12 MLAs is an ally of Nagaland's United Democratic Alliance (UDA) government in which NPF with 25 MLAs is a major ally, while the NDPP with 21 members is the dominant party of the UDA, which is an all-party alliance governing India's first Opposition less state.

In Mizoram, the Congress has five legislators and BJP one in the 40-member Assembly, while Congress has no MLA in BJP-ruled Tripura.

After the 12 Congress MLAs in Meghalaya, led by former chief minister Mukul Sangma, joined the Trinamool Congress in November last year, the party's strength was reduced to five in the 60-member Assembly.

These five Congress MLAs led by legislative party leader Ampareen Lyngdoh joined the NPP-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government on February 8, leading to no Congress MLAs in the Meghalaya Assembly.

CPI(M) calls for 'restoration of democracy' in BJP-ruled Tripura



AGARTALA, April 3 (PTI): Labelling the BJP-IPFT government in Tripura as "anti-people", leader of Opposition Manik Sarkar of the CPI(M) on Saturday called for "restoration of democracy" in the north-eastern state.

Under the Biplab Kumar Deb government, a "suffocating situation" has been created where the democratic rights of people have been curtailed, the former chief minister said while addressing a rally.

"Upholding democratic rights is important for a democracy. In Tripura, democratic values and rights are being trampled leaving the people

in distress. Not only the Scheduled Caste (SC) population, all sections of society be it dalit or minority are facing the brunt of anti-people policies", the veteran Communist leader said.

The rally was organised to present a "charge sheet" against the BJP-IPFT government on the 16-point charter of demands by Tripura Tapashilijati Sammanoy Samity (TTSS), a frontal wing of the CPI(M).

Urging the people to restore democracy in the state, Sarkar said the movement against the "anti-people" government has to be intensified. "Those who confine themselves to homes

must come forward to join the movement for restoration of democracy. No alternative way is left. Those persons become winners who join the massive movement for the cause of people," he said. Sarkar also took a dig at the ruling dispensation's "much-hyped" decision of providing 33 per cent reservation to women.

"What is the meaning of providing 33 per cent reservation to women when there is no job in the government sector? The BJP had promised 50,000 jobs for each year! Where is the fulfillment!", he said.

The CPI(M) politburo member claimed that the "good and welfare works" of the Left Front government have been razed to the ground and people are facing a "tough time" in the new regime.

CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Chowdhury also came down heavily on the BJP-IPFT government for "befooling people with false promises" in the vision document.

"The Biplab Kumar Deb government has taken away the rights of lakh of unemployed youths. Not a single promise of the vision document has been fulfilled by the present government", he claimed.

The democracy, the Constitution, and the state's tradition have collapsed in the BJP rule, and the voting rights of citizens have also been snatched away, Chowdhury alleged.

The BJP-IPFT alliance came to power in the north-eastern state in 2018 by ending 25 years of CPI(M)-led Left Front rule.

NSCN-IM accuses Assam Rifles

DIMAPUR, April 3 (NNN): NSCN-IM has accused Assam Rifles of "throwing the spirit of the ongoing Indo-Naga political talks into dustbin".

This statement of NSCN-IM came on Sunday following certain alleged incidents in Arunachal Pradesh which had occurred recently.

"The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) is highly indignant of the unruly Assam Rifles at the repeated inglorious acts that it had been condemned every now and then, and thereby, exposed their incompetence and cowardice," the NSCN-IM statement alleged. It further said that while Assam Rifles at Tirap district in Arunachal Pradesh is making another botched operation in Chasa village of Tirap district which injured two innocent villagers, another group of Assam Rifles has created a dramatic nuisance at the very area which stood within the peaceful precinct that symbolised the Indo-Naga ceasefire and political dialogue.

"The ubiquitous Assam Rifles is wrongly targeting NSCN personnel under the pretext of loitering outside the designated camp as if a designated camp is a jail, and thereby, throwing into dustbin the spirit of the ongoing Indo-Naga political talks that is under process to solve the Naga issue through peaceful means," the

NSCN-IM statement added.

According to NSCN-IM, the "immediate provocative issue" in focus is the regrettable incident which took place on April 2, 2022, at Bimila village near Doyapuri, where the Longvibu of the Naga Army, along with his family members and a dozen of children accompanied by a few of his security staff went for fishing cum picnic. NSCN-IM further said that three times Assam Rifles came to disturb them displaying their belligerent attitude and tried to chase them out on the pretext that it is outside the jurisdiction of designated camp and that permission was not taken from the Assam Rifles prior to visiting such place. It added that the security staff of the "Longvibu" (Naga Army chief) reasoned with them that such a private family program should not be disturbed by applying human sense. "They also explained to them the need to respect the spirit of the ongoing Indo-Naga political dialogue. Much to our indignation Assam Rifles pulled back abruptly but within no time came back with more reinforcement with two gypsy vehicles and one big truck loaded with Assam Rifles jawans," it also stated, while adding, "Placed under such a shadow of threatening gesture, the picnic was aborted".

According to NSCN-IM, what was sadly observed was the "inherent recklessness" on the part of the Assam Rifles personnel. "They showed a reckless disregard to the very person who is none other than the Longvibu (chief) of the Naga Army designated as the official coordinator for the Indo-Naga political talks," it also said. NSCN-IM then asked, "Is this the way to handle the Indo-Naga political talks when such a designated official is not duly respected or was it another mistaken identity issue? Is this the way to let loose the ghost of the AFSPA on the Naga political group which is spearheading the Indo-Naga political talks?"

NSCN-IM then said that these "highly undesirable loopholes that have turned menacingly nasty" need to be corrected immediately. It further said that "robbing" the dignity of the very person entrusted to coordinate the Indo-Naga political talks is certainly a hit below the belt. "More than that, a sense of humanity in keeping with the spirit of ceasefire and peace talks should also be made to prevail during the entire political peace process," NSCN-IM added. It finally said that nothing should come too costly for Assam Rifles to exercise "human touch" to help drive the Naga peace process to logical conclusion.

NF Railway to extend weekly service of the Agartala – Secunderabad – Agartala Special train

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 3: The Northeast Frontier Railway has decided to extend the service of weekly Agartala – Secunderabad – Agartala Special train from April 4 to July 1 to clear the summer rush of passengers. Train no. 07030 (Secunderabad-Agartala Special), will depart from Secunderabad at 16:35 hrs. on all Mondays from April 4 till June 27. The special train will extend its services for a total of 13 trips and will run via Guntur, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Khurda Road, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Kharagpur Jn., Malda Town, New Jalpaiguri Jn., New Bongaigaon Jn. (via Goalpara Town), Guwahati, Badarpur Jn., New Karimganj & Dharmanagar railway stations reaching Agartala at around 03:00 hrs. every Thursday. Train no. 07029 (Agartala – Secunderabad Special), will start its journey from Agartala railway station at 06:10 hrs. on every Friday from April 8 till July 1. The special train will cover a total of 13 trips from Agartala and will run via similar routes in a reverse order to reach its destination of Secunderabad railway station, at 16:15 hrs. every Sunday. The Agartala – Secunderabad – Agartala special train will consist of 20 coaches. There will be 2 luggage cum guard vans, 2 general second class coaches, 10 sleeper coaches, 5 AC three-tier coaches & amp; 1 AC two-tier coach. The details of stoppages and timings of these trains are available at IRCTC website and are also being notified in various newspapers and social media platforms of NF Railway. Passengers are requested to see these details before undertaking their journey.

Advisor to CM meets consulate general of Germany, US consul general

DIMAPUR, April 3 (NNN): Advisor to Nagaland chief minister, Abu Metha, had meetings with the office of the US Consul General Kolkata and the Consul General of Germany, Manfred Auster on April 2, 2022, an official report said. In the meeting, they discussed building friendships, strengthening bilateral ties, working collaboratively, and creating opportunities, the report also said. The Nagaland chief minister's Advisor then thanked them for their visits to Nagaland and also for their positive participation during the Hornbill Festival. Metha highlighted the initiatives of the Nagaland government in the fields of tourism, arts, culture, music, and sports, the report added.

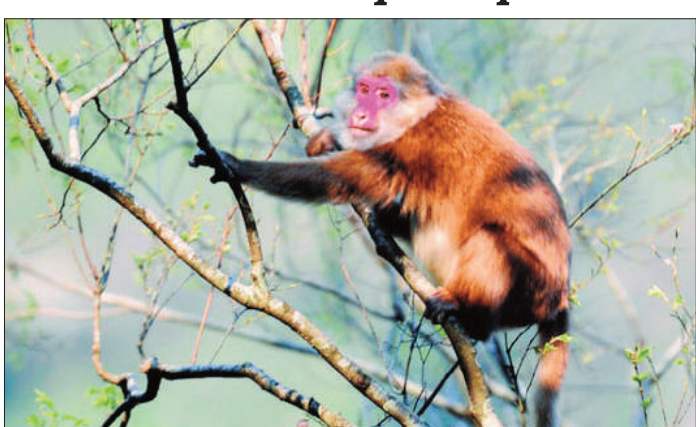
Rare white-cheeked macaque spotted in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, April 3 (PTI): The rare white-cheeked macaque was spotted in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district for the second time, a forest official said on Sunday.

The mammal was first spotted in Anjaw district by scientists of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) earlier this year, and it was published in the February 3 issue of the international peer-reviewed journal 'Animal Gene'.

The mammal is the newest addition to the list of primate species found in the Indian subcontinent, the official said.

Before this, the white-cheeked macaque was found in Modog in southeastern Tibet in 2015. West Kameng district divisional forest officer (DFO) Chukhu Loma said,



Anjaw is barely 200 km in aerial distance from where it was first spotted in Modog in China, he said. "Not many days after its discovery in Anjaw, a white-cheeked

First-ever international film festival begins in Manipur

IMPHAL, April 3 (IANS): The first edition of the 'Eikhoigi Imphal International Film Festival' began on Saturday at the Palace Auditorium of Manipur State Film Development Society (MSFDS), manifesting a new feather in the cap of Manipuri Cinema as it completes 50 years. The five-day non-competitive festival, supported by the Union Information and Broadcasting ministry, is being organised as part of the year-long golden jubilee celebration of Manipuri Cinema. Speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural ceremony of the festival, eminent Manipuri filmmaker, Aribam Syam Sharma emphatically pointed out that special financial assistance from the government is a must for success of the festival in its future editions.

Syam Sharma, who has been associated with Manipuri cinema since its inception, lamented that the government had always exuded indifferent attitude towards the growth of Manipuri cinema. Nevertheless, he drew the attention of the government to make the Manipur State Film and Television Institute fully functional at the earliest to facilitate professionalism and production of good films in the



northeastern state. MSFDS Secretary, Sunzu Bachaspatimayum, while delivering the keynote address, stated that the festival has been conceived to catalyse the amplification of motion picture storytelling in Manipur.

He further expressed joy over realising the dream of an international film festival where one experiences world cinema which slices life and intrinsic cultural and political experiences beyond one's boundaries and transpires invaluable knowledge. Manipur government's commissioner of Art and Culture department, M. Joy stated that the Eikhoigi Imphal International Film Festival marks the new beginning for Manipuri cinema. He also exuded confidence that

the festival will fill up the void of a voracious cinematic culture in Manipur. Deputy Director of Directorate of Film Festivals under the Union Information and Broadcasting ministry, Tanu Rai, Assamese filmmaker Utpal Borpujari, Khasi (Meghalaya) filmmaker Pradip Kurban among other prominent personalities also attended the inaugural function. Eminent filmmaker, Romi Meitei's award winning film "Eikhoigi Yum" (ours home), in its Imphal Premier screened in the opening day of the festival. Prior to the screening, contemporary dance performance aMeeppa, a tribute to the pioneer filmmakers, choreographed by Surjit Nongmeikapam was also showcased.

NSF condemns Arunachal firing incident, demands removal of AFSPA from Naga areas in NE

KOIHMA, April 3 (PTI): Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Saturday condemned the firing incident in Arunachal Pradesh, where two civilians were "mistakenly" shot at by Army personnel, and sought strict punishment for the guilty besides complete removal of AFSPA from all Naga-inhabited areas in the Northeast.

The apex Naga students' body in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, in a statement, said it "outrightly rejected the Centre's ploy to please certain sections of Northeast" by removing Armed Forces (Special Powers Act), 1958 from some pockets, while keeping it imposed in a majority of Naga-inhabited areas in the region.

"Two Naga youths Nokphua Wangpan and Ramwang Wangsu were critically injured when 12 Para Special Forces fired upon without any warning while they were returning from the river after fishing early Saturday morning." "Such acts of the armed forces trampling upon the dignity, existence, freedom and happiness of the Naga people without any remorse under the protection of AFSPA cannot be accepted by

the Federation in particular and the Naga people in general," it said. The Army said that it was a case of "mistaken identity" as there was credible information about the movement of armed insurgents in the area in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh.

NSF demanded that justice be delivered to the innocent civilians at the earliest and befitting punishment to the "trigger-happy" jawans.

The federation said it would undertake a series of democratic agitations to press for their demands but did not announce a date for launching the stir.

The Centre had on Thursday announced a reduction in the number of "disturbed areas" under the purview of the contentious law in Nagaland, Assam and Manipur with effect from April 1.

"There is no denying that areas falling under 15 police stations in seven districts of Nagaland will benefit from the Centre's policy but a major chunk of the Naga homeland spread across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland remain classified as 'disturbed areas'," it said.

The CBI had registered the urea scam case on May 19, 1996, on allegations that the accused persons entered into criminal conspiracy

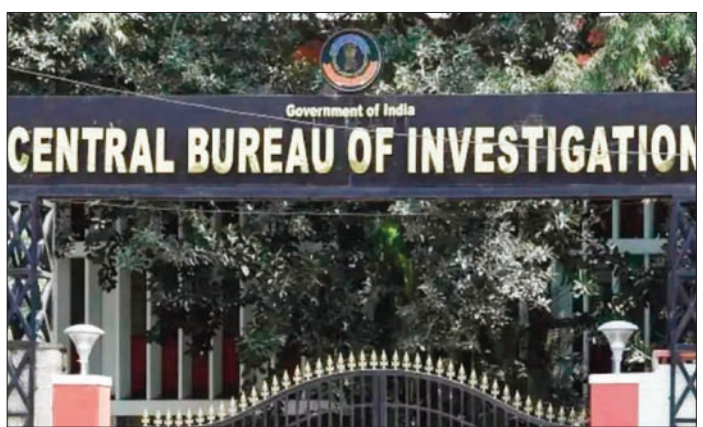
Court rejects CBI's closure report filed in urea scam case after 22 years

NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): In an embarrassment to the CBI, a special court rejected its closure report in a case related to the urea scam, asking it to probe the 22-year delay in filing it and ensure that such "miscarriage of justice" does not happen again.

Special Judge Surinder S Rathil did not mince words in his recent order as he pointed out that the last investigation in the case was conducted by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in 1999 and that it was evident that the agency sat on the report, which is legally unacceptable. "This is obviously a cause of concern to this Court and also should be a cause of concern for the head of the Investigating Agency i.e., director, CBI," the judge said.

The CBI director shall look into the matter and take necessary action as also steps to ensure that such "miscarriage of justice" does not happen again, he said.

"It is not the CBI's case that any investigation was going on in the matter after 1999 up to 2021... One fails to understand as to why the



same (final report) was being withheld and what purpose the withholding must have been serving," the court noted. The judge also ordered the joint director of the prestigious anti-corruption unit 1 of the CBI to inquire into the matter and submit a report. "Evidently, when the current final report was filed, the IO and the concerned SP conveniently did not discuss anything about this 22 years' delay, even though they had an opportunity.

Such conspicuous and deliberate silence in explaining the delay is legally unacceptable," he said.

The CBI had registered the urea scam case on May 19, 1996, on allegations that the accused persons entered into criminal conspiracy and cheated the National Fertilizer Limited (NFL) to the tune of ₹ 133 crore. In the main case, several NFL officials, private businessmen and former Prime Minister P V Narsimha Rao's nephew B Sanjeeva

Rao were convicted.

The case in which the CBI filed its closure report was registered on June 4, 1997, and is related to the supply of one lakh metric tonnes of urea. The CBI had named former NFL MD C K Ramkrishnan and executive director D S Kanwar, chief executive of Hyderabad-based Sai Krishna Impex M Sambasiva Rao and S Nuthi of USA-based Alabama International INC in its FIR. The agency filed its closure report against these accused in January 2021, saying no pecuniary loss was suffered in the case.

It was alleged that Ramkrishnan and Kanwar gave repeated concessions to Sanjeeva Rao and Nuthi who failed to supply urea, the court noted in its order.

According to the conditions, failure to fulfil contract would have resulted in forfeiture of Performance Guarantee (PG) Bond in favour of the NFL. The court pointed out that instead of forfeiting 2 per cent PG Bond, cumulatively valuing USD 3.01 lakh (current value more than ₹ 2.28 crore), for repeatedly failing

to supply urea as per letters of intent (LOI), Kanwar returned these bonds on January 8, 1996, to Nuthi and the NFL was constrained to purchase urea from a third party.

Citing the statement of an additional manager of the NFL, a prosecution witness, the court said Sambasiva Rao was introduced to Ramkrishnan by Sanjeeva Rao.

"I do not find any iota of credence in the conclusion arrived at by the Investigating Officer and the SP of CBI when they say that no pecuniary loss was suffered by the Government. The PG Bonds (having a value of) USD 3.01 Lakhs in 1995 (Current value ₹ 2.28 crores) constituted valuable property..." the court pointed out in its order rejecting the CBI's closure report.

There was sufficient material to summon all the four as accused, it added.

Going through the case files, the special judge said the last investigation in this case was carried out on March 11, 1999, and thereafter on March 17, 1999, when the draft final report was prepared.

BJP, CPI(M) hope to give a 'good fight' to TMC's Babul Supriyo



KOLKATA, April 3 (PTI): Opposition BJP and the CPI(M) candidates are hoping to play spoilsport to celebrity Trinamool Congress candidate Babul Supriyo having a cakewalk in the April 12 by-poll to the upmarket South Calcutta assembly constituency of Ballygunge, which has been a pocket borough for the TMC since 2006.

The south Kolkata constituency is a unique patchwork which boasts of palatial houses of the Biras, Thapars, Mookherjees (of Martin & Burn fame) and Zamindars of yesteryears such as the Rajas of Santosh, as well as tony upper middle-class high-rises and sprawling slums. Traditionally since the 1950s, the fight in these constituencies used to be between CPI(M) and the Congress, with the slums and some of the middle-class intelligentsia voting Left, while the rest of the middle class and Uber rich rooting for the Right.

The rise of the left-off centre Trinamool saw votes of both the poor and rich gravitating towards the Mamata Banerjee-led party. However, the rise of the BJP in the last few years has again created a new right-wing electorate, while the Left is hoping to make a small come-back by channeling dissatisfaction with TMC towards votes for the hammer and sickle.

The TMC of course remains confident of the Mamata-magic.

"I am getting great response from people - across the constituency including in areas like Park Circus. The opposition is leveling all kinds of false charges against me as they are sure of defeat," Supriyo told PTI over the phone, while undertaking a door-to-door campaign in the minority-dominated Mullickbazar area.

The around 2.5 lakh electorate in the constituency reflects an eclectic mix of Bengali and Hindi speakers, Urdu-speaking Muslims, with a sprinkling of Anglo-Indians, Christians, Parsis and a handful of Jews.

The by-election to Ballygunge was necessitated by the death of Subrata Mukherjee in November, 2021, who was then the Panchayat minister in the Mamata Banerjee cabinet. In the last election held in 2021, TMC received over 70 per cent vote share, the BJP candidate came a distant second with just over 20 per cent votes and the

CPI(M) got 5.61 per cent.

In the four-cornered contest, TMC has fielded former Union minister Babul Supriyo, BJP has nominated Keya Ghosh, CPI(M) has propped up Saira Shah Halim while the Congress nominee is Kamruzzaman Choudhary.

The campaign is on but yet low key as can be expected in a by-election. Saira Halim is banking more on door-door campaigns, trying to access pockets of Left support for her party with the help of a band of young volunteers from the CPI(M)'s student and youth wings.

TMC leader Baiswanor Chattopadhyay, overseeing the Supriyo's campaign, said Muslims are a majority in wards 60, 61, 64, 65 of the seven-ward (others being 68, 69 and 85) constituency, which he estimates constitutes over 50 per of the vote. "We don't see the voters in the prism of Muslims, Hindus or Bengalis and non-Bengalis. They are all people of Bengal living here for years. It is the BJP which tries to divide them into segments," Chattopadhyay told PTI.

Supriyo has been facing a campaign of innuendoes where he has been called a "turncoat" for switching from the BJP to Trinamool, and an Imams organisation had early in the campaign held meetings against him where this had been highlighted.

However, Chattopadhyay said, "Muslims in Ballygunge will vote for Mamata Banerjee who stands for secularism, democracy and justice. They know TMC is their true friend which does not try to divide people along religious lines and does not dangle the threat of NRC and CAA on those living here for decades." A rally was however held on Saturday in the constituency by some Leftist social organisations, which had earlier staged anti-NRC and anti-CAA protests with the slogan "No vote to Babul Supriyo and the BJP". BJP south Kolkata district president Sanghamitra Choudhury, overseeing the party's campaign in Ballygunge, also claimed, "In our campaign we have discovered Supriyo has no acceptability. The death of student leader Anis Khan and burning of nine minority community people including innocent women and children at Bogtui have shaken the voters in these areas."

WHO suspends Covaxin supply to UN agencies

HYDERABAD, April 3 (PTI): The World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed it has suspended the supply of Covaxin, produced by city-based Bharat Biotech, through UN procurement agencies and recommending to countries that received the covid vaccine to take actions as appropriate.

A statement issued by WHO on Saturday said the suspension is in response to the outcomes of its post EUL (emergency use authorisation) inspection held between March 14-22, 2022 and the need to conduct process and facility upgrade to address recently identified GMP (good manufacturing practice) deficiencies.

There will be interruption of supply of Covaxin due to suspension of production for export, WHO said. The risk assessment to date does not indicate change in the risk-benefit ratio. The data, available to WHO, indicate the vaccine is effective and no safety concern exists, WHO said. Company officials could not be reached immediately for a response.

Haryana calls special Assembly session days after Punjab's move seeking transfer of Chandigarh

CHANDIGARH, April 3 (PTI): The Haryana government has summoned a special session of the Assembly here on April 5, days after neighbouring Punjab passed a resolution seeking immediate transfer of Chandigarh to the AAP-ruled state. A decision to summon the one-day special session was taken at a meeting of the council of ministers, Transport minister Mool Chand Sharma told PTI over the phone.

Sharma, who was in Faridabad, said he joined the meeting, presided over by Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar, through online mode.

"A decision was taken to summon the special session of the Haryana Assembly on April 5. Several issues will be taken up in the special session, which has been summoned after Punjab brought a resolution..." Sharma said.

Earlier on Saturday, chief minister Khattar had condemned Bhagwant Mann-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab for bringing a resolution seeking the transfer of Chandigarh to the state. Notably, the resolution was passed by the Punjab Assembly on Friday in the absence of two BJP members who had staged a walkout from the House. Khattar had also asked AAP national convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann to seek an apology from the people of Haryana.

"What the Punjab government has done is condemnable," Khattar said while replying to a ques-



tion on the resolution.

"What they did is condemnable and it should not have been done," he said.

Khattar said Kejriwal being the head of the Aam Aadmi Party should condemn it and apologise to the people of Haryana.

Similarly, Punjab chief minister Mann too should apologise to the people of Haryana, he said. The AAP-led government in Punjab should first get the Satluj-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal built and transfer Punjab's Hindi-speaking areas to Haryana, Khattar said. On Friday, Khattar said "Chandigarh is and will remain the capital of Haryana and Punjab". Notably, the SYL canal issue has been a bone of contention between Punjab and Haryana for several decades.

In the past, Punjab had been demanding a reassessment of its share of the Ravi-Beas rivers

water while Haryana had been seeking completion of the SYL canal to get its share of 3.5 million acre feet (MAF) of water.

In 2020, the then Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh had warned that it was an emotive issue and "Punjab will burn" if asked to share water. Haryana Home minister Anil Vij had on Saturday said the "issue of Chandigarh is there but it is not the only issue". "There are other issues which are connected to it. There is SYL water (issue), (the issue of) Hindi speaking areas. They have not spoken on those issues. Whenever there will be a decision, it will be a single one. There cannot be different decisions," Vij said.

As the Punjab Assembly passed the resolution, chief minister Mann accused the Centre of trying to upset the balance in the administration of the Union Territory and other common assets.

The resolution, which was moved by Mann, was passed by the House in the absence of the two BJP legislators, who had earlier staged a walkout.

The Punjab government's move to bring a resolution in the state assembly came in the wake of the Centre's announcement that the Central Service Rules will apply to the employees of the Union Territory of Chandigarh.

Mann and many other parties including Congress and SAD had slammed the Centre's decision, claiming that it goes against the Punjab Reorganisation Act.

Crisis in Sri Lanka: Air India scales down flights to island nation due to poor demand

NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): Air India on Sunday said it will reduce its India-Sri Lanka services from 16 flights per week currently to 13 flights per week from April 9 due to poor demand. Sri Lanka is currently experiencing its worst economic crisis in history. With long lines for fuel, cooking gas, essentials in short supply and long hours of power cuts, the public has been suffering for weeks. "Currently AI is operating 16 flights a week - daily flights from Delhi and nine flights a week from Chennai," an Air India spokesperson told PTI.

In the new schedule, AI will be operating a total of 13 flights per week, the spokesperson noted.

In the new schedule, while the frequency from Chennai will remain untouched, flights from Delhi will reduce from seven to four per week, the spokesperson said.

"Four flights from Delhi instead of seven effective April 9 due to

poor loads," the spokesperson noted. AI 283 on the Delhi-Colombo sector will now operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays from April 8 to May 30. AI 284 on the Colombo-Delhi sector will operate on Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays from April 9 to May 31.

The Sri Lankan government on Sunday blocked social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram after declaring a nationwide public emergency and imposing a 36-hour curfew ahead of a planned anti-government rally over the worst economic crisis in the island nation.

The move is aimed at preventing masses from gathering in Colombo to protest the government's failure to provide relief to the public suffering from shortages of food, essentials, fuel and medicine amidst hours-long power cuts, the Colombo Page newspaper reported.

Raj Thackeray remains underground for months; lack of consistency his speciality: Sharad Pawar

PUNE, April 3 (PTI): Rejecting Raj Thackeray's allegation that NCP plays 'caste politics', party chief Sharad Pawar on Sunday said the MNS president never takes a consistent stand on any issue and remains in 'hibernation' for three to four months a year which is his 'speciality'.

Speaking at a rally at Shivaji Park in Mumbai on Saturday, Raj Thackeray had criticised Sharad Pawar, accusing him of "playing the caste card from time to time and dividing society". "On the contrary, NCP brings together people from all castes. Raj Thackeray should have studied the history of NCP (before making comments)," Pawar told reporters in Kolhapur. Replying to a question on the MNS chief's speech, Pawar took a swipe saying, "Raj Thackeray stays underground for three to four months and suddenly surfaces to give a lecture. This is his speciality. I don't know what he does for months". Pawar said the MNS chief talks about many things but lacks a consistent stand.

"He spoke about NCP and caste politics. The fact is that Chhagan Bhujbal, and Madhukarrao Pichad among others had worked as the Leader of the House of NCP. Everybody knows which communities they belong to," the former Union minister said.

Pawar said that his nephew and Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar became the Leader of the House after completing 30 years in the Assembly.

"Ajit Pawar decided to accept this position after many leaders in NCP felt that he deserved it since he has completed 30 years in the legislature," the NCP chief added. When asked about Raj Thackeray, whose party is known for the aggressive sons-of-soil brand of politics, praising Uttar Pradesh, Pawar said, "As I said earlier, he can talk about anything. I don't know what he saw in UP."

"What happened in UP recently? Election results were different because of different reasons. But in Lakhimpur Kheri, where farmers were killed...farmers were protesting on the borders of UP, but no one came to solve their issues. Many things happened under the Yogi government and if he (Raj Thackeray) is praising that government then I don't want to say anything. Under (chief minister) Uddhav Thackeray's guidance this won't happen," Pawar added. NCP and Congress are constituents of the Shiv Sena-led MVA govt. When asked if Raj Thackeray was trying to align his party's stand with the BJP ahead of civic elections in Maharashtra, Pawar referred to the lacklustre performance of the MNS in the past elections.



Post-Covid education all about retraining teachers, blend of online and offline learning: Academicians

KOLKATA, April 3 (PTI): The manner in which teachers are trained to get the most out of newer learning methods and a judicious blend of digital and classroom teaching will shape the future of education in the post-Covid era, feel noted academicians and experts.

The impact of technology on education, however, is yet to be assessed, whether it will turn out to be a revolution or a complete failure, they said.

"The social purpose of education was brought to the forefront due to the pandemic, though the imprint of digitisation on education is yet to be seen...digital learning skills are still patchy," said Dr. Debanjan Chakrabarti, director-East & North East, British Council. Online learning gained prominence across the world, as the pandemic and recurrent lockdowns made physical

classes almost redundant for much of 2020 and 2021.

But, as academic institutions slowly but surely begin to reopen, students, teachers and parents are faced with a million-dollar question - how learning would take shape in the post-Covid scenario, educators said at the recent Education East Summit organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry. "There have been problems with the mix of online and offline methods since Covid struck...but teachers should be retrained to focus on some key areas, more so in the aftermath of the pandemic - create analytical minds and encourage non-linear thinking so that our students are skilled enough to adapt to changes taking place around them," former IIT professor and Padma Shri awardee Ajoy Kumar Ray told PTI.

According to Bratati Bhat-

tacharya, secretary general of Shikshayatan Foundation, faculty training has become necessary at every level after the pandemic.

"With the advent of online learning, the attention span of students is on the decline, and teachers need training to make academic content engaging to hold their attention during the limited time period. Developing thinking skills among students is another challenge for tutors," she said.

A recent report by UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education argues that digital technology that enables communication, collaboration and learning across distance is a formidable tool, not a panacea but a source of innovation and expanded potential.

The capacity to initiate, experiment and innovate that has been un-



leashed during the pandemic disruptions must be allowed to continue, it said.

"It is an illusion to think that online learning is the way forward for all...today it is clear that nothing can substitute collaboration between teachers, whose function is not to

apply ready-made technologies or pre-prepared didactics, but to fully assume their role as knowledge enablers and pedagogic guides," the report, which talks about education in the post-Covid world, said.

"We can expect to increasingly have hybrid forms of teaching and

learning, in different spaces, inside and outside the school, at different times, synchronous and asynchronous, using a multiplicity of means and methods," it added.

The need of the hour is blending digital and classroom teaching, and bridging the technological divide, feels Ujjwal K Chowdhury, adviser and professor at Daffodil International University, Dhaka.

Future classrooms need to be experimental and visually expressive, he said.

"I feel the notion of competition needs to give way to collaboration and co-creation. Tests on knowledge and memory should now be replaced with evaluation of attitude, aptitude and application," Chowdhury told PTI virtually on the sidelines of the CII summit.

Students, meanwhile, are excited to get back to their familiar school

and college buildings, the fun, frolic and banter. They are equally curious to experience the integration of 'old and new normal'.

"The new mode of learning, which took me some time getting used to, has its share of advantages and shortcomings...but perhaps, the saddest thing for me was missing out on college life due to the Covid-19 curbs. I am glad to be back to my college in all its brick-and-mortar glory," said Devdeep Dasgupta, a third-year undergraduate student at the Institute of Engineering and Management, Kolkata.

It is no different for little Pratyusha Chatterjee, a Class 5 student of Gokhale Memorial Girls' School, who can't wait to meet her friends after two years.

"My school reopens tomorrow and I am simply thrilled," she said with a big smile.

Third force claim with 10% score: Stalin's jibe at BJP in Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): Scoffing at the BJP's claim of having emerged as the third force in Tamil Nadu, state chief minister and DMK supremo M K Stalin has said it is like a student managing just a 10-point score behind those having 90 and 50 marks.

He also said it was wrong to assume that the BJP won massively in the recently held assembly elections in five states as its tally declined in Uttar Pradesh and its 10 ministers, including one deputy chief minister, lost there, while several key leaders in Goa and the chief minister in Uttarakhand also had to suffer defeat.

"Taking into account the real field conditions of the five state election results, I'll say it is negative for the BJP," Stalin told PTI in an interview.

"In UP, they have got fewer seats than last time. The defeat of 10 ministers, including the deputy chief minister, is an expression of popular discontent. The BJP chief minister has been defeated in Uttarakhand and their key leaders lost in Goa too. The party has won only two seats in the Punjab assembly," said the DMK stalwart, who was on a three-day visit to the national capital.

Asked about the BJP's claim that it has emerged as the third force in Tamil Nadu, Stalin said, "A boy gets 90 marks in an examination. Another student gets a score of 50. Another one gets 10 points. Would you appreciate a 10-point scorer finishing third?"

After urban local body polls in February, the BJP claimed that it has emerged as the third-largest party in Tamil Nadu after the DMK and the AIADMK.



The local elections saw the ruling DMK relegating its arch-rival AIADMK to a distant second position, after trouncing it in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and then during the 2021 assembly polls. While the DMK won almost two-thirds seats, the BJP managed to make its inroads by winning over 300 seats, though it had fielded candidates for almost 5,600 seats of the total of more than 12,800.

The results prompted the saffron party workers to emphatically remark that the "lotus is blooming" in the Dravidian heartland, while its state chief K Annamalai said the BJP was now officially the third-largest party in Tamil Nadu as it finished second after the ruling DMK in several wards and third after the DMK and the AIADMK in others, while its vote share increased to 10 percent from 8 per cent across the state and in Chennai it rose to 8.04 per cent from 3 per cent earlier.

After years of nil representation in the state assembly, the party had also seen four of its well-known faces, including BJP Mahila Morcha national president Vanathi Srinivasan, getting elected to the

assembly last year.

On many political pundits suggesting that the recent round of assembly polls in five states, including in all-important Uttar Pradesh, indicated a clear win for the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Stalin said parliamentary elections are different from assembly polls.

"The results of the five state assembly elections and the results of the parliamentary elections should not be considered together. (I) Can't even think (so). Legislative elections will focus on political issues in the state. The parliamentary election will focus on who will be the next prime minister. It is therefore incorrect to predict the combination of the two," Stalin said.

Moreover, it is wrong to say that the BJP has won hugely in five states, the Tamil Nadu chief minister said.

He further said opposing the BJP is not any personal hatred towards a political party.

"You should not think so. We criticise the policies of the BJP, not of individual persons.... So all our criticisms are principled."

Stalin also asserted that the

DMK's importance in national politics has always been there.

"DMK has always been the party that plays a key role in who can become prime minister or president of the country. DMK is now the third-largest party in Parliament. We have always been important in national politics and will remain so."

Asked about his message for all opposition parties for taking on the BJP in 2024, Stalin said, "All parties must realise that unity is strength. Everyone must come together to save India. My plea is that if we want to preserve India's diversity, federalism, democracy, secularism, equality, fraternity, state rights, education rights, we must all leave aside our individual political mindsets and unite."

The inauguration of the DMK's office here on Saturday by Stalin saw top leaders from virtually all major Opposition parties come together on one stage. They included Sonia Gandhi, P Chidambaram, Farooq Abdullah, Akhilesh Yadav, Sitaram Yechury and D Raja, as well as leaders from parties such as the TMC, BJD, BJD and the TDP.

On the DMK's alliance with the Congress, which has had a decent electoral representation in the south, the DMK leader said, "We did not work with Congress for any need. We work together on the basis of conceptual agreements."

"We have mobilised all the secular forces in Tamil Nadu and pushed them (BJP) to the sidelines. We all (allies) continue to have a policy relationship, not just during the election period, but as parties that share constituencies. That is the foundation of our success," he said.

Nepal PM Deuba visits temples in Varanasi

VARANASI (UP), April 3 (PTI): Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba arrived in Varanasi on Sunday and offered prayers at the famous Kal Bhairav and Kashi Vishwanath temples. Deuba, accompanied by his wife Arzu Rana Deuba, was received by Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath at the Lal Bahadur Shastri Airport here in the morning. School children holding Indian and Nepalese flags greeted the Prime Minister at the airport. Later, the Nepalese PM visited Kal Bhairav and Kashi Vishwanath temples and paid obeisance there. Deuba was accompanied by Adityanath. Amidst showering of flower petals and beats of 'Damru', various artists performed traditional dances to welcome the prime minister. Deuba and his wife performed 'rudrabhishek' -- a ritual to offer prayers to Lord Shiva -- at the Kashi Vishwanath temple and also watched a short film showing the history of the Kashi Vishwanath Dham. Earlier, the high-profile guests were greeted with cultural programmes, including various dance forms, at 15 places on the road from the airport to the Taj Hotel. The Nepalese PM is likely to visit Pashupatinath temple located at Lalit Ghat and hold a meeting with the chief minister, officials said. Deuba arrived in New Delhi on Friday in his first bilateral visit abroad after becoming Prime Minister for the fifth time in July 2021.

Karauli communal clashes: Curfew continues, SIT formed

JAIPUR, April 3 (PTI): Curfew remained clamped in Karauli in Rajasthan on Sunday while more than a dozen people were arrested and an SIT formed to probe the communal clashes that broke out in the district during a motorcycle rally taken out to celebrate the Hindu New Year.

Incidents of arson and vandalism were reported on Saturday after stones were pelted at the rally when it was passing through a Muslim-dominated locality, according to police. At least 35 people were injured in the violence.

Mobile internet remained suspended on Sunday and police said they were examining videos of the violence that have been shared on social media.

"Around 30 people were detained and a dozen of them have been arrested. A special investigation team led by an additional superintendent of police has been formed to probe the incidents," DIG Rahul Prakash, who is camping in Karauli, said.

"Curfew is continuing. Some vendors will be allowed to sell essentials like vegetables and milk in the presence of police," he said, adding that an assessment of losses and damage is underway.

The violence has sparked a fresh



war of words between the ruling Congress in the state and the BJP.

Chief minister Ashok Gehlot alleged that an environment of religious polarisation had been created in the country after the BJP-led NDA came to power at the Centre and blamed it for such incidents.

"The atmosphere which has been created in the country after the NDA government came to power, I believe that the prime minister himself should appeal to the countrymen that this polarisation in the name of religion and caste is not justified and is not in the interest of the country," he said.

On the other hand, BJP state president Satish Poonia, who has

blamed the Congress' 'appeasement' politics for the situation, formed a 10-member panel that will visit Karauli and talk to all sides. Deputy Leader of Opposition Rajendra Rathore, BJP's national secretary Alka Singh Gurjar, state general secretary Madan Dilawar and chief spokesperson and MLA Ram Lal Sharma are among the members of the committee, according to a party spokesperson.

An additional 600 policemen including 50 officers were deployed last night to maintain law and order in Karauli. Four IPS officers including Rahul Prakash were also sent from Jaipur to monitor the situation.

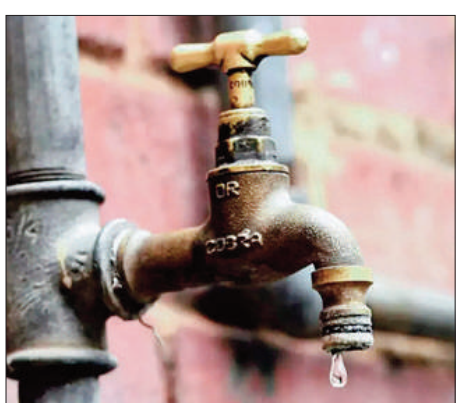
Groundwork for providing tap water connections to rural households at very advanced stage: Official

NEW DELHI, April 3 (PTI): The groundwork for providing tap water connections to the country's rural households under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) is at a "very advanced stage" and on track to meet the 2024 deadline despite the impact of Covid-19, a senior Jal Shakti ministry official said. However, low functional tap water connection coverage in a few states is a matter of concern and the Centre is working with them to avoid any hiccups, said Vini Mahajan, secretary, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation. Functional tap water connections are being provided to all rural households in the country under the government's flagship JJM. The scheme aims to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024.

Mahajan said different states are progressing at a different pace but all have told the Centre that they are determined to meet the deadline.

"All states are committed to completing the mission by 2024. Different states started at different levels. Some were below the all-India level and that is impacting their current performance but even beyond that, there are a few states which are not yet close to the all-India reaches, which is a matter of concern," Mahajan told PTI. On Uttar Pradesh, which has the lowest rural tap connection coverage in the country at 13.46 per cent, she said the new state government has assured the Centre that it will deliver.

"UP has the greatest requirement of functional household tap connections. Two years of Covid have been problematic, all states have faced issues of lockdown, labour and price rise. We have been given a clear commitment by the new government of UP that they are fully geared up and that a lot of state work has happened and they will be able to deliver," she said.



But the preparatory work for providing drinking water to every rural household is at a very advanced stage, Mahajan said.

"You are looking at the end point, you are looking at the tap connection in the household but before you reach there, you have to look at the source like tube wells, pipelines, making overhead reservoirs and after that water reaches a household... the preparatory work is at a very advanced stage," she said. "There is no shortage of funds and political will in the entire country and there is a lot of focus on it (JJM). So in the next two or two-and-a-half years, we are very hopeful that the number of functional household tap connections will quickly start showing up," she added. Speaking about the impact of Covid-19 on the JJM, Mahajan said it was felt during the lockdown when almost all construction work came to a standstill.

There was a time when labour left construction sites and did not come back. Though projects had started, their actual performance was very low and limited. Then globally prices of

iron and steel, and petroleum started rising, she said. On the current status of the mission, Mahajan said in terms of labour availability and work on sites, things are back to the pre-pandemic level but price rise is still an issue.

"There is still an impact and we are sorting out the issues but overall we are back on track in terms of projects being structured, tenders being given and implementation. So, things are looking up in the country but there are some underlying issues which are being sorted out," she said. Asked if it will be possible to meet the 2024 deadline, she said even though different states are progressing at a different pace, all of them have told the Centre that they are determined to do so.

"We are working with them to ensure that there are no hiccups and we are also strongly urging them to ramp up technical manpower because if you are working with speed, you also want to make sure that quality is not compromised," she said.

Mahajan further said that there are two kinds of quality issues being looked at -- there must be a tap connection and it should give water at the service level so there is a minimum of 55 litres per capita daily. "The quality of water must be of BIS level, it must be available in a regular fashion. It is not expected to be (available) 24x7 but (if) it is going to come for two hours in a day, then people must know that these are the two hours when water would come, pressure of water must be there and sources should be such that water can be provided throughout the year," she said.

"We are also looking at quality during the implementation phase so pipes must be of the prescribed standards and they must be weighed properly with proper earth cover," she added.

Contd. from Page 1...

Buragohain dangoriyas left a lasting

security of the state and gave special impetus to socio-economic activities. Keeping alive the rich heritage of their ancestors and following their ideals, chief minister Sarma urged the descendants of Buragohain dangoriyas to dedicate themselves more enthusiastically to the service of the country. He also expressed hope that in the coming days, the Buragohain descendants, with their committed endeavours, will play a crucial role in realising the steps taken by the state government. Chief minister Sarma also announced that the demands of the memorandum submitted by the 'Sadou Buragohain Bongkhawali' in the meeting would be considered in a positive light.

Besides, the government would allot a piece of land at Sadiya for construction of the office of the 'Sadou Buragohain Bongkhawali'. Minister of Tea Tribe Welfare Sanjay Kisan, MP Pradan Baruah, local MLA Bolin Chetia, MLA of Dambuk constituency of Arunachal Pradesh Gum Tayeng, educationist Dr. Dayananda Borghain, central committee president of Sadou Buragohain Bongkhawali Chao Sundar Buragohain and secretary Chao Ranjan Buragohain were present among others at the open session.

India's position on Russia

conflict in Ukraine and called for early cessation of violence in that country. Russia has been India's major supplier of military hardware and New Delhi has been worried about possible delays in the supply of some key platforms and equipment because of the Ukraine conflict. India has also decided to purchase discounted crude oil from Russia, triggering concern among a number of Western powers. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said around two weeks back that India taking the Russian offer of discounted crude oil would not be a violation of the US sanctions on Moscow but underlined that countries should also think about "where you want to stand" on the Russian action.

More than 2.5 million people are estimated to have fled Ukraine to escape Russian attacks, in what the United Nations has called the fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II. On March 23, India abstained in the UN Security Council on a vote on a draft resolution by Russia on the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine on Wednesday. India had previously abstained on two occasions in the Security Council and once in the General Assembly on resolutions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

India's export touches record

include petroleum, cotton yarn/fabrics/made ups, handloom, gems and jewellery, engineering goods (USD 111 billion as against USD 76 billion), electronic engineering products (USD 15.58 billion as against USD 11 billion), leather goods, chemicals, plastic and marine products. The exports have also seen a significant increase to different countries, especially, developed countries, it said.

"Notwithstanding the challenges posed by successive waves of Covid, India's merchandise trade performance has shown impressive growth and exports remained above USD 30 billion for 12 consecutive months during April 2021 to March 2022," Goyal said.

Agriculture exports have crossed USD 48 billion during April 2021-March 2022.

Ukraine documents alleged

were funding the invasion of Ukraine, now in its 39th day. "Not a penny should go to Russia anymore. That's bloody money used to slaughter people. The gas and oil embargo must come immediately," the mayor said.

Charles Michel, president of the European Council, wrote on Twitter that he was shocked by the "haunting images of atrocities committed by the Russian army" in the capital region. The EU and non-governmental organisations were assisting in the effort to preserve evidence of war crimes, according to Michel, who promised "further EU sanctions" against Russia.

On Sunday morning, Russian forces launched an airstrike on the Black Sea port of Odessa, in southern Ukraine, sending up clouds of dark smoke that veiled parts of the city. The Russian military said the targets were an oil processing plant and fuel depots around Odessa, which is Ukraine's largest port and home to its navy. "I live in that eight-floor building. At six in the morning, Russia launched an attack, and this piece of rock reached my house," said Maiesienko Iliia, who lives near one of the targeted facilities.

The Odessa city council said Ukraine's air defense shot down some missiles before they hit the city. Ukrainian military spokesman Vladyslav Nazarov said there were no casualties from the attack. The smaller port of Mariupol, located to the east on the Sea of Azov, remained cut off from the rest of the country as Russian and Ukrainian soldiers fought for control of the besieged city. About 100,000 civilians -- less than a quarter of the prewar population of 430,000 -- are believed to be trapped there with little or no food, water, fuel and medicine. The International Committee of the Red Cross said it hoped a team of nine staffers and three vehicles it sent Saturday to help evacuate residents would reach Mariupol on Sunday but cautioned, "The situation on the ground is volatile and subject to rapid changes." Ukrainian authorities said Russia agreed days ago to allow safe passage from the city, which has been the site of some of the worst attacks and greatest suffering, but similar agreements have broken down repeatedly under continued shelling. Mariupol is in the mostly Russian-speaking Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian troops for eight years. Its capture would create an unbroken land corridor from Russia to Crimea, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

With Mariupol squarely in Russia's crosshairs, Ukraine insisted it had gained a leg up elsewhere in the country. As his country's troops retook territory north of the capital of Kyiv from departing Russian troops, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on all Ukrainians to do whatever they could "to foil the enemy's tactics and weaken its capabilities".

"Peace will not be the result of any decisions the enemy makes somewhere in Moscow. There is no need to entertain empty hopes that they will simply leave our land. We can only have peace by fighting," Zelenskyy said late Saturday. Zelenskyy and Ukraine's Western allies believe Russia has shifted its forces from the capital region and the country's north in order to build strength in the east and south. The Ukrainian leader again urged the West to supply his military with warplanes and more anti-missile systems. "Every Russian missile that hits our cities and every bomb dropped on our people, on our children, only adds black paint to the history that will describe everyone on whom the decision depended -- the decision of whether to help Ukraine with modern weapons," Zelenskyy said. While the geography of the battlefield morphed, little changed for many Ukrainians more than five weeks into a war that has sent more than 4 million people fleeing the country as refugees and displaced millions more from their homes. The regional governor in Kharkiv, said Sunday that Russian artillery and tanks performed over 20 strikes on Ukraine's second-largest city and its outskirts in the country's northeast over the past day. Guv Oleh Symyehubov said a missile strike on the city of Lozovo wounded four people and that Russian tanks bombed a hospital in the town of Balakliya. Zelenskyy alleged on Saturday that Russian troops have left mines around homes, abandoned equipment and even the bodies of the dead as they withdraw from around Kyiv. Those claims could not be independently verified, but Ukrainian troops were seen heeding the warning. In towns and cities surrounding Kyiv, signs of fierce fighting were everywhere in the wake of the Russian redeployment. Destroyed armored vehicles from both armies lay in streets and fields along with scattered military gear.

IOC to pump in ₹ 840 cr

permanent and contract modes. IOC at present has 13 POL depots across the Northeast with an installed capacity of 3,160 TMTPA, while the capacity utilisation is 2,428 TMTPA, the official said. "After all our expansion projects are completed, our installed storage capacity will reach 5,530 TMTPA against a projected demand of 4,950 TMTPA by 2030," he said. Earlier, IOC had said it is embarking on a major expansion drive to enhance its LPG bottling capacity in Northeast by nearly 53 per cent to eight crore cylinders annually by 2030 to meet the growing demand of cooking fuel.

CM grants 26 ambulances for

in all the tea gardens of the state. Union minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Rameswar Teli, minister for Tea Tribe Welfare Sanjay Kisan, MLA Lahowal Binod Hazarika, MLA Dibrugarh Prasanta Phukan, MLA Moran Chakradhar Gogoi, MLA Naharkatia Taranga Gogoi, chairman ATDC Rituparna Baruah and host of other dignitaries were present during the ambulance distribution programme.

Himanta asks AGCL to strengthen

played an important role in the generation of environment friendly energy in the state".

Sarma also complimented AGCL for its ability to reach more than 42,000 domestic consumers as well as about 1,200 commercial establishments in urban and rural areas in almost all districts of Upper Assam. CM Sarma also lauded AGCL for its recent success in winning a bid for building City Gas Distribution (CGD) Network jointly with Oil India Limited in Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Darrang, Udaluguri, Sonitpur and Biswanath districts on the north bank of Brahmaputra as well as several districts of Tripura.

Moreover saying that in today's competitive business sector, there is no alternative but to advance innovative thinking for industrial enterprises, the chief minister appreciated AGCL for its pioneering effort to capitalise on the market potential for alternative green fuels in Assam by setting up of the first CNG Station of the state at Chowkidangee in Dibrugarh town. Sarma also said that various projects undertaken by AGCL under its CSR initiatives for social and economic development of its adjoining areas over the years have had a positive impact on the entire region today. Further highlighting the "Hydrocarbon Vision-2030" of the Government of India, the chief minister said that Assam and the North East has immense potential in the hydrocarbon sector. The possibility of hydrocarbons in northeast India can be gauged from the fact that the region has a large amount of hydrocarbon reserves and with its proper use, the region can script a spectacular growth narrative, he said.

He also urged AGCL to work in close coordination with Government of India PSUs, its sister organisations and local community to give a new impetus to its operation and development journey. Industries and Commerce minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, Union minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Rameswar Teli, Tea Tribe Welfare minister Sanjay Kisan, Sadiya MLA & chairman of AGCL Bolin Chetia, Duliajan MLA Teros Gowala, Naharkatia MLA Taranga Gogoi, chairman of DNPL Rupam Goswami were present along with host of other dignitaries on the occasion.

Karbi Customary Law Court to be

in the vicinity of Kaziranga National Park in the Eco-Sensitive Zone. He also said the KSA is opposed to the "give and take policy" adopted by Meghalaya and Assam governments in resolving the inter-state boundary problem. It does not want to lose the land of Karbi Anglong. Timung urged the strengthening of the 6th Schedule and renewed the movement for implementation of 244 (A) of the Constitution of India. Deputy chairman of KAAC, Ritesh Engli and executive members and Members of Autonomous Council, general secretary of KSA, Budho Terang also attended the Open Session.

NIA conducts searches in Assam

March, the spokesperson said. These accused along with their associates were involved in spreading the network of the CPI (Maoist) in Assam and other parts of the northeast region of the country, he said. During searches, digital devices and incriminating documents of the CPI (Maoist) were seized, the NIA spokesperson said, adding that further investigation is being carried out.

Besides shattering records, 'RRR' signals altered power equations in Tollywood



BENGALURU, April 3 (IANS): Images of the protagonists in the latest box-office super hit 'RRR' tell a great story of friendship on the big screen. In real life too, the Tollywood actors Jr NTR and Ram Charan are winning hearts for their friendship bordering on bromance.

On several occasions during the run-up to the movie's release and after that too, the camaraderie between the two star actors, scions of two of the most powerful Tollywood clans, have touched a chord with the people. It looks like their friendship spans several years at least.

But nothing could be farther from the truth. A couple of years ago, it would have been impossible to imagine seeing the two stars in the same frame, let alone a three-hour-long multi-star blockbuster! In fact, Jr NTR confessed as much in some of his media interactions.

It was a trend that symphonised the deep divisions in Tollywood for many years.

Where stars refused to act in multi-starrers for fear of being overshadowed or offending the sentiments of their fans.

In recent years, however, the trend seems to be slowly but surely reversing. A few years ago, 'Seetamma Vakitlo Sirimalle Chettu', a family entertainer starring Venkatesh and Mahesh Babu became a blockbuster. Then came 'Bahubali' where S.S. Rajamouli brought Prabhas and

Rana Dagubatti together to the big screen. It was a casting coup of sorts for the director to get Rana play the antagonist. In more recent times, 'Bheemla Nayak' had Pawan Kalyan facing off with Rana on screen.

"Today's stars are more concerned about the story and their characterisation. They believe in letting bygones be bygones," a director said on the condition of anonymity.

Rajamouli-Mahesh Babu's project in the pipeline

HYDERABAD, April 3 (IANS): Tollywood hitmaker S.S. Rajamouli is currently savouring the success of his most-hyped project 'RRR'.

Not revealing much about his next big thing, Rajamouli still hints at a big-ticket movie with Mahesh Babu, which is yet to be announced.

"Because of the pandemic, I had many things to wrap up for 'RRR'. With multiple postponements and uncertainty, I had to concentrate on 'RRR' alone. Meanwhile, I was trying to work on the story-line, which gives me hope that there are a couple of lines which interest me", Rajamouli reveals.

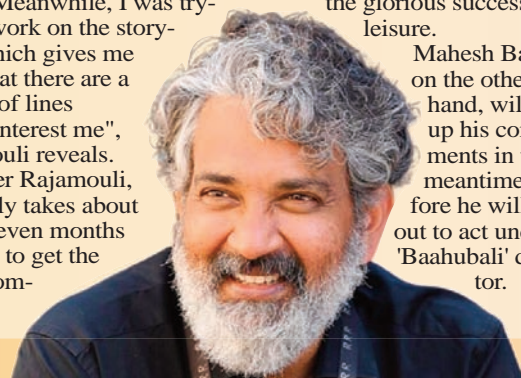
As per Rajamouli, it usually takes about six to seven months for him to get the story completely

penned, from the time he fixates on making the next move.

"From this point, to get into the pre-visualization and pre-production ready for the shoot, it takes about eight months. So, it will get rolling by this year-end", Rajamouli stated, as he hints at the next project with Mahesh.

For now, up next for Rajamouli is a short vacation, as he wants to relax and bask in the glorious success in leisure.

Mahesh Babu, on the other hand, will wrap up his commitments in the meantime, before he will set out to act under 'Bahubali' director.



Debattama Saha learns Braj language for her role in 'Mithai'

MUMBAI, April 3 (IANS): Popular television actress Debattama Saha, who is portraying the titular role in the show 'Mithai', talks about getting into the skin of character and learning Braj language for her role.

Debattama shared how she went about learning the Braj language. She said: "It was indeed challenging to understand the Braj language, but I believe a specific language can't be a barrier for an actor. I undoubtedly faced difficulties and challenges to grasp the character's diction, but I am trying my level best to get it right. Also, grasping the U.P. dialects and their nuances

has been a difficult task, but I believe this will definitely help me explore my boundaries as an artist and grow as a performer."

'Mithai' is based on the life of a sweet maker based in Mathura who wants to preserve and conserve the legacy of Aloo Jalebis that she has inherited from her father but is now, unfortunately, on the verge of extinction. The crew shot a few initial episodes at Jatipura and Mathura.

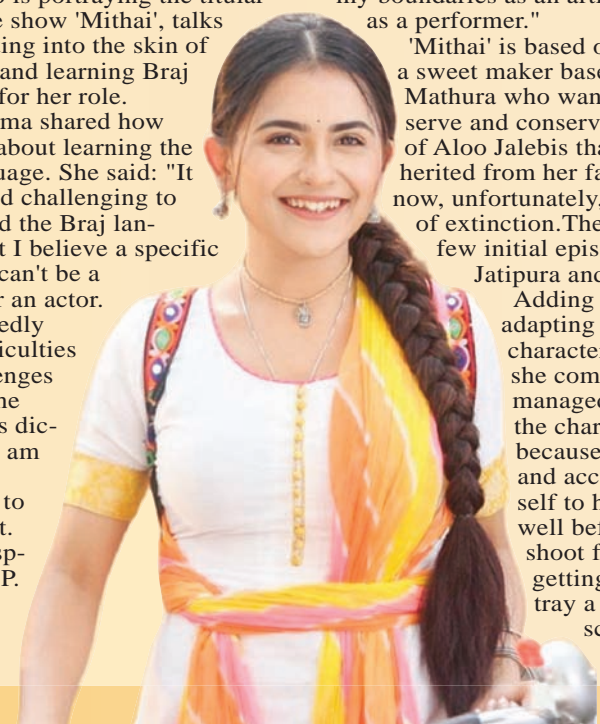
Adding further about adapting from one character to another, she commented: "I managed to step into the character easily because I connected and accustomed myself to her lifestyle well before I could shoot for it. Prior to getting on to portray a new role on-screen, I always give

myself some time to rehearse for the part. That way I am always well prepared to step into the shoes of a character."

"However, for 'Mithai', to bring the cultural essence, we filmed the initial episodes in the real locations from where the character belongs. I learned a few skills and the local dialect which are important for the character. It was a little challenging for me to communicate because Brajwasis speak a distinct language, which is Braj Bhasha," she shared.

On how she prepped for the role, the actress added: "I was curious to understand the culture and everything about it. I am someone always looking out to learn something new and I am working so hard to do justice to the local dialect and match it up with my character. I believe using these methods greatly eases the actor's job. During my stay in the city and interacting with the locals, I got a chance to take it all in with its glory and splendour."

'Mithai' will be airing from April 4 on Zee TV.



HARRDY SANDHU OPENS UP ON HIS NEW SINGLE 'KUDIYAN LAHORE DIYAN'

MUMBAI, April 3 (IANS): The well-known singer Harry Sandhu talks about his newly released song 'Kudiyan Lahore Diyan' featuring Aisha Sharma.

Harry says: " 'Kudiyan Lahore Diyan' is an extremely special song for me because it's very true to my artistry and brings me closer to my Punjabi roots. Jaani has outdone himself with penning these lyrics. B Praak composed a beat that I instantly fell in love with, and Arvind Khaira undoubtedly conceptualized a larger-than-life video that does absolute justice to the song." Sandhu made his acting debut in 'Yaaran Da Katchup' and his song 'Soch' was remade

for the movie 'Airlift'.

The singer shares that he hopes to get positive response for his latest track.

"I loved working on it from the first time we made a draft and I would like to thank my team for bringing 'Kudiyan Lahore Diyan' to life. I hope the fans give it all their love and it finds a spot on your playlist," he adds.

The song is directed by Arvind Khaira, music is composed by versatile B Praak and the song is written by lyricist Jaani. Desi Melodies released the official music video of 'Kudiyan Lahore Diyan' on their official YouTube channel.

ANIL KAPOOR GETS NOSTALGIC AS 'BETA' COMPLETES 30 YEARS

MUMBAI, April 3 (IANS): Who can forget the sensuous look of Bollywood superstar Madhuri Dixit in the track 'Dhak Dhak Karne Laga' from 1992 movie 'Beta'. Indra Kumar's directorial broke all the records at the box office and became a hit of that year.

Anil Kapoor, who won the Filmfare Best Actor Award for his performance goes down memory lane and recalls his working experience with co-star Mad-

huri.

While speaking about the same, Anil Kapoor said: "The writing of 'Beta' was revolutionary for that year. It had many layers with women in charge, the very topic of discussion today."

"I had the best time working on it with Madhuri Dixit and Aruna Irani. Thirty years is a long time, but the memories of shooting it are still very fresh in my mind," he added.

Meanwhile, Anil Kapoor is all set for his projects such as 'Jug Jugg Jeeyo', 'Thar', 'Animal', and 'Fighter'.



FIRST QUARTER LACKS KICK!

The first quarter of the year held a great promise for the film industry to level up with the pre-Covid-19 times and return to the good old normal days when a pandemic did not run your life or, rather, restrict it. For various reasons, though, the film industry has not been able to realise that promise. Ever since the exhibition trade re-opened post-pandemic, initially with restrictions of limited capacity, there was a sigh of relief. The exhibitors were back in business after almost two years of uncertainties. Since then, however, the films made for the Hindi audience are not working as expected. And it is not because they are remakes of South films. Because, South films dubbed in Hindi are doing better than they ever did.

I have mentioned this on an earlier occasion, the South dubbed films used to be released in the Hindi belt as gap fillers when the times were not con-

ducive for the box office prospects of a mainstream film. But the cinemas had to run. Things seem to have changed and, in fact, South films dubbed in Hindi have salvaged the first quarter of the year to some extent.

Somewhere during the lockdown, the viewer has come to terms with certain things, starting with content being most important. OTT platforms filled the gap and continued to provide entertainment when the cinemas were shut. On streaming platforms, there were quite a few big successes and most of them did not boast of big stars.

In fact, OTT serials that succeeded featured either newcomers, or actors who were not getting assignments in films any longer, or those who played character roles in films. Somehow, even on OTT platforms, some of the films with big stars failed to find favour with the viewer!

Then, the cinemas reopened at 50

per cent capacity to start with and are now allowed to operate at full capacity. To their relief, the cinema chains had a lineup of films due for release. We saw no major release in January. February saw the release of 'Badhaai Do' and 'Gangubai Kathiawadi'. The former just about managed to touch double-digit collections (in crores) and 'Gangubai Kathiawadi' just could not justify the hype around it. The claimed collection figure for it is about Rs 118 crore, but the trade puts it at about Rs 80 crore!

Amitabh Bachchan's 'Jhund' again remained a non-starter, barely managing to cross the double-digit mark with about Rs 12 crore. Much was expected of 'Bachchan Paandey', being a remake of the Tamil film 'Jigarthanda' (which, in turn, had been inspired by a South Korean film) and an Akshay Kumar-starrer at that! The film failed to get a decent opening and

had to be withdrawn from many cinemas or the number of shows allotted to it curtailed. It could not cross even the Rs 50 crore mark, thereby qualifying to be rated as a disaster. Ironically, the Tamil original had won two National Awards, one for Bobby Simha (Best Supporting Actor) and another for Vivek Harshan (Best Editing) in March 2015. The first quarter belonged to just one film, 'The Kashmir Files'. A small film with senior character actors playing the protagonists, it has stirred up the biggest political debate in the country and its after-effects are being felt nationwide. And, it did not let the box office down either. IANS



Espargaro fights to fourth on grid, career best Argentina GP qualifying

ARGENTINA, April 3 (IANS): Pol Espargaro showed off his incredible determination here, recovering from a complicated and compacted day to fourth on the grid.

The 2011 Moto2 World Championship winner Stefan Bradl showed steady and constant progress over the day's running.

Delays in the arrival of some of the MotoGP freight from the previous round saw the Argentina GP compressed into a two-day event. 'Super Saturday' seeing the Repsol Honda Team complete Free Practice and Qualifying in the space of just a few hours. Two hour-long Free

Practice sessions were followed by the usual Q1/Q2 format.

Pol Espargaro showed his experience as he was immediately on the pace in Free Practice 1, ending the session in third place and two tenths shy of fellow Honda rider, and fastest in the morning, Takaaki Nakagami.

Later in the day he would his first fall of the 2022 season, coming off at Turn 1 during Free Practice 2, and leading to a difficult afternoon session which resulted in the #44 would having to fight through Q1. MotoGP's unique Saturday schedule in Argentina meant there was no Free Practice 3 to attempt to further improve his



time.

Working with just a single bike as a result of the crash, Espargaro would not be stopped in Q1 and ended the session as the fastest rider despite an incredible tank slapper down the main straight. Just a single run was all Espargaro had during Q2, but he and his team pulled a rabbit out of the hat to secure the head of the second row with a 1'38.165 - only 0.046s shy of the front row. A moment at Turn 1 on his fastest lap is what Espargaro feels cost him a top-three birth.

Fourth place is Espargaro's best grid position at the Termas de Rio Hondo circuit, improv-

ing dramatically on his previous best of tenth in 2016. The Repsol Honda Team have won three of the six races held in Termas de Rio Hondo.

Stefan Bradl produced a day of steady improvements upon his return to racing the Repsol Honda Team RC213V. A 1'40.346 in FP1 would improve by over a second to set a 1'39.487 in Q1 for 14th in the session. The Honda HRC Test Rider is aiming for a productive race on Sunday, gathering more important data for the Repsol Honda Team.

Pol Espargaro said, "Mentally it was a stressful day; I crashed, went through Q1 to

Q2, then was battling for the front row. Already this morning it was set to be a busy day and I did not help this, but my team worked really hard. In the last moment we found the setup for Qualifying, a shame we only had one tyre for Q2 but we were still able to make a good lap for fourth. I had a moment coming into Turn 1 which I think finally cost us the front row.

"The track changed a lot over the course of the day so we had to adapt a lot and we were coming stronger with it. Warm Up will be important to see where we are, there will be a lot of rivals tomorrow but we're ready to fight."

PREMIER LEAGUE

NO CHANGE AT THE TOP AS MAN CITY, LIVERPOOL WIN

LONDON, April 3 (IANS): Manchester City remain on top of the Premier League after a 2-0 win away to struggling Burnley. Any pressure Pep Guardiola's side could have felt after Liverpool's win at home to Watford in Saturday's early kick off was dispelled in the fifth minute when Kevin de Bruyne's finish from Raheem Sterling's volley pass put them ahead.

Sterling was again the provider in the 25th minute when he found space down the right to cut the ball back for Ilkay Gundogan to wrong-foot Burnley keeper Nick Pope with a powerful half-volley.

Pope kept Burnley in the game with several decent saves before halftime, but Burnley hardly threatened with just three shots throughout, while their rivals enjoyed a 77 per cent possession.

Liverpool kicked off the weekend with a comfortable but unimpressive 2-0 win at home to Watford in Jurgen Klopp's 250th game in charge.

Diogo Jota's header, his 20th goal of the season, put Liverpool in front in the 22nd minute, but it was not until the last minute of normal time that Fabinho's penalty assured all three points against a spirited rival, Xinhua reports. Chelsea's preparations to face Real Madrid in the Champions League next week didn't go to plan as they suffered a 4-1 defeat



at home to Brentford, who took a massive step towards assuring their top-flight future.

Things looked to be going to

script when Antonio Rudiger fired Chelsea ahead in the 48th minute, but Vitaly Janett's first goal of the match two minutes

later made it 1-1.

Christian Eriksen put Brentford ahead in the 54th minute and Janett's second left Chelsea reel-

ing in the 60th minute.

Yoane Wissa had been excellent for the visitors and got his reward when he netted Brentford's fourth goal with three minutes left to play.

Manchester United dropped more points at home as they were held 1-1 by Leicester City.

Kelechi Iheanacho fired Leicester ahead in the 63rd minute, but Fred leveled for United three minutes later. James Maddison had what would have been the winning goal ruled out eight minutes from time after Iheanacho was ruled to have fouled Raphael Varane in the buildup.

Jonny's opening goal in the seventh minute and the first own goal of Ashley Young's long career gave Wolverhampton Wanderers a 2-1 win at home to Aston Villa in the West Midlands derby to keep his side's European hopes alive. Ollie Watkins scored the visitors' goal with an 86th-minute penalty. James Ward Prowse's spectacular free kick earned a 1-1 draw for Southampton away to Leeds United, who had taken a first half lead through Jack Harrison. Brighton and Norwich drew 0-0 with a result that ends both sides' six-game losing streaks, but which will make neither of the two sides happy. Brighton had 30 shots in the game, but managed to get just four on target.

Real Madrid beat Celta amid controversy; Atletico thrashes Alaves in La Liga



MADRID, April 3 (IANS): Real Madrid opened up a 12-point lead at the top of La Liga over Sevilla and moved 15 points clear of Barcelona, thanks to a controversial 2-1 win away to Celta Vigo. Referee Gonzalez Fuentes blew three penalties for Real Madrid and ruled out a Celta goal for off-side.

Karim Benzema put Real Madrid ahead in the 19th minute on from the penalty spot on Saturday night after Nolito clipped Eder Militao's heel as he was preparing to shoot. Celta were denied an equaliser when the referee ruled out Thiago Galhardo's header due to possible interference from Iago Aspas.

Celta levelled in the 52nd minute when Nolito scored from close range, but although Benzema saw a penalty saved in the 63rd minute after Rodrygo had been brought down, the Frenchman netted his third penalty of the afternoon after Ferland Mendy was judged to have been fouled on the edge of the home area shortly afterwards to give his side a vital win, Xinhua reports.

Joao Felix kept up his excellent recent form with two goals and Luis Suarez added two more as Atletico Madrid won 4-1 at home to Alaves. The Portuguese forward opened the

scoring after 11 minutes of a close first half and Alaves got a deserved equaliser thanks to Gonzalo Escalante in the 63rd minute.

However, a soft penalty allowed Suarez to put Atletico back in front with 15 minutes left to play. Felix scored a third with eight minutes to play and Suarez added a fourth in the last minute.

Borja Mayoral's 81st minute goal gave Getafe a 1-0 win at home to Mallorca that just about assures the home side's top-flight future.

Mallorca improved in Javier Aguirre's debut as first team coach, and was unlucky to be reduced to 10 men when Franco Russo was shown a second yellow card for handball which also saw Getafe given a penalty. Mallorca keeper Sergio Rico saved the penalty and the follow-up, but was helpless as Mayoral slid the ball across him. Two magic moments from captain Jose Luis Morales in the second half gave Levante a 2-0 win against Villarreal, who might think more of their Champions League tie with Bayern Munich next week.

FC Barcelona will entertain Sevilla and four more matches are scheduled on Sunday, before the round of matches ends with Real Sociedad playing Espanyol on Monday.

ICC CEO makes a strong pitch for inclusion of cricket in Oly Games

DUBAI, April 3 (IANS): The International Cricket Council (ICC) CEO Geoff Allardice is aiming for cricket to be included in the Olympic Games curriculum, as it will result in the governments of respective countries to pay more attention to the game's facilities and also provide high-performance assistance for the growth of the sport in their countries.

Allardice added that, as far as the ICC is concerned, it's "not a money-making exercise" for the global cricket governing body, but the move was to make respective governments stakeholders in the growth of the sport in their countries.

Women's Twenty20 cricket has been included at the 2022 Commonwealth Games at Birmingham following on from the men's competition at the Kuala Lumpur

CWG in 1998.

"In many of our members, being seen as an Olympic sport and having an association with the government and the national Olympic movement is something that is going to be really beneficial in terms of facilities and high-performance assistance," Allardice told SEN's This Is Your Journey on Sunday.

"It's certainly not a money-making exercise from our point of view, it's about getting exposure for cricket in markets where we may not be popular.

"And the other one is about giving all of our 106 members the opportunity to engage more closely with their governments. In some countries, being an Olympic sport gets you closer to your government than not being an Olympic sport."

Soon-to-be world No. 1 Swiatek crushes Osaka for Miami Open title

MIAMI, April 3 (IANS): Poland's 20-year-old tennis star Iga Swiatek bested Naomi Osaka of Japan 6-4, 6-0 in the Miami Open title clash to complete a 'Sunshine Double' in the prestigious WTA 1000 tournament on Sunday (IST).

This was Swiatek's 17th straight match win on the WTA Tour and her third consecutive WTA 1000 title with a straight-sets win over the four-time Grand Slam champion.

On Monday, the Pole star will officially become the world No.1 for the first time in her career. She moves to that position following her commanding 1-hour and 17-minute victory.

"I just feel really satisfied and fulfilled and also proud of myself," Swiatek was quoted as saying by wtatennis.com. "I feel like I have got to celebrate, because I don't know how long I can keep up with this streak."

The former French Open



champion also joins an exclusive club by becoming only the fourth woman to win the Sunshine Double -- titles at WTA 1000 Indian Wells and Miami in the same season.

Germany's Steffi Graf (1994 and 1996), Belgium's Kim Clijsters (2005) and Belarusian Victoria Azarenka (2016), all

former No.1 players, are the others. Swiatek, 20, is the youngest woman to pull off this feat.

"I feel pretty privileged that I can be amongst those players, because I wouldn't even dream of it a few years ago," Swiatek said. "I knew it's going to be tough playing these two tournaments in a row. I realized at the end it's just another match and I took it step by step."

Swiatek's career-best winning streak continues, with all of her past 17 wins coming at the first three WTA 1000 events of the season. She swept the titles at WTA 1000 Doha, Indian Wells and now Miami, joining American great Serena Williams (2013 - Miami, Madrid, Rome, Toronto) and Caroline Wozniacki (2010 - Montreal, Tokyo, Beijing) as the only players to win three or more consecutive WTA 1000 titles in a single season.

An IPL century for Shubman Gill is round the corner, says Titans' Lockie Ferguson



PUNE, April 3 (IANS): Gujarat Titans' right-arm fast bowler Lockie Ferguson felt that a century for young opener Shubman Gill is round the corner, given the way he batted against Delhi Capitals at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium here on Saturday night.

The 30-year-old New Zealand fast bowler was the star in Gujarat Titans' 14-run victory against DC but he chose to put the spotlight on the 22-year-old Gill, who played a superb innings of 84 off 46 balls to help the IPL newcomers to a competitive 171/6 in 20 overs, batting first.

Ferguson then bowled an in-

spired spell, taking four wickets for 28 runs at a superb economy rate of seven as DC could manage only 157/9 in reply.

"Having played with Gilly (Shubman Gill) over the last three years, with KKR and then again here (Gujarat Titans) this year, it's been awesome to see his progression as a player," Ferguson said after the match.

Gill was batting in the first innings of a night match. That meant dew. That meant batting first was going to be way more difficult than batting second, when the wet ball slides nicely on to the bat. That difficulty was reflected in the Titans' batting figures: a batting line-up packed with power-hitters from top to

bottom remained subdued even as Gill went into overdrive.

"There's no doubt that he's (Gill) got unbelievable talent, and so much time. I know, bowling to him in the nets, he has all the time in the world. But seeing him tonight really extends that and get a big total... I know he would be upset not to get the big hundred, as he would be, but it's just around the corner. Exceptional batting tonight," added Ferguson.

Gill scored at a strike rate of 156 against pace bowlers, while against the spin of stalwarts such as Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav, he smashed 45 runs off 21 balls at a strike rate of 214.28.

Super-skilled player is mascot for FIFA World Cup 2022

DOHA, April 3 (IANS): La'eeb, the official mascot of the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar is playful, adventurous and curious. Sporting the flowing Qatari national dress, the mascot seems to be trying to stop a football in air in the illustration released by FIFA and tournament organising body -- the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy.

La'eeb is an Arabic word meaning super-skilled player. He belongs to a parallel mascot-verse that is indescribable -- everyone is invited to interpret what it looks like. La'eeb encourages everyone to believe in themselves as 'Now is All', the Supreme Committee said in a press statement. He will bring the joy of football to everyone, added the statement.

The adventurous, fun and curious La'eeb was unveiled during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 draw, which took place in Doha. Khalid Ali Al Mawlawi, Deputy Director General, Marketing, Communications and Tournament Experience, Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, said, "We are delighted to unveil La'eeb as the Official Mascot for the Middle East and Arab world. He comes from the mascot-verse -- a place that is indescribable. We encourage everyone to imagine what it looks like."

"We are sure fans everywhere will love this fun and playful character. La'eeb will play a vital role as we engage fans young and old in Qatar's FIFA World Cup experience," added Al Mawlawi.

The courageous and uplifting La'eeb has attended every previous FIFA World Cup tournament and has contributed to some of the most famous moments in football history, including a number of iconic goals, said the statement in an apparent attempt to sound imaginative. La'eeb will be known for his youthful spirit; spreading joy and confidence everywhere he goes. La'eeb comes from a parallel world where tournament mascots live. It is a world where ideas and creativity form the basis of characters that live in the minds of everyone.

La'eeb will be everywhere -- welcoming the world, inspiring young fans and cheering the action during the tournament, which will take place from November 21 to December 18.

Dravid will do remarkable job as India coach, says Ganguly



KOLKATA, April 3 (PTI): BCCI president Sourav Ganguly believes his former teammate Rahul Dravid has all the attributes for becoming successful in his current role as the coach of the Indian cricket team. Ganguly feels Dravid's "intense, meticulous and professional" attitude are just the ingredients a coach needs to be successful in the high-pressure India job. "He (Dravid) is as intense, as meticulous and as professional as he was during his playing days," the former India captain said on the sidelines of a promotional event here on Saturday.

"The only difference is that now he does not have to bat at No. 3 for India which I feel was harder since he had to face the best bowlers of the world which he also did exceptionally well for

a long period of time," he added. "As a coach also he (Dravid) will do a remarkable job as he honest and he has the talent. Being the BCCI chief, Ganguly was instrumental in roping in Dravid as India coach, replacing Ravi Shastri after the T20 World Cup last year. "He will make mistakes as everybody does but as long as you try doing the right things you will achieve success more than others," Ganguly said. The BCCI top official, however, refused to compare Dravid with his predecessor Shastri. "They are different people with different personalities. One is at you all the time which is his strength while the other will quietly do his job in spite of being one of the greatest of all time," Ganguly said. "No two people will be successful the same way."

Nortje is 4-5 spells away from being match ready, says Ponting

PUNE, April 3 (PTI): Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting feels South African pacer Anrich Nortje is just a couple of spells away from being match ready and expressed optimism over his availability for their next IPL game against Lucknow Super Giants on April 7. Nortje has been out of competitive cricket since last November's T20 World Cup due to a back and hip injury. "Nortje bowled 100% this morning (Saturday) in the warm-ups. He has to get through another maybe four or five-over spell at 100% capacity and then I think if he gets clearance from Cricket South Africa, he should be right to go. "We have got a few more days before our next game, so hopefully he is available for selection for that one," Ponting said at the virtual post-match press conference after losing by 14 runs against Gujarat Titans here on Saturday night. Asked about the availability of Australian duo of David Warner and Mitchell Marsh, who is nursing a hip injury, Ponting said: "David Warner has arrived in Mumbai. He left early yesterday morning I believe, so he should be there when we get back to Mumbai tonight. "Mitchell Marsh has been in Mumbai for a few days, obviously getting his quarantine done. I think he might be out of quarantine tomorrow actually," he said. "We are hoping that he (Marsh) is going to be available for the game on 10th (against Kolkata Knight Riders). He picked up that slight hip flexor strain in Pakistan. So we need to get a lot of treatment work into him and obviously a few good training sessions before he is available for selection. "But fingers crossed, Davey should be there for the next game and Mitch Marsh for the game after."

DC coach said the 172-run target was a chaseable one but early wickets hurt their cause against Titans.

Chasing, DC were reduced to 34 for three inside five overs by Titans at the MCA Stadium. "On this wicket, on this ground, we thought it was a very, very chaseable total," Ponting said. "Unfortunately for us, for the second game in succession we were behind the eight-ball early. There were a few too many quite soft dismissals from our batsmen tonight."

"If you are losing three wickets in the powerplay, it's really hard to win games from there. We know that, the stats say that, they have said that right through the history of T20 cricket. That's certainly one area that we got to get better at, getting through that powerplay. None or one down would be a nice start to a run chase." The loss of early wickets, notwithstanding, DC were in great position to chase down the target, needing 54 runs off the last six overs with skipper Rishabh Pant and Rovman Powell at the crease. "There probably was a little bit of panic. At no stage did the run rate go out of hand and that's what probably makes it a more disappointing loss than it probably looks on the scoreboard," Ponting said.

"We had Rishabh in the middle of a really good innings. Rovman Powell had just gone out. If those two had been out to bat together for two-three more overs, I think we would have won the game. But we were not good enough to do it." Titans fast bowler Lockie Ferguson, who returned with match-winning figures of 4 for 28, said his focus was only on bowling in the right areas. "There was little bit of nip in the pitch. My job was pretty simple to bowl in the right areas and try to find the nip off the pitch," he said.

I am 32 and I have seen it all, says 'grateful' Healy

CHRISTCHURCH, April 3 (PTI): Record-breaking Australia wicketkeeper-batter Alyssa Healy, whose sensational 170 set up Southern Stars' WODI World Cup triumph on Sunday, feels that she has now "seen it all" having been there and done that on most big days.

Riding on Healy's breathtaking hundred, Australia bossed their way to a record-extending seventh Women's World Cup title with a crushing 71-run win over traditional rivals England, stamping their undisputed dominance in the tournament.

"I'm 32 and I've seen it all. Our team sets out to win events like these and everyone is sort of keen to get out there and do just that, grateful for the opportunity," said Healy, who was named player of the final as well player of the tournament.

"You probably couldn't have asked for anything more. Proud of the batting unit. We have done some amazing things this whole tournament, so to be able to do it one more time on the biggest stage was impressive," Healy said after the title win.

For Healy, the manner of triumph was beyond her imagination.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I ever thought I'd do something like that so it is pretty cool."

During her epic knock, Healy also became the player with most runs in a single edition of a World Cup. She not only went past New Zealand great Debbie Hockley's 25-year-old record, but also became the first woman cricketer to score 500 or more runs in a single edition of the tournament.



Hockley had scored 456 runs in the 1997 World Cup in India. But Healy and her opening partner Rachael Haynes went past Hockley on Sunday, scoring 509 and 497 runs respectively in this edition.

"We knew the first 10 overs was going to be the most challenging part of the game and we got two world class bowlers swinging the ball."

"We just knew we had to hold our nerve. I enjoy batting with Rach (Rachael Haynes) and it's what we set out to do and we ticked that box."

She said Haynes should have won the player of the tournament award for her consistency.

"No way (on two fifties and two hundreds). I shouldn't have received this award but Rach should have because I just turned up for the last two games."

Riding on Healy special, Australia annex record-extending seventh World Cup title

CHRISTCHURCH, April 3 (PTI): Australia bossed their way to a record-extending seventh Women's World Cup title with a crushing 71-run win over traditional rivals England, stamping their undisputed dominance in the tournament after a breathtaking hundred from Alyssa Healy in the final here on Sunday.

Playing the innings of her life, Healy put England attack to sword with a sensational 170 off 138 balls that powered Australia to a massive 356 for five.

Defending champions England needed something more than special to pull off the record chase but kept losing wickets throughout the innings which ended at 285 in 43.4 overs.

Natalie Sciver, who scored an unbeaten 148 off 121 balls for her second successive hundred against Australia in the competition, eventually ran out of partners.

Australian pacer Megan Schutt (2/42) bowled a brilliant new ball spell removing last match centurion Danielle Wyatt (4) and Tammy Beaumont (27) with her lethal inswingers before leg-spinner Alana King (3/64) turned the ball on a bating beauty to end with three crucial wickets including that of England skipper Heather Knight (26).

Healy, who was dropped on 41, toyed with the English attack in her mesmerising knock, which is now the highest-ever individual score in a World Cup final across men's and women's cricket.

Adam Gilchrist (149, 2007), Sciver (148 in this game), Ricky Ponting (140, 2003) and Viv Richards (138, 1979) are behind Healy in the elite list.



Healy's opening partner Rachael Haynes (68 off 93) and Beth Mooney (62 off 47) also batted with confidence as Australia put on board the highest team total in a World Cup final in women's cricket and second-highest behind the Australian men's team's effort of 359 for two against India in 2003.

To put Australia's achievement in perspective, it was their sixth win in seven World Cup finals, making Meg Lanning's unit one of the greatest teams of all time. Australia had won their first trophy on points back in 1973.

Though England ended runners-up, it was still a remarkable campaign for the defending champions that came into the final after

five wins in a row following defeats in its first three games.

They always had run rate under control in the massive chase but the lack of partnerships cost them the game.

Sciver, who smashed 15 fours and a six in her epic knock, fought till the end alongside number 10 batter Charlotte Dean (21 off 24) but they were left to do too much in the end. The duo shared a 65 run-stand for the ninth wicket to take the game deep.

Earlier, Healy forged a 160-run stand with Haynes before sharing 156 runs with left-handed Mooney who was sent in ahead of skipper Meg Lanning to maintain the left and right combination.

Orleans Masters: Indian shuttler Mithun Manjunath settles for silver



ORLEANS (FRANCE), April 3 (IANS): Indian shuttler Mithun Manjunath settled for a silver medal after losing to home favourite Toma Junior Popov in the men's singles final of the Orleans Masters 2022 badminton tournament here on Sunday.

Playing in his first BWF final, the 79th ranked Indian shuttler lost to the world No 32 Frenchman 11-21, 19-21 in 50 minutes at the Palais des Sports arena. This was also the first meeting between the two players.

The 23-year-old Manjunath began the match cautiously as both players were tied at 6-all after early exchanges. However, Junior, the defending champion, used his reach to good effect and went into the break leading 11-6.

From there on, it was one-way

traffic as Indian failed to counter a series of smashes from the former junior European champion to go 1-0 down. Manjunath tried to force Popov into playing longer rallies in the second game and the plan worked. A number of unforced errors by the Frenchman helped him take a 12-6 lead.

However, the French shuttler mounted a comeback with some sharp returns and successfully defended his BWF Super 100 crown.

Up until the final, Manjunath enjoyed a fine run in the tournament. The unseeded Indian stormed through five rounds which included a win against world No 22 Hans-Kristian Solberg Vittinghus of Denmark in the round of 16, an olympics.com report said.

Manjunath emerged as India's

best hope after B Sai Praneeth, the top seed at the tournament, crashed out early in the pre-quarters. The women's doubles pair of Ashwini Bhat K and Shikha Gautam were the only other Indian players to make it to the semi-finals at the Orleans Masters 2022.

Notably, the top Indian players like PV Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, Kidambi Srikanth and Lakshya Sen did not compete in the tournament. They are expected to be in action at the Korea Open BWF Super 500 event which begins on Tuesday. The shuttler from Bengaluru was rated highly during his junior days and he also had one or two odd performances in the circuit like reaching the quarters at 2018 Czech Open and back-to-back semi-finals finishes at Vietnam Open and Russian Open in 2018.

However, it was during the COVID-19 pandemic that he decided to work hard on his fitness, something which has helped him to stay longer in the rallies and outlast his opponents in the three-game contests. He had reached the semi-finals of Infosys foundation India International in October last year. However, COVID-19 disrupted his plans as he was one of the players who was withdrawn from the India Open Super 500 event ahead of his second round match against India's H S Prannoy after testing positive for the virus.

He, however, reached the last four at Lucknow and the quarters in Odisha in January. He was also part of the Indian team which competed at the Badminton Asia Team Championships in Malaysia.

LSG relying on batting prowess to come good against Sunrisers



NAVI MUMBAI, April 3 (PTI): Their campaign back on track after a poor start, new entrants Lucknow Super Giants will rely on their batting prowess to get past Sunrisers Hyderabad in an Indian Premier League match here on Monday.

LSG did not have the best start to their debut season, losing by five wickets against fellow IPL debutants Gujarat Titans. But they roared back in style by beating defending champions Chennai Super Kings six wickets in a high-scoring affair in their second match.

In skipper KL Rahul and Quinton de Kock, LSG boast of formidable opening pair, and they proved their worth against CSK by scoring 40 and 61 in a 99-run first-wicket stand. West Indian Evin Lewis smashed unbeaten 55 off 23 balls in a steep chase of 211 against CSK while, in Deepak Hooda, LSG possess a dependable middle-order batter.

Young Ayush Badoni, who has taken the ongoing IPL by storm with his six hitting prowess, is a treat to watch and would be looking to carry on his fine form.

Badoni struck an 41-ball 54 in his IPL debut against Titans and

followed it up with yet another entertaining nine-ball unbeaten 19-run knock against CSK. But the form of Manish Pandey will be a cause of concern for LSG, who also boasts of hard-hitting all-rounders like Krunal Pandya and Jason Holder among others.

On the bowling front, Avesh Khan, Sri Lankan Dushmantha Chameera, Andrew Tye and Ravi Bishnoi were the main wicket-takers for LSG in the two matches so far, but they need to be more disciplined to contain the run flow.

Sunrisers, on the other hand, were blown away by the batting effort of Rajasthan Royals in a 61-run defeat in their opening match.

Comprising a mediocre squad, Sunrisers players need to punch above their weight.

While experienced Bhuvneshwar Kumar (1/29) produced an economical spell, the likes of Romario Shepherd (1/33), Umran Malik (2/39), T Natarajan (2/43) and Washington Sundar leaked runs against RR.

And Sunrisers team management will expect a much-improved performance from its bowling unit in the matches to come.

Hockey Jr Women's WC: India stun Germany 2-1 to seal quarterfinal berth



POTCHEFSTROOM, April 3 (PTI): The Indian women's hockey team stunned formidable Germany 2-1 to register its second consecutive win in pool stages and assure its place in the quarterfinals of the FIH Junior World Cup here on Sunday.

India, who thrashed a lowly Wales 5-1 in its opening Pool D match on Saturday, scored through two penalty corner conversions by Lalremisiami (2nd minute) and Mumtaz Khan (25th) to emerge winners.

Germany's lone goal was scored by Jule Bleuel in the 57th minute. The Indian will finish off their pool engagements against Malaysia on April 5 before the quarterfinal round which starts on April 8.

The Indians are currently atop Pool D with two wins from as many games ahead of second-placed Germany. Two teams each from pools will qualify for the knock-out rounds. Against Germany, the Indians took the lead as early as in the second minute when Lalremisiami scored from a rebound after Deepika's dragflick from a penalty corner was saved by German

goalkeeper Mali Wichmann. Thereafter, Germany proceedings and earned a handful of penalty corners by putting relentless pressure on the Indian defence, which stood firm. India goalkeeper Bichu Devi Karibam had an excellent match as she not only denied the Germans from penalty corners on number of occasions but also pulled off a brilliant save to keep out a penalty stroke by Jette Fleschutz in the second quarter. The Indians mostly relied on counter attacks and from one such move secured back-to-back penalty corners, the second of which was deflected in by Mumtaz in the 25th minute. The Germans were the attacking side for major part of the first half but have been wasteful in converting penalty corners as they wasted as many as six set pieces.

The Indians, on the other hand, scored from two of the three penalty corners they managed in the first two quarters. Down by two goals, the Germans continued to attack after the change of ends but as has been the case they failed to find the back of the Indian net despite creating numerous chances.

The Indians also upped their game a bit in the fourth and final quarter, making inroads into German circle on quite a few occasions but to no avail. Germany lived up the game three minutes from the final hooter through a reverse hit field goal by Bleuel. But the Indian defence did enough in the remaining minutes of the game to pocket full points from the game. The quadrennial tournament, which was originally scheduled for last December, was postponed due to the threat posed by the omicron variant of COVID-19 in South Africa. India, who have appeared in four editions of the junior global event, claimed their best finish in 2013 with a bronze.