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DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2023 PAGES 8 PRICE ₹ 8

Centre rushes more forces ● Amit Shah speaks to neighbouring CMs

Tension runs high in Imphal valley, more gunfights reported

Himanta directs Cachar admin to take care of displaced Manipur families

GUWAHATI, May 5 (PTI): Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday directed the Cachar district administration to take care of Manipur violence-affected families that have sought refuge in the state. "Several families affected by the recent incidents in Manipur have sought refuge in Assam. I have requested the District Administration of Cachar to take care of these families," the CM tweeted. Sarma said he was in constant touch with his Manipur counterpart N Biren Singh. "I am also in constant communication with the HCM @NBirenSingh and have pledged the full support of the Assam Government during this hour of crisis," he said in the micro-blogging site. Manipur has witnessed violence since Wednesday with clashes between tribals and the majority Meitei community that has displaced over 9,000 people. Clashes broke (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IMPHAL, May 5 (PTI): The Imphal Valley in Manipur remained peaceful but tense on Friday, as more forces were brought in from neighbouring states by road and air to bolster efforts to keep the peace in the state which had witnessed bloody rioting over the last 48 hours.

Intermittent gunfights between militant groups and security forces were also reported in the morning hours from various hill districts surrounding the valley, but a wary peace seems to be reigning there since.

The exchanges of fire between militant groups, who have involved themselves in the ethnic clashes in the state, and security forces were reported at Kangvai in Churachandpur district, western hill range of Phougaichao in adjoining Bishnupur district and Dolaithabi and Pukhao in Imphal East district, a senior police officer said.

However, it was not immediately known whether there was any casualty on either side.

Nearly 10,000 soldiers from the Army and the Assam Rifles have been deployed in the state which was rocked by clashes since Wednesday between the Meitei community, which mainly live in Imphal Valley, and Naga and Kuki tribals who are inhabitants of the hill districts.

At least five Deputy Inspector General (DIG) rank officers and seven senior su-



perintendents of police (SSP) and SP rank officers of the CRPF have been tasked to coordinate the deployment of various security forces in violence-hit Manipur, official sources said in New Delhi.

The Centre has rushed in about 20 fresh companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), including the CRPF and the BSF, in the wake of the spiralling violence between tribals and the majority Meitei community leading to the displacement of more than 9,000 people from their villages.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is closely monitoring the situation in Ma-

nipur and is in constant touch with top functionaries of the state and central governments, sources said on Friday.

Multiple sources said the fighting between communities had left several scores of people dead and nearly a hundred injured. However, the police were unwilling to confirm this.

Officials said the Army's Sikh regiment is currently carrying out rescue operations in Langol in Imphal West district, shifting over 500 people to safe shelters in the Leimakhong army camp.

Trains to Manipur have been cancelled with immediate effect on Friday due to the prevailing in the state, a Northeast

Frontier Railway (NFR) spokesperson said.

The Defence PRO, in a statement, said, "The Indian Air Force (IAF) undertook continuous sorties from two airfields in Assam employing C17 Globemaster and AN 32 aircraft."

"Induction commenced on the night of May 4 and additional columns commenced domination with effect from the wee hours of May 5. Domination & evacuation of civilians of all communities from affected areas continued throughout the night. Flag march in Churachandpur and other sensitive areas are underway," it added.

Violence first erupted in Torbung area in Churachandpur district during the 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised by the All Tribal Student Union Manipur (ATSUM) on Wednesday to protest the demand of Meiteis for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

The march was organised by tribals -- including Nagas and Kukis -- after the Manipur High Court asked the state government last month to send a recommendation to the Centre within four weeks on the demand for ST status by the Meitei community.

During the march in Torbung, an armed mob allegedly attacked people of the Meitei community, leading to retaliatory attacks in the valley districts, which escalated the violence throughout the state, police said.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of the population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribals, who include Nagas and Kukis, account for another 40 per cent of the population and live mostly in the hill districts which surround the Valley.

Two shopping malls in New Checkon and Chingmeirong areas of Imphal city were vandalised and torched by an angry mob on Thursday evening.

People were not seen gathering in large numbers or venturing out of their houses in Imphal and other areas on Thursday night (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Joyram boost for Congress in KA

For me, it is a 'ghar wapsi', says former CEM

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 5: Former chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and former MLA of Howraghat, Joyram Englang have formally joined the Congress in a joining programme at Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (KADCC) office here on Friday.

Englang was the CEM during the Congress-ruled KAAC and in 2016 he was the BJP MLA from Howraghat LAC, but in the 2021 Legislative Assembly election he was denied a BJP ticket.

Joining the Congress along with Englang were former executive member (EM) of KAAC, Bhupen Hasnu; executive member of BJP,



East Karbi Anglong District Committee, Moheswar Rajjung; Edward Topno; former president of KSA, Mohon Teron and Philip

Terang and Chandra Lekthe from Nilip member of Autonomous Council constituency and others. Englang and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gauhati HC rejects anticipatory bail plea to YC president in harassment case

GUWAHATI, May 5 (PTI): The Gauhati High Court on Friday rejected the anticipatory bail plea of Youth Congress president B V Srinivas in a case by the expelled chief of Assam Youth Congress, Angkita Dutta here accusing him of causing mental agony to her.

Justice Ajit Borthakur in his judgement said that the court is of the opinion that the case is not a fit one to grant the privilege of pre-arrest bail to the petitioner and as such it stood rejected. The judge returned the case diary and also disposed of the anticipatory bail application. Opposing the bail plea, public prosecutor M Phukan argued that the petitioner had filed two pre-arrest bail applications be-



fore the sessions court in Bengaluru and both were rejected after appreciating the materials of the case diary.

He submitted that the alleged offences were related to outraging the modesty of a woman and the privilege of pre-arrest bail may not be granted in favour of the petitioner. K N Choudhury, the counsel

for Srinivas, argued that the allegations levelled against the petitioner are "completely false and mala fide" and that the case was filed with an ulterior motive to malign his reputation. It was done also to "avoid any litigation for making defamatory statements by the informant on social media".

He argued that all charges levelled against the YC president under various sections, barring those under Section 354 of the IPC are bailable in nature. Section 354 relates to assault or use of criminal force on any woman with the intention of outraging her modesty.

Besides, the alleged offence occurred in Raipur in Chhattisgarh which is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

House panel reviews execution of govt schemes in KA

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 5: Assam Legislative Assembly's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) visited Diphu on Friday to review the progress of various government schemes and projects implemented in the area. The Committee, led by MLA and Chairman Wazid Ali Chaudhury, met the heads of Line departments in the Conference Hall of Circuit House, Diphu, and visited various sites to assess the status of the schemes. The meeting was attended by the Principal Secretary of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Mukul Kumar Saikia, and the Deputy Commissioner, Madhumita Bhagwat. The heads of various departments were questioned by the committee about the progress of the schemes in their respective departments.

The PAC, which comprises eight members, including MLAs Ramendra Narayana Kalita, Basanta Das, Utal Bora, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Bhabendra Nath Bhargali, and Hafiz Basir Ahmed, emphasized the importance of not compromising on the quality of the schemes while implementing them.

During the two-day visit, the Committee also made a field visit to assess the progress and status of various schemes and projects implemented by the various departments in the district.

HT BRIEFS

Fuel pump inaugurated

DONGKAMUKAM: The first fuel pump in Dongkamukam, West Karbi Anglong, M/s Dongkamukam Service Station was inaugurated by chairman of Dongkamukam Municipal Board (DMB), Telishram Ronghang. The people of the town and nearby villages now need not travel to Baithalangso or Kheroni to fill up the tank of their vehicles. The inauguration was attended by deputy chairman of DMB, Rensing Timung; ward commissioner, Serlongki Bey; chairman of Village Development Committee, Ramson Rongpi and others.

Peace Meeting

DIPHU: Peace and Communal Harmony meeting was held in Diphu police station in the afternoon at 2 pm in view of the communal violence in the state of Manipur. The meeting chaired by ACS (Rtd.), S Thiek was attended by tribal representatives and OC of Diphu police station, JS Khobung laid stress on passing and preventing rumours. At the meeting, Diphu Thana Level Peace Committee was formed. There are 24 Members in the Committee. The committee will work on maintaining harmony under the jurisdiction of the Diphu police station.

Pawar relents, withdraws decision to step down as NCP chief

MUMBAI, May 5 (PTI): Sharad Pawar on Friday said he has decided to rescind his decision to step down as Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president, owing to pressure from party leaders and workers. "I can't disrespect your sentiments. Due to your love, I am accepting the demand that was made to me to withdraw my resignation," Pawar, 82, told reporters, hours after the NCP panel selected by him to pick his successor passed a resolution that he continue as the party president.

Senior NCP leader Ajit Pawar, who was seen backing his uncle's decision to step down when he made that announcement on May 2, was not seen at the NCP chief's press conference.

Asked about Ajit Pawar's absence at Friday's press briefing, Sharad Pawar told reporters, "not all people can be at all places", and asked media not to read too much in his nephew's absence.



Pawar said his daughter and MP Supriya Sule declined to a suggestion by party leaders to become NCP working president.

Pawar's resignation announcement on Tuesday had sent shockwaves among the party cadre. After pressure from party workers and

leaders had mounted, Pawar had said he would take two-three days to rethink his decision.

Pawar said he could not disrespect the sentiments of his colleagues and party workers who insisted that he withdraw his decision. "I cannot disrespect their feelings. I am overwhelmed by the love, trust and faith showered on me. Considering the appeals made by all of you, and honouring the decision of the committee constituted by the party, I am withdrawing my decision to retire," the veteran politician said.

"I had given a slight hint about my resignation to Ajit (Pawar), but I did not tell anyone else sitting here," he said. He also stressed that there has to be a "succession plan" for any post or responsibility in an organization. He will focus on making organizational changes in the party, assigning new responsibilities and creating new leadership, Pawar said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Nagaland to hold consultative meeting with tribal bodies before inking MoU on oil exploration with Assam: DyCM

KOHIMA, May 5 (PTI): The Nagaland government has decided not to go ahead with signing any MoU with Assam on oil exploration before a final consultation is held with stakeholders and tribal bodies of the area, deputy chief minister Y Patton said. Patton said this while replying to queries from journalists on Thursday on the stand of the state government on objections raised by various tribal organisations and also Naga underground groups on the proposed signing of Memorandum

of Understanding (MoU) on oil exploration with Assam government along the Disturbed Area Belt (DAB) of the two states.

"The government will hold a consultative meeting with all stakeholders before signing the MoU with Assam government," he said.

Not only a particular tribe but consultation will be held with tribal bodies and civil societies of Mon, Longleng, Mokochung, Wokha, Nuland, Dimapur and Peren, the oil bearing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NE now on forefront of India's developmental agenda, says Sonowal

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, May 5: Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal will be receiving the first cargo ship to Sittwe Port in Myanmar from Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata on May 9.

The minister is likely to inaugurate regular transit of cargo ships between Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata to Sittwe Port in Rakhine state of Myanmar, heralding a new age of transportation between two countries, an official statement said on Friday. Union minister Shantanu Thakur on Thursday flagged off the inaugural cargo shipment to operationalise Sittwe Port in Rakhine, Myanmar, from Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port.

According to an official statement, cargo ship MV-ITT LION (V-273) carrying 20,000 bags containing 1,000 metric tonnes of cement will reach Sittwe Port on May 9.

The Sittwe port development is a

part of the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP), which aims to provide alternate connectivity from the Eastern coast of India to the North-eastern states through the Sittwe port. The port will enable multimodal transit connectivity with South East Asia, acting as a bridge with other countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.

Addressing a press conference at Dibrugarh, Sonowal praised the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has put Northeast India at the forefront of India's developmental agenda.

"This is the true reflection of implementation of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' philosophy of Modi ji," Sonowal added.

The Union minister further added that once the port is fully operationalized, the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit TP will provide an alternate and more feasible route for trade and transit, saving time, money, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jaishankar talks tough on terror with Bilawal Bhutto in attendance

BENGAULIM (GOA), May 5 (PTI): The channel of finances for terrorist activities must be blocked without any distinction and terrorism in all its forms, including cross-border terrorism, must be stopped, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said on Friday at a conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) here in presence of his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari. In his address at the SCO Council of foreign Ministers' meeting, Jaishankar said taking the eyes off terrorism would be detrimental to the security interests of the grouping and that when the world was engaged in facing COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, the menace of terrorism continued unabated, in an apparent reference to Pakistan.

The external affairs minister, chairing the conclave, said India firmly believes that there can be no justification for terrorism and noted that combating the menace is one of the original mandates of the SCO.

"We must not allow anybody - individual or State - to hide behind



non-State actors," he said.

Jaishankar also underlined that while connectivity is key to progress, it must come with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all member states.

The meeting at a luxury hotel in this beach resort was attended by Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang, Russia's Sergey Lavrov and their

counterparts from other SCO member nations.

Jaishankar also delved into the situation in Afghanistan and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the consequences of geo-political upheavals that impacted supplies of energy, food and fertilisers.

"Taking our eyes off the menace would be detrimental to our security

interests. We firmly believe that there can be no justification for terrorism and it must be stopped in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism," Jaishankar said.

"The channel of finances for terrorist activities must be seized and blocked without distinction. Members need not be reminded that combating terrorism is one of the original mandates of the SCO," he added. On Afghanistan, he said the unfolding situation in that country remains at "centre of our attention". "Our efforts should be directed towards the welfare of the Afghan people. Our immediate priorities include providing humanitarian assistance, ensuring a truly inclusive and representative government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities," he said.

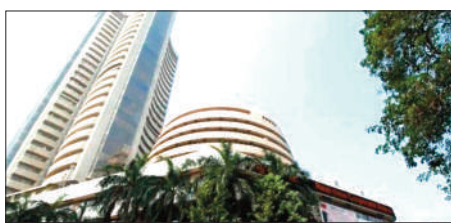
In his remarks, Bhutto-Zardari said the "collective security of our peoples is our joint responsibility. Terrorism continues to threaten global security," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sensex, Nifty tank over 1 pc on deep losses in HDFC twins

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 694.96 points to settle at 61,054.29

MUMBAI, May 5 (PTI): Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined more than 1 per cent at close on Friday due to a heavy sell-off in index major HDFC twins after reports that their merger could lead to outflows of USD 150-200 million. The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 694.96 points or 1.13 per cent to settle at 61,054.29 as 20 of its components declined and 10 advanced. During the day, it plunged 747.08 points or 1.20 per cent to 61,002.17. The broader NSE Nifty fell 186.80 points or 1.02 per cent to end at 18,069 with 30 of its constituents declining and 19 closing with gains. Among the Sensex firms, HDFC Bank tumbled 5.80 per cent followed by HDFC which plummeted 5.57 per cent. Both the stocks fell sharply amid reports that the merged HDFC entity could see significant outflows. "The Indian market was dragged down by heavy selling in HDFC twins on fears of post-merger fund outflow. In addition, the cues from global peers were lacklustre as the ECB raised rates by 25 bps and signalled the need for further rate hikes.

"Wall Street has witnessed prolonged selling pressure due to apprehensions in the banking sec-



tor about the strength of regional banks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. IndusInd Bank, Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Infosys, Wipro and NTPC were the other major laggards. Titan, UltraTech Cement, Maruti, Nestle, ITC and Larsen & Toubro were among the gainers.

"Nifty opened lower and saw some profit-taking amid volatility. HDFC twins were major losers today, dragging benchmark and banking indices down. The majority of the sectors ended in the red," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge de-

clined 0.50 per cent, while the smallcap index dipped 0.39 per cent. Among indices, financial services fell 2.28 per cent and bankex by 1.87 per cent. Metal (1.55 per cent), commodities (0.63 per cent), teck (0.59 per cent), IT (0.58 per cent) and telecommunication (0.34 per cent) also declined. Consumer Durables, consumer discretionary, FMCG, industrials and capital goods were the gainers. "Markets were under a bear hug on the back of massive profit-taking amid sell-off in HDFC twins. US banking woes and weak Wall Street cues. The negative takeaway was that Nifty Bank tumbled 2.3 per cent on reports that merger of HDFC twins may result in slight outflows of USD 150 to 200 million," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. In Asian markets, Shanghai ended lower, while Hong Kong settled in the green. European equity markets were trading higher. The US markets ended lower on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers on Thursday also as they bought equities worth ₹ 1,414.73 crore, according to exchange data.

HDFC Bank launches customised relationship program

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 5: HDFC Bank envisions being the ideal financial partner to enable better rural lives. For the same, the Bank has planned to expand its presence in the semi-urban and rural locations (SURU) of the country. As a part of this strong push, it intends to add more branches and launch customised products for this market segment. The Bank proposes to add more than 675 branches in the current financial year in these locations to take the total number to close to 5000. Further, the Bank has launched an industry-first, customised program called 'Vishesh', for the SURU areas. Under this program, the bank offers a blend of financial and wellness benefits and is tailored to provide a premium banking experience to customers in semi-urban and rural geographies. On the occasion, Arvind Vohra, Group Head-Retail Branch Banking, said, "As a bank, we believe Bharat is critical for tomorrow's India and improving rural lives is key to India becoming a \$5 trillion economy. Our unique customer engagement model and differentiated propositions for customers in semi-urban and rural geographies position the bank to play the role of an ideal partner to enrich rural lives." Apart from launching new products/services, the Bank has a unique customer engagement model, facilitating rural seniors such as sarpanches, teachers, and key officials as they play a key role in the growth and progress of villages. The bank is a strong supporter of 'The One District One Product' scheme launched by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries which targets turning each district in India into an export hub and thus takes a step towards realizing the vision of an 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat'.

Gold falls ₹ 160; Silver climbs ₹ 650

NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): Gold prices declined ₹ 160 to ₹ 62,040 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid a fall in international precious metal prices, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the yellow metal had closed at ₹ 62,200 per 10 grams. Silver, however, climbed ₹ 650 to ₹ 77,950 per kg. "Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at ₹ 62,040 per 10 grams, down ₹ 160 per 10 grams," Samuil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas market, gold was quoting lower at USD 2,040 per ounce and silver was up at USD 25.88 per ounce. Gold prices traded lower in Asian trading hours on Friday.

Govt receives nine EoIs for international transshipment port project in Great Nicobar Island

NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): The ports ministry has received expressions of interest (EOIs) from nine players for the ₹ 41,000 crore international transshipment port project at Great Nicobar Island in the Bay of Bengal, a senior government official said on Friday.

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways in a statement said the project is expected to be completed with an investment of ₹ 41,000 crore (USD 5 billion), including investment from both government and public-private partnership (PPP) concessionaires. "Nine players have submitted expressions of interest for the international transshipment port project at Great Nicobar Island," a senior government official told PTI on the condition of anonymity. The EOI was released on January 28. The proposed port in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands will have the ultimate capacity to handle 16 million containers per year, and in the first phase, to be commissioned by 2028 at a cost of ₹ 18,000 crore, it will handle more than 4 million containers. Other projects planned around the transshipment port include an airport, township and power plant. The project is located on the international trade route, with existing transshipment terminals like Singapore, Klang and Colombo in proximity. The project focuses on three key drivers, which can result in making it a leading container transshipment port -- strategic location in terms of proximity (40 nautical miles) with the international shipping trade route, availability of natural water depth of over 20m and carrying capacity of transshipment cargo from all the ports in the proximity, including Indian ports, as per the statement.



Central banks have helped boost demand adding 228 tonnes to global reserves, a quarter one record high in this data series, compared to 83 tonnes in the same period last year, said the report.

"Central banks of Singapore, China and Turkey were the top buyers, while the Reserve Bank of India also added 7 tonnes to its reserves during the January-March quarter," WGC Regional CEO, India, Somasundaram PR told PTI.

On the supply side, there was a slight increase in the first quarter to 1,174 tonnes, with marginal 2 per cent growth in mine production and a 5 per cent uptick in recycling driven by the higher gold price.

The report further noted that bar and coin investment strengthened 5 per cent year-on-year to 302.4 tonnes compared to 287.7 tonnes in the same period of 2022, although there were notable shifts in key markets. The US bar and coin demand hit 32 tonnes in the first quarter, the highest quarterly level since 2010, and was driven primarily by recession fears and a flight-to-safety amid the banking turmoil, it said. This increase helped offset weakness in Europe and particularly Germany where there was a 73 per cent drop in demand, the stated. Meanwhile, jewellery performance was relatively flat in the first quarter at 477.9 tonne compared to 475.3 tonnes in the corresponding period of 2022, the WGC report said.

Global gold demand in Jan-Mar quarter dips by 13 pc to 1,080.8 tonnes: WGC

MUMBAI, May 5 (PTI): Global gold demand declined by 13 per cent year-on-year to 1,080.8 tonnes during the January-March quarter of this year, mainly due to outflows from European-listed exchange traded fund (ETF) products, according to the World Gold Council (WGC). The total gold demand stood at 1,238.5 tonnes during the first quarter of 2022, WGC's Gold Demand Trends Q1 2023 stated.

Holdings of global gold ETFs fell during Q1, with 29 tonnes outflows in January and February equivalent to a USD 1.5 billion in outflow, the report said, adding that the majority of outflows came from the European-listed products.

However, North American-listed ETFs, as well as those listed in other regions, witnessed recovery in inflows during the first quarter of 2023, it added.

"The mixed picture for quarter one highlights how gold's diverse sources of demand underpin its role and performance as a global asset," WGC Senior Markets Analyst Louise Street said.

"Growth in some regions offset weakness in others as different economic forces and demand drivers played out in the global gold market. One commonality was that different types of investors looked to gold as a store of value in uncertain times," Street added.

She, however, noted that against the backdrop of turmoil in the banking sector, ongoing geopolitical tensions and a challenging economic environment, gold's role as a safe haven asset has come to the fore.

Moreover, it is likely that investment demand will grow this year, especially with waning headwinds from the strong US dollar and interest rate hikes, she said. She further noted that positive demand for gold ETFs has continued in the second quarter so far, and the looming threat of developed market recession may be the trigger for inflows to accelerate later in the year.

"Central bank buying is likely to remain strong and will be a cornerstone of demand throughout 2023, even if at lower levels than the record highs seen last year," she added.

Cook emphasises the dynamism and vibrancy in the Indian market, calls it 'unbelievable'

First two retail stores in India 'milestone' for Apple CEO Tim Cook

NEW YORK, May 5 (PTI): India is at a "tipping point" and a major focus for Apple, the technology giant's CEO Tim Cook has said, terming the opening of its first two retail stores in the country - in Mumbai and Delhi - as a "milestone" for the company.

Speaking at Apple's Q2 2023 earnings call on Thursday, Cook emphasised the dynamism and vibrancy in the Indian market, calling it "unbelievable".

"Looking at the business in India, we did set a quarterly record, grew very strong, double digits year-over-year. So it was quite a good quarter for us. Taking a step back, India is an incredibly exciting market. It's a major focus for us," Cook said. Referring to his recent visit to India, Cook said in the earnings call, "I was just there, and the dynamism in the market, the vibrancy is unbelievable."

Cook was in India in April, his first trip to the country in seven years, to open Apple's first official retail store in the country, in Mumbai, followed by the launch of a second store in New Delhi. Cook said the stores are "off to a great start." Terming the opening of Apple's first two stores in Mumbai and Delhi as a "milestone" for the company, the Apple CEO said, "...in a milestone for Apple, we just opened our first two Apple stores in India, in Mumbai and



Delhi. I was there to see it for myself, and I couldn't have been more delighted by the excitement and enthusiasm of the customers, developers, creators and team members I got to spend time with."

"I've had the chance to connect with customers and teams all around the world in recent months, so many people shared with me that they were fans of Apple, not just because of the innovations we create, but because of the values that guide us, and that means a great deal to us," he said.

He said that Apple has been expanding its operations in India to serve more customers.

"We've got a number of channel partners in the country as well that we're partnering with, and we're very happy with how that's going overall. Overall, I couldn't be more delighted and excited by the enthusiasm I'm seeing for the brand there," Cook said.

He added that many people are "coming into

the middle class, and I really feel that India is at a tipping point, and it's great to be there."

On Apple's performance in other emerging markets, Cook said the company had a stellar quarter in emerging markets overall, with records set in several places, including Indonesia and Mexico, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, UAE, and quarterly records set in Brazil, India and Malaysia.

"It was a great quarter for emerging markets in general, despite the headwinds of the currency...and so we're putting efforts in a number of these markets and really see, particularly given our low share and the dynamics of the demographics, et cetera, a great opportunity for us in those markets," he said.

Apple reported revenue of USD 94.8 billion for the March quarter and set an "all-time record" for services and a March quarter record for iPhone.

Responding to a question comparing the market in India today and that in China a decade ago, Cook said each country is different and has its journey, "so I hesitate to compare too much. But what I do see in India is a lot of people entering the middle class, and I'm hopeful that we can convince some number of them to buy an iPhone, and we'll see how that works out. But right now, it's working out well."

Contd. from Page 1...

NE now on forefront of

and excelling efficiency. Sonowal stated that the cost of transportation of goods from Kolkata to Aizawl has seen a drop by more than 50 per cent. Similarly, goods from Kolkata to Agartala will incur much lesser cost and time via this route. Union MoS Rameswar Teli, Dibrugarh Municipal Board (DMB) chairman Saikat Parta, and other senior BJP leaders were also present at the press meet.

Himanta directs Cachar admin

on Wednesday which intensified overnight with counter-attacks being mounted by rival communities in retaliation, after 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised to protest the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Tension runs high in Imphal

as patrolling was intensified on the streets, he said. A tribal MLA, Vunzagin Valte, of Thanlon constituency was critically injured and was undergoing treatment at a hospital after he was assaulted by a mob on Thursday, the officer said. The violence between the majority Meiteis and tribals over the demand of the former for ST status has displaced over 9,000 people from both communities. Many affected people are taking shelter in camps of security forces. The Manipur government has given "shoot at sight" orders to contain the violence and Chief Minister N Biren Singh has said the violence was a result of "misunderstanding" in the society and that his administration was taking all measures to bring the situation under control. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has held meetings with top functionaries of Manipur and central governments through video conference to review the situation besides talking to Singh and his counterparts in Nagaland (Neiphiu Rio), Mizoram (Zoramthanga) and Assam (Himanta Biswa Sarma).

Joyram boost for Cong

others were welcomed into the Congress party by MP Gaurav Gogoi; president of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), Bhupen Kumar Borah and president of Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (KADCC), Sum Ronghang. They were felicitated with a Congress party cap and scarf. After joining the Congress Englang said, "I am happy that the Congress leaders of the district and from the state have received me back into the party fold. For me, it is a 'ghar wapsi', homecoming to my party."

He said his joining the BJP was accidental. Englang urged party workers to work together wholeheartedly in strengthening the party without discriminating on the lines of religion, caste and community. MP Gaurav Gogoi said more young leaders will join the Congress. Gogoi said, "Our former chief minister and my father Tarun Gogoi has a deep love for the people of Karbi Anglong. During his tenure as the chief minister he has given development packages for the district. When I come here I feel at home." Gogoi also said, "Last year in May, the Congress held a conclave in Rajasthan to discuss the party's tragedies, plans and programmes and we have seen a change in the party within one year. Those leaders dreamed of 'Congress mukh' from the country, but during Rahul Gandhi's long walk from Kanyakumari to Kashmir it was seen that there is Congress in every locality, district and state. Those leaders who spent crores of money to stop Rahul Gandhi's rath yatra went in vain. Power may go away from me for a short period, but the love for Congress will not go away from the people's mind." The MP said the development seen in the Modi government is price rise. During the Congress government, the price of a litre of edible oil was ₹ 60, now it is ₹ 200. During the tenure former chief minister Tarun Gogoi's government a month's electricity bill was ₹ 100 to 150 and now in Himanta Biswa Sarma's government, it is ₹ 400.

He further said, "One good parivartan in 2014 is Adani, a businessman from Gujarat who was running a pity business, but when Modi became the Prime Minister he became so rich that he became No. 3 world richest person. When Gandhi asked about the relationship between Modi and Adani in Parliament, the answer was not given by Modi. Out of fear, Modi thought of disqualifying Gandhi from MP." Gogoi claimed that Narendra Modi will no longer stay in power and Congress is coming back to power.

Pawar relents, withdraws decision

"I will also work vigorously for the growth of the organisation and take our ideology and goals of the party to the people," he said. "During the publication of my autobiography, I had announced my retirement from the NCP chief's post. After 63 years in public life, I wanted to be free from all responsibilities. However, my decision did not go down well with the people and a strong reaction was seen. NCP workers, office bearers, and people were unhappy. They asked me to reconsider my decision. They appealed me for the same. Also, leaders from various political parties across the state and the country requested me to continue as the president of the party," Sharad Pawar said.

The NCP chief said that although he will continue with his responsibilities, his primary focus now would be creating a new leadership and handing over new responsibilities to them. On his role ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, Pawar said, "Bringing all parties together is important when it comes to the elections. I enjoy personal relations with many who said that I was required for this. They include Rahul Gandhi, Sitaram Yechury and many more." The rumours about some of our MLAs joining the BJP are completely false, he said.

On the absence of Ajit Pawar from the press conference where Sharad Pawar withdrew his resignation, state NCP chief Jayant Patil said, "Ajit Pawar was there to urge him to withdraw the resignation. He was there even when we visited Pawar Sahab's residence after the decision was taken at the party office." The NCP panel met earlier on Friday wherein party leaders rejected Sharad Pawar's resignation. "Pawar expressed his desire to step down as president of the party. We unanimously reject the resignation. We have passed a resolution that we will request him to carry on as party president," NCP vice president Praful Patel told reporters before leaving for Sharad Pawar's residence to brief him about the resolution.

The four-day long resignation drama followed recent media reports of a section of NCP MLAs planning to leave the party with Ajit Pawar to join the BJP, after which Ajit Pawar had said he will never leave the party.

Gauhati HC rejects

beyond the territorial jurisdiction of the Dispur police station, where the case was filed, Choudhury argued. The judge after hearing both sides observed that the victim is aged 35 years and according to the order of the Kamrup (Metro) additional chief judicial magistrate he was satisfied that she had "deposed voluntarily and without being under any pressure or influence from any side".

The magistrate had recorded her statement after giving her two hours for reflection. The FIR appears to have been filed on April 20 after a preliminary inquiry and the investigation is at its nascent stage, he observed. "For these reasons as well as consideration of the various pleas taken by the petitioner and the documents he filed, the Court is of the opinion that it is not a fit case to grant the privilege of pre-arrest bail to the petitioner", Justice Borthakur stated. Srinivas in his petition filed in the HC here on April 26 had appealed that the FIR filed by Dutta alleging "mental harassment and physical manhandling" be quashed immediately.

The Court after hearing both sides had posted the matter for further hearing on May 2. As Dutta's lawyer had said that his client had not received the petition, the Court had fixed the next date of hearing on May 4. The judge announced his order on May 5. Dutta in her complaint at Dispur police station alleged that Srinivas was "persistently harassing and torturing her for the last six months by making sexist comments, using slang words and also threatening her of dire consequences" if she kept complaining against him to the senior party office bearers. She had also claimed that Srinivas had heckled her, held her arm, pushed and pulled her and used slang words during the party's recent plenary session at Raipur. He had also threatened to ruin her career in the party if she complained against him. Dutta had made allegations against the YC president in a series of tweets in the micro-blogging site Twitter on April 18. A five-member Guwahati police team went to Bengaluru on April 23 and issued a notice at Srinivas' residence directing him to appear at Dispur Police station by May 2. The Congress issued show cause notice to her and later expelled her from the primary membership of the party for six years for anti-party activities. Srinivas had also served a legal notice to Dutta demanding an apology, failing which he threatened to initiate legal proceedings.

Nagaland to hold consultative

areas of Nagaland, the Dy CM said. The MoU is not yet signed though the Chief Ministers of Nagaland and Assam have agreed in principle, he said while asserting that unless a thorough discussion is held with the civil societies that will not be carried out. Without specifying the date, Patton said the government will hold the consultative meeting soon. The Lotha Hoho, an apex body of Wokha district which has rich depository of oil in Nagaland, had objected taking the stand on Article 371(A) of the Constitution which gives special protection to the Nagas on land and other rights, said the MoU cannot be signed without involvement of the community. As per Article 371(A) land and its resources belong to the people, and not the government in Nagaland. On the other hand, the Naga political groups including the NSCN-IM and Working Committee of Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) composed of at least seven factions, engaged in peace negotiations with Government of India said that the natural mineral and resources should not be explored without arriving at a final solution to the Naga Political Issue.

Jaishankar talks tough

"Let's not get caught up in weaponising terrorism for diplomatic point scoring," he said, in remarks that appeared to take a pot-shot at the Indian side. "When I speak on this topic, I do so not only as the Foreign Minister of Pakistan whose people have suffered the most in terms of number of attacks and number of casualties. I also speak as the son whose mother was assassinated at the hands of terrorists," the Pakistan foreign minister said.

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated by a suicide bomber in Rawalpindi in 2007. Bhutto-Zardari said he and his country are firmly committed to be part of regional and global efforts for eradicating terrorism. "This requires not only a comprehensive approach but also a collective approach. It demands we address the root causes as well as the threats posed by specific groups. It requires that we let this challenge unite us to fight it rather than divide us to become its victim. Our success requires us to isolate this issue from geo-political partisanship," he added.

In his address, Jaishankar noted that current crises facing the world have exposed a credibility and trust deficit in the ability of global institutions to manage challenges in a timely and effective manner. He said reform and modernisation of the SCO will aid a more contemporary outlook which India will actively support. The external affairs minister also noted the progress for the admission of Iran and Belarus as full member states of the SCO. He also said that constructive steps are being taken to make English the third official language of SCO. Currently, Chinese and Russian are the two official languages of the SCO. Jaishankar also appreciated the support of member countries for India's proposal of creation of two new working groups on startups and innovation and traditional medicine. In his address, the Pakistan foreign minister, talking about the challenge of terrorism, also said that practical and pragmatic solutions exist to put an end to "this chapter once and for all".

"We must stop conflating non-state actors with state actors. Condemn all forms of terrorism including state sponsored terrorism," he added. Bhutto-Zardari also called upon "interim Afghan authorities" to uphold their commitments on not allowing the use of Afghan soil for terrorism. The Pakistan foreign minister also made a special mention of the "commendable role" China has recently played in bridging differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran. "We must ensure respect for these universally recognised principles within the SCO. Unilateral and illegal measures by States in violation of international law and Security Council resolutions run counter to the SCO objectives," he said. "We need to be unambiguous in keeping our commitments and charting out a new future for our people. One that is not based on conflict preservation but on conflict resolution," he said. The SCO is an influential economic and security bloc and has emerged as one of the largest trans-regional international organisations.

The SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the presidents of Russia, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Narco Coordination Centre Committee meeting held in Hojai

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, May 5: The District Level NCORD (Narco Coordination Centre) Committee meeting was held at the conference hall of the SDO(C) in Hojai on Thursday. The meeting was chaired by Lachit Kumar Das, ACS, ADC i/c SDO(C), Hojai, which was attended by HoDs of the various departments. During the meeting, discussions were held on many significant points in which some key decisions like compulsory installations of CCTVs in pharmacies, awareness drive by tobacco control society, etc., were taken up.

Govt taking steps to evacuate people stranded in Manipur: Mizoram CM

AIZAWL, May 5 (PTI): Mizoram chief minister Zoramthanga on Friday said that his government is taking steps to evacuate people from the state stranded in violence-hit Manipur.

Zoramthanga also assured the safety of the people of Manipur living in Mizoram.

He urged the central and Manipur governments to make more efforts to end the mob violence in the northeastern state.

"Efforts are on to charter flights to evacuate the state's residents, especially students and employees stranded in the neighbouring state," the Mizoram chief minister said in a statement.

Zoramthanga said that he has urged Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh to ensure safe return of tribal people stranded in capital Imphal to their native villages in Churachandpur and other districts of the state and he assured of requisite steps.

He had written to Biren Singh and also had a telephonic conversation with him on Thursday on the violent clashes in several parts of Manipur. He also spoke to union home minister Amit Shah and urged him to send additional central armed forces to Manipur.

The Mizoram home department has, meanwhile, assured safety for Meiteis living in the state.

The Meiteis are the majority community residing in the valley areas of Manipur and their demand for ST status triggered the present unrest in the northeastern state.

It also appealed to the community to engage in peace-building measures in order to restore normalcy in the violence-hit areas of Manipur.

The Mizoram home department activated help line numbers 0389-233427/2335359 (Landline), 9862899962 (Whatsapp) and 8787784958 (Mobile) for its residents stranded in Manipur.

"The Mizoram government calls for peace and harmony to be restored in Manipur. While expressing solidarity with the Zohnahthlak (Kuki) community, the Mizoram government appeals to all cross sections of the society in Mizoram to work towards maintaining peace and to do away with any elements that may escalate or aggravate the present situation," the home department said in a statement.

State home minister Lalthamliana is closely monitoring the situation and developments to ensure that no untoward incidents occur in Mizoram, it said.

The Centre has deployed additional central armed forces to diffuse tension in the neighbouring state.

Meghalaya: PDF announces merger with NPP

SHILLONG, May 5 (PTI): The People's Democratic Front (PDF) on Friday announced that it will merge with Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma's NPP.

The PDF is a part of the NPP-led ruling coalition in the state, and has two MLAs in the assembly, whose current strength is 59. After the merger, NPP's tally will rise to 28.

The decision to merge was unanimously taken at PDF's general council meeting, chaired by its president Gavin M Mylliem, who is one of the two MLAs. Senior PDF leaders, including its working president Banteidior Lyngdoh -- the other MLA, were present at the meeting.

"The official merger will take place at the NPP's state office on Saturday. The merger document will be signed between NPP national chief Conrad K Sangma and the PDF president," Lyngdoh told PTI.

Mylliem said several parties approached them for a merger, but the majority of PDF members were inclined to go with the NPP considering its ideology and agendas.

Atul Bora reviews progress of government schemes in Barak Valley

HT Bureau

SILCHAR, May 5: Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Dairy Development, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Border Protection and Development, Atul Bora, on Friday, held a meeting in Silchar with officials of various departments to review the progress of work of various government schemes in Barak Valley.

The meeting was held at the Cachar deputy commissioner's office on Friday afternoon. Officials of Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Dairy Development, Border Protection and Development departments of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts were present during the meeting.

Minister Atul Bora, who reached Silchar on Friday morning, took stock of the implementation process of various schemes in the three districts of the valley.

In the meet, minister Bora inquired about the current implementation of various schemes including PM-Kisan, National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Date (NMEO-OP), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Millet Mission, Krishak Gyan Kendra Nirman Yojana in the three districts of Barak Valley. He also reviewed the lat-



est status of animal vaccination campaigns under the department of animal husbandry and veterinary medicine, availability of veterinary drugs, artificial insemination of cattle and other related aspects.

After gathering information about several schemes' work progress, Bora shared his reaction and also gave instructions to officials to ensure all the schemes are implemented properly and on time. The minister said the agriculture

and livestock sector has immense potential to strengthen the economy of the state and create employment opportunities and that the Assam government, under chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's leadership, is making continuous efforts to accelerate the development of these sectors and ensure the empowerment of farmers.

The minister directed the concerned officers of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary department, Dairy Development department to expedite the departmental works for farmers' benefits. He said a milk processing plant with a capacity to produce 100000 litres of milk per day will be set up in Cachar district and asked officials of the dairy sector to pay special attention to the sector's functioning.

The minister, who also took stock of the current situation of the inter-state borders in Barak Valley, said he is optimistic that proper implementation of all the schemes (which were discussed at the meeting) would strengthen the socio-economic foundation of the valley. The review meeting was also attended by MLA Silchar Dipayan Chakraborty and Udharchandh MLA Mihir Kanti Som.

All Tripura students in Manipur safe: CM Manik Saha

AGARTALA, May 5 (PTI): Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Friday claimed that all the students of the state stranded in violence-hit Manipur are safe.

More than 150 students from Tripura are stranded in Manipur.

"I have tried to talk to Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh but could not because he is busy with official engagements. I have spoken to our chief secretary and DGP and instructed them to talk to officials of Manipur about the safety and evacuation of the stranded students", Saha told reporters.

The chief minister claimed the students from Tripura in Manipur are still in their respective hostels under CRPF security coverage and all of them are safe.

"We are closely monitoring the situation in Manipur and if the situation requires all the stranded students will be evacuated but we will not take any hasty steps," he said.

Saha said a 24x7 helpline has been set up to help the students of Tripura or anybody from the state stranded in Manipur.

"I have already spoken to a faculty of Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) and requested to collect contacts of all the medical students from Tripura in the institute", he said, adding contact has also been established with leaders of Tripura Students' Union in Manipur to know the ground situation.

CEM Boro distributes land title certificates in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 5: A total of 7,144 land title certificates were ceremonially distributed among the villagers under Haltugao and Kachugao forest divisions in Kokrajhar district at a programme held at Patgaon HS School's playground on Thursday.

The land title certificates were distributed among the 7,144 beneficiaries which covered 25,500 hectares of land under Haltugao and Kachugao forest divisions under the Forest Right Act, 2006.

The programme was organised by district level committee of Kokrajhar district under the aegis of Forest & Environment department of Bodoland Territorial Region government.

Chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro, BTR executive member for Forest & Environment, Ranjit Basumatary, MLAs Lawrence Islay, Jiron Basumatary ceremonially distributed the land title certificates.

Notably, the beneficiaries' hails from remote areas under Haltugao and Kachugao forest divisions in Kokrajhar district who have been living at the remote villages for decades, they have been offered land entitlement certificates after a thorough verification from circle officers and forest department officials of BTR government.

Most of the peoples, who have received the certi-

ates, are from Scheduled Tribe (Bodos). Peoples from all walks of life attended the distribution ceremony and hailed the initiatives to distribute the land entitlement certificates.

The beneficiaries after receiving the certificates have expressed their gratitude and thanked the concerned authority and department officials for facilitating the certificate, saying that it is a gesture of rendering services and dedication for the welfare and development among the citizens initiated by the government of Bodoland Territorial Region.

CEM Boro said that the BTR government and state government are working for the welfare of common citizens in the state and accordingly it has been implementing the Forest Right Act, 2006 among the citizens of remote areas who are living in the forest areas for many years. He said that hundreds of citizens are getting land entitlement certificates under the Act.

He informed that the BTR government is committed to safeguarding the interests of the indigenous people and is doing all round development that is necessary for their welfare. He also said that it is an effort to protect and secure the rights of indigenous people under the Forest Right Act, 2006 and subsequently distributed the land entitlement certificates.

"In keeping with the BTR government's ongoing effort to protect and secure the rights of indigenous people, I am delighted to distribute the land title certificates under Forest Rights Act, 2006 to beneficiaries of Haltugao and Kachugao forest division in Kokrajhar," Boro added. BTR executive member Ranjit Basumatary said that after thorough verifications of the beneficiaries, the land title certificates were distributed and land must be protected with multiple cultivation. He urged the citizens to plant saplings and build a green natural environment in the region.

Among others, BTR executive members Reoreoa Narzhary, Rakesh Brahma were also present.

Be prepared to tackle any disaster during monsoon: Rio

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 5: Nagaland chief minister asked all government departments to be prepared to tackle any disaster that the state may face in the monsoon season. Addressing a monsoon preparedness meeting at the CM's residential complex in Kohima on Friday, Rio, who is also the chairman of Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA), stressed that more weather forecasts should be given to the public and awareness be checked at the local level. "Good roads with proper drainage should be maintained by the PWD (roads and bridges) and National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd.," he said.

Indian Oil retail outlet deceit caught red handed by customer at Boko

HT Correspondent

BOKO, May 5: A deceit of an Indian Oil retail outlet (Petrol Pump) was caught red handed by a customer who came to refill petrol at Indian Oil Dhupguri Nandini Energy near National Highway 17 on Thursday at Sukuniapra in Boko.

The story came to light when Najbul Ali along with his wife came from Boko towards Dhupdhara through NH 17 with their Maruti Dzire vehicle and they visited Indian Oil Dhupguri Nandini Energy petrol Pump for refuelling. Najbul Ali asked for petrol for Rs 600 to the delivery boy.

Ali said, "I noticed that the fuel delivery boy gave petrol in my ve-

hicle without ensuring zero in the meter of the fuel machine. The delivery boy delivered petrol to a scooter and directly gave petrol to my vehicle."

Ali also noticed that when he asked for fuel, another guy distracted him to check the machine to ensure that the delivery boy was starting from zero or not. After that, Najbul Ali immediately complained about the matter to the manager of the petrol pump and asked to see the CCTV footage.

The manager of the fuel pump showed him the CCTV footage, where it was proven that the delivery boy had deceit with Najbul Ali.

"This is not fair in business,

owners should keep an eye on these kinds of deceit. However, I was confused about how much money to pay and gave my mobile number to the manager so that the higher authorities would inform me and only then would I pay the money," added Najbul Ali.

Ali also said that after that the manager connected him by mobile with the owner of the petrol pump, according to the manager and the owner asked the matter and at the end the owner requested him to let it go. However, the manager of the fuel pump said that after getting orders to dismiss the delivery boy from the petrol pump, he immediately dismissed the delivery boy.

Public Accounts Committee of Assam Legislative Assembly meeting held at Haflong



HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, May 5: A two-day study visit of the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee was held at Haflong, Dima Hasao on Wednesday and Thursday. A detailed presentation pertaining to various departmental ongoing works, plans and performance, financial status was presented to the committee members. The committee meeting was attended by eight members of Assam Legislative Assembly which was chaired by Wazed Ali Choudhary, MLA. Other MLA members of PAC were Ramendra Narayan Kalita, Basanta Das, Utpal Bora, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Bhabendra Nath Bharali, Hafiz Bashir Ahmed, Karim Uddin Borbhuyan, officials from Dispur comprising of additional secretary to government of Assam, under secretary and others were also seen accompanying the PAC. The committee members closely discussed the projects under various departments and instructions were given especially to PWD to submit reports on few of the projects which showed slow progress and also details about the contractors involved.

The committee also enquired about the NFSA card holders and total production of wheat and rice production-consumption report. They informed us that there will be another meeting held at Dispur in this regard. Expressing satisfaction over the Medical department performance in the district, the committee congratulated the joint director for their efforts and sincerity. Acknowledging the scopes and advantages in the field of tourism, the committee suggested that Dima Hasao district should gear up for a boom in the tourism sector post completion of the National Highway connecting the Cachar belt. The presentations were given by the respective HoDs of the department led by principal secretary DHAC, Thai Tsho Daulaguppu and Dima Hasao deputy commissioner Simanta Kumar Das.

ABSU withdraws protest demonstration



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 5: The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has withdrawn its 3-hour sit in protest demonstration at every district headquarters of Assam including Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) on May 8, 2023 as per the decision of the executive meeting taken on dated April 12, 2023 held at Mayuri Guest House, Manas National Park on demand of village notification of the Boro-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council (BKWAC) administered area, constituency formation, conduct of election and increase of the fund for council for the 2023-24 financial years to resolve socio-political issues, education and economic development of the Bodo people in Assam.

Addressing the reporters at a press conference, on Friday, held at Bodofa House in Kokrajhar, ABSU president Dipen Boro informed that the decision to withdraw was taken after the draft publication of the notification by the Governor of Assam issued on Thursday after announcement of the protest dharna on Tuesday. It has already been 3 years without village notification, election, and constituency. "The Union welcomes the present initiative and extends our gratitude to the state government for beginning steps for implementation of the Clause 5.1 MoS of Bodo Accord. Further, the Union demands for time bound

completion of all the remaining processes without further delay. The Union has already instructed all the district committee, ABSU to submit claims and objections for inclusion and exclusion of villages before May 12, 2023 after the discussion with all the Bodo organisations, intellectuals, and social workers resolve the aspiration of the Bodo people living outside the sixth schedule in Assam," Boro said.

Further, the Union has decided to sit for a protest demonstration on May 29, 2023 at Kokrajhar demanding to stop constant harassment, mental and psychological pressure by NIA during hearing and trial by the special court to the former NDFB which is reported by the family members of the jailed former NDFB. The Union clearly stated that after signing of the Bodo Peace Accord, January 27, 2020, all those steps are unjustified and unfortunate to the peace-loving people.

ABSU appeals to the Union government to stop the hearing and trial, convicting one after another by NIA court and demand for release of all under trial and convicted members of ex NDFB by CBI and NIA and withdrawal of all the remaining cases for the interest of permanent peace and harmony in the region maintaining the true spirit of the peace accord. In this regard, the students' union will send a memorandum to the President of India, Prime Minister of India and Home minister of India very soon.

Assam DGP donates books for competitive exams in Boko J N College



HT Correspondent

BOKO, May 5: Assam director general of police, G P Singh has donated several subject books to the Jawaharlal Nehru College, Boko through the superintendent of police, Kamrup, Hitesh Chandra Roy on Thursday.

On the occasion, a meeting was organised by the Central Library in collaboration with the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of J N College,

Boko and Boko police officer-in-charge, Phanindra Chandra Nath at KK Handique Conference Hall in the college premises. The meeting was presided over by the college principal Dr Tapan Dutta. College students and faculties also took part in the program.

"We thank DGP Sir for his great initiative by donating some important books to help the students for competitive examinations and other examina-

tions. As a part of his dream, he also donated many important books to our central library," said Tapan Dutta, principal, J N College.

Several books like Indian Polity, Modern History, Indian Art and Culture, NCERT's books which includes Science, History, Mathematics, Geography and many others.

Kamrup SP Hitesh Chandra Roy also toured the college library and the compound. SP Roy expressed his thoughts after seeing the infrastructure of the college, "I hope the college will be an educational hub for this bordering area along the Assam-Meghalaya border." "Success never comes without effort," SP Roy quoted and added that "you have to prepare yourself from the college level for competitive and other exams".

During the media interaction, SP Roy said, "DGP sir has already started to donate books for competitive examinations all over Assam. Today, he also donated a bundle of books to prepare for competitive exams and I officially handed over the books to the principal of the college."

No. SLRC-G-III/6/Advertisement/2022/86

NOTICE

This is for information to all the candidates who have qualified and provisionally selected for, appointment to Class-III Posts under State Level Recruitment Commission for Class-III Posts that, they can view their allotted departments, on 6th May, 2023 from 12 noon onwards by logging into the official website of Govt. of Assam www.assam.gov.in and official website of SEBA www.sebaonline.org by using their respective application number and date of birth.

Sd/-
Secretary,
State Level Recruitment Commission
for Class-III Posts,
AASC, Khanapara, Guwahati-22.
Janasanyog/D/1602/23

No. GB-EST/Advertisement (GT & PGT)/1/2022/PU/18,

NOTICE

It is for information of the candidates that the District-wise, Category-wise, Medium-wise "FINAL MERIT LISTS" of selected candidates for the post of Post Graduate Teacher and Graduate Teacher (Arts / Science / Hindi / Sanskrit) of both Government and Provincialised Secondary School in response to the advertisements published on 28.12.2022 are made available in the official website at www.madhyamik.assam.gov.in from 12.00 Midnight of 05.05.2023.

The candidates are requested to visit the website for downloading the final merit list.

Sd/-
Director of Secondary Education, Assam,
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19.
Janasanyog/D/1592/23

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The best revenge is massive success.
—Frank Sinatra

India mulls to privatize banking sector

In any country, the banking sector plays a vital role in shaping the economy. Especially in poor, underdeveloped and developing countries, banks have a crucial role to play. Our country is no exception. Before independence, all our banks were in private hands, some of them in foreign hands and some of them owned by Indian private people. When India became free in 1947, it was highly backward because of the exploitation of our economy for nearly two hundred years by the British. Thus, these problems were staring at our country. When in the 1950s, India decided to move forward through economic development, the task was huge and involved huge resources. After independence, the government was compelled to convert the Imperial Bank of India into the State Bank of India in 1955 to open rural branches and help the people. But this one bank alone could not address the problem. Hence arose the demand that all the private banks should be nationalised. AIBEA spearheaded this struggle. In this background, due to the then prevailing favourable political scenario, in 1969, major private banks were nationalised in India. In the last 53 years, these nationalised banks have immensely contributed to the economic development of our country.

Nevertheless, before nationalisation and even after 1969, many private banks collapsed due to mismanagement and people lost their savings. Nationalised banks are protecting the savings of the people. Currently, there are more than one lakh bank branches as against 8000 in 1969. During this period, the total deposits have gone up from ₹ 5,000 crore to ₹ 180 lakh crore and total loans and advances from ₹ 3500 crore to ₹ 135 lakh crore. But, in 1990, the government decided to open our economy for privatisation, liberalization and globalization. Banks also became the target. To begin with, the government amended the policy by permitting the entry of private capital up to 49 per cent. Then, they have been trying to fully privatise our banks. But now the government has announced that nationalised banks will be privatised, thus, jeopardizing rural banking. Private banks will not encourage rural banking. They will be interested in more profits only. Slowly only rich people will be encouraged to have accounts. If banks are sold out, only very rich people can buy the banks and they will become the owners of the banks. Hence AIBEA is opposing the decision to privatise the banks.

For the past six years, bad loan accounts have been referred to tribunals under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Instead of loan recovery, these loans are being sold to some other companies for a cheap rate and banks have made huge losses. IBC has become a method to loot public money because banks incur huge haircuts and sacrifices in these deals. Defaulters escape without any penal action on them. Another corporate company is taking over these loans at cheap rates. AIBEA is a glorious organisation which fought for the nationalisation of banks in the larger interest of the country. That is why it is a reputed trade union in the country. Today, the challenge is the privatisation of banks and handing over huge money and precious savings of the people to greedy private corporate hands.

By not holding bilateral talks with Bilawal Bhutto, India has lost an opportunity

By: Sushil Kuttu

India in its capacity of rotating head of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) invited Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to the Goa SCO on May 4-5, but India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar hadn't decided on a bilateral with Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. So much for India's legendary 'atithi devo bhava' and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's much banded 'Vasudeva Kutumbakam'.

Instead, Jaishankar was all set to play favourites and hold talks with SCO Secretary-General Zhang Ming, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang. Bilawal couldn't fit in for historical reasons. Also, not long ago, he had called Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'Butcher of Gujarat' proving once and for all that Pakistan was a hostile neighbour!

The drone attack on the Kremlin on May 3 further distanced anything that had to do with India-Pakistan ties at the SCO. India got another chance to play prime mover-and-shaker without doing anything much concrete. That is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy template, which delivers little but which keeps the Indian Prime Minister in the limelight. Also, EAM Jaishankar has his moves perfected!

Therefore, it wasn't likely that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari would get a 'dekho-in' when the heavyweights were to have a go at trying to solve the 'Ukraine Crisis' to nobody's satisfaction. For neighbourhood-watchers, it was interesting to watch 'Bilawal's Progress' at the SCO. Goa has a lot to offer for a young man and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was probably the youngest FM at the SCO. That said, time could not weigh more heavily on Bilawal. Jaishankar had Sergey Lavrov to listen to and little time for Bilawal's Oxford accent. The "attack" on Putin couldn't have come at a more inopportune time. "Russia-Ukraine" would dominate the Goa SCO.

Jaishankar's bilateral with Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang was also considered interesting. The border tension was among the topics but the opposition parties, especially the Congress, could not be denied the details. If talks with China are okay, why not with Pakistan? It's not that China is 'Casper the Friendly Ghost', but Pakistan dacoit Gabbar.

President Xi Jinping will be at the G20 summit in July. Jaishankar is on record that the India-China relationship is 'abnormal'. What has been normalised is India-Pakistan ties. After nine years of Modi, none of the major powers mentions India and Pakistan in the same breath these days. It is almost like Kashmir has been 'solved'. But lest we forget, doesn't matter how, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto will not forget to rake up the 'K' word "at the international forum" and emphasize that India and Pakistan have certain uncertain issues which cannot be swept under the carpet as India would like to do and has been trying to do.

India's neighbourhood matters for India, first and foremost. Pakistan, India's most prominent neighbour, is hard to ignore but easy to sideline. Nine years of Modi rule hadn't made a dent on the continuously souring India-Pakistan ties. India's rising economic and military prowess keeps Pakistan at bay though that does not hold Pakistan back from the occasional muscle-flexing. India's "Neighbourhood First policy" does not include Pakistan. Even the 'Covid Challenge' could not bring the two neighbours together against the common enemy. Modi's 'Vasudeva Kutumbakam' has no room for Pakistan. Not long ago, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari called Prime Minister Narendra "Butcher of Gujarat" and reminded the United Nations that the Kashmir issue "remains unaddressed". Bilawal Bhutto was likely to open up Pandora's Box at a presser. Bilawal said Modi shouldn't have hard feelings about the "Butcher of Gujarat" nomenclature because he (Bhutto) was "just talking about historical reality" little realizing that if anything bothered Modi, it was historical context. Bilawal had clarified that it wasn't he who had invented the term 'Butcher of Gujarat', it was already there and everybody knew who the 'Butcher of Gujarat' was. In conclusion, there were more reasons why Bilawal Bhutto Zardari wouldn't make any difference to the status quo. Bilawal's grandfather Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had visited India, Bilawal's mother Benazir Bhutto also came, and Bilawal's father Asif Zardari, too. None of them could make a difference. That is because India has been playing neighbourly resentment with the Bhuttos/Zardaris. India should give Bilawal Bhutto Zardari a break. After all, Bilawal chose to come despite the entire Pakistani establishment, and the ecosystem, urging him to show the middle-finger to India. Even the all-powerful Pakistan Army voiced its reservations. Forget the Army, ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan criticized Bilawal's decision, reasoning that India's invitation to Bhutto was at the behest of the United States and that India would bend over backwards to please the US. (IPA Service)

Farmers of Karnataka resolve at their meet to defeat BJP in assembly polls

Farmers of Karnataka, under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Panchayat declared an open war against the Narendra Modi government from Bengaluru and called upon the farmers who constitute 65 per cent of the total population of the state, to ensure the defeat of BJP, Narendra Modi resorted to his tested theatrics and played the victim card to the rural people of the state by alleging that Congress has used abusive words against him 91 times since 2009 when he was the chief minister of Gujarat. Unfortunately for Modi his melodramatics failed to move the farmers and Samyukta Kisan Panchayat reiterated to "defeat the anti-farmer, anti-people, communal BJP" in the upcoming polls in Karnataka and take this message to the grassroots level through door-to-door campaigns and other means of communication. Significantly around 250 farmer leaders and 20 organisations participated at the meet.

A Charter of Demands containing 15 demands and 1 special and immediate demand of Farmers of Karnataka was released at the Panchayat. Some of the key demands included: Repeal of anti-farmer laws enacted by the BJP government in 2019-2020, such as the Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, APMC Amendment Act and the Prevention of Cattle Slaughter Act.

Continuation of power subsidy given to farmers even if the central government brings in a law on privatisation of the sector. Enactment of a new law to legally guarantee realisation of remunerative prices by all farmers for all agricultural commodities. Adequate compensation to farmers for the various losses being suffered due to numerous disasters through effective disaster relief and crop insurance mechanisms set up by the government. Enactment of Farmers' Freedom from Indebtedness Act to ensure that farmers and agricultural workers do not experience distress under the weight of debts and commit suicides due to agricultural losses. The government should also waive off all outstanding farm loans of farmers. Scrapping of amendments brought in by the BJP government to the Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act

(LARR) 2013. No land should be acquired against the wishes of farmers.

Farmers' leaders from Karnataka were candid in their assertion that the national leadership of BJP intended to turn Karnataka as their colony. The participants viewed the move of bringing Amul to Karnataka with suspicion. They look at the move to promote the business interest of Ambanis. According to them it was a design to finish the identity of Kannada farmers. The meeting describing the move of Modi and Amit Shah to merge Nandini with Amul as anti-farmers demanded to immediately drop the move. They will not tolerate any attack on their identity and self-respect. They are even against allowing Amul to compete with Nandini. Nandini is a conglomeration of more than 15,000 milk producers cooperatives involving more than 60 lakh farmers families. The Charter of Demands was presented to three major political parties of Karnataka; Congress, BJP and JDS. The farmers union has also invited the representatives of these three parties to participate in the Panchayat. While the Congress and JDS sent their representatives, the BJP boycotted. Senior national leaders of SKM, Hannan Mollah, Yogendra Yadav, Smt. Kavitha Kuruganti and Avik Saha addressed the Panchayat. The Panchayat began with a homage ceremony to Martyred Farmers who have sacrificed their lives in various struggles of farmers to get their rights and dues. Farmer leaders from Karnataka GC Bayyareddy of KPRS, Badagalapura Nagendra of KRRS, HR Basavarajappa of KRRS, Deepak Lamba of Jai Kisan Andolan, Dr Prakash Kammaradi (veteran agriculture scientist) and Noor Sridhar of Karnataka Janashakti participated.

As a follow up to the Bengaluru meet, the SKM leaders met in Delhi on April 30 and virtually presaged the launch of the second phase of Kisan Andolan. The Morcha leaders also met agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar and submitted a memorandum, reminding the govt of its promises that had prompted the farmers. It read; "Over 15 months later, the Union government has not

fulfilled the promises made to the farmers. We request the Union government, through you, to stop challenging the patience of the farmers. If the government continues to renege on its promises and responsibility towards farmers, then farmers will be left with no option but to intensify the struggle."

The farmers' have been feeling let down by the government on its dithering on enacting a proper and genuine law guaranteeing minimum support prices (MSPs) for all crops as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission; assured procurement; disbanding of the committee on MSPs set up by the government; loan waivers; and reduction in input prices including those of fertilisers.

The other pending demands include the withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill; dismissal and arrest of Union minister of state for home Ajay Mishra Teni over the murder of farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri; and compensation and rehabilitation for the families of farmers who died while participating in the yearlong agitation.

The Morcha leaders pointed out that the farmers' of Bengal have been worst hit of the irresolute attitude of the central government paying the MSP. The state government has procured 47 lakh tonnes of paddy till date, at least 2 lakh tonnes higher than the same period last year. But this success has come under the scanner as complaints have cropped up in some districts that the procurement process was faulty and farmers did not get the benefit.

Meanwhile Samyukt Kisan Morcha at its April 30 meet decided to launch series of nationwide protests from May till November, peaking between August 1 and 15, to press its demands for legally guaranteed minimum support prices, farmer pensions and a comprehensive crop insurance scheme. Morcha in a statement said "large protest marches would be organised to all members of Parliament and key political leaders in their home constituencies and memoranda will be submitted to them, warning them to immediately resolve all farmers' demands failing which they will face further protests".

In May, June and July, state and district-

level conventions of the Morcha will be held across the country to galvanise and organise farmers and farm workers, it said. Between August 1 and 15, mass protests in coordination with workers' unions and organisations will be held to end the Centre's sale of farmer and worker interests to corporate houses, the Morcha said.

"Between September (mid) and-November, massive all-India yatras shall be held all over the country, which shall be led by national leaders of SKM. The yatras will specially focus on states that will see Assembly elections such as Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, etc," the Morcha said. The Karnataka meet of farmers' was quite annoyed with the government's attitude towards them. Some members were highly critical of the leaders of the ruling party of dividing the farmers on caste and communal line and sing them for their political gains. They alleged the political leaders were using one group of farmers against other on the name of caste. They were not bothered of their plights and miseries. In 2021, 10,881 farmers committed suicide throughout the country. While most of them were from Maharashtra, second highest were from Karnataka. It is noticeable that West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha did not have a single suicide by farmers. While the state recorded 2,082 farmer deaths by suicide over the said period, Belagavi topped the list among the districts with 200 deaths, followed by Mysuru in second spot with 191 cases. The government was not serious in paying the compensation. According to the government figures during the 2020-21 financial year, out of the 855 farmers who died by suicide, the families of 718 received compensation, while applications from 137 families were rejected. In 2021-22, out of the 917 cases of farmer suicides, compensation worth ₹ 5 lakh was granted to each of the 775 affected families, while 134 applications were rejected. In 2022-23, out of the 310 cases, compensation was paid to the families of 188 farmers who had died by suicide, while 24 applications were rejected. Another 98 applications are being processed. (IPA Service)

Many hurdles remain in introducing digital currency in India

By: Arun Kumar Shrivastava

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched a pilot program to test its digital currency, the digital rupee, in India's four largest cities. The program is intended to assess the feasibility of a digital currency in India and to better understand its potential use cases. The pilot will initially be available to a small number of users in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Bhubaneswar.

Users who are interested in participating in the program can sign up through a mobile app that has been developed by the RBI. Once signed up, they will be able to use the digital rupee to make purchases and transactions with participating merchants and retailers.

One of the key features of the digital rupee is that it will be issued and maintained by the RBI. This will allow the central bank to have greater control over the currency and its circulation. The digital rupee will also be backed by the RBI, providing users with greater confidence in its value and stability. Insurance companies are starting to warm up to the digital currency. For instance Reliance General Insurance has become the first general insurance company in India to accept the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) digital currency. In collaboration with YES BANK, the company will facilitate the collection of premiums through the bank's e₹ platform.

Customers with an active e₹ wallet with any bank can make immediate payments by scanning Reliance General Insurance's e₹ QR code. This launch is aimed at providing customers with a simple, secure, instant, and eco-friendly payment solution, while fulfilling the company's promise of providing excellent customer experience.

The eRupee is a digital token that is equivalent to legal tender and is a sovereign currency backed by the RBI. Since it is digital, eRupee removes the issues of handling physical cash and offers the same anonymity as a banknote.

Additionally, eRupee transactions are conducted through an RBI-regulated entity, reducing banknote-related risks such as Anti-Money Laundering and Counterfeit Currency. Reliance General Insurance is providing customers with eRupee as a form of digital currency transaction option, promoting safe financial transactions.

Rakesh Jain, CEO of Reliance General Insurance, expressed his excitement about the launch and association with YES BANK, stating that the company aims to provide customers with greater ease, higher safety, and greener payment options. This launch is also in line with the company's commitment to

fulfilling the Indian government's vision of Digital India.

Arun Agrawal, Country Head – Institutional & Government Banking, YES BANK, also expressed his pleasure in partnering with Reliance General Insurance in promoting Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), which is an industry first in the insurance sector. With higher familiarization and wider adoption, CBDC transactions are expected to complement existing digital payment systems with features such as authenticity, interoperability, and settlement finality.

Currently, Reliance General Insurance's physical e QR code is available at select branches for walk-in customers to scan and make instant payments. The company plans to make it available at all branches across the country, on its website, and on the Reliance Self-i app in the coming months.

Unlike cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum, the digital rupee will not be decentralised. It will be a centralised digital currency, which means that it will be regulated and maintained by the RBI. This will help to reduce the risks associated with cryptocurrencies, such as volatility and lack of regulation.

One potential advantage of the digital rupee is its ability to promote financial inclusion. Currently, a large portion of India's population does not have access to traditional banking services, such as checking and savings accounts. The digital rupee could potentially provide these individuals with a low-cost and accessible alternative to traditional banking services.

Another potential use case for the digital rupee is in cross-border transactions. Currently, cross-border transactions can be expensive and time-consuming due to the involvement of multiple intermediaries. The digital rupee could potentially streamline these transactions and make them faster and more cost-effective.

The RBI has been studying the potential use cases for a digital currency for several years. In 2021, the central bank released a report on the potential benefits and risks of a digital currency. The report suggested that a digital currency could help to reduce the cost of financial transactions, increase financial inclusion, and promote the use of digital payments.

Hurdles faced with the development of the digital rupee

However, there are several issues that the RBI needs to address in order to make the digital currency safe and accessible to everyone. While most of these issues have been discussed by the RBI's, it remains to be seen how the central bank addresses them going forward. One of the key issues that

the RBI needs to address is the validation mechanism. While account-based CBDC may be suitable for wholesale CBDC applications, the token-based approach would be better suited for the retail needs of the Indian market. While the RBI has discussed all the available options, experts believe that India may take a hybrid approach down the line.

Another issue that has been widely debated is the degree of anonymity that CBDC would offer. While some experts believe that CBDC would impact privacy, others believe that it would offer more privacy. The RBI's thoughts on this issue are very clear. For lower transactions, the maximum degree of privacy would be extended, i.e., wallets with smaller limits will not ask for many personal details, but for advanced wallets, all personal details may be required to be filled in.

Cybersecurity is another key concern that needs to be addressed, irrespective of whether CBDC is a centralised ledger or decentralised. Counterfeiting and cybersecurity will remain key concerns that need to be addressed.

Making people shift to CBDC is another challenge that the RBI needs to address. Making people aware of CBDC could be a huge challenge, and the central bank must think in advance about frictionless conversion of CBDC into cash across the country. For retail, the government had earlier launched e-rupee tokens through NPCI. It is still evolving, and the RBI needs to work on ensuring that CBDC is easily accessible and usable for the masses.

Technical challenges also need to be addressed, such as ensuring that CBDC is accessible in areas with connectivity issues. Interoperability with existing systems is another challenge that the RBI needs to address.

The launch of the digital rupee pilot comes at a time when several other countries are also exploring the potential of a digital currency. China has been working on its digital currency, the digital yuan, for several years, and has already begun testing it in several cities. The United States is also exploring the potential of a digital dollar, although it is still in the early stages of development.

Overall, the launch of the digital rupee pilot represents an important milestone in the development of digital currencies in India. While it is still in the early stages of development, the pilot program will provide valuable insights into the potential use cases and risks associated with a digital currency. If successful, the digital rupee could potentially revolutionise the way that Indians transact and interact with money. (IPA Service)

Ukraine war and US, EU sanctions leading to loss of us dollar's global dominance

By: Subrata Majumder

A new landscape in currency dominance in global market is taking shape, with US dollar losing pre-eminent and Chinese yuan gaining steam. According to a IMF survey, dollar share in central bank foreign exchange reserves declined from 71 percent in 1999 to 59 percent in 2021. This resulted in steady decline in the use of US dollar in global trade, according to Fareed Zakaria, foreign affairs columnist in the article in Washington Post. The allegation against dollar losing steam is dollar-weaponization. US dollar has been increasingly used as economic sanctions against non-USA allies rather than facilitating trade financing. According to Ruchir Sharma, Head of Rockefeller Capital Management International, "30 percent of all countries now face sanctions from USA, EU, Japan and UK – up from 10 percent in the early 1990's". This led a number of countries adopted for de-dollarization to rein in dollar volatility.

China has been viewed in leading for de-dollarization. Since 2011, China gradually shifted to Chinese yuan from US dollar in trade financing and in 2018; it started buying oil in yuan. As a matter of fact, Chinese yuan is emerging as a major challenge to US dollar. By the end of 2020, Chinese Yuan emerged the largest component of non-traditional currency in the global reserves (such as Australian dollar, Canadian dollar, Swiss franc and Chinese yuan). These demonstrate that Chinese yuan is emerging fast as a global currency for trade and paves the way for de-dollarization. In 2016, Chinese Yuan became the first emerging market currency to be included in IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDR). Till that period, only Big Four had the privilege to be in the SDR.

In 2022, Turkey and Russia agreed to use Russian ruble in trade for natural gas. In 2022, Russian president Putin signed an order, desisting 'non-friendly' countries (like USA, EU, Japan); from buying Russian gas in any other currency other than Russian ruble, as a retaliation against USA sanctions on Russia. In January 2023, Finance Minister of Saudi Arabia Mohammed Al – Jadaan said that it was open to trade in other currencies, besides US dollar.

The momentum growth in de-dollarization was spearheaded by surge in ruble – yuan trade, owing to Ukraine war According to Reuters, 'Rouble-yuan trade increased eight fold from February to October 2022'.

India is not left behind in the de-dollarization rally. The single biggest item of import of India, which is traded in US dollar, is crude oil. India is the third biggest importer of crude oil in the world. Oil accounts for nearly one third of total import of India. Given the burgeoning US sanctions and OPEC's tweaking of oil prices, India gradually followed global movement for de-dollarization. It surged largely diversified import of crude oil from Russia, based on the terms of non-dollar payment.

Resultantly, Russia emerged as the second biggest supplier of crude oil to India. In the first ten months of 2022-23 (April-January), import of crude oil from Russia increased to 20 percent of total import, as compared to 2 percent in the corresponding period last year. Most of the oil imports from Russia were paid in non-dollar currencies, which included United Arab Emirates dirham and rouble, according to oil industry sources. To tide over the US sanctions, India and Russia set up alternative arrangements. Indian refineries have accepted Russian insurance. Russian oil suppliers are trying to handle Urals oil transport to India themselves, using their own vessels and shipping arrangement. Further, Indian government has permitted nine Indian banks to open vostro accounts with Russian banks. This will facilitate to deal with Russian oil in rupee trade in currency swapping deal. Indian UCO bank has opened the vostro accounts with Russian Gazprombank and VTB banks.

Furthering the de-dollarization movement, RBI introduced additional convertibility of Indian Rupee from July in 2022 for trade financing. It allowed invoicing and payment of international trade in Indian rupee under "International settlement in Indian Rupees". RBI allowed 18 countries to transact trade in Rupees.

According to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, RBI initiated this measure to rein in Rupee susceptibility to dollar and euro – the two major currencies dealing with Indian exports and imports – and settle Rupee with non-dollar currencies, which are more stable. This will shield Indian exporters from currency risks and ensure to offer stable export prices to the importing countries. Eventually, this will act benign to boost exports of the country. The latest Economic Survey was upbeat to promote international trade in domestic currency. It envisaged that it will protect Rupee from volatility and reduce cost of business in global market. The survey advocated that it could help Indian exporters in getting advance payment in Rupee from overseas clients.

In summing up, de-dollarization movement will pave the way for rupee convertibility. This will prove benign to rupee stability, which ultimately helps to boost exports. (IPA Service)

Russia's Wagner boss threatens Bakhmut pullout in Ukraine

Prigozhin says casualties in Bakhmut would be 'five times fewer if we had more ammunition'

KYIV, May 5 (AP): The owner of Russia's Wagner Group military contractor threatened on Friday to pull his troops out of the protracted battle for the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut next week, accusing Russia's military command of starving his forces of ammunition and causing them heavy losses.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, a notorious millionaire with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin, claimed that Wagner had planned to capture Bakhmut by May 9. That day is a major Russian holiday marking the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

But, Prigozhin said, his force hasn't received enough artillery ammunition supplies from the Russian military since Monday. Known for his bluster, Prigozhin has previously made unverifiable claims and made threats he hasn't carried out.

Hours before releasing the statement, Prigozhin's spokespeople published a video of him angrily demanding ammunition from Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov.

In the video, Prigozhin stands in front of around 30 uniformed bodies lying on the ground. He says they are the bodies of Wagner fighters who died on Thursday alone.

Prigozhin speaks in a furious tone and uses numerous expletives in the video. "These are someone's fathers and some-



one's sons," Prigozhin says, pointing at the bodies. "The scum that doesn't give us ammunition will eat their guts in hell."

He alleged that Russia's regular army was supposed to protect the flanks as Wagner troops pushed forward but is "barely holding on to them," deploying "tens and rarely hundreds" of troops.

Russia's Defense Ministry did not immediately comment on the claims, and it was not possible to independently verify them.

"Wagner ran out of resources to advance in early April, but we're advancing despite the fact that the enemy's resources outnumber ours fivefold," Prigozhin's statement said. "Because of the lack of ammunition, our losses are growing exponentially every day."

The Wagner Group has spearheaded the struggle for control of Bakhmut, which is the longest — and likely bloodiest — battle of the war. The more than eight months of fighting there is believed to have cost

thousands of lives, though neither side is saying how many.

Prigozhin has toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising inmates pardons if they survive a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner. Western countries and United Nations experts have accused Wagner mercenaries of committing numerous human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in the Central African Republic, Libya and Mali.

Bakhmut, located about 55 kilometers (34 miles) north of the Russian-held regional capital of Donetsk, has tactical military value for Moscow, though analysts say it won't be decisive in the war's outcome.

The city had a prewar population of 80,000 and was an important industrial center. It is now a devastated ghost town, but it has become an important symbol of Ukrainian resistance to Russia's invasion, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy saying its capitulation could begin building international support for a deal that could require Ukraine to make unacceptable compromises.

Prigozhin's statement said that Wagner will be forced to pull out of Bakhmut on May 10 and have Russia's regular army take over, "because without ammunition, (Wagner fighters) are doomed to a senseless death."

He accused "jealous military bureaucrats" of denying him ammunition. West-

ern officials and analysts believe Russia has run low on ammunition as the 14-month conflict became bogged down in a war of attrition over the winter, with both sides resorting to long-range bombardments.

It is not the first time Prigozhin has raged about ammunition shortages and blamed Russia's military, with which he has long been in conflict. He has already threatened to withdraw from Bakhmut once, in an interview with a Russian military blogger last week, if the situation with ammunition doesn't improve.

Asked by The Associated Press about Prigozhin's statement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said he had seen references to it in the media but refused to comment further. The Russian military did not immediately comment on the statement either.

Also on Friday, an oil refinery in Russia's southern Krasnodar region which borders the annexed Crimean Peninsula briefly caught fire after it was attacked by a drone, Russia's state news agency Tass reported, citing emergency officials. The fire was small and was quickly put out, the report said.

It was the second straight day that the Ilyinsky refinery had come under a drone attack. Drone attacks on oil facilities in Russian regions on the border with Ukraine have been reported almost daily over the past week.

India-China border 'generally stable', both sides should push for further easing of tensions: Chinese FM Qin to Jaishankar



BEIJING, May 5 (PTI): Foreign Minister Qin Gang reiterated China's view that the situation at the India-China border is "generally stable" and said that both sides should take joint action to further ease and cool down the border situation and maintain sustainable peace along the LAC.

In his talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar at Benaulum in Goa on the sidelines of the meeting of the SCO Foreign Ministers on Thursday, Qin restated China's oft-repeated recent stance that the current situation on the China-India border is generally stable, in an apparent reference to the ongoing military standoff in eastern Ladakh which brought the relations to a standstill.

"Both sides should continue to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, consolidate the existing achievements, strictly abide by relevant agreements, take joint action to further ease and cool down the border situation and maintain sustainable peace and tranquillity in the border areas," Qin was quoted as saying by a press release on his talks with Jaishankar issued here on Friday said.

In a tweet after the talks, Jaishankar said the focus remained on resolving outstanding issues and ensuring peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

"A detailed discussion with State Councillor and FM Qin Gang of China on our bilateral relationship. The focus remains on resolving outstanding issues and ensuring peace and tranquillity in the border areas," he said.

The Indian and the Chinese troops are locked in a standoff at a few friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh for the last three years though they disengaged in several places following a series of military and diplomatic talks.

The meeting between Qin and Jaishankar was their second in the last two months. The Chinese foreign minister visited India in

March to attend a meeting of the G20 foreign ministers. Calling for joint efforts with India to bring bilateral relations back on track with stable and sound development, Qin said the "two sides should learn from history and handle bilateral relations from a strategic and long-term perspective".

He called on the two neighbours to respect, learn from and reinforce each other, and embark on a new path of harmonious coexistence, peaceful development and common revitalisation, contributing to their respective national rejuvenation and injecting stability and positive energy into world peace and development, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

China is willing to work with India to carry out bilateral consultation and exchange, enhance dialogue and cooperation under multilateral frameworks, and deepen coordination and collaboration on international and regional issues, Qin said.

Qin also said China supports India in hosting a successful SCO summit and hopes that India, as the current chair, will display the spirit of solidarity and collaboration and play a positive role in making the summit a success.

The two sides also exchanged views on international and regional issues of common concern, the press release added.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh told his Chinese counterpart General Li Shangfu at a recent meeting that China's violation of existing border agreements "eroded" the entire basis of ties between the two countries and that all issues relating to the frontier must be resolved in accordance with the existing pacts.

The meeting on April 27 took place in New Delhi on the sidelines of a conclave of the SCO defence ministers.

Days ahead of the meeting between the two defence ministers, the Indian and Chinese armies held the 18th round of talks on ending the border row.

Indonesia works to rescue 20 trafficking victims in Myanmar

JAKARTA, May 5 (AP): Indonesian officials said on Friday they were working to rescue dozens of their nationals who were trafficked to Myanmar to work as cyber scammers, amid an increase in human trafficking cases in Southeast Asia. At least 20 Indonesian job seekers are trapped in Myawaddy township, the site of an armed conflict between Myanmar's military and ethnic Karen rebels, said Judha Nugraha, an official in Indonesia's Foreign Affairs Ministry. Myawaddy is in eastern Kayin state along the Thai border. According to Nugraha, fake recruiters offered the victims high-paying jobs in Thailand but instead trafficked them to Myawaddy, about 567 kilometers (352 miles) south of Naypyidaw, the capital, to perform cyber scams for crypto websites or apps.

The Indonesian Migrant Worker Union, a nonprofit group, said some victims were tortured when

they failed to reach certain targets and forced to pay more than \$10,000 in travel costs. Authorities said the victims were likely trafficked to Myanmar by illegal means since no records can be found of their arrival in Myanmar's immigration system.

"The challenges on the ground are indeed high as authorities in Myanmar face difficulties entering Myawaddy since rebels have taken over the region," Nugraha said.

Indonesian officials are working with authorities in Naypyidaw, Myawaddy and Thailand, and have asked for assistance from other organizations to help get the victims out of the area safely, he said.

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told a news conference on Friday that the government has worked on 1,841 human trafficking cases in the past three years where victims are Indonesians who were duped into online scams.

Australia PM: US effort to extradite Assange not worth it

CANBERRA, May 5 (AP): Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese expressed frustration at the United States' continuing efforts to extradite WikiLeaks founder and Australian citizen Julian Assange, saying: "There is nothing to be served by his ongoing incarceration." Albanese's comments on Friday in an Australian Broadcasting Corp. interview appeared to escalate diplomatic pressure on the United States to drop the charges against the 51-year-old Assange, who has spent four years in Britain's Belmarsh Prison fighting extradition to the United States.

Before that, Assange had taken asylum for seven years in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

Albanese said Assange's case had to be examined in terms of whether the time Assange had "effectively served" was in excess of what would be "reasonable" if the allegations against him were proved.

"I just say that enough is enough. There is nothing to be served by his ongoing incarceration," Albanese said.

Strong earthquake hits Japan, killing one, injuring 13

TOKYO, May 5 (AP): A strong, shallow earthquake hit central Japan on Friday afternoon, killing at least one person and injuring 13 others, but no tsunami warning was issued.

The magnitude 6.2 quake struck Ishikawa prefecture on the west coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, the U.S. Geological Survey said. The Japan Meteorological Agency measured the quake at 6.5 and said it was centered at a depth of about 12 kilometers (7.5 miles).

One person was reported dead and at least 13 were injured in Suzu city at the northern tip of Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa prefecture, a city official said. He said six homes were damaged and rain could trigger mudslides, causing further damage.

He did not say how the person died, but the Fire and Disaster Management Agency reported that a person was found without vital signs after falling from a ladder. It said another person was injured when a cabinet fell on them, and two people were rescued from damaged buildings in the city.

A video broadcast by NHK public



television showed a section of a hill that had crumbled and fallen on a house. It also broadcast a video taken by a reporter who was visiting his family in Ishikawa prefecture that showed a room shaking for nearly half a minute, with picture frames rattling on the walls. Japan is celebrating several national holidays this week.

Government spokesperson Hirokazu Matsuno said there were reports of other damaged buildings but details were still being confirmed.

There was no reported damage at two nuclear power plants in the area, he said. East Japan Railway Co. said bullet trains connecting Tokyo and Kanazawa in Ishikawa prefecture were temporarily halted for safety checks but resumed normal operations, with some delays.

Japan is one of the world's most earthquake-prone nations. A massive 2011 quake in the country's northeast caused a devastating tsunami and nuclear plant meltdown.

Swaminarayan temple in Melbourne defaced by pro-Khalistani elements with anti-India graffiti: report

MELBOURNE, May 5 (PTI): A prominent Hindu temple in Sydney was defaced allegedly by pro-Khalistani elements on Friday with anti-India graffiti on the walls, in the latest incident of vandalism against Hindu temples in Australia ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the country later this month.

The incident took place at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Rosehill, Sydney.

Temple authorities also found a Khalistani flag hanging on the gate, and reported the matter to New South Wales (NSW) police, the Australia Today newspaper reported.

"We are deeply saddened by the anti-India graffiti on the walls of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Rosehill, Sydney by anti-social elements," the temple said in a statement.

"We are further disheartened that BAPS temples in Australia have been targeted. For the last 23 years, the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir



has been a cornerstone of the local community and a prominent Hindu Temple which, like all BAPS temples worldwide, is an abode of peace and harmony, equality, selfless service and universal Hindu values," it said.

Member of Parliament for Parramatta Andrew Charlton reached the BAPS Temple as soon as he was informed of the Hindu Hate incident, the Australia Today newspaper reported.

Charlton along with Temple authorities helped to repaint the wall.

"This morning, the BAPS temple in my electorate of Parramatta was

vandalised by religious extremists. I am deeply shocked and saddened by this act of mindless vandalism. Everyone in Australia has the right to practice their faith in peace," he was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

"At this time, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha prays for peace and unity and has appealed to all devotees and well-wishers in the community to maintain peace.

We are thankful to the local police command, the Department of Home Affairs, State and Federal Members of Parliament, the Indian High Commission and the Consul

General of Sydney for their continued support," the temple said.

"BAPS temples across Australia are symbols of a thriving multicultural society that nurture Australian values of respect, mateship and tolerance. We request everyone to join in worldwide prayers that God blesses and guides us all to continue to do good and think good of all," it said.

"Officers from Cumberland Police Area Command have commenced an investigation following reports of malicious damage to a religious site in Rosehill," NSW Police spokesperson said in a statement.

"Police are conducting inquiries into the circumstances surrounding the incident." Earlier this year three Hindu Temples in Melbourne and two Hindu Temples in Brisbane were vandalised by Khalistan supporters.

Prime Minister Modi is scheduled to visit Sydney for the QUAD summit on May 24.

King Charles III to confer thank-you Coronation Medals to thousands

The design features a double portrait of King Charles and Queen Camilla on the front and a version of their Royal Cypher

LONDON, May 5 (PTI): As a thank you gift from King Charles III, around 400,000 Coronation Medals will be handed out to the UK armed forces personnel and emergency frontline workers taking part in the historic ceremony on Saturday. The UK government unveiled the design of the medal, which will be handed out to everyone actively contributing and supporting the Coronation, including choristers, police officers, military personnel and St. John Ambulance personnel, as well as those directly involved in the delivery of the mega event.

The design features a double portrait of King Charles and Queen Camilla on the front and a version of their Royal Cypher, a laurel wreath and the date of the Coronation on the reverse. The ribbon is made up of red, blue and white vertical stripes — the colours of the UK's Union Flag and are made of nickel silver and plated in nickel.

"This medal is a symbol of the critical role our emergency services will play in this potentially once in a lifetime opportunity to honour our new King," said UK Home Secretary Suella Braverman.

"However, it rightly also goes further and recognises not just those who are helping at the Coronation, but the heroes across our emergency services, such as the police, fire and rescue services, that go to work every day to protect and support us all," the Indian-origin minister said.

The medals will also be given to serving frontline members of the police, fire, emergency services, prison services and armed forces that have completed five full calendar years of service.

"The Coronation would not be possible without the dedication and selfless service shown by our armed forces and other public servants. This medal is a fitting recognition of their efforts, and a



thank you from the nation. It will be worn with pride for years to come," said UK Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden.

The double portrait of the King and

Queen Consort on the front of the newly unveiled Coronation Medal was designed by Martin Jennings who also designed the official effigy of the King for the new coins issued by the UK's Royal

Mint. The Coronation Medal is made by Worcestershire Medal Service Ltd in Birmingham.

"The Coronation Medal will act as a reminder of the important part each person has played in this moment of history. From our Armed Forces who protect our country to the emergency services who care for us at home, alongside those volunteers who are giving up their time to make this event so special, I am delighted that we can mark their contribution to this special day, and for each and every day that they go above and beyond serving their country," said UK Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer.

The tradition of Coronation Medals dates to the reign of King James I when the first medal was awarded in 1603, featuring a bust of James I wearing the costume of a Roman Emperor. Its reverse included a crowned lion rampant holding a beacon and a wheat sheaf.

The estimated 400,000 Coronation Medal recipients for this weekend will include: individuals who have actively contributed to the official Coronation events in Westminster Abbey and processions, and other officially recognised ceremonial Coronation events; serving members of the Armed Forces who have completed five full calendar years of service on May 6 or participate in Armed Forces Coronation events during the course of 2023.

Frontline emergency personnel who have been in paid service, retained or in a voluntary capacity, dealing with emergencies as part of their conditions of service, and completed five full calendar years of service on May 6; prison services personnel who are publicly employed and who have completed five full calendar years of service on May 6; and living individual recipients of the George Cross or of the Victoria Cross.

5 Army personnel killed in blast during anti-terrorist operation in J&K's Rajouri

RAJOURI (J-K), May 5 (PTI): Five Army personnel were killed and a major was injured on Friday in an explosion triggered by terrorists in the thickly forested Kandi area in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district where an operation was underway to flush out terrorists, officials said.

The operation, still underway, was launched following inputs about the presence of a group of terrorists involved in an ambush on an Army truck in Bhata Dhurian of Poonch district last month, in which five security personnel were killed.

The People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF), a shadow organisation of the Jaish-e-Mohammed terror outfit, has claimed responsibility for Friday's attack. Before Friday's attack, the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri have witnessed seven major terrorist incidents since October 2021 in which 29 people, including 22 Army personnel, have been killed. As the anti-terrorist operation was underway, mobile internet facilities in the Rajouri area have been suspended.

According to a statement from the Army's Northern Command in the morning, its personnel have been conducting "relentless intelligence-based operations

to flush out a group of terrorists involved in an ambush on an Army truck in the Tota Gali area of Bhata Dhurian in Jammu region last month".

"On specific information about the presence of terrorists in the Kandi Forest in the Rajouri Sector, a joint operation was launched on May 3. Around 7.30 am on Friday, a search team established contact with a group of terrorists well entrenched in a cave. The area is thickly vegetated with rocky and steep cliffs.

Officials said additional troops of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Army were inducted into the area to put it in tight cordon so that terrorists do not escape from the spot. The forces deployed drones and sniffer dogs and troops hit a cave hideout with heavy fire of mortars and grenades, they said. "The terrorists triggered an explosive device in retaliation," it said.

In the morning, two Army men belonging to the Special Forces were killed and four, including the major, injured during the operation in Rajouri sector. Later in the day, three died in a hospital in Udhampur. "There is a likelihood of casualties in the terrorist group and the operation is in progress," it said.



The slain soldiers were lance naik Ruchin Singh Rawat from Gairsain in Uttarakhand, paratrooper Siddhant Chettri from Darjeeling in West Bengal, naik Arvind Kumar from Kangra district in Himachal Pradesh, havildar Neelam Singh from Jammu and paratrooper Pramod Negi from Sirmour in Himachal Pradesh. Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Mukesh Singh rushed to the spot and reviewed the security setup, they said.

The security forces have been engaged in a massive combing operation for the past 15 days in the twin border districts of Rajouri and Poonch districts. The operations started after the attack on Army vehicle in Bhata Dhurian in which five soldiers were killed and another was injured on April 20.

Three militant associates arrested in J&K's Pulwama, Shopian

SRINAGAR, May 5 (PTI): Security forces have arrested three militant associates in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama and Shopian districts and recovered arms and ammunition from their possession, police said on Friday. During a naka checking at Nagisharan in south Kashmir's Shopian, the security forces intercepted a man, Mohammad Asgar Dar from Nagisharan, who tried to evade them suspiciously. He was later arrested, a police spokesperson said.

Arms and ammunition, including a pistol, a magazine and eight rounds, and other incriminating materials were recovered from his possession, the spokesperson said. Preliminary investigation revealed that Dar was working as a terrorist associate of proscribed terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), he said.

A case has been registered and further investigation is underway, he added. Dar's arrest came on a day when five

Army personnel were killed and a major was injured in an explosion triggered by terrorists in a thickly forested area in Rajouri district where an operation was underway to flush out terrorists.

Two militant associates of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) were arrested in Pulwama, also in south Kashmir, on Thursday. Acting on specific information, the security forces launched a cordon and search operation in the Tral area in Pulwama on Thursday, the spokesperson said. During the operation, two terrorist associates of JeM, who were identified as Bashir Ahmad and Gulzar Ahmad, both residents of Tral, were arrested, he said. On the basis of disclosures made by them, arms and ammunition, including an AK-56 rifle, two AK magazines, 56 AK rounds, three pistols, six pistol magazines, 24 pistol rounds, and other incriminating material were recovered, he added.

Row over Kejriwal's residence expenditure

BJP draws parallel with 'palaces' of Saddam, Kim Jong Un



NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): The BJP on Friday fired a fresh salvo at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal amid the row over the Rs 45 crore expenditure on his residence, comparing him with the likes of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in terms of "luxury" linked to their "palaces".

BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi played videos of Kejriwal's old statements in which he presented himself as a crusader against political leaders spending public money on maintaining expensive lifestyles, including big houses, and luxurious cars.

Trivedi hit out at Kejriwal, quoting a 2013 tweet of him in which he had targeted the then Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit for allegedly having 10 ACs in her house when so many people lived in slums.

He accused the Aam Aadmi Party leaders of playing an "important role" in creating a crisis of credibility in Indian politics and claimed that it is the conduct of the likes of him that causes distrust among people about the political class.

The BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi symbolises credibility while the AAP and other opposition leaders symbolise the crisis facing it, the Rajya Sabha leader alleged.

Hinting that the AAP government deliberately divided the expenses on Kejriwal's house under various projects to keep every single budget estimate under ceiling to avoid scrutiny, Trivedi said government agencies will do their job as per the law but Kejriwal's party should provide "political and moral" answers.

Noting that Kejriwal's residence has doors controlled by sensors, he took a swipe at the AAP leader, saying he is running everything from his party to governments, including the one in Punjab, by remote control.

He said, "Kejriwal's luxurious palace unveils so many truths about him. The way and extent of the luxury Kejriwal's palace possesses seem similar to Saddam Hussein's and Kim Jong Un's palaces one has heard."

Kejriwal's Party has not only attained national stature but "international" recognition too, he said in a jibe at the AAP.

Trivedi added, "The issue here is not just to make allegations, to just show the real face, the issue is about the pain, about the betrayal that the people of Delhi have experienced! The people of Delhi had believed him, and he so shamefully cheated on them all."

Fulfill your duty towards violence-hit Manipur instead of electioneering in Karnataka: Cong to PM

NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): The Congress on Friday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fulfil his duty towards violence-hit Manipur instead of being busy in election campaign in Karnataka and sought home minister Amit Shah's sacking for his "complete failure" in maintaining peace in the northeastern state. The Congress also demanded President's rule in Manipur, which has been hit by violence between tribals and the majority Meitei community. "Modi ji, you are an elected prime minister of the country and the people of Karnataka are also watching what is happening in Manipur and want that you should save Manipur from burning and restore peace in the state first.

"Seeking votes in Karnataka is against your 'karyavya' (duty) and we want to remind you that your duty is to save Manipur instead," Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said.

She charged that the home minister has totally failed, and referred to an earlier clash between police forces of Assam and Mizoram and the border rift between Maharashtra and Karnataka.

"What moral right do you have to remain in your post. Actually, President's rule should be imposed immediately by invoking Article 356 (of the Constitution) and attempts should be made to bring back peace in the state," the Congress leader said.



All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary Randeep Surjewala shared a government order on social media and pointed that the state government has written that it is "pleased to authorise shoot at sight orders".

"Just like the British government, only the Modi government could use such draconian language as there is a complete breakdown of law and order and constitutional machinery in Manipur," he said in a video message.

"This is a fit case where Home Minister of India Amit Shah should resign or should be

sacked forthwith. This is a fit case where the BJP government in Manipur should be dismissed and Article 356, that is President's rule, should be imposed," he added.

Shrinat said Manipur has been burning for the last four days and reports of loot, murder and arson are coming in. The situation there is so bad that internet services had to be suspended, half the state is under curfew and the Indian Railways has stopped services there, she said. "Ministers, MLAs and MPs of Manipur are urging the prime minister to save Manipur which is burning. But it is unfortunate that the prime minister and the home minister are so busy in electioneering in Karnataka that they are not bothered about the situation in Manipur.

"They are so concerned with votes that it does not matter to them even if Manipur is burnt to ashes," she alleged.

Clashes broke out in Manipur on Wednesday and intensified overnight with counter-attacks being mounted by rival communities in retaliation to earlier attacks after Naga and Kuki tribals organised a 'Tribal Solidarity March' to protest moves to give scheduled tribe status to the Meitei community.

The state government on Thursday issued shoot-at-sight orders in "extreme cases" to contain the spiralling violence which has displaced more than 9,000 people from their villages.

Pawar has sought more time to consider NCP committee's resolution: Praful Patel

MUMBAI, May 5 (PTI): Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar has sought more time to reconsider his decision to step down as party chief, senior NCP leader Praful Patel said on Friday.

Patel and senior party leaders met Pawar at his Silver Oak residence in south Mumbai after a committee formed to choose his successor rejected his decision to step down as NCP chief.

"We requested (Sharad) Pawar saheb to consider the NCP committee's resolution (which rejected his decision of stepping down as party chief). He (Pawar) has asked for more time and will convey his decision," Patel said.

Earlier in the day, the committee set up to choose the new Nationalist Congress Party chief rejected Pawar's decision to step down.

"The committee has unanimously passed a resolution. It unanimously rejects his decision to step down and urges him to continue as party president," Patel said after a meeting of the committee. Pawar himself had set up the committee, including Ajit Pawar, Supriya Sule, Patel and Chhagan Bhujbal, after he announced on

May 2 that he would be resigning as NCP chief.

"We will meet Pawar saheb with this resolution and request him to reconsider his decision," Patel, who is also the vice president and convener of the committee, told the media after the meeting.

Patel said the party and the country needs a leader like Pawar. "Pawar saheb is a respected leader in the country. There was a strong response against Pawar's decision. The emotions cannot be ignored," Patel said.

As the meeting was underway, several NCP workers wearing caps with the message "I am with saheb" demanded that Pawar reconsider his decision.

Pawar on Tuesday sprang a surprise by announcing his decision to quit as president of the party he founded and headed since 1999 when he left the Congress to chart his own political course.

The announcement, made at an event, stunned leaders and workers of the 24-year-old party.

Pawar, a Rajya Sabha MP and one of the stalwarts of the Opposition, had said he was stepping down as NCP chief but was not retiring from public life.

BJP 'sold governance' in Karnataka, alleges Congress



NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): The Congress on Friday described the outgoing BJP government in Karnataka as "corrupt" and accused it of having "sold governance" in the southern state.

Ahead of the May 10 Karnataka assembly election, the Congress released a set of posters listing out the "corruption rates" in the state between 2019 and 2023 while terming the BJP government a "trouble engine".

Sharing one of the posters of the "corruption rate list", former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said the people of Karnataka will give the BJP only 40 seats as the party seems to be in love with the number. "BJP's 40 per cent commission Sarkara's 'Rate Card'! 'Trouble Engine' BJP is in love with the number 40, people of Karnataka will give them 40 seats only," Gandhi said on Twitter.

The Congress has been hitting out at the BJP government in Karnataka with the "40 per cent commission sarkara" jibe as it seeks to wrest power from the BJP in Karnataka, the only state in southern India where the saffron party is in power.

The "40 per cent commission" row erupted in the southern state following the death of Belagavi-based contractor Santosh Patil last year who had earlier alleged that then minister K S Eshwarappa demanded 40

per cent commission for the release of funds for the civil works undertaken by him at a village.

Posting a photo of the "corruption rates" poster, Congress general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh tweeted, "The rate at which BJP has sold governance in Karnataka. This is the BJP double engine of 'Delhihoo' and 'BengaluruLoot'."

Congress general secretary in-charge of Karnataka Randeep Surjewala tweeted, "The Digit '40' is ingrained in BJP! The 40-km roadshow in Bengaluru by prime minister today seems to depict the symbolism of 40 per cent BJP Sarkara! As Manipur burns, PM is busy electioneering. Is this the way PM follows Raj Dharma"? "The Bommai government and the BJP are busy in Hindu-Muslim and raising fake religious bogeys as the IT and Innovation hub Bengaluru suffers job losses. Cognizant to lay off 3,500 employees. The atmosphere of polarisation, violence and BJP-driven hate is driving investment and jobs away from Karnataka," he said.

"Time to sack the divisive BJP. Time for a change. Change is here. Congress is here," Surjewala said.

The BJP, however, hit back saying the Congress has honestly proposed its own "commission rate card" with the people of Karnataka. "Appreciation where it's due! The Congress Party has honestly proposed its Commission Rate Card to the people of Karnataka. The only thing they have missed out is that you will have to pay protection money in addition to these commissions to save yourself from PFI," BJP MP Tejasvi Surya tweeted sharing a copy of the Congress' advertisement in a newspaper. "The Congress' dirty tricks department is working overtime to manufacture fake news. They had earlier fabricated a news item involving CT Ravi and the culprit was arrested. This digital artist too will meet the same fate," he said in another tweet.



Modi to attend Bastille Day Parade in Paris as guest of honour on July 14

NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend this year's Bastille Day Parade in Paris as the guest of honour on July 14, the Ministry of External Affairs announced on Friday. An Indian armed forces contingent will also participate in the parade along with their French counterparts, the MEA said in a statement.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership, Prime Minister Modi has accepted French President Emmanuel Macron's invitation to attend this year's Bastille Day Parade as the guest of honour, it said.

Reacting to the announcement, Macron in a tweet in French and Hindi said, "Dear Narendra, it will be my pleasure to welcome you to Paris as the guest of honour for the 14th of July parade." The MEA said that Prime Minister Modi's visit is expected to herald the next phase of the India-France strategic partnership by setting new and ambitious goals for strategic, cultural, scientific, academic and economic cooperation, including in a wide

range of industries. India and France have a shared vision on peace and security, especially in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, and uphold the objectives and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which are also the basis of their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, it said.

"This historic visit will also deliver common initiatives in order to respond to the key challenges of our time, including climate change, biodiversity loss and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, and will be an opportunity for India and France to reaffirm their commitment to multilateralism, including in the context of India's G20 presidency," according to the statement.

ED, CBI won't help BJP get votes: Mamata

SAMSHERGANJ (WB), May 5 (PTI): West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday took potshots at the BJP, saying that central agencies such as CBI and ED will not help the saffron party get votes in next year's general elections. The Trinamool Congress supremo called upon all opposition parties in the country to unite and fight the BJP together in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

"I urge all opposition parties to unitedly fight the BJP in the 2024 elections. The BJP is using the ED and the CBI to harass opposition leaders, but agencies will not help it get votes," Banerjee said while speaking at a government programme where she handed over land deeds to those who have lost their lands to river erosion at Samsheerganj in Murshidabad district. She alleged that despite several requests to the BJP-led Union government, the state administration has not received any help in arresting Ganga erosion, which is a major issue in Murshidabad and Malda districts.

Banerjee claimed that the state did not get its share of ₹ 700 crore for the development of the local people from India's water sharing treaty with Bangladesh.

Zardari calls for collective approach by SCO to combat terrorism

'CPEC can be a force multiplier for regional connectivity'

BENALIM (GOA), May 5 (PTI): Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Friday called for a collective approach by the SCO to combat terrorism and not get caught up in "weaponising terrorism for diplomatic point scoring".

His remarks at the India-hosted conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Goa came shortly after external affairs minister S Jaishankar said terrorism in all its forms, including cross-border terrorism, must be stopped.

"... We firmly believe that there can be no justification for terrorism and it must be stopped in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism," Jaishankar said, in an apparent reference to Pakistan's support to terrorist activities against India.

Bhutto-Zardari in his address said terrorism continues to threaten global security and that collective security of our peoples is our joint responsibility.

"Let's not get caught up in weaponising terrorism for diplomatic point scoring," he said, in comments seen as a veiled dig at



India. He also talked about the need for ensuring respect for universally recognised principles such as peace, cooperation, regional integration and economic opportunities within the SCO.

"Unilateral and illegal measures by States in violation of international law and Security Council resolutions run counter to the SCO objectives. We need to be un-

ambiguous in keeping our commitments and charting out a new future for our people. One that is not based on conflict preservation but on conflict resolution," he said. Though Bhutto-Zardari did not make any specific references or clarified the context, his remarks are seen as an indirect reference to India's policy on Kashmir.

The text of his speech was released by the Pakistan foreign ministry.

Ties between India and Pakistan came under severe strain after India announced withdrawing special powers of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcation of the state into two union territories in August 2019.

On combating terrorism, the Pakistan foreign minister said a collective approach is required to deal with the challenge.

"When I speak on this topic, I do so not only as the foreign minister of Pakistan whose people have suffered the most in terms of number of attacks and number of casualties. I also speak as the son whose mother was assassinated at the hands of terrorists," he said.

"I feel the pain of this loss, empathise

with victims across the world in a way most can't. I and my country are firmly committed to be part of regional and global efforts for eradicating this menace. This requires not only a comprehensive approach but also a collective approach," he added.

"It requires that we let this challenge unite us to fight it rather than divide us to become its victim. Our success requires us to isolate this issue from geo-political partisanship," he said.

The Pakistan foreign minister said "practical and pragmatic solutions exist for us to put an end to this chapter once and for all."

"We must stop conflating non-state actors with state actors," he noted.

India has been attempting to drum up global support to put pressure on Islamabad to dismantle the terror infrastructure with the country as a number of Pakistan-based terror groups carried out a series of attacks in India in the last several years, including the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008. Talking about various challenges facing

the region, Bhutto-Zardari said the solution to the collective challenges should be collective action, and not a divided reaction. "While our problems may seem immense, I believe as a united human race we have the capacity to not only deal with the challenges but to learn lessons for our collective good, and build in the resilience that will equip us to address future challenges," he said.

"We must isolate these issues from hyper-partisan geopolitics if we are to succeed. Our excuse cannot be we were too divided to put up a fight," Bhutto-Zardari added.

Highlighting the need for poverty alleviation in the region, he said it can be addressed through common efforts and by learning from each other's experiences.

Referring to the importance of connectivity, he said the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can be a force multiplier for regional connectivity.

India has been strongly critical of the CPEC as it goes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

RCB ARE BETTER PLACED THAN DELHI IN THE STANDINGS

DC, RCB look to end their batting woes as Kotla awaits Kohli's homecoming

NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): Coming on the back of improbable wins, both Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bangalore will not want to leave anything to chance and put up a better batting display in a crucial IPL contest here on Saturday.

While RCB are better placed than Delhi in the standings, the Faf du Plessis-led side can't afford any slip ups as the IPL reaches its business end.

Delhi, who have had a tournament to forget up till now, needed something to go their way and it did in the low-scoring thriller against table leaders Gujarat Titans.

Back in action after three weeks, pacer Khaleel Ahmed and veteran Ishant Sharma got Delhi out of a hole and kept them alive in the competition.

After a win like that, the morale of any team would be on the higher side but Delhi will need to find a way to bat well against the star-studded RCB.

Skipper David Warner was at pains to explain their batting troubles after the previous game. The performance of Indian batters remain a big concern but the effort of Aman Hakim Khan and Rival Patel after a batting collapse offers hope to the struggling outfit.

Phil Salt at the top has either gone boom or bust in the four chances he has got so far while Warner has not got runs in his last three innings. The captain's strike rate has also been a subject of debate but that can be attributed to the collective batting failure of the side.

Batting at three, Priyam Garg looked out of place against high quality fast bowling and he would want to prove his doubters wrong. The team also expects a lot more from the experienced Manish Pandey.

The in-form Axar Patel batted at six against Gujarat but there is a case for him to bat higher up the order.

Considering the game involves Virat Kohli, the stadium is expected to be packed to the rafters.

The RCB star had a lengthy net session on Thursday before he headed back into the pavilion named after him. Following an ugly spat with Gautam Gambhir after the win over LSG, Kohli will be fired up as ever to let his bat do the talking.

Kedar Jadhav, who not so long ago was commenting on the game, finds himself in the thick of action after getting a surprise call up from RCB head coach Sanjay Bangar midway into the



tournament.

The former India batter is expected to solve RCB's middle-order issues, something which has plagued them all through the season.

On a tacky wicket at Lucknow, the bowlers bailed the team out of trouble. Mohammad Siraj got much needed support from a fit

again Josh Hazlewood who both made impact with the new ball.

The spinners Karn Sharma and Wanindu Hasaranga also revelled in friendly conditions but the strip at Feroz Shah Kotla and small dimensions will make their task much tougher.

Squads:

Delhi Capitals: David Warner (captain), Prithvi Shaw, Mitchell Marsh, Sarfaraz Khan, Aman Hakim Khan, Abhishek Porel (wk), Axar Patel, Khaleel Ahmed, Kuldeep Yadav, Rovman Powell, Rilee Rossouw, Anrich Nortje, Mustafizur Rahman, Chetan Sakaria, Mukesh Kumar, Phil Salt, Lungi Ngidi, Praveen Dubey, Lalit Yadav, Rival Patel, Vicky Ostwal, Ishant Sharma, Manish Pandey, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Yash Dhull.

Royal Challengers Bangalore: Faf du Plessis (captain), Akash Deep, Finn Allen, Anuj Rawat, Avinash Singh, Manoj Bhandage, Michael Bracewell, Wanindu Hasaranga, Dinesh Karthik, Siddarth Kaul, Virat Kohli, Mahipal Lomror, Glenn Maxwell, Mohammed Siraj, Wayne Parnell, Harshal Patel, Suyash Prabhudesai, Rajan Kumar, Shahbaz Ahmed, Karn Sharma, Himanshu Sharma, Sonu Yadav, Vijaykumar Vyshak, David Willey.

KL Rahul rules himself out of WTC final, to undergo thigh surgery



NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): India's top-order batter KL Rahul on Friday ruled himself out of the upcoming World Test Championship (WTC) final against Australia and will undergo a thigh surgery on the advice of his medical team.

Rahul, the captain of the Lucknow Super Giants franchise, has been ruled out for an indefinite period due to the injury he sustained during an Indian Premier League game against Royal Challengers Bangalore earlier this week.

The other players who are not available due to injuries are Jasprit Bumrah, Shreyas Iyer and Rishabh Pant. The WTC final will be played at the Oval in London from June 7.

"Absolutely gutted that I won't be at the Oval next month with Team India. I'll do everything I can to get back in blue and help my country. That has always been my focus and priority," Rahul said in a statement he uploaded on his social media handles. "After careful consideration and consultation with the medical team, it's been concluded that I'll be undergoing a surgery on my thigh shortly."

"My focus will be on my rehabilitation and recovery in the coming weeks. It's a tough call to make, but I know it's the right one to ensure a full recovery," he added.

Meanwhile, his IPL franchise too issued a press release saying the batter has suffered a significant tear to his tendon and was facing a "lengthy layoff".

"... Further tests and scans have unfortunately confirmed a significant tear to his tendon which will require surgery," LSG said in the release.

"We are continuing to provide all possible support to KL at this difficult time and are working with him to ensure the best care on his road to recovery. However, the extent of the injury means that he is set for a lengthy layoff, which will include the remainder of this IPL season."

Rahul injured himself while trying to stop a boundary against RCB at Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow, after which he limped off the field with the help of team physio and a player who was in the reserve's list.

"As the team captain, it pains me deeply not to be able to be there during this crucial period. But, I'm confident that the boys will rise to the occasion and give their best performance as always. I'll be cheering for them from the sidelines with all of you, watching every game," Rahul said.

"I want to express gratitude to each one of you - my fans, that gave me the strength to get back up, the LSG management and the BCCI for their promptness, and my teammates for their unwavering support during this difficult time."

Chasing 127 in the game on Monday, Rahul returned to bat at number 11 but struggled to run between the wickets, as RCB won in the last over.

"... I promise to keep you all updated on my progress, and hope to be back on the field sooner than soon. The last few days have been really hard, but I'm determined to come out on top."

"Injuries are never easy, but I'll give it my all as always. Thank you for all the support and good wishes," Rahul said.

Messi and PSG will talk after suspension, Galtier says

PARIS, May 5 (AP): Lionel Messi and Paris Saint-Germain will have discussions about the Argentine player's immediate future with the club when he returns from suspension, coach Christophe Galtier said Friday.

The World Cup champion was suspended by the club this week after he skipped practice to make a promotional trip to Saudi Arabia.

Messi is not expected to extend his contract, and there are only five games remaining this season.

Galtier was asked at a news conference if he'll be able to count on the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner returning to the field after the suspension.

"We'll see when Leo returns what will happen," Galtier said. "Obviously, there will be discussions with the entire club but also with Leo, who is the primary person involved."

The club hasn't confirmed the length of the Argentina great's suspension but French media has reported it to be two weeks, which would mean he'd miss two games. PSG has a five-point lead over second-place Marseille.

Galtier said the club told him that Messi had been suspended, and he declined to say if he endorsed the decision.

Wrestlers still contemplating next move

NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): The protesting wrestlers are still contemplating their next move after the Supreme Court closed proceedings on their plea even as Sports Minister Anurag Thakur requested them to have faith in the system, saying the investigation will make everything crystal clear.

With Delhi Police blocking the entry of more wrestlers to the protest site, only a few farmers could reach Jantar Mantar to extend their support to the aggrieved grapplers.

The usual fervour was missing as the protest entered the 13th day though political and farmer leaders continued to visit the wrestlers.

Congress leaders Kumari Selja, Kiran Choudhary and Anil Kumar extended their support to the grapplers.

"Our legal team and the mentors are still discussing the next move. We will let you know once we finalise something," Olympic medalist Bajrang Punia told PTI.

The wrestlers have the option of moving to a lower court or the Delhi High Court if they are not satisfied with the police investigation into the sexual harassment charges against the outgoing Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brijbhushan Sharan Singh. The Supreme Court on Thursday closed the proceedings

on the women wrestlers' petition, saying the prayer for an FIR has been answered. The wrestlers said the apex court order was not a setback for them.

The Delhi Police has registered two FIRs, including one on POCSO Act, against Singh. The police have also recorded statements of five wrestlers, including the minor.

"It is my request to all the sports persons who are agitating there that whatever their demands were, they were met. Court has also given its directions and they should let an unbiased probe to complete," Thakur said in Lucknow on the sidelines of a Khelo

India event.

"Delhi police will do 'doodh ka doodh pani ka pani' and take strict action as per law," he added.

The wrestlers, who alleged that police personnel misbehaved with them on Wednesday night, have threatened to return the awards the government has bestowed on them in the past.

Renowned wrestling coach Mahvir Phogat, the uncle of Vinesh Phogat, who is the face of the protest, also made a similar threat.

He is a Dronacharya awardee, having received the honour in 2016. "I will return my medals if justice is not delivered in the case," Phogat said.

Asia Cup: Compound archers make clean sweep, power India to top with 14 medals

TASHKENT, May 5 (PTI): India's compound archers bagged all the medals on offer to stamp their authority as the country topped the Asia Cup Stage 2 World Ranking Tournament with seven gold, five silver and two bronze here on Friday. The compound archers made a clean sweep in the men's and women's section to have a share of five gold, two silver and two bronze. In the hunt for all 10 gold medals, India missed a complete domination with the recurve archers losing three finals, all against their Chinese rivals. But that did not stop them from topping the medals tally in the continental showpiece that saw a depleted field, without heavyweights Korea.

Overall, the recurve archers had

a share of two gold and three silver to propel India to the top spot in final standings with 14 medals.

Mrinal Chauhan, who topped the qualification in men's recurve individual section, lost to Wang Baobin 2-6 (29-30, 29-29, 27-28, 26-26). Two points separated the 19-year-old Indian from Baobin who took a decisive lead after winning the first and third sets by slender margins.

Sangeeta was a big letdown as the fourth-seeded Indian squandered a 3-1 cushion and shot a wayward six in the fourth set to go down to her lower-ranked Chinese rival Wu Jiaxin 3-7 (27-26, 27-27, 26-27, 24-27, 26-30).

The recurve women's team of Sangeeta, Madhu Vedwan and Tanisha Verma also disappointed after

losing to their Chinese counterparts 0-6 (52-56, 47-52, 51-52) in a lopsided final. The recurve archers finally managed two gold medals when the men's team and mixed pair teams won their respective finals against the Chinese.

Mrinal Chauhan, Tushar Shelke and Jayanta Talukdar outplayed China 5-1 (57-54, 54-54, 54-51) in the men's team final. The mixed team duo of Chauhan and Sangeeta overcame a scare from China before winning 5-4 (36-37, 39-39, 37-36, 37-37, 20-18). The compound archers showed the way in the morning session when the women's team of Parneet Kaur, Raginee Markoo and Pragati defeated Kazakhstan 232-223 to open India's gold rush.

Mirabai manages only two good lifts, finishes sixth

JINJU (KOREA), May 5 (PTI): Star Indian weightlifter Mirabai Chanu's Asian Championship campaign did not go as per plan as she faltered in snatch and chose not to make her last two clean and jerk attempts to finish sixth here on Friday. The Tokyo Olympics silver medalist, competing in the 49kg category, managed to lift 85kg in snatch and 109kg in clean and jerk for an overall effort of 194kg, a whopping 13kg less than her personal best of 207kg.

Japan's Rira Suzuki, who was competing in the B group finished with the same total 194kg (83kg+111kg). But since she competed before Chanu she finished ahead of the Indian.

Chanu started the snatch with an 85kg lift, which she executed perfectly. She then set a weight of 88kg

as she attempted to match her personal best. The Manipuri, however, failed to heave the barbell in her next two attempts and had to be content with an 85kg total in snatch.

Four lifters had better snatch results than Chanu, all lifting 90kg or above. While Chanu herself has been trying to breach the 90kg-mark in snatch since 2020, head coach Vijay Sharma had told PTI

that the former world champion was unlikely to attempt the coveted lift here. The last time Chanu competed at the Asian Championships in 2021, she had returned home with a bronze medal and a world record in clean and jerk (119kg).

However this time, she only attempted a 109kg lift before deciding

not to go for her final two attempts, the reason for which is not known yet. Sharma has said several times earlier that the aim is to peak at the Asian Games later this year. A medal at the continental multi-sport event is the only one missing from the Manipuri's trophy cabinet.

China's Jiang Huihua won the gold medal with a total lift of 207kg (94kg+113kg). She attempted to break Chanu's world record of 119kg with a lift of 120kg in her final clean and jerk attempt.

Tokyo Olympic gold medalist Hou Zhihui finished second as she heaved 204kg (93kg+111kg) while Thailand's Serodchana Khambao 200kg (90kg+110kg) bagged the bronze medal.

ASIAN C'SHIPS

I don't have many 'yes people' around me which helps in maintaining balance: Gill

NEW DELHI, May 5 (PTI): Instant stardom in Indian cricket has often proved to be fickle and unnerving for talented individuals but Shubman Gill believes that having the right people around helped him immensely in maintaining the balance required in his heady journey.

Considered the next megastar of Indian batting after the peerless Virat Kohli, the 23-year-old Punjab man has enjoyed a dream four months in international cricket between December to March, and is one of the architects of Gujarat Titans' consistent run for the second IPL season in a row.

For a young man who has achieved a lot of fame and adulation, how does he handle success while having a balanced approach towards life?

"I think it has a lot to do with the upbringing and the friends around me. I don't have many 'yes people' (hanger ons) around me. I have more friends around me who are challenging my decisions, whatever they may be on field or off field. So

that really helps," Gill told PTI in an exclusive interview.

He is still very young but in Gujarat Titans' set-up, Gill is already a senior member. And he is enjoying the responsibility that comes with being a sounding board in a high-stakes IPL team.

"I think I can give my inputs on how the batter might be thinking right now," said the man, who has already played 110 senior level T20 games.

He believes that in crunch situations, a bowler has a lot on his plate, and there he comes in.

"It is important sometimes in that situation as a bowler, there is so much going on -- you have to see the field, you have to see where you want to bowl that sometimes you don't focus on what the batter is trying to do, or where he is trying to hit you. So I think those inputs are important." He has scored seven international hundreds across formats through the last season with a staggering 65 plus average after 24 ODI games.

Khelo India University Games (KIUG), to be held from May 25 in Uttar Pradesh

Once infamous for riots, UP is now a sports hub: Anurag Thakur

LUCKNOW, May 5 (PTI): Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Friday said the state of Uttar Pradesh was once notorious for witnessing riots but has now transformed into a sports hub.

Thakur's comment came ahead of the third edition of Khelo India University Games (KIUG), scheduled to be held from May 25 to June 3 across four cities in the state as more than 4700 athletes from 200-plus universities are expected to participate.

Thakur launched the logo, jersey, mascot and anthem of the Games in presence of UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

"UP which was known for 'danga' is now known for 'khelon ka dangal'. Khelo India not only unearths sportsmen but also hone their skills," Thakur said adding that Khelo India centres will be set up in all the districts of UP.

"A few days back we completed five years of Khelo India, which



has progressed very fast. The players have also won medals for the country and today I can say that the third biggest event of Khelo India University Games is going to be held in Uttar Pradesh," he said. "The way chief minister Adityanath has worked to promote sports here, I can say that if India win medals anywhere in the

world, Uttar Pradesh will have a big contribution in it."

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made a provision of Rs 3200 crore for Khelo India scheme so that athletes do not face any kind of inconvenience in their efforts to bring laurels for the country.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath

The third edition of the KIUG will feature 21 sporting disciplines, the highest-ever in the history of the Games as rowing is set make its debut. The competition will be hosted in Varanasi, Noida, Gorakhpur and Lucknow

said the University Games will prove to be a milestone in promoting sports activities among the youth of the state.

"Today Uttar Pradesh is not only the state with the largest population, but every event held there inevitably grows to be the biggest. I can assure that this will be the biggest event ever," he said.

The third edition of the KIUG will feature 21 sporting disciplines, the highest-ever in the history of the Games as rowing is set make its debut.

The competition will be hosted

in Varanasi, Noida, Gorakhpur and Lucknow.

The shooting competition will be organised in New Delhi at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

Two indigenous sports -- Malakhamb and Yogasana -- were part of the last edition of the KIUG held in Karnataka.

Adityanath and Thakur also flagged off the torch relay on the occasion.

These four torches will travel through all the districts of Uttar Pradesh before returning to Lucknow on May 25.