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Andhra, WB witness violence, Polling peaceful in J&K Fourth phase of LS polls Over 62 pc turnout till 5 pm; voting percentage to go up

NEW DELHI, May 13: A voter turnout of more than 62 per cent was recorded till 5 pm on Monday in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha polls in 96 constituencies spread over 10 states and Union Territories amid incidents of violence in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. According to the Election Commission, a voting percentage of 62.31 was recorded till 5 pm. The voting will continue till 6 pm. Jammu and Kashmir witnessed the lowest voting percentage till 5 pm with 35.75 per cent of voters exercising their franchise, while West Bengal recorded the highest with 75.66 per cent. Among other states, Andhra Pradesh recorded 68.04 per cent polling, Bihar 54.14 per cent, Jharkhand 63.14 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 68.01 per cent, Maharashtra 52.49 per cent, Odisha 62.96



per cent, Telangana 61.16 per cent and Uttar Pradesh 56.35 per cent. BJP candidate in Telangana's Hyderabad Lok Sabha seat K Madhavi Latha was booked by election authorities after a video clip surfaced online in which she was purportedly seen asking burqa-clad women voters to show their faces to compare with the photo identity cards. In Andhra Pradesh, the TDP and YSRCP traded charges and accused each other of resorting to violence, especially in Palnadu, Kadapa and Annamayya districts.

YSRCP also wrote to the EC, alleging poll code violations by rival TDP in several assembly segments, including Vemuru, Darsi, Ichchapuram, Kuppam, Macherla, Markapuram, Palakonda and Pedakurapadu. Polling for 175 Assembly seats and 25 Lok Sabha constituencies in the coastal state is taking place simultaneously. The YSRCP alleged that TDP leaders captured five polling booths in the Vemuru constituency as it requested additional police forces and immediate action. The ruling party also claimed that the polling officer of booth number 57 in Kuppam colluded with the opposition TDP leaders to allow them to rig elections. YSRCP leader and Tenali MLA A Shiva Kumar allegedly manhandled a voter in Tenali following an argument, police said, adding the voter also retaliated. At Dalavaipalli village in Railway Kodur constituency, an EVM was destroyed while cars belonging to the ruling party and TDP were damaged, a police official said. A TDP agent was attacked at Nakkaladinne village in Myduruku constituency, leading to his hospitalisation. The YSRCP alleged that party agent Suresh Reddy was stabbed at Mandi Krishnapuram village in Chittoor's Gudipala mandal. It also alleged that TDP supporters attacked party member B Anji Reddy at Aravallipadu in the Darsi constituency. TDP MLC Mohammed Ahmed Shariff wrote a letter to Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena, complaining about alleged attacks by YSRCP cadres on TDP supporters at Rentala village in Renthintala (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Condolences pouring in at the demise of anti-witch hunting crusader Padma Shri Birubala Rabha dies at 75



GUWAHATI, May 13: Padma Shri awardee Birubala Rabha, renowned for her fight against witch hunting, passed away at a hospital here on Monday after a long battle with cancer. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed his deep condolences over the passing away of the social activist. "I am deeply distressed to learn about the passing away of Padma Shri Birubala Rabha. Through her untiring efforts to end social evils she illuminated the paths of scores of women with hope and confidence. "Rising through a challenging life, she epitomised courage against all odds. Assam will forever remain grateful for her leadership in serving society," he posted on X. Representing the Assam government, environment and forest minister Chandra Mohan Patowary reached the GMCH and offered his condolences. "It is a big loss to the state and the country. We will never get another person like Birubala Rabha, who defied all odds and stood up for humanity," he added. Her mortal remains will be taken to her home in Goalpara district and the last rites will be performed with full (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Modi govt 'anti-MSME', thousands of small business shut down: Cong

NEW DELHI, May 13: The Congress on Monday accused the Narendra Modi-led central government of being "anti-MSME" and alleged that thousands of small businesses have shut down in the past 10 years. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh claimed that the vital MSME sector accounts for 30 per cent of GDP, 40 per cent of exports and employs 12 crore people. "However, the small businesses of India have spent 10 years suffering in this 'anyay kaal' through neglect or through malicious anti-MSME policies. It is a well-established fact that Narendra Modi has spent the last decade working only for his few chosen friends," he said in a series of posts on X. "As a result, MSMEs have contributed to the lowest fraction of

GDP in decades, face the highest tax rates in decades, and are dealing with severe job losses and price rise. Thousands of MSMEs have been shutting down," he added. The Congress general secretary pointed to six major issues relating to "Modi-made MSME mismanagement", which include demonetisation that, he said, affected MSMEs the most and "shoddy" implementation of the GST regime. Citing reasons for small businesses shutting down, Ramesh alleged that policies favour "crony corporates", "ill-conceived Income Tax 45-day payment rule", uncontrolled dumping of Chinese goods, and the MSME board being captured by "BJP cronies". His remarks came after reports citing a survey said 72 per cent of MSMEs (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

INDIA bloc leaders scared of Pakistan's nuclear power: Modi

MUZAFFARPUR/HAJIPUR/ARAN (BIHAR), May 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday lashed out at the opposition INDIA bloc, calling its leaders "cowards" who were "scared of Pakistan's nuclear power". Addressing three back-to-back rallies in Bihar's Hajipur, Muzaffarpur and Saran Lok Sabha constituencies, Modi made an apparent reference to a recent statement of National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, without mentioning him by name. "The INDIA bloc seems to have leaders who are scared of Pakistan and have nightmares of its nuclear power," he said. The remarks come in the backdrop of comments by Abdullah about Pakistan having atom bombs and not wearing bangles. "If Pakistan does not wear bangles, we will make the country wear these. I knew they did not have food-



grains. Now, I come to know they do not even have adequate supply of bangles," the PM said. "But, we must look carefully at the opposition which seems to be full of cowards and timid people, who give a clean chit to Pakistan on terrorism, raise doubts on surgical strikes... their Left allies even want our nuclear arsenal to be dismantled," he said. Modi maintained that the INDIA bloc had worked out a formula, which would allow five of its leaders, to enjoy a year of premiership each. "Just imagine what type of a mess we would get to see if the bloc's plan to have a different PM, every year, for five years, succeeds. However, they are a motley group that is bound to fail," he said. "The current elections are for having a government that will give a further boost to the standing and clout enjoyed by the country," the PM said. Modi also said the money recovered in raids against politicians "belonged to the country's poor". "I will tell you why they are crying hoarse against the action of agencies like the ED. During the previous Congress regime, the ED seized only Rs 35 lakh, which could be contained in a school bag. Ever since (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam: Mid-segment businesses hit hard by high tax, inflation, absence of schemes



GUWAHATI, May 13: Businessmen, traders and contractors in Assam are keeping their fingers crossed as they hope that crucial issues such as high taxes, exclusion from financial schemes and inflationary pressure that are affecting the mid-segment businesses will be resolved by the new dispensation at the Centre after the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. They felt that there would be an adverse impact on the economy if the mid-segment businesses continued to reel under pressure, despite being one of the biggest employment-generating sectors after the railways. While interacting with PTI, businessmen and traders, who are from Marwari and Bengali communities in the state, also alleged

that the government has "totally neglected" the medium segment of businesses across sectors. "In the present scenario, the government is focussing on industrialisation. But the medium size businesses are not progressing. The government has not rolled out any scheme targeting the medium scale units," Sivasagar-based garment trader Rupchand Karnani said. The government claims that many schemes are launched, but when traders go to banks and financial institutions to avail of these facilities, too many documents are sought and finally, they become a failure, he said. Karnani, also the Sivasagar district secretary of All India Marwari Federation, claimed that the sales of every trader were down, as compared to the previous years, during the recent Rongali Bihu, which is the main festival of Assam. "The government (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Nagaland to set political affairs committee on Naga issue

HT Correspondent DIMAPUR, May 13: The Nagaland government has decided to constitute a political affairs committee to act as a facilitator in finding an inclusive solution to the long-drawn Indo-Naga political issue. The decision was taken at high-level political meeting chaired by chief minister Neiphiu Rio on May 9. The panel will comprise the council of ministers and the legislature party leaders of all political parties in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly. An official circular issued by Nagaland parliamentary affairs minister KG Kenye said the move has been reinitiated with a renewed vigour in furtherance of the spirit of the all-party opposition-less government to achieve a broad consensus for an early and amicable settlement. Kenye directed all legislature party leaders to set up political consultative committees in consultation with their respective party organisations to deal with the matters exclusively for the purpose. The circular said the matter be treated on priority and the list of political consultative committees may be submitted to the parliamentary affairs minister at the earliest. Kenye said the size of the members comprising the political consultative committees could vary as per the numerical strength of the party legis-



lators in the current assembly. He said it would be a seven-member committee for 10 MLAs and above, five-member committee for five MLAs and above, three-member committee for one MLA and above, and convener and co-convener for Independent MLAs. Kenye said the signing of the Framework Agreement with the NSCN (IM) on August 3, 2015, and the Agreed Position with the Naga National Political Groups on November 17, 2017, raised hopes that the people would have a peace accord soon. Highlighting the state government's role as a active facilitator in the peace talks, Kenye noted the lack of a conclusive outcome despite (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KADAC honours top achievers of HSLC and HSSLC examinations

HT Bureau DIPHU, May 13: Karbi Anglong District Academic Council (KADAC) felicitated the outstanding students of Karbi Anglong in the recently declared High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) examinations result of 2024. The felicitation was held in the Inspector of Schools conference hall here on Monday. Speaking to the media, inspector of schools and president of KADAC, Biren Sing Engti said the program was organised to recognise schools that achieved a cent percent pass in the HSLC and HSSLC examinations. He also extended his thanks to all the parents, school authorities, village headmen and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) for bringing about good results. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Among the states that responded, the study said the figures reveal alarming patterns Over 9,600 children jailed in adult prisons between January 2016 and December 2021: Study

NEW DELHI, May 13: More than 9,600 children were wrongly incarcerated in adult prisons across India between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2021, a new study has found. The data for the study -- "Incarceration of Children in Prisons in India" -- was obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. The study by legal rights body iProbono sheds light on a deeply concerning issue affecting the juvenile justice system in India. The data indicates that at least 9,681 children were wrongly incarcerated in adult prisons between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2021. "This means an average of over 1,600 children were transferred out of prisons across the



country every year," the study said, referring to the children identified by Juvenile Justice Boards (JJB) and moved to juvenile homes from adult jails. This figure was ascertained on the basis of responses to RTI requests by 285 district and central prisons out of a total of 570. "This also does not include the 749 other prisons from which we did not request data, including sub-

jails, women's prisons, open prisons, special prisons, borstal schools and other prisons. It also, as previously mentioned, only includes those who were successfully identified and transferred, not all those who were juveniles at the time of their alleged offence, including those identified by prison visitors, families or through self-identification," it said. Several states failed to adequately respond to enquiries, with notable non-compliance from Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Nagaland and the Union Territory of Ladakh. Among the states that responded, the study said the figures reveal alarming patterns. With a response rate -- jails that provided data (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Haven't received anything worthy of being probed by Indian agencies: Jaishankar

NIJJAR CASE

MUMBAI, May 13: India has never received anything which is specific and worthy of being pursued by its probe agencies, external affairs minister S Jaishankar on Monday said over a fourth arrest made by Canada in the killing of Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Jaishankar said New Delhi is open to an investigation if Ottawa has any evidence or information related to any violence which is relevant to be investigated in India. "We have never received anything which is specific and worthy of being pursued by our investigative agencies and I am not aware that anything has changed in the last few days in that regard," the minister said in response to a question during a press conference here. As a consular practice, it is informed to the government or the embassy of the country of origin when arrests of foreign nationals are made, Jaishankar said. Nijjar, 45, was killed outside Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia on June 18, 2023.



A fourth Indian national has been arrested by Canadian authorities in connection with the killing of Nijjar, a week after police arrested three Indians linked with the high-profile case that has severely strained India's relations with Canada. Amandeep Singh, 22, a resident of Brampton, Surrey, and Abbotsford areas of Canada, has been charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder, as per officials. (PTI)



## NFR monitors infrastructural health for better safety



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 13:** The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has been making a constant endeavour to make train journeys safer and secure. It continues to adopt technically advanced measures to upgrade and maintain its infrastructure. Modern communication systems are being used to control train movements by providing visual information to drivers and operators. During April the NFR has installed Thick Web Switch Point machines with clamp type locking in 24 stations across the zone. To further enhance efficiency and safety, NFR has carried out various up gradations and replacements in its existing signalling system at several sections within the zone. During April the NFR has commissioned intermediate block signalling between Bagrakot and Sivok section, which will increase the operational capacity of the section resulting in movement of more trains. Data logger has been installed and commissioned at the Pawakhali Station in Katihar divi-

sion for electronically monitoring operation of various safety gears. Electric lifting barriers have been replaced at six level crossing gates in Rangiya division to enhance the safety at level crossing gates. 14.715 km signalling cable have been newly laid at various stations in Tinsukia, Lumding, Rangiya and Katihar divisions. Automatic fire detection and alarm system have been commissioned at 10 locations over the zone as a part of safety measures to prevent any damage to the railway properties. System integrity testing has been carried out at 32 level crossing gates of NFR. A total of 916 signalling batteries of varied capacities were also being replaced in all the five divisions, enabling better reliability of safety gears. Infrastructural up gradation in railway system ensures safe operation of trains and their reliability and maintenance directly affects the capacity of railway operations. NFR is dedicatedly working to ensure a superior, punctual and safer railway experience for all its customers.

## Deomorni College organises sensitisation programme breast cancer

**HT Correspondent**  
**MANGALDAI, May 13:** The Women's Cell, IQAC of the Deomorni Degree College in collaboration with the Darrang Cancer Center organised an awareness programme on breast cancer at the college auditorium in Mangaldai. The programme was presided over by Gita Kalita, principal of the Deomorni Degree College. In attendance were several dignitaries, including Siyad Itikar Sobhani, superintendent of the Darrang Cancer Center, Shahidul Islam, health officer Dipmani Sarma, senior nurse Rosna Begum, patient navigator Niranjan Saikia, college students and trainees from the Deomorni B.Ed. College. In the programme, Sobhani explained thoroughly regarding breast cancer and its causes. Meanwhile, Shahidul Islam in his speech, deliberated on oral cancer caused by tobacco and what precautions one should take to keep it at bay. Similarly, Rosna Begum and Niranjan Saikia also briefed the audience. The guests were introduced by Hiranmayee Medhi, assistant professor of the department of education. Dipika Devi, assistant professor of the department of philosophy gave the vote of thanks.

## ONGC Bassantutsav 2024 ends

**HT Correspondent**  
**SIVASAGAR, May 13:** Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited's (ONGC) three-day Bassantutsav (Spring Festival) concluded at the Dr Bhupen Hazarika Auditorium in the ONGC Colony in Sivasagar on Sunday. Singer Nilotpal Bora's melodious songs and Ranjit Gogoi's thrilling husori presentation were the main attractions of the cultural extravaganza held on the occasion. Nirjuma Kakoty of Nagaon was crowned the 'ONGC Basanta Rani 2024' in the state level Bor Biguwoti contest. Pahari Buragohai of Dhemaji and Barasa Burgohain of Lakhimpur emerged as the second and third runners-up in the contest. The Surjumukhi Husori Dal got the best Bihu troupe award followed by Samannay Husori Dal of Charaideo and Rongman Anajori Husori Dal of Moran in the second and third positions. Rajesh Tewari, executive director of ONGC accompanied by his wife Rani Tewari gave away the prizes to the winners of various categories. 'Anajori' a souvenir was also released by the guests. Tiwari and Pawan Kumar Jalutharia, president of the celebration committee flagged off a massive cultural procession, which was joined by hundreds of ONGCians, family members and guests including noted actor Preety Konkana. Diverse ethnic cultural troupes from Janjhi Moranchiga, Segun Chariali, Patsako, Palengi, Desangmukh, Katori, Deoriting and Sonapur took part in the procession. Saptarathi Gavoru Zengbihu Dal was adjudged the best followed by Borhamthiri Gavoru Zengbihu Dal, and Darikaporia Moijnajan Dal in the second and third places in the Zeng Bihu contest held on May 11. The cultural evening was graced by Union minister of state for petroleum Rameswar Telli and popular singer Rakesh Riyyan, who enthralled the audience.

## Winners of state pageants to get direct entry in grand finale of Miss Universe India

## Miss Universe India launches state pageants

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 13:** Miss Universe India will hold state pageants, the winners of which will secure direct entry to the grand finale of the coveted beauty pageant. Miss Universe India announced its expansion strategy to discover talents across the nation through a state-wise format. As part of this initiative, it has appointed state directors to oversee the details of talent hunts through host state pageants.. The audition for Assam is slated to be held at the end of June this year. A team from Miss Universe India is currently on a tour of the Northeast, comprising of Amjad Khan, director of operations and marketing, Miss Universe India, Arshina Sumbul, Miss Grand International India 2023 and Sophiya Singh, Miss Asia Pacific India 2024. Their objective is to facilitate the audition process and assess the qualifications of contestants from across the Northeast and the country. During a meeting held in the city



on Monday, the team was welcomed by Dominic Savio Diengdoh, state director of Miss Universe Assam. Expressing his enthusiasm over the soft launch of

## Rabha played instrumental role in making state government pass Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, 2018

# Governor mourns death of Padma Shri Birubala Rabha

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 13:** Governor Gulab Chand Kataria mourned the death of revered social activist, Padma Shri Birubala Rabha who breathed her last in a hospital in Guwahati on Monday. Rabha had been undergoing treatment at the State Cancer Institute in the city for the past few months. Expressing his deep condolences Kataria said, "With the death of Birubala Rabha, the state has lost a compassionate soul and an activist who dedicated her life for the emancipation and empowerment of women". He said that belonging to a humble family, Rabha displayed her profound and unflinching commitment, fought vociferously against the social evil of witch hunting. He said that she is an inspiration to lakhs of women, who by virtue of her courage fought against social evil. Her demise would create an irreparable void in the social life. However, she left behind a rich legacy of her works and contributions, which would be a source of inspiration for the women in the society. "I express my condolence and pray to the Almighty for eternal peace of the departed soul", the Governor added. Notably, a crusader of anti-witch hunting, Rabha was instrumental in making the state government pass the Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, 2018. She was conferred the Padma Shri Award for social work in 2021. She received the 12th Upendranath Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award, 2014, Sati



Sadhani Award in 2017. Rabha, in 2008, was felicitated by Reliance Industries Limited in Mumbai under their third edition of Real Heroes — ordinary people, extraordinary service and has found mention in the Switzerland 1,000 women peace project, which celebrates the work of 1,000 peace women across the 150 countries of the globe. Condolences poured in from different social organisations, students union, leading citizens across the state including the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro. CEM of BTR,

I extend my sincere condolences to her bereaved family in this hour of grief. May almighty grant eternal peace to her soul", Boro said. Assam cabinet minister, Utkhao Gwra Brahma, Raja Sabha MP, Rungwra Narzary, Bodo Sahitya Sabha president, Surath Narzary, ABSU president Dipen Boro and several organisations representing different communities have extended their deep condolences to the bereaved family members of Rabha. The organisation leaders and members have offered their prayers to the almighty for eternal peace of the departed soul. On the other hand, Samahar Natya Gosthee expressed its deep condolence at the demise of Rabha. Rabha and her NGO 'Mission Birubala' worked in severe hostile situations in remote places, while superstitious villagers tried to kill the 'iron lady' by branding her a witch on several occasions at different places. Samahar Natya Gosthee's much acclaimed stage play 'Tamasha' and street play 'Aei Maaitie' against witch hunting menace were loosely inspired by her lifelong struggle. Ms Rabha formed 'Mission Birubala' in 2012 to create awareness among people against the social evil and all forms of superstitious beliefs, besides providing rehabilitation to the victims of witch hunting menace. The organisation has saved lives of nearly 60 victims so far in Majuli, Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Tinsukia and other districts.

## DHSK College signs MoU with GNIOT



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, May 13:** The Dibrugarh Hanumanbax Surajmali Kanoi (DHSK) College has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Greater Noida Institute of Technology (GNIOT), an institute of management studies at Hotel Raj Meridian in Dibrugarh. The MoU will facilitate educational exchanges, seminars, workshops, training and various research programmes between the two institutions to expedite the educational process. The MoU was signed on May 11 in the presence of the principal of the DHSK College and Sashi Kanta Saikia, coordinator of IQAC, Anup Jyoti Bharali, coordi-

nator of student relation, Jyoti Prasad Phukan, coordinator of innovation, Aditya Dahal and group head of GNIOT, Pankaj Kumar, regional head of GIMS Pradeep Dey, vice president of GNIOT Chandrakant Singh and Jyotirmoy Hazarika, alumni of DHSK College and chairman of Spear, an NGO. The event was attended by Ranjan Changmai, former professor of DHSK College, Hriday Chowdhury, principal of the Dibrugarh Government Boys School, Basabi Bhattacharya Hazarika, principal of Gurukul, Bikash Gogoi, principal of Dr. Radhakrishnan School, officials of Spear and many other dignitaries.

## Meeting on model flood relief camps held in Hojai

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOJAI, May 13:** The Hojai district administration conducted a meeting on the theme of 'Assured Minimum Facilities and Services in Model Flood Relief Camps' at the Conference Hall of the district commissioner here on Monday. The meeting was presided over by Lachit Kr. Das, Hojai district commissioner cum chairman of the District Disaster management Authority. The meeting was attended by ADC cum CEO, DDMA, all the additional district commissioners, circle officers, assistant commissioners, executive magistrates of municipal boards, DPO, FOs and all the members of DDMA.

## Students felicitated in Sivasagar

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 13:** A felicitation ceremony was organised at the Desang Rajabari High School in Sivasagar on Monday for students securing cent per cent marks in the HSLC examination. The ceremony was graced by Sivasagar district commissioner, Aditya Vikram Yadav, Devajoti Gogoi, inspector of schools and Harsh Khemka, director of Yuvaan Educative LLP. Pranab Baishya, principal of the Desang Rajabari High School and president of the High School Teachers Association, Sivasagar. The district commissioner asked the achievers to aim higher in the field where they have already excelled. He individually enquired on the career aspiration of all the candidates of tourism and hospitality subject. Harsh Khemka, director of Yuvaan Educative LLP said that the results of the school in the vocational subject show the rapidly increasing interest of students of government schools in vocational subjects. They now want to pursue skill based learning along with traditional subjects. A total of seven candidates, Anisha Tanti, Priya Gogoi, Arju Ara Ahmed, Chayanika Boruah, Farhiya Begum, Jesmen Begum, Yesmen Begum secured 100

## Karbi students from fringe villages explore Aaranyak's nature camp

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 13:** A three-day nature camp for young Karbi students has been organised by Aaranyak, a biodiversity conservation organisation in collaboration with the Chandrasing Rongpi Memorial High School at Kohora in Karbi Anglong district. The aim of the nature camp, which took place from May 10 to 12, was to foster a deep connection with nature from an early age and to create awareness about the natural world around us and its importance in sustaining our lives. The event was organised to promote environmental awareness and education, and featured various engaging sessions and activities led by experienced resource persons and supported by dedicated team members of research driven organisation Aaranyak. A total of 23 students from 9 villages namely, Bakring Engti, Chandrasing Rongpi, Diring Lekthe, Engle Pathar, Khaalun Terang, Phumen Engti, Sivoram Terang, Diring Lekthe and Sarbura Singnar of the Kaziranga Karbi Anglong Landscape participated in the three-day long event.



gaging. An introductory session through memory games was also held among the students. Participants then enjoyed games such as Web of Life, and puzzle game, fostering teamwork and environmental awareness. Aaranyak's Bhaskor Barukial delivered a presentation on 'Birds and How to Identify Them' to equip the students with foundational knowledge about avian species. A nature trail was organised and led by Aaranyak experts Arif Hussain, Bhaskor Barukial and Rangina Phangcho. The participants had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the great outdoors and observe the natural surroundings firsthand. The students showcased their learning through poster presentations on the nature trail, followed by an experience-sharing session. This interactive approach reinforced their understanding and encouraged reflection. Practical activities, such as learning on soil texture and characteristics, planting trees and visiting the community nursery to learn and observe vermin-composting were also held. Fun games like treasure hunt and musical chair correlating the natural resources variation with Hoolock gibbon voices added an element of excitement and playfulness to the learning experience. Aaranyak's Jayanta Kumar Roy interacted with the students discussed on the 'Importance of Frogs: Toads in the Ecosystem' and shed light on the vital role these amphibians play in maintaining the ecological balance. The participants also engaged in the break and paper game, which explored engineering principles and the application of science in nature. The camp concluded with a captivating drama performance by the students, divided into four groups. The scripts, written by Swapan Nath and directed by the Aaranyak team, provided an entertaining and creative platform for the participants to express their learning and experiences. An exhilarating safari guided by experts Bhaskor Barukial, Arif Hussain, and Dipankar Lahkar. The students' senses were heightened as they encountered the wilderness up close. Following the safari, the students engaged in a creative poster-making activity, where they had to illustrate and name four different animals or birds they had encountered during their excursion. After capturing their memories on paper, Lahkar led an insightful discussion on endangered species of animals and their habitats, raising awareness about the importance of conservation efforts. Mirmili Engtipi, a participant, said, "I liked the program very much, and such a programme will encourage students like us to participate in nature conservation as well as promote interest in learning". The event would not have been successful without the support and dedication of the Aaranyak team members and Theso Group of Chandrasing Rongpi village respectively.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Everything popular is wrong. -Oscar Wilde

India's Defence Sector surge

India's defence manufacturing sector is experiencing a significant surge, contributing notably to the nation's economy and bolstering the stock market. The industry's remarkable performance is evidenced by the substantial growth of India's top defence stocks, with a surge of up to 446 percent in the past year. Among the standout performers are HAL, Mazagon Dock, Bharat Forge, and others. The Nifty India Defence Index has soared by 142 percent in the last twelve months, outperforming the benchmark Nifty 50 by a considerable margin. This impressive growth underscores the robust potential of India's arms manufacturing market, which is estimated at US\$17.40 billion in 2024 and projected to reach \$23.05 billion by 2029. Despite this growth, India remains the world's largest importer of defence products, highlighting the urgent need to ramp up domestic production. India's defence budget, although the fourth-largest globally at \$74 billion, faces challenges in adequately supporting its armed forces. Much of this budget is allocated to salaries and pensions, leaving limited resources for modernization and indigenous manufacturing. However, amidst escalating security concerns along India's borders and China's strategic expansion in the region, there is a pressing need for increased defence spending. The current global security landscape, marked by conflicts such as the Ukraine-Russia war and China's military expansion, is driving a surge in demand for weapons and supplies worldwide. As Western governments grapple with fiscal constraints, India must reassess its reliance on arms imports to counter Chinese military aggression effectively. While China has reduced its arms imports over the past five years by leveraging indigenous technologies, India continues to lead as the world's top arms importer. This underscores the imperative for India to prioritize self-reliance in defence manufacturing, leveraging successes such as the development of missile systems, armoured vehicles, and aircraft. To achieve this, collaboration between the government, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), and private sector stakeholders is essential. India must attract investment from deep-pocketed industrial houses to establish capital-intensive defence manufacturing ventures. By fostering a conducive environment for indigenous production, India can significantly reduce its reliance on arms imports and bolster its national security posture. India stands at a critical juncture in its defence manufacturing journey. With the support of investors, government initiatives, and technological advancements, India has the potential to emerge as a global leader in defence production. By seizing this opportunity, India can not only bolster its economy but also enhance its strategic autonomy and safeguard national interests effectively. India stands at a pivotal moment in its defence manufacturing trajectory, with a surge in domestic industry bolstering economic prospects and stock market performance. Despite this growth, India remains the world's largest importer of defence products, necessitating a strategic shift towards self-reliance. With escalating security challenges along its borders and China's expanding influence, there is an urgent need to ramp up domestic production capabilities. Collaboration between government entities, such as the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), and private sector stakeholders is crucial to achieving this goal. By attracting investment from major industrial players and fostering a conducive environment for indigenous manufacturing, India can significantly reduce its reliance on arms imports. This transformation not only strengthens India's economic resilience but also enhances its strategic autonomy and ability to safeguard national interests in an increasingly volatile global landscape.

Massive student protests in us universities rattle Biden in poll year

The student movement against the brutal Israeli invasion of Gaza resulting in a severe humanitarian crisis in Palestine, first stated in a chaotic way by the 'Gaza Solidarity Encampment at Columbia University which saw more than 100 demonstrators arrested on April 18, 2024. On April 23, 2024, the students there staged a walkout at the University campus in Washington DC and posted a call in the social media for students of other universities - "We will seize our universities and force the administration to divest from any Israeli connections, for the people of Gaza! Join the popular university, take back our institutions". In quick succession, students at ULCA (University of California, Los Angeles) set up a Gaza solidarity encampment inside the university campus on April 25. On April 28, clashes occurred between the pro-Palestinian and some pro-Israeli students as 'stand with US rallied on the campus'. During the attack, the pro-Israeli group chanted 'second Nakba' referring to the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes by Israeli forces in 1948. The following day, police dismantled the encampment, arresting 132 protesters and shooting multiple students with rubber bullets. On the same day, students from Georgetown University and George Washington University established a joint encampment in response to the International court of Justice's ruling that Israel has violated the Genocide Convention set by U.N.O. They were later joined by Howard University, George Mason University, University of Maryland and Baltimore University students. Soon students of many other colleges/universities including Ivy League universities like Harvard, M.I.T, Yale, Tuft, Boston, Emory, UNC - Capitol Hill, Brown, New York, Pennsylvania joined the movement and set up encampments in the campuses. In the month of April, 2024, students protests escalated on more than 60 University campuses in the USA, spreading to other educational institutions of many other countries, including Europe (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Finland, Spain, UK), Australia, Canada, Egypt, Japan, Mexico, Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen, as a part of wider Israel - Hamas war protests. In 14 universities in UK, students set up encampments as protests spread up elsewhere. Students of Princeton and Edinburgh university began a hunger strike in protest. Small protests have taken place at universities including France, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and Austria. In Amsterdam University Riot Police were employed to disperse an encampment by the students. The methods the students adopted were civil disobedience, encampment and picketing. In the US, police Force were deployed to disperse the protesters. As of May 8, over 2400 protesters have been arrested in the USA, including faculty members and professors and more than 30 protesters have been injured and hospitalized so far. In Sorbonne University in France police applied force to disperse the student demonstrators. The varying demands include severing financial ties with Israel and its affiliated entities, transparency over financial ties and amnesty for protesters, as well as an end to US military support for Israel - as a part of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) movement. The students' protests have been criticized by President Biden, former president Donald Trump, many US governors and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu as anti-Semitic. The Republican Party as a whole vehemently criticized the movement. Many of the Democratic Party leaders are also against the students' movement, but over 200 groups have expressed support for the protesters including Senator Bernie Sanders, Congress members like Alexander Ocasio Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Irvine mayor Tarah Khan and multiple progressive members of the Congress and various important Democrats. "I worry very much that president Biden is putting himself in a position where he has alienated not just young people, but a lot of Democratic base, in terms of views on Israel and this war" - Sanders told CNN. The recent ongoing student movement in the US is the biggest since the anti-war Vietnam movement in the late 60s and to some extent the anti-apartheid movement against South Africa regime in the 80s. Senator Sanders drew comparison with Vietnam, noting former president Lyndon Johnson's decision not to run in 1968 amid growing anger over the war in Vietnam. Just like the protesters of the 60s and 80s, the protesters of the present era are being arrested, suspended and expelled for setting up encampments on the campuses in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza. For that they are demonized by politicians calling them anti-Semitic. Some demands, including divesture from firms that support Israel's war and occupation, mirror demands that past student protesters made to divest from South Africa's apartheid govt. Their discontent has similarly intensified in the face of police crackdown. Anti-Israeli war protests on college campuses and a looming Chicago Democratic convention invite comparison between today's protest against Israeli attack and genocide on Gaza and the student movement against the Vietnam War. The 54th anniversary of the Kent State University shooting on Saturday, May 4, 1970, reminds the day when the Ohio National Guard Troop shot 13 students during anti Vietnam demonstration on the campus, killing 4 and unleashing a surge of protest across the country. But the campus protests over the past three weeks differ in both scale and motivation. Students' bodies have

DEGREE OF THOUGHT Deabrata Biswas

changed, as has the Democratic Party. Still, given the tight re-match incumbent president Joe Biden, Democrat, faces with Republican Donald Trump, they could hold political sway. In Vietnam War, America was directly at war with North Vietnam led by Ho Chi Min, and after 5 years, nearly 1.8 million American had been enlisted and more than 30,000 had been killed. On the other hand, there are no US troops fighting in Israel's war in Gaza, where 12000 were killed by surreptitious attack of the Hamas on Oct.7, 2023, with 253 hostages taken and more than 35000 Palestinians were killed by Israel's attack on Gaza, 75% of which were women and children and more than 80 thousand were injured. The indiscriminate killing of civilians and the destruction of schools, hospitals, homes and infrastructure of Gaza by Israel has been terminated as genocide by International Court of Law. Those atrocities swayed public opinion against Israel; support for Israel's military assault dropped from 50% in a Nov. Gallup poll to 36 % in late March. America though not fighting in Gaza, actually enables Israel to destruct in such a scale. Without all the military and financial aid given unconditionally to Israel by the US government, Israel could not go for such a heinous assault on Gaza. Senator Bernie Sanders in a speech commented that US is actually waging a proxy war in Gaza and cannot avoid moral responsibility for the inhuman casualty inflicted on the civilians of Gaza by Israel. President Biden who last month signed a bill to provide \$ 14 billion more aid to Israel, has faced growing criticism over his handling of the crises, with hundreds of thousands of voters casting "uncommitted ballots" in Democratic primaries in recent months to express their frustration and anger. "I worry very much that President Biden is putting himself in a position where he has alienated, not just young people, but a lot of Democratic base, in terms of views on Israel and this war." - Sanders told CNN. The Democratic Party "in 1968 failed to gauge the sentiment of the anti war youth and continued the horrific war in Vietnam and alienated young voters They are at risk of doing the same this time also" - said veteran journalist and poll analyst Abbas Alawieh. It is very hard to imagine that the university authorities will agree to divest from companies that has direct business relations with Israel as the list includes very big International companies like Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Cisco, Lockheed Martin, Caterpillar, General Electric. As for the political parties, the Israeli lobby in America hold a very strong influence, the AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) is one of the biggest donor of Democratic Party and Joe Biden himself is very attached to them. Yet the political pressure and public opinion matters in shifting policies sometimes. For example, Ever Green State College in Olympia, Washington reached a deal with students to work towards divesting from 'companies that profit from gross Human Rights violation and / or the occupation of Palestinian Territories'. It is one the few colleges to reach deals with protesters in the US as demonstrations spread to more than 154 campuses nationwide in 49 states. President Joe Biden also has to postpone temporarily, shipment of arms and ammunition to Israel on the eve of Israel's full scale invasion of Rafah. These protests are only getting started and it's too early to tell just now how large might get before classes let out for summer, but one thing is clear, with Presidential elections less than six months away, President Biden is rattled at the magnitude of the students protests. That might have its impact on the US President's latest decision to freeze shipment of high tech weapons to Israel for using in its planned attack on Rafah. For the protesting students, this is not a small victory. (IPA Service)

Manipur's complex security crisis: Paths to peace and empowerment India's diplomatic relation with US continues to be under strain on Pannun issue

By: Dipak Kurmi

A year since the eruption of violence, Manipur finds itself mired in an increasingly precarious security predicament. The imperative solution lies in the convergence of key stakeholders to devise swift and decisive measures for urgent course correction. Three notable incidents in the state demand attention. On April 24, miscreants orchestrated an IED blast on a bridge along National Highway-2 in Kangpokpi district. This bridge crucially links Imphal with Dimapur in Nagaland, serving as a vital artery for Manipur. The disruption has left more than 100 trucks, laden with essential provisions for the people of Manipur, stranded in limbo. On April 27, tragedy struck as two CRPF personnel fell victim to an attack in Naranseina, Bishnupur district. The incident unfolded merely 200 meters away from an India Reserve Battalion (IRB) camp, predominantly manned by members of the Meitei community. The CRPF contingent, in the midst of vacating their quarters, had left behind only a platoon when the assault occurred. Speculation arises that the assailants may have intended to target the Meitei personnel within the IRB ranks. Under the cover of darkness, they may have mistakenly identified the CRPF camp as the intended IRB target, leading to the fatal assault. Alternatively, the CRPF might have been the intended target-a reminiscent strategy reminiscent of the modus operandi adopted by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) during the mid-1990s. During this period, the insurgent faction targeted Hindi-speaking individuals in Assam, aiming to draw attention from New Delhi. This tactic proved successful, prompting numerous MPs from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to rally support for their Hindi-speaking counterparts in Assam. Notably, a faction within the Assamese populace remains staunchly opposed to outsiders establishing roots in the state-a sentiment that persists to this day.

The Naranseina incident underscores the alarming depths of lawlessness in Manipur, prompting concerns that certain elements are contemplating teaching New Delhi a lesson. It's noteworthy that historically, central paramilitary forces like the CRPF and the BSF had been spared from such targeted attacks. While Kuki militants were initially suspected in both the IED explosion on the bridge and the assault on the CRPF camp, the perpetrators could have emerged from any faction. In the spiraling chaos gripping the state since May 3, 2023, virtually every group has undergone militarization. Another instance of unchecked disorder under political patronage unfolded when Meira Paibis intercepted an Army Casspir vehicle. This incident occurred subsequent to the apprehension of Arambai Tenggol cadres with illicit weaponry by the military column. Hundreds of Meira Paibis encircled the Casspir, confronting the soldiers vehemently. The situation teetered on the brink of escalation, with the potential for a catastrophic outcome had the Army personnel lost their composure. The dawn of peace in Assam stands as a testament to effective collaboration and coordination. To replicate this success, it is imperative to swiftly establish a Unified Command Structure (UCS) for Manipur, Nagaland, and south Arunachal Pradesh, akin to the model implemented in Assam. This UCS should operate under the overarching leadership of the General Officer Commanding of the 3 Corps based in Rangapahar. A unified, strategic approach, with a singular authoritative voice, derived through extensive consultations, is essential to pave the path for peace and restoration of normalcy. Manipur stands fragmented, with its police force teetering on the brink of dysfunctionality. Instead of fulfilling its duty, it has ceded control to a radical militia organization intolerant of dissent. The recent abduction of a DSP by the Arambai Tenggol has further undermined the morale of law enforcement, prompting some officers to relinquish their weapons.

In this critical moment, what the police desperately need is decisive leadership. Regrettably, such leadership is unlikely to emerge from within the force itself. The authority must be vested in a resolute leader with robust organizational support, such as the General Officer Commanding of the 3 Corps. While the Assam Rifles continues to excel in its duties, it faces unjust accusations of partisanship, particularly from residents of the Manipur valley advocating for its removal. The removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act from various areas in Manipur has shed light on the nefarious activities perpetrated by non-state actors in the state. Currently under the operational command of 3 Corps, integrating the Assam Rifles into the Unified Command Structure (UCS) would not only facilitate synchronized operational strategies with the Army, Manipur Police, and Central paramilitary forces but also enhance its agility through collaborative intelligence gathering with other UCS stakeholders. The confluence of interconnected issues necessitates the grouping of Manipur, Nagaland, and south Arunachal. For instance, the infiltration of valley-based insurgent groups into Manipur with the assistance of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) cannot be viewed in isolation from the implications of establishing separate administrative zones. Likewise, the clandestine activities in Tirap, Changlang, and Longding districts of south Arunachal must be contextualized within the support extended to NSCN(IM) by the Eastern Nagaland Government. The Indian state and its formidable Army possess the strength to confront any obstacle. At this pivotal moment, the crucial action required from New Delhi is to empower its forces further. With their capabilities, the Army can accomplish feats that seem insurmountable. Allowing the current turmoil to persist could lead to irreversible consequences, risking the loss of Manipur. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

By: Girish Linganna

Relations have soured since Joe Biden labelled India as 'xenophobic'. Additionally, tensions have been fuelled by criticisms from Washington and a foiled assassination attempt. However, experts believe that Washington will make sure that nothing hinders its strategy to work with New Delhi in order to counter China's challenge to both. Despite recent tensions over Washington's views on New Delhi's human rights record and an assassination attempt in the U.S., the challenge posed by China continues to bring India and the United States together. Experts suggest that despite considerable tension, the importance Washington places on India as a balance to China's increasing power in the Indo-Pacific will keep their relationship stable and ensure that any disagreements are kept separate, reports South China Morning Post (SCMP). At a hotel fundraiser last week, speaking to an Asian-American audience, US President Joe Biden described India and a few other countries as "xenophobic." He mentioned that these nations are facing economic challenges due to their anti-immigrant policies. Xenophobic means having a dislike or prejudice against people from other countries. Biden's comments coincided with the release of two important reports: the annual human rights report by the US State Department and a review conducted by the bipartisan United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. Both reports shed light on the mistreatment of minority groups, the implementation of unfair nationalist policies, and the silencing of dissent in India. The US has accused India of attempting to assassinate Gurnatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh separatist, on American soil. In response, India has announced that it is currently investigating these allegations. Michael Kugelman, director of the Wilson Centre's South

Asia Institute, highlighted the importance of not perceiving all these various developments as indicative of a strained relationship, according to a report by SCMP. He referred to the release of the human rights and religious freedom reports by Washington as a standard procedure, but acknowledged that the accusations of an extrajudicial killing would be the primary factor causing tension between Delhi and Washington in the short term. According to a report, Kugelman, in an interview with This Week in Asia, stated that this issue would take centre stage in the bilateral relationship in the foreseeable future. He emphasized that the results of India's investigation would carry considerable weight in determining the course of events. In media reports, India's spy agency has been identified as the entity behind the alleged plot to assassinate the Sikh separatist leader. However, India's foreign ministry has firmly rejected these accusations, deeming them unjustified and lacking evidence. Delhi expressed its disagreement with the US human rights and religious freedom reports, criticizing them as "deeply biased" and reflecting a "limited understanding of India." Kugelman highlighted the importance of a strategic partnership between the US and India, which would help maintain stable relations in the immediate future. He noted that Washington's reaction to the case had been fairly neutral. A significant reason for this is the high importance that Washington places on its alliance with India at this time. It is determined to overcome any hindrances that could impede joint initiatives with India in countering China's increasing influence

in South Asia. Kugelman mentioned that the identity of the US President was another significant factor influencing the robustness of US-India ties, particularly in reference to the upcoming presidential election. He suggested that Trump and Biden might have different responses to the situation. Kugelman was unsure if the Trump administration would exhibit the same level of caution as the current Biden administration. According to SCMP reports, Walter Ladwig, a senior lecturer in international relations at King's College London, highlighted that both countries recognized the shared challenge presented by China, which continues to act as a common ground between them. In the field of international relations, it is commonly understood that actions speak louder than words. Ladwig, an expert in the field, pointed out that the United States is actively working to strengthen its relationship with India, regardless of any verbal exchanges or conversations taking place. He highlighted the importance of recognizing the exceptional measures taken by the Biden administration to separate and manage the consequences of the Pannun assassination scheme in order to fully grasp the depth of the relationship between the United States and India. Ladwig noted that while the United States was instrumental in supporting India during its successful G20 presidency, it concurrently had to address and investigate an inappropriate activity carried out by members of the Indian intelligence service targeting an American citizen on U.S. soil. Washington and Delhi are consistently working to strengthen

their bond and maintain strong connections at the highest levels, as mentioned by Ladwig. Ladwig pointed out that Biden was incorrect when he grouped India among countries facing economic challenges due to their resistance to immigration; in reality, India's economy is experiencing rapid growth. He also noted that Biden labelled Japan, a longstanding U.S. ally, as "xenophobic," another country he considered closed off to immigrants. This seems more like an instance of an elected official giving an impromptu response rather than a deliberate attempt to communicate with New Delhi, according to Ladwig. The White House quickly clarified Biden's comments, emphasizing that the U.S. values India's friendship and cooperation, and explained that his remarks were actually about U.S. immigration policy. Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar dismissed the U.S. president's comments, stating that India has always been an open society. When India's relations with China are particularly strained and America's rivalry with China is intensifying, the need for mutual support between India and the U.S. is more crucial than ever. Former Indian diplomat Anil Trigunayat speaking to media mentioned that India and the U.S. are comprehensive strategic partners who hold similar perspectives on global and regional matters. Anil Trigunayat, also the author of "Evolving Security Dynamic in West Asia and India's Challenges," pointed out that India often has different evaluations and approaches to issues, in line with its policy of strategic autonomy to protect its national interests-something Washington may not favour. India frequently criticizes the double standards of many countries, including those in the West. Despite this, the relationship between India and the U.S. is unlikely to deteriorate, as shown by the detailed clarifications following Biden's 'xenophobic' comment. (IPA Service)







## 2 arrested in connection with abduction, assault of four policemen



**IMPHAL, May 13:** Two members of radical outfit Arambai Tenggol were arrested in connection with the abduction and assault of four police personnel in Manipur's Imphal East district, officials said on Monday.

Those arrested were identified as Taibanganba Sanoujam (25) and Moirangthem Bobo (40), they said. "Search operations are continuing to arrest the other accused persons involved in the incident," police said in a statement.

Around 10 armed men kidnapped the four police personnel in the Koirangei area along NH 2 on Saturday. They were then assaulted after being blindfolded, officials said.

The policemen were returning to Kangpokpi after official work in Imphal when the incident happened. They were set free following the assault. The policemen were identified as Ram Bahadur Karki, Ramesh Budhathoki, Manoj Khatiwoda and Md Taj Khan.

Protesting the assault, the Committee on Tribal Unity (CoTU) observed a shutdown in Kangpokpi district on Sunday. (PTI)

## Exercise Shakti is a biennial training event conducted alternatively in India and France

# India-France joint military exercise 'Shakti' commences in Meghalaya

**NEW DELHI, May 13:** The seventh edition of the 'Exercise Shakti' between India and France began in Meghalaya on Monday with an aim to enhance joint military capability of both sides to undertake multi-domain operations in a sub-conventional scenario, the defence ministry said.

The joint military exercise also seeks to enhance the level of defence cooperation between the two friendly nations and boost their bilateral ties.

Exercise Shakti, being held from May 13-26, will enable the two sides to share their best practices in tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting joint operations, the Ministry of defence said in a statement.

Tactical drills to be practiced during the exercise will include response to a terrorist action of capturing a defined territory, setting up of a joint command post, establishment of an intelligence and surveillance centre, securing a helipad or landing site, small team insertion and extraction, special helicopter operations, cordon and search operations besides employment of drones and counter-drone



systems among others, it said.

Exercise Shakti is a biennial training event conducted alternatively in India and France. The last edition was conducted in France in November 2021.

The seventh edition of the exercise commenced on Monday at Umroi, in a fully developed and modern foreign training node in Meghalaya.

"The joint exercise will facilitate

developing inter-operability, bonhomie and camaraderie between armed forces personnel of the two countries. This will also enhance the level of defence cooperation, further fostering bilateral relations between the two friendly nations," the statement said.

The opening ceremony of the joint exercise was attended by Thierry Mathou, Ambassador of France to India and Major General

Prasanna Sudhakar Joshi, general officer Commanding 51 Sub Area, the ministry said.

The Indian contingent comprising 90 personnel is being represented primarily by a battalion of the Rajput Regiment, besides personnel from other arms and services. Observers from the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force are also a part of the exercise, the statement said.

"The French contingent comprising 90 personnel will be represented mainly by personnel from the 13th Foreign Legion Half-Brigade (13th DBLE)," it said.

The aim of Exercise Shakti is to enhance joint military capability of both sides to undertake multi-domain operations in a sub-conventional scenario under Chapter VII of the United Nations Mandate, the statement said.

The joint exercise will focus on operations in the semi-urban and mountainous terrain. The objectives to be achieved from the joint training are "high degree" of physical fitness, rehearsing and refining drills for operations at tactical level and sharing of best practices, it added. (PTI)

## Cucumber Festival held in Nagaland village



HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, May 13:** The 3rd edition of the Off-Season Cucumber Festival 2024 was held at Aliba village under Mokokchung district on May 10, according to a delayed report received here on Monday.

Cucumber farmers, including the oldest male cultivator Imnanichet and the oldest female cultivator Mchasungla were honoured during the programme. About 22,000 cucumbers were harvested for the festival and were put up for sale.

Gracing the festival as the special invitee, Nagaland tourism director Veyielo Doulo underlined the festival's role in fostering unity among the Nagas, saying that it is not only a display but a means of sharing blessings. He commended the farmers, Alba Village Council and the organising committee for their dedication in producing cucumbers during the challenging dry season, recognising it as a rare achievement.

Doulo called on the villagers to preserve their uniqueness and also inspire and educate others. He also encouraged them to set up home-stay services to increase tourism and enhance economic development.

He underscored the importance of showcasing the village's beauty beyond the cucumbers, urging for creation of comprehensive tourism guides and brochures. He also highlighted the medicinal value of cucumbers and urged farmers to explore this aspect.

## Army celebrates International Mother's Day across NE

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 13:** On the occasion of International Mother's Day, Indian Army, conducted a series of initiatives across the North-Eastern states, encapsulating the theme "Mother - The First Protector." In a heartfelt endeavour to honour the invaluable contributions of mothers, Indian Army extended its outreach to diverse communities, reaffirming the essence of maternal love and sacrifice.

In Barjala, Agartala, a heartwarming celebration at the 'Apna Ghar' old age home, extended joy to 50 women residents. Amidst smiles and fellowship, lunch was served to express maternal affection.

Simultaneously, in Bishnupur district of Manipur, the Army exemplified its commitment to maternal welfare by providing essential medical aid and baby care kits to 14 mothers and their newborn infants affected by the ongoing community clashes. Army doctors conducted comprehensive health check-ups, ensuring the well-being of both mothers and babies, while distributing vital supplies to safeguard their health during the impending wet season. In Imphal East district, an enlightening Awareness Capsule, elucidating upon crucial maternal health issues was felicitated, imparting knowledge on peripartum and postpartum health, fostering

awareness among mothers and children alike. Through interactive sessions and recreational activities, the event emphasized the significance of maternal love and support in shaping the future generations.

Additionally, Indian Army has undertaken various initiatives, including awareness lectures and seminars in the past, emphasizing the significance of maternal healthcare practices, equipping mothers with the information and tools necessary to foster healthier communities.

Through regular interactions with Women Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) and NGOs, Indian Army underscores the pivotal role of mothers in shaping the future of their wards. By highlighting the array of initiatives offered by the Indian Army, mothers are empowered to actively participate in their children's educational and skill development endeavours. These interactions are aimed to serve as a catalyst though mothers for nurturing brighter prospects and fostering resilience within communities across the North Eastern states.

The Indian Army's multifaceted initiatives epitomize its unwavering commitment to serving society and honouring the indomitable spirit of motherhood. As we celebrate Mother's Day, let us cherish and uphold the selfless love and resilience embodied by mothers, whose nurturing embrace sustains us all.

## Deportation of illegal immigrants to continue: Manipur CM

**IMPHAL, May 13:** Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh said protection of the indigenous community is the priority of both the central and the state governments. He asserted that deportation of illegal immigrants will continue.

Addressing a press conference at the chief minister's secretariat in Imphal today, Biren Singh said, "We will continue the deportation of illegal immigrants to protect the state".

He also said that Manipur has already been affected by various challenges and threats posed by illegal immigration, forest encroachment and poppy plantation.

The chief minister was reacting to a recent statement of International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) accusing the Indian authorities of forced deportation of Myanmar refugees while saying that it violates the principle of non-refoulement.

It also asked the Indian authorities to halt any further plans to forcibly deport more Myanmar refugees.

The Manipur chief minister said that they have come across certain news articles on a selected media house of an NGO called International Committee of Jurists (ICJ) which had urged India to halt the deportation of



Myanmar refugees.

"This organization does not have a clear understanding of the ground reality in Manipur. We are not dealing with illegal immigration under normal circumstances. The demography, history and identity of the indigenous people of Manipur are being threatened," he said.

He denied the allegation of force deportation saying that the deportation of the illegal immigrants was done after communicating with the concerned authorities of Myanmar.

Reiterating that the protection of the indigenous community is the priority of the government, the chief minister said that the

government is also aware of the fact that "certain so-called rights activists and part-time social workers" are closely involved with some groups who are attempting to create more hostility and divisions in the state. "They are closely working with the ones spreading lies and hatred against the state and the people of Manipur. They must understand that their work goes against the larger interest of the people of the state and nation," Biren said.

"This is a matter of national security and justice will prevail," he further said.

In the same time, Biren Singh said that his government is well aware of the displacement

of a large number of people due to the ongoing civil war in the neighbouring country, Myanmar. "Many are entering Manipur illegally due to the prevailing situation in Myanmar", he said, and added that till date a total of 5801 illegal Myanmar migrants have been detected in Kamjong district of Manipur. Among them 15 have expired due to natural causes, 359 have returned to their native places in Myanmar voluntarily. Currently, 5457 illegal Myanmar migrants are in the district," he informed.

These 5457 migrants are taking shelter in eight villages in designated camps which are located far from the local habitation to prevent mixing with local people, Biren said.

The chief minister also said that the migrants are keen to go back to Myanmar as cultivation season has started but they have become hesitant due to bombing by the Myanmar army in the past few days.

The illegal migrants will be deported to Myanmar by the administration as and when the situation improves in Myanmar, he said.

Biren then urged the people of the state not to panic or spread rumors and to understand the public that the relief is being provided on humanitarian grounds. (NNV)

## 'Protection of Children From Sexual Offences'

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 13:** The University School of Law and Research, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya on Monday organized an awareness programme on "The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences" in the Ri Bhoi College Nongpoh.

Recognizing the gravity of child abuse as a pervasive global issue, the university law department collaborated with the local community to disseminate vital information and strategies for safeguarding children. The outreach programme began with a welcome speech by Murphy Chetia, assistant professor at USLR. Dr EC Benny, principal of the Ri Bhoi College also addressed the gathering. Students of USLR spoke on the POCSO Act 2012 and the meaning and significance of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences and to provide remedies.

## 'Separate teams for tracking, sighting, darting (tranquillizing) and fixing radio collars have been engaged in the mission'

# Tripura launches drive to fit radio collars on wild elephants for tracking

**AGARTALA, May 13:** The Tripura Forest department has launched a special drive to fit radio collars on wild elephants, which have been creating problems across human habitations in the Khowai district for the last few months, officials said on Monday.

The four-day-long drive, carried out by four teams, began on Saturday. It will cover all the natural habitations of the jumbos in Teliamura and Mugiakami hills, a senior forest department official said.

"Amid reports of human-animal conflicts in some forest areas, we have launched a four-day drive to put radio collars on two or three male elephants, which have strayed away and created trouble in nearby human habitations," the District Forest Officer (DFO), Khowai, Akshay B Bhorde, told PTI.

Earlier, the department had fitted a radio collar on one elephant, which was roaming around in the Atharamura hill range in Khowai district.



Separate teams for tracking, sighting, darting (tranquillizing) and fixing radio collars have been engaged in the mission, he said, adding that 19-20 elephants are reportedly roaming around the Atharamura hill range,

which is considered a natural habitat for wild elephants.

He said a Bangalore-based trust - Asian Nature Conservation Foundation (ANCF) - has been assisting the forest department in the drive, and a

## Truck loses control killing one in M'laya

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 13:** A truck travelling from Mawblei towards Madanrting in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya met with a devastating accident, leaving one person dead and another injured.

Around 10 pm, the driver lost control of the vehicle (ML05R9977) near a curved section of road by the Madanrting police station.

The truck careened into three vehicles, a scooter, and a pedestrian before finally crashing into a shop.

The truck's helper died at the scene. The driver, unharmed, claimed the brakes failed, causing him to lose control.

The helper's body was retrieved on Sunday and sent to NEIGRIHMS for autopsy.


Both the deceased and the driver hailed from Goalpara, Assam.

renowned veterinary doctor, K K Sharma, is stationed at Teliamura for help, in case of any urgency.

"Last year, we had fitted a radio collar on one elephant. But now it appears two or three male jumbos have started living separately, and they are coming out of the jungles often and creating trouble in human habitations," Bhorde said.

Asserting that there is no permanent solution to human-animal conflict, with destruction and encroachment of reserve forest areas, Bhorde said that the conflict could be minimised, only if an early warning system (radio collar), is ensured.

"If we succeed in fixing radio collars on two or three male troublesome elephants, their movement can be sighted, and accordingly, alerts will be sounded to minimize human casualty," he said. It is the only way to combat the ongoing conflict in some areas, he added. (PTI)



**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**  
**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER::**  
**WEST KARBI ANGLONG::HAMREN**

No WKA/DDMA/FLOOD/2024/04 Date: 10/05/2024

**QUOTATION NOTICE**

Sealed quotations as per enclosed format affixing Court fee of Rs. 8.25 (Eight Rupees and twenty five paise) only are hereby invited from the local intending firms/supplier for supply of GR items & other Flood related items that may be required for distribution among distressed people of West Karbi Anglong district during any flood and other natural calamities for the year 2024-2025. The Quotation should be registered Govt. firms and to enclose Good and Service Tax (GST) Registration No. etc. The details of quotation and specification may be obtained from the office of the District Commissioner, West Karbi Anglong, Hamren, DDMA Branch during office hours up to 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2024. The quotation must contain the following.

- Affixing court fee of Rs. 8.25 (Eight rupees and twenty five paise) only.
- G.S.T Number with Clearance Certificate.
- Professional Clearance Certificate.
- Trade License/Past Experience of supply in any Govt./Semi Govt. institution for emergency situation.
- Pan Card, Voter ID, Aadhar Card.

**Terms & Condition:**

- The supplier/firm should supply/complete their supply within 24 hours after issuing order.
- Payment will be made if and when Govt. issue ceiling/Budget etc. from time to time.
- The undersigned has the right to reject any quotation as and when required without assigning any reason.
- The Existing firm must have valid trade license.

Sd/-  
District Commissioner cum Chairperson,  
DDMA, West Karbi Anglong, Hamren

Memo No. WKA/DDMA/FLOOD/2024/04-A Date: 10/05/2024







# My recovery still in progress: Shreyas Talpade on resuming work after heart attack



**MUMBAI, May 13:** Actor Shreyas Talpade, who underwent an angioplasty after suffering a heart attack last year, says he will wait to take up films with action and high-intensity drama sequences till he recovers fully.

The "Iqbal" star was rushed to a Mumbai hospital after he collapsed at his residence on December 14, 2023. He was discharged after a week.

Talpade said he is taking things slow for the time being and awaiting the release of his latest film "Kartam Bhugtam".

"There are certain limitations right now because my recovery is still in progress. My doctors have said 'Another six months and you should be as good as new'. So, I will wait. But till that time, there are some films that I am working

on which probably do not have those kind of action sequences or high-intensity drama sequences which I might not be able to do immediately," Talpade told PTI in an interview here.

"Kartam Bhugtam", directed by Soham P Shah, is a psychological thriller movie set to be released in theatres on May 17.

The actor will also be seen in Kangana Ranaut's "Emergency" in which he plays the role of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, comedy film "Welcome to the Jungle", and will reprise the voice role of Allu Arjun's iconic character Pushpa Raj in the Hindi dubbed version of "Pushpa 2: The Rule".

"The kind of work that I'm doing right now and the lineup that I have in the next few

months is very interesting. It's a nice mixed bag... I'm just keeping my fingers crossed and praying," he added.

According to the 48-year-old actor, films are supposed to be a big-screen experience.

"Films should be released in theatres and then whatever happens, you just leave it up to the audience. I think they are the best judges. Once they are spending money and coming into theatres, they want their value for money."

"Every film has its destiny. After you have done your job, it's time for the audience to watch it and give their verdict... As an actor, if you think you have given them something new, interesting, original, they will lap it up. If not, you move on to the next film, next story."

Talpade also said he wanted his film "Kaun Pravin Tambe?", a 2022 biopic on the Indian cricketer Pravin Tambe, to also release in theatres. Backed by Fox Star Studios along with Friday Filmworks and Bootroom Sports Production, the film got a direct-to-digital release on Disney Hotstar.

"I remember when the edit was locked, Neeraj Pandey gave me a call and said he loved both me and the film. He said the only regret he'll have is that we won't be able to release it in theatres because it's already commissioned for an OTT platform. We felt bad because it deserved a theatrical release. Nevertheless, it reached out to many people and that is what we eventually want," he said. (PTI)

## Sonakshi Sinha, Vijay Varma mark first anniversary of 'Dahaad' premiere



**NEW DELHI, May 13:** Actors Sonakshi Sinha and Vijay Varma on Sunday marked the first anniversary of their acclaimed web series "Dahaad".

The crime drama series followed Sinha's Anjali Bhaati, a cop in the interiors of Rajasthan who is hot on the heels of a serial killer, later revealed to be a mild-mannered teacher called Anand Swarnakar, played by Varma.

Directed by Reema Kagti and Ruchika Oberoi, "Dahaad" premiered on Prime Video on May 12, 2023.

Production house Tiger Baby shared a photo montage from the show on its official Instagram page.

"The hunt #1YearOfDahaad," the banner said in the post.

"Dahaad" is also the first ever Indian web series to premiere at Berlin International Film Festival, where it competed for Berlinale Series Award.

Sinha, who is receiving favourable reviews for her latest show "Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar", said she is having a great month. She plays a courtesan named Fareedan in "Heeramandi", which started streaming on Netflix from May 1.

"May is a damn good month for me... must say, Congrats team Dahaad!!!" she wrote on Instagram about the series that marked her digital debut.

Varma thanked the audience for their love and support.

"One year of #Dahaad. So grateful for this show that brought so much love, appreciation and accolades. We are so proud of this show and it's only apt that we share this first anniversary with you all... the viewers who made the show what it is. A big Roaaaaarrrrr!!!" he posted on Instagram. (PTI)

## 'ZARA HATKE ZARA BACHKE' GETS MAY 17 DIGITAL RELEASE ON JIOCINEMA PREMIUM

**NEW DELHI, May 13:** "Zara Hatke Zara Bachke", starring Vicky Kaushal and Sara Ali Khan, will start streaming on JioCinema Premium from May 17, the platform has said. Directed by Laxman Utekar, the romantic comedy was released in theatres on June 2, 2023. It was a box office success earning over ₹ 100 crore in worldwide gross collection. Set in Indore, "Zara Hatke Zara Bachke" follows a married couple Kapil and Somya, played by Vicky and Sara, who are headed for a 'divorce'.

JioCinema shared the date of the film's digital release on its official X page on Sunday. "Sah-parivaar shaadi ki thi, ab sah-parivaar divorce bhi hoga! Toh aap sab #DivorceMeinZaroorAana #Zara-HatkeZaraBachke streaming May 17 onwards, exclusively on JioCinema Premium. #ZHZBOnJioCinema #JioCinemaPremium @vickykaushal09 @SaraAliKhan," the post read. JioCinema subscribers can watch ad-free content on the platform for ₹ 29 per month. Produced by Maddock Films and Jio Studios, "Zara Hatke Zara Bachke" also stars Inaamulhaq, Sushmita Mukherjee, Neeraj Sood, Rakesh Bedi and Sharib Hashmi. (PTI)



## India's indies poised on the cusp of a new era in Cannes



**NEW DELHI, May 13:** With an entry in almost every major section of the 77th Cannes Film Festival, which kicks off on Tuesday evening with French musician-filmmaker Quentin Dupieux's "Le Deuxieme Acte" (The Second Act), India will have no dearth of action during the 12-day event.

Never before in history have Cannes and its sidebars found space for eight Indian, or India-themed, films. As many as six of these will be in contention for awards. So, when the festival winds down on May 24 and 25, the media contingent from the world's largest film-producing nation might, fingers crossed, have plenty to write home about.

Indian cinema's previous best at Cannes was in 2013, when it sent five films to various sections: "Monsoon Shootout" (Midnight Screening), "Bombay Talkies" (a special screening to mark 100 years since Dada

Saheb Phalke's "Raja Harishchandra"), "Ugly" (Directors' Fortnight), "The Lunchbox" (Critics' Week) and "Charulata" (Cannes Classics).

In 2012, too, India had a substantial presence in Cannes with "Miss Lovely" (Un Certain Regard), "Gangs of Wasseypur" (Parts 1 & 2), "Peddlers" (Critics' Week) and "Kalpana" (Cannes Classics). But for many years before and since, the pickings have been dishearteningly slender.

One notable aspect of the Indian films in Cannes this year is that they are all either helmed by female directors or are women-centric, with the exception of one. In what could herald a new era, these films, made by directors endowed with sensibilities and approaches entirely their own, have shaken off the shadow of the gangster genre.

Leading the Indian charge at Cannes 2024 is Payal Kapadia's India-French-Dutch co-produc-

tion "All We Imagine as Light," a film in Malayalam and Hindi. It competes for the Palme d'Or, the festival's top prize, and is the first Indian film to do so in three decades.

Kapadia will have to beat off, among others, Paolo Sorrentino, David Cronenberg, Andrea Arnold, Kirill Serebrennikov, Paul Schrader, and Yorgos Lanthimos. Jia Zhangke and two previous Palme d'Or winners, Francis Ford Coppola (who won for "The Conversation" and "Apocalypse Now," both in the 1970s) and Jacques Audiard (for "Dheepan," 2015).

Indian-British filmmaker Sandhya Suri's "Santosh" and Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's "The Shameless", in which Nepal stands in for India, are in the running for awards in the Un Certain Regard section.

FTII alumnus Chidananda S Naik's "Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know..." is in the

La Cinef competition for film school entries. Mysore-based Naik is a qualified doctor.

After graduating from medical college, he practised for some time before enrolling in a one-year course in the television wing of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). "Sunflowers..." was Naik's final television film at the institute.

La Cinef has Indian filmmaker Mansi Maheshwari representing the UK. The Meerut-born animation director is in the line-up with "Bunnyhood," a self-reflexive graduation film made at the National Film and Television School (NFTS), London.

Maheshwari studied knitwear design at the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIIFT), Delhi, and developed an interest in stop-motion animation. During the Covid lockdown, she made a bunch of animated shorts of varying lengths. She is a 2024 NFTS graduate. (PTI)

# Neeraj Chopra, Kishore Jena to compete directly in Fed Cup finals

**BHUBANESWAR, May 13:** Star Indian javelin throwers Neeraj Chopra and Kishore Jena have been given direct entry into the Federation Cup finals here on May 15, having already bettered the minimum qualification mark of 75m multiple times in their careers.

Olympic and world champion Chopra is coming off a fairly good outing at the Doha Diamond League last week where he finished second with a throw of 88.38m. Asian Games silver-winner Jena's Diamond League debut, however, ended in disappointment as he was eliminated after three rounds with 76.31m being his best.

DP Manu, who finished sixth in the 2023 World Championships and who is looking to qualify for the upcoming Paris Olympics by breaching the 85.50m mark, will also compete directly in the finals.

"All those who have crossed 75m will not compete in the qualifying round on Tuesday. There are nine of them from among those who had made entries, including Neeraj and Jena. They will directly compete in the final on Wednesday," Indian athletics head coach Radhakrishnan Nair said, quoting the Athletics Federation of India's qualification rules.

"The remaining who have below 75m mark will compete in the qualifying round and the top three will join the nine above-75m throwers in the final."

The AFI is quite looking forward to 26-year-old Chopra's first home competitive outing in three years.



"The AFI is not at all surprised at Neeraj taking part in the Federation Cup. His participation in domestic event is no doubt a very good thing for Indian athletics," a top official of the AFI told PTI.

It is learnt that the AFI wanted Chopra to compete in a domestic event after he won gold in Tokyo Olympics and before the Paris Games.

He did not take part in any domestic event in 2022 and 2023

as he was training or competing abroad. His last domestic event was the Federation Cup in March 2021.

It is learnt that Chopra has reached India from Doha but will land here only on Tuesday.

Asian Games medallist Jena is arriving here later on Monday.

Nair played down the injury to men's 4x400m relay squad member Rajesh Ramesh who pulled out midway during the second leg of the first round

qualifying heat in Bahamas earlier this month.

Ramesh was replaced by Arokia Rajiv, who was also not fully fit, in the second round of the Olympic qualifying heat and the Indian team booked a Paris ticket.

"Ramesh's injury is not a hamstring pull, it's related to tendon in thigh. So, it is not a major injury. He is expected to start training in 10-15 days. Rajiv will also be alright soon," Nair

said. "There should not be any problem in Olympics preparation."

A total of 19 track and field athletes have qualified for Paris and Nair said the team will train in Spala in Poland for four weeks before travelling to Paris for the Olympics. Track and field events starting on August 1.

"The team will train in Spala before Olympics and we will reach Paris three or four days before the competition starts," he said. (PTI)

## We have switched on the attacking mode: RCB pacer Dayal

**BENGALURU, May 13:** Pace bowler Yash Dayal attributed the renaissance of Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the second half of the IPL to them "switching on the attacking mode."

After six consecutive defeats, Royal Challengers won five matches on the bounce to remain in contention for a playoff berth.

In the last game, RCB defeated Delhi Capitals by 47 runs here on Sunday to leap to fifth spot on the table with 12 points from 13 matches.

"Our performances have markedly improved in the last few matches. I think we have switched on that attacking mode in the last few matches. It has been a big positive for us," said Dayal, who took three for 20 against DC, during the post-match press meet.

The left-arm quick said even while RCB were going through a losing streak, the dressing room remained a thickly-knit unit.

"When you lose matches continuously, like it happened with us, morale will come



down a bit. But we took it in our stride and bounced back well. "But even when we were losing, fingers were not pointed at anyone. We have remained positive throughout the season," he added.

The resurgence of RCB is directly linked with the improved performance of their bowling unit, which was all over the place in the first half of the season.

Dayal credited team bowling coach Adam Griffith for that

turnaround. "The credit goes to our bowling coach. He engages us in specific drills, visualising particular opposition batsmen and we discuss this a lot.

"When I go out to bowl, I just think about how to get the batter out or save some runs. All of us think the same way," he added.

James Hopes, the DC bowling coach, said dropped catches allowed RCB to add a few more runs and reach an

over-par total.

Rajat Patidar, who made a quick fifty, and Will Jacks, who scored a fluent 41, were dropped multiple times on Sunday. "They got one too many and we dropped four catches and had we taken them we could have probably restricted them to 160-165.

"But that's fine and if you are not going to put it together with the bat you are not going to win too many games in this tournament," said Hopes.

The Delhi side now has 12 points from 13 matches and it now needs a massive win over Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday to keep their playoff hopes alive.

The former Australian all-rounder was confident of achieving it in their home ground. "We have to win big now. But fortunately, we are going back to Delhi where big scores have been the norm for the season. "So, we are going to ask them to put a big score on the board and keep them a fair way below us to have any chance to advance in this tournament," he said. (PTI)

Tabilo next faces 16th-seeded Karen Khachanov, who beat Francisco Cerundolo 6-2, 6-4.

Third-seeded Alexander Zverev advanced after the 2017 Rome champion beat Luciano Darderi of Italy 7-6 (3), 6-2. Grigor Dimitrov and Thiago Monteiro also advanced, while Taylor Fritz beat American compatriot Sebastian Korda 6-3, 6-4. Another American, Ben Shelton, lost to Zhang Zhizhen.

In the women's tournament, second-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eased through to the fourth round with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Dayana Yastremska. American Sofia Kenin, who won the Australian Open in 2020 and also reached the final at Roland Garros the same year, was upset by Slovakian qualifier Rebecca Sramkova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

American Danielle Collins is safely through after beating Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-3. Also advancing in third-round matches were Maria Sakkari, Irina-Camelia Begu, Jelena Ostapenko, Victoria Azarenka and Elina Svitolina. (AP)

performance from the Serb as he tries to step up his game on clay before attempting to defend his title at the French Open, which starts on May 26.

"I was going for kind of easy training yesterday. I didn't feel anything, but I also didn't feel the same," Djokovic said. "Today under high stress, it was quite bad — not in terms of pain, but in terms of this balance. Just no coordination. Completely different player from two nights ago ... I don't know. I have to do medical checkups and see what's going on." Djokovic had 12 unforced errors to Tabilo's four and produced 14 winners to his opponent's 22. It was also a rare occasion when he had zero break point chances.

He was broken four times in the match, including in the final game, and Djokovic could only shake his head when another unforced error handed Tabilo match point. Djokovic is still without a title this year — the first time he's reached May without a trophy since 2018, when he was returning from a right elbow injury.



**BHOPAL, May 13:** Manu Bhaker and Adarsh Singh emerged winners in the qualification rounds of the women's 25m pistol and men's 25m rapid-fire pistol respectively in the Olympic Selection Trial here Monday.

All five shooters in both men's and women's categories will now clash in the final at the M.P. State Shooting Academy ranges on Tuesday.

Anish Bhanwala took a healthy four-point lead from the first precision stage into the second rapid-fire stage, only to be pipped by Adarsh on countback, after both posted scores of 583 with the same number of 24-hits in the inner 10-ring.

Ankur Goel too shot the same score but had 10 fewer hits in the

inner ring, while Vijayveer Sidhu clinched fourth with 581, scoring just one inner-10 more than Bhavesh Shekhawat.

Olympian Manu defeated Esha Singh on inner-10s after both shot an identical 586. Rhythm Sangwan came in third while Abhidnya Patil (582) and Simranpreet Kaur Brar (564) were fourth and fifth respectively.

On pure calculations and taking best of three scores, Manu and Esha take the top two spots in the women's event, while Anish and Vijayveer are 1-2 in the men's RFP, irrespective of what happens in the finals.

The final team for the Paris Olympics will be declared after a meeting of the selection committee post the trials. (PTI)



## Adarsh Manu top qualifications in fourth 25m Olympic selection trial

## It's storm in a tea cup: Klusener downplays Goenka's public outburst on KL Rahul

**NEW DELHI, May 13:** Lucknow Super Giants assistant coach Lance Klusener on Monday played down team owner Sanjiv Goenka's public outburst on their skipper KL Rahul, terming it "storm in a tea cup" and said he didn't find any issue in a "robust discussion between two cricket lovers".

Social media has been abuzz after Goenka was seen having an animated chat, purportedly reprimanding Rahul after LSG's record demolition at the hands of Sunrisers Hyderabad, last Wednesday.

There have been speculations about Rahul's future as LSG skipper also, but Klusener said there has been "certainly no discussions around" the matter.

"I don't see any problem with some robust discussion between two cricket lovers. So for us, I guess it's just a storm in a teacup. We love a robust discussion. I think that's how teams get better. So, it's not a big thing for us," the South African said during the pre-match press conference.

Opening the batting, Rahul has scored 460 runs but his strike-rate reads 136.09, and it has put pressure on the LSG middle-order comprising Marcus Stoinis and Nicholas Pooran.

Klusener, however, backed the senior batter. "KL has got his own unique style which has made him a fantastic player and respected around the world. I think this IPL has been exceptionally tough for

him because we've kept losing wickets at stages which hasn't allowed him to kick on where he likes. He probably feels like he's always having to rebuild.

"I think as a batting unit around KL, we haven't been as good as we should. It's just been extremely tough conditions for him. That's something we've chatted about as well -- we've just kept losing wickets at tough times." However, Klusener said a big knock from Rahul was just around the corner.

"Then batters coming in, seem to have to be rebuilding the whole time and not just coming into a platform. So, I think by KL's standards, he probably would have liked to have kicked on in a few more games.

"Probably (he) would have liked to have at least one or two hundreds that haven't worked out for him. But there's still a couple of games left. He's in a good space. So, we've got our fingers crossed again for him," he said.

LSG bowling unit was at the receiving end of a brutal onslaught from SRH openers Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma, who racked up a record 167 in 9.4 overs.

"By the bowling unit's high standards, they didn't execute as well as they would have liked to on that surface and then you mix in two players who played absolutely beautifully and quite often that ends in a poor result for the team that doesn't bring their best skills," Klusener said. (PTI)

## Pragg, Humpy, Vaishali to lead India's challenge in Norway Chess



**STAVANGER (NORWAY), May 13:** Grandmasters R Praggnanandhaa, Koneru Humpy and Vaishali Rameshbabu will spearhead India's challenge in the prestigious

Norway Chess, to be held here from May 27 to June 7.

Popularly known as the 'Wimbledon of Chess', this tournament annually extends invitations to top grandmasters from the world rating list.

Praggnanandhaa's outing will be keenly watched after the world No. 11 player finished a creditable fourth in the recent Superbet rapid and blitz tournament.

He is the only Indian men's player in the 12th edition of the event which will feature World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen, who won the Superbet, World No.3 Hikaru Nakamura and current World Champion Ding Liren. Praggnanandhaa was also the winner of the Norway Chess International Open Tournament in 2022. He remained unbeaten throughout the nine rounds, recording 7.5 points to clinch the title. India's world No. 2 Humpy and No. 14 Vaishali, sister of Praggnanandhaa, will feature in a strong women's field that has world champion Ju Wenjun of China and her compatriot Lei Tingjie.

However, within the top 100 players globally, no women are listed. Hence, to set a new benchmark for gender equality, Norway Chess has introduced world's first-ever equal female tournament this year.

Speaking about the inaugural Norway Chess Women's Tournament, legendary Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand, who has competed in the Norway Chess, said: "They experiment a lot with the format and time controls. I welcome their attempt to help popularise the women's game by having an equal prize fund for the women this year."

