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- BJD govt will expire on June 4: PM Modi in Odisha
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## 82.11 lakh electorate to seal fate of 47 candidates

Third phase of LS polls for 4 Assam constituencies today ● All eyes on Guwahati battle

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** The political fate of 47 candidates in four Lok Sabha seats will be decided on Tuesday when the third and final phase of the elections in the state will be held.

Polling will begin at 7 am and conclude at 5 pm in the four constituencies - Kokrajhar (ST), Dhubri, Barpeta and Guwahati.

All eyes will be on the prestigious Guwahati seat where both BJP and Congress have put up woman nominees - Bijuli Kalita Medhi and Mira Borthakur Goswami - respectively.

The other prominent candidates are AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal who is seeking re-election for the fourth successive term from Dhubri, Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain, eight time Asom Gana Parishad legislator Phanibhushan Choudhury and CPI(M) MLA Manoranjan Talukdar.

Barpeta has the highest of 14



candidates and Guwahati the lowest of eight in the fray while six women are contesting in the final phase. The BJP has put up only one candidate in this phase for the Guwahati seat, while its alliance partners AGP are contesting in two - Dhubri and Barpeta - and the UPPL in Kokrajhar.

The AIUDF, CPI(M), Gana Suraksha Party, Hindu Samaj Party, Asom Jana Morcha, National Road Map Party of India, Rashtriya Ulema Council, Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal and Bahujan Maha Party are contesting in one seat each while 16 independents are also in the fray.

A total electorate of 82.11 lakh including 41.27 men, 40.84 women and 112 belonging to the third gender will be eligible to exercise their franchise in 9,516 polling stations.

Polling will be held amid tight security with 60 companies of security forces deployed across the five constituencies.

In Guwahati, held by the BJP, a direct contest is on the cards between BJP's Bijuli Kalita Medhi and Congress candidate Mira Borthakur Goswami, both debutants in Lok Sabha polls. The contest in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Items worth ₹ 210 crore seized in Assam during Lok Sabha polls

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** Items worth ₹ 210 crore have been seized in Assam where the last phase of polling will be held on Tuesday, a senior official said.

Addressing a press conference on Monday, chief electoral officer Anurag Goel said cash, liquor, drug and other goods were seized by various agencies during the elections.

"The total cash seized so far during the three-phase polling in Assam stood at ₹ 19.1 crore. Various agencies seized nearly 8.26 lakh litres of liquor, valued at more than ₹ 31.8 crore," he said.

Drugs worth ₹ 129.5 crore were also seized during the period under review, he added.

Besides, ₹ 28.8 crore worth of precious metals were seized, Goel said. A total of 502 Flying Squads, 452 Static Surveillance Teams and 93 Quick Response Teams were deployed, and 440 checkpoints and 178 inter-state nakas were created, he said. Goel said a total of 81,49,091 people, including 41,00,544 men, 40,48,436 women and 111 persons of third gender, will vote in the third phase of polling on Tuesday. Among them 1,529 are centenarians and 2,10,177 are first-time voters, he added.

A total of 47 candidates, including six women, are in the fray in the four constituencies -- Guwahati, Barpeta, Dhubri and Kokrajhar (ST).

There will be a total of 9,516 polling stations, including 300 critical ones, the CEO said.

"We will have 1,474 urban and 8,042 rural booths. Out of the total booths, 326 will be managed by women and 14 by persons with disabilities (PwD). There will also be 84 model polling stations," he said.

Around 45,000 polling officials and an equal number of security personnel have been engaged during the third phase of polling, Goel said.

A total of 221 complaints over violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) were lodged in the three phases in the state.

"Out of the total complaints, 219 have been resolved and only two are pending. There were 12 major complaints," he said.

Goel further said that out of 18,202 licensed arms in the state, 15,315 were deposited. Besides, 32 illegal weapons were seized along with 85 cartridges. Assam has a total of 14 Lok Sabha seats, with voting for 10 seats taking place on April 19 and April 26. (PTI)



**HT BRIEFS**

**Burmese supari**

**BOKAJAN:** Last at around 9 pm the police in Karbi Anglong recovered foreign cigarettes and Burmese Supari during a routine check on NH 39 under Khatkhati Police Station. The police searched a passenger bus, MN 01 2174, coming from Dimapur and heading towards Bokajan. 350 cartons of Esse Light Cigarette each packet containing 10 packs of cigarettes and 13 sacks of Burmese Supari, weighing 510.400 kg were found from the trunk of the bus. The driver and helper of the bus failed to produce the documents for the goods.

**Yoga camp**

**BOKAJAN:** Three-day yoga camp was held at Yuva Sansitha Club, Lahorijan. The camp was under the guidance certified yoga teacher, Rita Singh. The program primarily focused on promoting healthy eating habits and adopting a healthy lifestyle through yoga. Participants from diverse backgrounds including students, youths, ladies and businessmen of the area actively attended the sessions. Throughout the camp, emphasis was placed on incorporating yoga into daily routines, emphasising its benefits for holistic health and wellness. Overall, the three-day yoga training camp at Yuva Sansitha Club served as a platform for individuals to learn, practice and experience the transformative power of yoga.

**Khatkhati Taekwondo**

**BOKAJAN:** The Khatkhati Taekwondo Academy showcases Color Belt Examination, conducted skills and dedication of the martial arts practitioners. The event was held at the premises of the Taekwondo Academy. Under the guidance of Coach Anirudra Pandey, taekwondo instructor the students demonstrated their skills and proficiency in various aspects of the martial arts including Pemp-sai, fighting, breaking, self-defence, fitness etc.

## INDIA bloc leaders echoing voice of Pakistan: BJP

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The BJP on Monday highlighted a series of statements made by INDIA bloc leaders that, it said, were against the nation's interest, as the ruling party accused the opposition of echoing the voice of Pakistan and asked people to be wary of such "traitors".

BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi cited Maharashtra Congress leader Vijay Wadetiwar's allegation that an RSS-affiliated police officer and not terrorist Ajmal Kasab killed the then anti-terrorism squad chief Hemant Karkare and former Punjab chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi's claim that the attack on IAF personnel in Jammu and Kashmir was a poll stunt to slam the party. He cited five other instances, including Pakistani leader Chaudhry Fawad Hussain's criticism of Prime Minister Narendra

Modi and praise of Rahul Gandhi, and Farooq Abdullah's reference to Pakistan having nuclear weapons, to allege that these INDIA bloc leaders are echoing the neighbouring country's stand. What the National Conference leader has said is very "astounding, revealing and shocking" as so far only a few Pakistani leaders considered reckless or radicalised religious leaders have made such comments, he claimed.

Replying to a question related to Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, the former J-K chief minister had said that Pakistan is not wearing bangles and has nuclear weapons. Such remarks are also an insult to women, the BJP leader said.

Noting that Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has written a column in a Bangladeshi newspaper slamming (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Empowering women, PM's development programmes BJP's key issues: Bijuli

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** Bringing women to the economic, social and political forefront besides the development programmes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi are the key issues of the BJP, party candidate for the Guwahati Lok Sabha constituency Bijuli Kalita Medhi said.

The BJP will also get the support of the minority community as they have understood that only its government can provide them security and jobs, Medhi claimed in an interview with PTI.

Medhi is locked in a direct contest with Congress candidate Mira Borthakur Goswami in the constituency which has been represented by women since 2009.

"Our party's main agenda is to empower women, to bring them to the frontline economically, culturally, socially and politically," she



said. The women electorate will come out in large numbers to vote for the BJP since they have been benefitted from the schemes initiated by the governments, she claimed. Minority women, in particular, are "extending full support to us because they are aware of the fact that if anybody can provide them security and safety, work for their uplift, it is the BJP government at the Centre and the state," Medhi as-

serted. People are happy with the development work that has taken place in the state during the last 10 years and they want Modi to be the prime minister for the third time, she claimed. "The consecration of the Ram Temple had a very good impact on the people," the 45-year-old BJP candidate said.

"Members of the minority community, too, have come out in large numbers to attend our meetings in different parts of the constituency and they have extended full support to us," Medhi added.

The BJP dropped sitting party MP Queen Ojah and gave ticket to Medhi who is a party Vice President and a former head of the party's women wing. Her Congress rival Mira Borthakur Goswami has claimed that Medhi is seeking votes so that (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Delhi LG V K Saxena recommends NIA probe against Kejriwal

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena has recommended an NIA probe against chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for allegedly receiving political funding from the banned terrorist organisation 'Sikhs for Justice', Raj Niwas sources said on Monday.

AAP alleged that the recommendation is "yet another conspiracy" against Kejriwal at the behest of the BJP.

In a letter to the Union Home secretary, the Lt governor's secretary said Saxena had received a complaint that the Kejriwal-led AAP allegedly received USD 16 million funding from extremist Khalistani groups for facilitating the release of Devendra Pal Bhullar.

Bhullar, who is in Amritsar Central Jail, was convicted in connection with the killing of nine people in a bomb blast in 1993 in Delhi. He was sentenced to death by a designated TADA court on August 25, 2001 and is undergoing life imprisonment after the Supreme Court commuted his death sentence. "The electronic evidences adduced by the complainant requires investigation including forensic examination," Saxena has said in the letter according to sources.

The complaint is made against a chief minister and relates to political funding received from a banned terrorist organisation, the letter stated. The move comes a day ahead of the Supreme Court considering granting Kejriwal interim bail in view of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The AAP chief, who is in Tihar jail, was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with an excise policy linked money laundering case.

The complaint refers to a video released by Khalistani terrorist Gurbatwint Singh Pannun, where he alleged that the Kejriwal-led AAP received USD 16 million from Khalistani groups between 2014 and 2022, sources said. In the complaint to the LG, it has also been (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## There will be 'jungle raj' in country if INDIA bloc comes to power: Shah

**SAMASTIPUR (BIHAR), May 6:** There will be 'jungle raj' in the country if INDIA bloc partners - Congress and RJD - are voted to power, Union home minister Amit Shah said here on Monday.

He also claimed that cash recovery in Jharkhand proves INDIA bloc leaders are corrupt.

Addressing an election rally in favour of senior BJP leader and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, in Bihar's Samastipur district, Shah said, "The latest recovery of Rs 30 crore and more from the house of a minister in Jharkhand proves INDIA bloc leaders are corrupt."

He also said, "If they come to power, there will be a complete 'jungle raj' in the country as well as in Bihar."

Notably, the Enforcement Directorate on Monday claimed to have recovered a huge amount of "unaccounted" cash during searches at the premises of a domestic help allegedly linked to the secretary of Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam.

"Who will be the PM of the INDIA bloc? Will Sharad Pawar be the prime minister? Will Mamata Banerjee become (the PM) or MK Stalin or Uddhav Thackeray? I will take another name. Please don't laugh. Can Rahul baba become the PM?" Shah said.

He also alleged that leaders of the RJD and the Congress did not attend the consecration ceremony of the



Ayodhya Ram temple because of vote bank politics. RJD's Lalu Prasad and Congress always opposed the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, he claimed.

Shah also said Congress has always opposed reservation to backward classes.

Sarairanjan block comes under the Ujainpur Lok Sabha constituency where Rai is seeking reelection. Rai, who is the NDA nominee, is pitted against RJD's Alok Mehta, who is the candidate of Mahagathbandhan, the prototype of the INDIA bloc in Bihar. (PTI)

## Cong criticises Modi govt's China policy

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The Congress on Monday targeted the Modi government on Chinese transgressions, and asked whether it has "surrendered" thousands of square kilometres in Depsang and Demchok to China or is it still trying to return to the status quo ante before May 5, 2020.

On the fourth anniversary of the clashes between Indian and Chinese troops at Pangong Tso in eastern Ladakh that culminated in the fatal engagement in Galwan on June 15, 2020 in which 20 soldiers were killed, the Congress also asked the prime minister when he will take responsibility for the "abysmal failure" of his China policy.

"Has anyone been held accountable for India's biggest strategic and intelligence lapse in several decades," AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh asked in a post on X. Posing questions to the prime minister, he asked, "Do you still believe your 19 June 2020 statement,

made after 20 of our soldiers gave their lives in Galwan, that 'Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai' (No one has entered India nor has anyone occupied any post)?"

"Has your government surrendered to Chinese control over thousands of square kilometres in Depsang and Demchok for the foreseeable future or are you still trying to return to the status quo ante before 5 May 2020," he asked.

Taking on Modi, he charged that, "The PM's clean chit to China four days later when he said 'Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai' was a profound insult to our fallen soldiers and became the legitimisation of Chinese control over 2,000 square kilometres of land in eastern Ladakh." Despite 21 rounds of military talks over four years, the situation remains unfavourable. Leh's Superintendent of Police has clearly shown (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## SC restrains authorities from carrying out any activity at tea estate in Cachar

National Green Tribunal for "complete abdication of its duty" and said it was the first and foremost duty of the tribunal to verify the authenticity of the grievance of the petitioners before dismissing their plea. "We hold that there was complete abdication of duty by the National Green Tribunal. As an expert body, which has been formed under statute enacted by the Parliament in the interest of preservation of environment, it was first and foremost duty of tribunal to verify the authenticity of the grievance of appellants and instead it just dismissed the OA (original application) saying no environmental clearance has been issued.

"From the material placed on record, we are of the view that authorities in the present case have acted in violation of the EIA notification by carrying out extensive clearance at the site in absence of environmental clearance," the bench, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'There has been no violence in BTR since we took over' Peace, development in focus for Kokrajhar voters

**KOKRAJHAR, May 6:** The assurance of sustained peace will be at the top of mind of voters in Assam's Kokrajhar, once an area affected by militancy, when they elect their representative to the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

The main contest is expected to be between United People's Party Liberal's (UPPL) Jayanta Basumatary and Bodoland People's Front's (BPF) Kampa Borgoyari in this constituency at the heart of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

Congress' Garjan Mushahary, Trinamool Congress' (TMC) Arun Kumar Sarania and Gana Suraksha Party's (GSP) Bineta Deka are also in the fray for the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency.

The UPPL heads the administration of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), in alliance with BJP, with both parties also part of the coalition government in the state.



The BPF is the principal opposition, having ruled the BTR for 17 years since its formation in 2003 until being ousted from power in 2020 by the present regime.

Though the incumbent MP, Naba Kumar Sarania, is out of the race after his Scheduled Tribe (ST) status was cancelled, his GSP is putting up

also ensuring development and all-round growth of the people. People have seen the misrule of BPF and Congress, and are ready to send our candidate to Parliament," he claimed.

The support of BJP could emerge as the decisive factor for the UPPL and take it first past the finish line.

BPF MLA Rabiram Narzary, however, differed and said, "It is the BPF which has brought peace to BTR and worked to bring the communities together. The people are fed up with these four years of UPPL." The Congress, which has not been able to regain its footing in the constituency for long years, also claimed of once again getting the confidence of the voters, while TMC and GSP each maintained that they are emerging as the choice of cross section of people. The parties may be putting together their political equations, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Doloo greenfield airport



**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The Supreme Court on Monday restrained authorities from carrying out any activity at the Doloo tea estate in Assam's Cachar district where a greenfield airport is proposed to be constructed.

Noting that over 41 lakh tea bushes have been uprooted, a bench

headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said the authorities in the present case have acted in violation of the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 by carrying out extensive clearance at the site without any environmental approval.

The top court also criticised the

# Absolute number of voters correct way to analyse: Report

## Concerns on low voter turnout a 'myth'

**MUMBAI, May 6:** Terming concerns on low voter turnout in the first two phases of 2024 general elections a "myth", an economist at the country's largest lender SBI has said comparing the absolute number of votes cast is a better way to analyse the turnout.

Soumya Kanti Ghosh, the group chief economic adviser at SBI, said there has been 0.4 per cent increase in the absolute number of votes cast in the first two phases.

"The unending debates propagated around supposedly low voter turnout in the first two phases of the General Elections 2024 is a myth. A better measure of votes cast is the absolute number of voters," he said in a report.

The Election Commission has been working to increase the voting percentage in the remaining phases of the polls.

Ghosh, who is also a part time member of the 16th Finance Commission, said the voting is about 3.1 percentage points below the trend observed in the last general elections of 2019, but was quick to add that the numbers can "swell"



in the remaining 5 phases of polls and there will be a "J-shaped" growth.

"During 2019, the voting pattern showed a declining trend over the 7 phases, starting at 69.4 per cent and finishing at 61.7 per cent. In 2024, we believe a reverse phenomenon could be underway, with voting percentage poised for a marked improvement going by the absolute numbers of voting exer-

cised in the first two phases," the report said.

In the first two phases of polls till now, there have been salutary changes like higher women participation on an incremental basis, and those in reserved seats as well, it said.

The SBI report said Karnataka accounts for the highest number of increase in voters in 2024, followed by Assam and Maharashtra.

A granular analysis of constituencies shows that the absolute number of votes cast increased by more than 1 lakh in 85 constituencies, whereas in 25 constituencies, there was a status quo. Hence, 60 per cent constituencies exhibited either increase or no marked difference, it said.

The Lok Sabha elections are being held in seven phases and the polling for the third phase is due on Tuesday.

"We also believe the scorching summer and sweeping heat waves might have played a spoilsport for a certain percentage of voters," it said.

Meanwhile, it also said that 17th Lok Sabha was the most efficient ever as per its model, and 2023 was the most efficient year for the Parliament in terms of bills passed, at par with 1955.

The years of 1976 (the emergency year with major opposition political leadership in abeyance) and 2020 (the disruptions brought in by the pandemic) have been excluded for the rankings purpose, it said. (PTI)

# India's service activity growth in April among fastest in 14 years: PMI

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** India's services sector growth eased slightly in April but growth of new business and output remained sharp and among the fastest in 14 years amid favourable economic conditions and strong demand, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index fell from 61.2 in March to 60.8 in April, highlighting one of the strongest growth rates seen in just under 14 years.

Survey members attributed the latest upturn in output to favourable economic conditions, demand strength and rising intakes of new work.

In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India's service activity rose at a slightly softer pace in April, backed by a further rise in new orders, with a notable strength in domestic demand," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

In addition to buoyant domestic demand, firms noted new business gains from several parts of the world, which collectively underpinned the second-quickest upturn in international sales since the series started in September 2014. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## 82.11 lakh electorate to seal

Barpeta is expected to be triangular among NDA partner Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) candidate Phanibhushan Choudhury, CPI(M)'s Manoranjan Talukdar and Deep Bayan of the Congress. In Dhubri, 13 candidates are in the fray with AIUDF strongman Badruddin Ajmal, seeking a fourth term, locked in a triangular contest with Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain and NDA partner AGP's Zaved Islam.

In Kokrajhar (ST), a triangular contest is also on the cards among UPPL's Jayanta Basumtary, Congress' Garjen Mushahary and Bodoland People's Front's (BPF) Kampa Borgoyary. The sitting independent Kokrajhar MP Naba Kumar Sarania, representing the seat reserved for Scheduled Tribes since 2014, had filed his nomination papers which was rejected following the striking down of his Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Assam chief electoral officer Anurag Goel said that all arrangements have been completed for conducting the polls in a free, fair, safe and peaceful manner.

In the first phase of polls held on April 19, 78.25 per cent of the electorate exercised their franchise to decide the fate of 35 candidates for the Kaziranga, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur constituencies.

In the second phase held on April 26, 81.17 per cent of the voters cast their votes to decide the fate of 61 candidates for Karimganj, Silchar(SC), Diphu (ST), Nagaon and Darrang-Udaluri. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one each from the state. (PTI)

## INDIA bloc leaders echoing

Modi while analysing the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, Rajya Sabha MP Trivedi said while elections are being held in India he is building public opinion in another country. The Congress leader has also referred to the Valley as India-administered-Kashmir, he alleged. Tharoor, however, later clarified saying he does not agree with that usage and has never used such a term in any of his writings or statements anywhere, ever. "It has been interpolated by the editors of the newspaper that my syndicated column appeared in. I disavow such language unequivocally, but have no control over what foreign newspaper editors do," he said in a post on X.

Attacking opposition leaders, Trivedi said one INDIA bloc leader is giving "cover fire" to Pakistan on the Mumbai terror attack, another is speaking about its nuclear weapon while somebody is describing the martyrdom of a soldier as a poll stunt. Modi had said that the Congress manifesto carried Muslim League's imprints, he noted, adding that every word spoken by its leaders echoed Pakistan's stand. The Left parties want the country's nuclear stockpiles removed, he said.

All these developments are not merely a coincidence but a deliberate and dangerous experiment, Trivedi said. "In whose hands these leaders are playing," he asked, telling people to be wary of "traitors" hiding within the country. Various kinds of powers outside are attempting to halt the rise of a proud and confident India, he said.

At the press conference, the BJP leader also took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi over the recovery of a huge amount of cash from the house of a domestic help allegedly linked to the secretary of Jharkhand minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam. He said Gandhi speaks about doing an economic survey and dividing the country's wealth and the Enforcement Directorate's raid has shown the way assets are being divided in Jharkhand when so much of money, between Rs 20 crore and 30 crore, is with the help of a minister's PA.

After looking at so much amount of money, nothing is left to explain, he added. (PTI)

## Empowering women, PM's

Modi can become the PM again and not for what she can do for the people of the constituency. Medhi said, "My opponent does not have to tell me what I have to highlight about my constituency. I was the deputy mayor of Guwahati and I know very well about the problems and how to resolve those."

She said that the BJP government in the state has already taken several measures to address the problems of water logging and traffic while land documents were provided to the people. Medhi claimed that 80 per cent of the work to solve the flood problem in Guwahati has been done but, since population is increasing day by day, continuous work is needed in this regard.

"People have realized that if there is any government that will address their problem, it is Narendra Modi's government at the Centre and Himanta Biswa Sarma's in the state. In several places, they have even given written support and assurance that they are with the BJP," she added. The party enjoys overwhelming support in the urban areas, while this time people in the rural areas too will vote for the BJP, she claimed.

"Development is already taking place during the last ten years and in Assam since 2016. Vast changes have taken place but we are committed to take this journey of development further ahead," Medhi asserted. (PTI)

## Delhi LG V K Saxena recommends

alleged that Kejriwal held closed-door meetings with Khalistani leaders at Gurudwara Richmond Hills, New York, during his visit in 2014. Kejriwal allegedly promised to facilitate the release of Bhullar in return for substantial financial backing from Khalistani factions to AAP. In a series of posts on social media, a former AAP worker, Munish Kumar Raizada, also shared purported pictures of Kejriwal's meeting with Khalistani leaders, the complaint said, according to sources. Reacting to the development, AAP leader and Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj called it "yet another conspiracy against Kejriwal at the behest of BJP". "They are losing all seven seats in Delhi and are rattled by the fear of defeat in Lok Sabha polls," he said. Bhullar was shifted to Amritsar Central Jail from Delhi's Tihar Jail on health grounds in June 2015. (PTI)

## Cong criticises Modi

that our troops were unable to reach 26 out of 65 patrolling points that they could access prior to May 5, 2020, Ramesh claimed. China's aggressive build up and intrusions are not restricted to Ladakh, he said, adding that along Arunachal Pradesh, the Chinese continue to build forces and infrastructure that pose a direct threat to India's Siliguri Corridor, which connects northeast India with the rest of the country.(PTI)

## Peace, development in focus

but for the general voters the prevailing peace has emerged as a major factor. "Bomb blasts, firings, kidnappings, bandhs were the order of the day. From communal and ethnic clashes to counter-insurgency operations, we have seen it all. It has only been the last few years that we have seen sustained peace," Arjit Das (named changed on request), a local entrepreneur said.

From having to give up his first car to the bank against unpaid instalments as business was bleak at the turn of the century, Das now owns two vehicles and operates several more under his travel agency. Newton Narzary, who runs a hotel near Raimona National Park and also drives a tourist gypsy, shares Das' sentiment.

"It used to be only uncertainty and fear, no matter to which community you belonged to. Let alone tourists, we locals feared to move out alone after dusk. But we have a bustling business now," he said. Most maintain that the return of peace has been possible with the signing of 2020 pact by the Central and the state governments with different Bodo groups, including NDFB, and surrender of almost all major militant groups active in BTR.

While people are thankful for return of peace, issues of 'inequal development' and 'more rights' of the Bodo community are also likely to play on the minds of the non-Bodo voters. In the constituency of nearly 15 lakh voters, Bodos form about 5 lakh of the electorate, while the rest are non-Bodo communities, including different ST groups, religious minorities and general category people.

"Naba Sarania had won by playing the 'non-Bodo card', but he did nothing in 10 years. We won't fall for such gimmicks again, but we will definitely look for someone who will give equal voice to all of us," Pramod Sharma, a retired government official of Basugaon, said. "The first step towards development has been taken with sustained peace. We are now hoping that whoever wins will take it forward," an optimistic Prasenjit, who works in a private firm, added, summing up the aspiration of peace and development of the voters. (PTI)

## SC restrains authorities

also comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said. The apex court said the decision where the airport should be is a matter of policy but when the law prescribes specific norms for carrying out activities requiring environmental clearance, the provision of law has to be complied with.

"We direct that no activity shall be carried out in breach of the EIA notification, 2006," the bench said after perusing the report filed by the secretary of the District Legal Services Authority of Cachar. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Assam government, opposed the locus standi of the petitioners and said action should be taken against them. The top court was hearing an appeal filed by Tapas Guha and others against a National Green Tribunal (NGT) order rejecting their plea against the construction of the proposed airport on "specious ground" that it was premature. The plea had sought a direction to cease further action related to the construction of the airport till a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is conducted.

The top court had on April 8 directed the Assam government to maintain status quo at the Doloo tea estate. On January 25, the NGT had dismissed the plea by Guha and others on the ground that the EIA report was awaited and environmental clearance for the project had not been granted.

"Counsel for the applicants has drawn our attention to the Government of India, Ministry of Civil Aviation, notification dated May 16, 2008, particularly column under the head 'Environment Clearances' and submits that even for grant of Site Clearance and In-principle approvals, Environmental Clearance is necessary which can only be done once the EIA assessment study is done. "In our opinion, mere inclusion of a clause under the head 'Environment Clearances' in a form of the said notification does not deem the same to be mandatory for purposes of EIA assessment study," the NGT had said.

The plea in the NGT had sought a direction to cease further action at the Doloo tea estate till a comprehensive EIA has been conducted and to restore the estate to its original condition as of May 12, 2022 by replanting uprooted tea bushes, felled shade trees and rectify the damage caused to the landscape and ecosystem.

The Airports Authority of India has submitted an application under the Greenfield Airports (GFA) Policy, 2008 to the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) for grant of site clearance for developing the airport. The MoCA launched the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) -- UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) -- on October 21, 2016, to stimulate regional air connectivity including in the northeastern region, and make air travel affordable for the masses. (PTI)

## Rupee falls 5 paise to close at 83.50 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, May 6:** The rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day 5 paise lower at 83.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said a weak trend in domestic equities also dented investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.43, then touched an intra-day high of 83.42 and a low of 83.50 against the greenback. The rupee finally settled at 83.50 (provisional) against dollar, registering a fall of 5 paise over its previous close. On Friday, the rupee inched up 1 paise to settle at 83.45 against the US dollar. Forex traders said US dollar demand from importers and a recovery in crude oil prices weighed on the rupee.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on the rise in risk appetite in global markets. However, any recovery in crude oil prices may cap sharp upside. Any renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East may also weigh on rupee at higher levels," said Anuj Choudhary, research analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.70, Choudhary added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 105.09. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.80 per cent to USD 83.62 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 17.39 points, or 0.02 per cent, to settle at 73,895.54 points. The Nifty fell 33.15 points, or 0.15 per cent, to close at 22,442.70 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Friday, as they offloaded shares worth ₹ 2,391.98 crore, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, India's forex reserves dropped USD 2.412 billion to USD 637.922 billion as on April 26, in the third consecutive weekly decline in the reserves, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday. (PTI)

## Sensex closes flat, Nifty slips on profit-taking by investors

**MUMBAI, May 6:** Benchmark Sensex closed almost flat in a range-bound trade on Monday as investors booked profits in index heavyweights amid high valuation concerns.

The 30-share BSE Sensex edged up 17.39 points or 0.02 per cent to settle at 73,895.54. The barometer hit a high of 74,359.69 and a low of 73,786.29.

The broader NSE Nifty declined 33.15 points or 0.15 per cent to close at 22,442.70.

From the Sensex basket, Kotak Mahindra Bank jumped 5 per cent after the company reported a 25 per cent growth in its March quarter net profit at ₹ 5,302 crore, limited by a drop in the core income due to narrow interest margins.

Tata Consultancy Services, Hindustan Unilever, Mahindra & Mahindra, Sun Pharma, Tech Mahindra and IndusInd Bank were among the other major gainers. Titan tanked 7 per cent after its March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors.

State Bank of India, NTPC, Power Grid, Bajaj Finance and Larsen & Toubro were the other laggards.

The domestic indices traded in a range-bound manner, said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

"The broader indices also witnessed major selling pressure due to valuation concerns and profit-taking," he added.

"Today, the benchmark indices witnessed lacklustre activity - the Nifty ends 33 points lower while the Sensex was up by 17 points," said Shrikant Chouhan, Head Equity Research, Kotak Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 1.06 per cent, midcap index dipped 0.95 per cent. Consumer durables tanked 3.85 per cent, serv-

ices declined 1.95 per cent, utilities (1.76 per cent), power (1.26 per cent), industrials (0.80 per cent) and commodities (0.78 per cent).

Healthcare, IT, auto, realty and tech were the gainers. Aditya Gargar Director of Progressive Shares said that a steep correction in PSU stocks put pressure on the index to trade lower. A vertical fall in the Mid and Smallcaps dented the market sentiments further however, select FMCG, IT, and Pharma counters supported the market, he added.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.80 per cent to USD 83.62 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 2,391.98 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. Japan and South Korea's markets were closed for the holidays.

European markets were trading with gains. Wall Street ended with significant gains on Friday.

Billionaire investor Warren Buffett said that the Indian market has "unexplored" opportunities which his conglomerate holding company, Berkshire Hathaway, would like to explore "in the future".

Buffett's remarks came at Berkshire's annual meeting on Friday when Rajeev Agarwal of DoorDarshi Advisors, a US-based hedge fund that invests in Indian equities, asked him about the possibility of Berkshire exploring in India, the world's fifth-largest economy.

The BSE benchmark dropped 732.96 points or 0.98 per cent to settle at 73,878.15 on Friday. The NSE Nifty also declined 172.35 points or 0.76 per cent to 22,475.85. (PTI)

## PhonePe unveils lucrative offer for Akshaya Tritoia

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** India's leading fintech giant, PhonePe, has unveiled an enticing offer to mark the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya this year. On May 10, PhonePe users can seize the opportunity to avail themselves of assured cashback, with the potential to earn up to ₹ 2000 on a minimum purchase of ₹ 1000 worth of 24k digital gold, exclusively through the PhonePe app. This unique offer, designed to enhance the festivities, is available solely on PhonePe and can be accessed through various payment modes including UPI, UPI Lite, credit and debit cards, as well as wallets and gift cards.

Furthermore, in a move to amplify the celebratory spirit, PhonePe has also introduced a special redemption offer for digital gold at Caratlane stores until May 12. The offer entails additional benefits such as a 2% discount on gold coins, a 4% discount on unstudded jewelry, and an impressive 10% discount on studded jewelry. This initiative not only adds value to the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya but also underscores PhonePe's commitment to providing its users with rewarding and innovative financial solutions. (PTI)

## POCO unveils exciting offers on bestselling smartphones

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** POCO, a prominent consumer technology brand in India, has announced irresistible deals on its top-selling smartphones for the upcoming May sale, set to commence from May 1 to May 10, 2024. These exclusive offers will be available on leading e-commerce platforms Flipkart and Amazon, presenting customers with an opportunity to acquire their desired products at unprecedented prices along with exciting incentives.

## BSNL to launch 4G services across India in August

### Using indigenous technology

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** State-owned BSNL will start rolling out 4G services across the country from August, using completely indigenous technology in line with the government's "Atmanirbhar" policy, according to official sources. BSNL officials claimed to have recorded peak speed of 40-45 megabit per second on the 4G network which has been rolled out in the premium spectrum band of 700 megahertz (Mhz) as well as in 2,100 Mhz band during the pilot phase.

The company has rolled out 4G services in Punjab using indigenously developed technology by IT company TCS and state-run telecom research organisation C-DoT-led consortium and onboarded around 8 lakh subscribers. "The 4G core developed by C-DoT is performing very well in the BSNL network in Punjab. It was installed in July last year. It takes 12 month to prove the success of such complex technology but the C-DoT core has stabilised within 10 months. BSNL will launch atmanirbhar 4G technology across the country in August," a senior government official, who did not wish to be named, told PTI.

The core network is a collection of network hardware, devices, and software that provides fundamental services in a telecommunication network. Telecom regulator Trai in a recent paper explained core as part of a network that offers the functionality of aggregation, call control, switching, authentication, charging, gateway functionality, etc.

TCS, Tejas Networks and government-owned ITI have bagged orders worth about ₹ 19,000 crore from BSNL for deploying 4G network which is upgradable to 5G. In a recent earnings call, Tejas Networks Executive Director and chief operating officer Arnob Roy said BSNL's mobile network is getting deployed across zones. He said that wherever the C-DOT core is not available on the BSNL network, the equipment is getting integrated to the existing core. "When the C-DOT core gets deployed in those circles, in those zones, they will get parented to the C-DOT core as well. Tejas Networks Limited." (PTI)

### LOST

I lost my original Class -X admit card of 2006 bearing Roll B06 - 439 No. 0176, somewhere in Diphu market on 4th May, 2024.

Anyone finding the same may kindly reach to the address and mobile number as given below.

Lucky Ronghangpi, W/o- Shem Naroh, Amlapatty, Ward No. 6, Diphu, PO & PS- Diphu. District - Karbi Anglong, Assam. Mobile No. 81349-47524.

### NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Mazibur Rahman to Mujibur Rahman by swearing a notarial affidavit at Sankardevnagar Hojai (Assam).

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Bibhash Bodo, S/o-Bijay Boro, Add.- Jawahar Nagar, House No. 672, Khanapara, Guwahati-22 changed my name BIBHASH BODO to VIVIAN BODO by an affidavit before the 1st class Judicial Magistrate, Kamrup (M), Guwahati. MR-73687/20

12 female candidates contesting Lok Sabha elections from state

## Assam LS polls: Decline in women candidates but female voters outnumber men

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** Despite the state having more women voters, only 12 female candidates are contesting the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, down from the previous count of 14.

These 12 women candidates are competing in seven out of the 14 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state.

Assam has a total electorate of 2,45,72,144 with 1,23,39,241 women voters and 1,23,25,293 male voters.

This declining trend in women candidates has been continuing since the 2014 polls when there were 16 female aspirants.

The ruling BJP has fielded one woman candidate, Bijuli Kalita Medhi, for the prestigious Guwahati seat, while the opposition Congress has nominated Mira Borthakur Goswami in Guwahati and Roselina Tirkey in Kaziranga.

Among the smaller parties, Gana Suraksha Party has given tickets to two women while Hindu Samaj Party, Gana Sangram Parishad, SUCI(C) and Voters Party have given to one each and there are three independents in the fray.

Kaziranga leads with three women candidates, followed by two each in Guwahati and Kokrajhar (ST), and one each in Sonitpur, Darrang-Udalguri, Nagaon, Barpeta, and Dhubri. In the first phase polls, there were four women candidates, two in the second and six in the third and final phase to be held on May 7.

The number of women candi-



dates representing the state in the Lok Sabha so far has been only 18 since the first general elections in the country and this too has been declining with two candidates in 2014 to one in 2019.

There has been, however, a remarkable increase in the participation of women voters in the polling process, registering 79.92 per cent voting in the first two phases for which elections were held on April 19 and 26.

In the first phase of polls held in five constituencies of Upper Assam, women recorded a higher voter turnout of 78.81 per cent as against male voters 77.69 per cent.

In the second phase, also in five seats, women registered 85.55 per cent of votes as against 84.41 per cent by men.

Congress candidate from Guwahati Mira Borthakur Goswami pointed out that while her party gave tickets to two women, the BJP, which passed the Women Reservation Bill in Parliament, gave ticket to only one in the North East.

"The BJP government treats women as a vote bank and has instilled fear in them that if they do not vote for BJP or attend election meetings, then their names will be deleted from schemes," she alleged.

Goswami said she is committed to help women participate in the decision-making process and will work for their 'economic safeguard and security'. Goswami, who is locked in a direct contest with another woman candidate Bijuli Kalita Medhi of the BJP, said though the Guwahati seat is not reserved for women, but since 2009 it has been represented by them.

Medhi, on the other hand, claimed that no previous government has focused on women as the BJP during the last ten years by giving them various benefits, including the 'Orunodoi' scheme of giving a monthly amount of Rs

1,250 to women and encouraging entrepreneurship by providing them funds to become 'Lakhpati Baideos' (Lakhpati Elder Sisters).

She pointed out that the BJP enjoys overwhelming support in the urban areas and this time, women in the rural areas are also very happy as they have benefitted immensely from the various schemes initiated by the BJP governments at both the Centre and in the state.

A women activist pointed out that the Women's Reservation Bill was passed in Parliament last September but in the first general elections held since its 'historic scripting', none of the major political parties made an effort to give tickets to women candidates anywhere close to the 33 per cent mark.

She said it is indeed a very heartening sight to find long queues of women, including first-time voters and the elderly, outside polling stations, dressed in their best colourful attires, and often outnumbering men in separate queues, but it would have been equally important to see more women candidates in the fray.

Prior to the polls, a group of women's organisations in the state had prepared a manifesto for women, highlighting the specific issues to be included in the policies of the next government, but most parties have ignored these and concentrated mostly on doling out usual sops for women, without any concrete measures for their actual economic, social and political empowerment. (PTI)

## Road mishap claims life at Rupahi weekly market

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, May 6:** In a tragic road mishap, a school student died on the spot while two others were seriously injured at the Rupahi weekly market in Nagaon on Monday.

According to sources, the incident took place when a speeding dumper bearing the registration number 'AS 25 EC 8723' mowed down the deceased along with his two schoolmates. The dumper also collided with a motorcycle bearing the registration number 'AS 01 AL 1637'.

The deceased student has been identified as Mahmood Zaman, a resident of the Gunanori village. The injured students have been identified as Ekramul Haque of Gunabori village and Iftekhar Ahmed of Gereki village under Rupahi Police Station. Soon after the incident the Rupahi police rushed to the spot and immediately sent the injured students to the Nagaon Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Meanwhile, the body of the deceased was sent to the Nagaon BP Civil Hospital for post mortem.

Police have already seized the dumper and motorcycle and are investigating the matter.

## 1 dead in accident at Sootea

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 6:** One person has died in a road mishap in Sootea in Sonitpur district.

The incident occurred on May 4 when the victim, Naseed Ali, who had been driving a truck bearing the registration number 'AS 01 GC 1779', rammied his vehicle into the under-construction Ghiladhari bridge on National Highway 15 in Sootea.

Naseed Ali who hailed from Udalguri, died on the spot.

On the other hand, a truck heading from Tezpur towards Biswanath Chariali fell into the Ghiladhari river after it hit the huge railings of the concrete bridge. Due to the slow pace of construction of the four-lane road from Jamugurihat to Gohpur, many road accidents have occurred. Road accidents have become a common occurrence at Jamugurihat, Sootea and Biswanath Chariali area at present.

Locals have alleged that the construction work of the four-lane road ended at the western end of the Ghiladhari river and the commuting vehicles have to cross the river through a single concrete bridge. No distinct road signs have been installed at the both ends of the bridge. As such, a driver has difficulty knowing the point where the road ended.

## Annual awards ceremony of Anupurbik Art and Craft Institute held at Nagaon



**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, May 6:** The annual award presentation ceremony of the Anupurbik Art and Craft Institute, a leading art and craft institution of Nagaon was held at the auditorium of the Bengali Girls' High School in Nagaon.

The event was inaugurated by Sangeeta Gogoi, director of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati by lighting the ceremonial lamp. During the programme,

over 58 dignitaries from various fields including sportsman Manoj Kalita, social workers like Gouri Shankar Roy, Ravindra Chandra Das and Namita Hazarika, a dozen of senior journalists were felicitated by the institute with mementos, jaapi and fulam gamusa.

Retired professor Kamakhya Prasad Chaudhary attended the programme as the chief guest while Simanta Bora, vice chairman of the Nagaon Municipality Board,

Narayan Majumder, principal of the Bengali Girls' High School, Runjun Bora, faculty of the Nagaon Normal School and Mrinal Jyoti Bezbaruah, principal of the Concept Senior Secondary School were present as the guests of honour in the event.

During the event, the student of the year award was presented to Dingkit Bezbaruah while the sincere student of the year award was bagged by Abhismita Goswami. While the best drawing award was presented to Prantika Majumder and the best colour award was presented to Aditi Dutta. Jeet Das and Ankita Paul won the best craft award. The school authority awarded the first five performers of each class.

The Anupurbik Art and Craft Institute bagged over 53 national and international awards and recognitions, including the Record of Asia and the London Book of Record for its outstanding performances in the field of teaching art and craft.

## Health check-up camp for specially abled children held

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, May 6:** The Arogya Care Foundation in collaboration with Healing Hands in support of Redcliffe Labs, organised a free health check-up camp for specially abled children under the National AYUSH Mission, Assam in Nagaon on Monday. The camp aims to provide comprehensive healthcare services to specially abled children ensuring their well-being and a better quality of life.

The programme was organized at the Indoor Stadium of the Dhing College, where medical professionals including Bhaskar Jyoti Sharma, Abhijeet Chutiyia, Jial Hoque, pharmacist, Ritamoni Doley (ANM), Himan Jyoti Bora, president of Healing Hands, Debashish Debnath, lab technician, Rup Jyoti Kar, secretary Arogya foundation and yoga instructor Trishal Dey were present.

## Assam Women's University organises UGC NET/SET coaching for students

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, May 6:** In a proactive initiative to nurture academic and competitive excellence among students, the Assam Women's University Alumni Association (AWUAA) in association with the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of the university has initiated a one-week coaching programme for candidates preparing for the UGC NET/SET examinations.

In the inaugural ceremony held on Monday, professor Ajanta Borghain Rajkonwar, vice-chancellor of Assam Women's University, highlighted the university's commitment to empowering women and fostering a culture of competitive and academic excellence.

The week-long offline coaching sessions will be conducted by a panel of experienced faculty mem-



bers and subject experts from various disciplines on the topics such as general knowledge, logical and mathematical reasoning, information and communication, data interpretation, research and teaching aptitude, etc.

Prashanta Puzari, director of IQAC and the programme co-ordinator mentioned that around 200 participants from various departments and institutions will be participating in the week-long coaching.

## Grievances of non-Bodo voters over land rights, ST status hold key in Assam's Kokrajhar LS seat

**KOKRAJHAR, May 6:** The brewing discontent over the absence of land rights and Scheduled Tribe (ST) status among non-Bodo voters could significantly sway the outcome in the Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, situated within Assam's Bodoland Territorial Region.

Despite being represented by Naba Kumar Sarania of the Gana Suraksha Party, the first non-Bodo MP from Kokrajhar, for two consecutive terms, these unmet demands of non-Bodo voters may affect his party's poll fortune in the elections.

Sarania's nomination was rejected this time due to the cancellation of his ST status by the state government, a decision upheld by the Gauhati High Court.

His Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) fielded Binita Deka as an alternative arrangement.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) is vying to capitalise on absence of a 'strong' GSP candidate by projecting itself as the 'alternative', though the ruling force in BTR, United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), and chief opposition Bodoland People's Front (BPF) asserted that they enjoy the support of all sections of voters.

The Kokrajhar constituency, reserved for Scheduled Tribe (ST), will go to polls on May 7.

"Two-time MP Naba Sarania had played the 'non-Bodo card' to win elections. We don't want such political divisions as we all want to live as Assamese. But since we are living in the Sixth Schedule area, we are at times left with no option but to follow such divisive sentiments," said Amrit Narayan Patgiri, a retired vice-principal of Basugaon Higher Secondary School.

He maintained that the non-Bodo people had rallied behind Sarania in the last two Lok Sabha elections as he had promised land rights and ST status for Koch-Rajbongshis and Adivasi communities but said that "the MP failed to keep any of his assurances".

Lokenath Barman, a former school teacher, claimed that Sarania was taking advantage of a leadership void among the non-Bodo community. "The Bodo community is politically conscious and their leaders have fought for their rights. Though we have a substantial population of non-Bodo communities like Koch-Rajbongshis and Adivasis, there is a lack of political awareness and coordination among leaders," he said.

Barman said that one of the reasons for Koch-Rajbongshis and Adivasis not getting ST status in the state could be that the Scheduled Tribe tag would make them eligible to contest polls in reserved category constituencies like Kokrajhar.

Patgiri and Barman are among many non-Bodo people who expressed disappointment over their unmet demands.

Even though he is not in the fray, Sarania was actively campaigning for the party's candidate and claimed that it would be a hat-trick for the GSP.

"I am just a soldier in this political battle. I may be out of the race but the people who are suppressed by the ruling regime in BTR will continue supporting our candidate," he said. (PTI)

## NFR provides drinking water in Vande Bharat trains

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has decided to provide 500 ml Rail Neer packaged drinking waterbottles across all Vande Bharat trains for the passengers. This step has been adopted towards minimizing the wastage of precious drinking water in trains in view of the ongoing summer season. Amid growing concerns about preserving natural resources like drinking water, the NFR has taken this significant step towards passenger convenience and environmental sustainability. As per the initiative, each passenger across all Vande Bharat trains will be served with a 500ml water bottle. In addition, an extra 500 ml bottle of water will also be provided to the passengers on demand.

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, May 6:** Principal scientist of CSIR-URDIP, Pune Nishad A Deshpande delivered a lecture on 'Patentability Criteria-Basic Requirements' at CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology, in Jorhat as part of day-long programme organised on the occasion of 'Rashtriya Boudhik Sampada Mahotsav/National Intellectual Property Festival' on Monday.

Deshpande presented a comprehensive overview of intellectual property and its different types such as copyright, trademarks, trade secrets, geographical indications, integrated circuits, industrial designs, etc. with special reference to patents and patentability aspects of an invention. He discussed in detail the patentable and non-patentable inventions laid down under sections 2, 3 and 4 of the

Indian Patents Act, 1970 and said that every invention must meet the requirement of novelty, non-obviousness and usefulness besides ensuring complete disclosure of the invention for it to be considered patentable. Later, he explained the procedure followed at CSIR-URDIP for assessing patentability of an invention.

It may be mentioned that CSIR-URDIP is a specialised unit under CSIR, which is involved in the pre-research and pre-development phase of the research projects by providing intellectual property and techno-commercial information services to CSIR institutes besides conducting patentability analysis of various inventions generated from these institutes.

Virendra M Tiwari, director of CSIR-NEIST in his address spoke about the importance of intellectual

property and emphasised on understanding how these legal frameworks are governed and enforced. He mentioned that IP is an asset for any organisation as the world is shifting towards Industry 4.0 with various technological advancements and further emphasised the impact of artificial intelligence in various technological fields.

Madhujya Saikia, IP coordinator, CSIR-NEIST briefly shared the National IP Festival wherein he mentioned that the event was launched by DSIR along with Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in July, 2023, with the objective to spread awareness about generation and protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). He also highlighted the activities charted out for the day-long programme at CSIR-NEIST.

## Awareness programme on DHA conducted

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, May 6:** The history department of the Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College has organised an awareness lecture programme titled 'DHAS: A Treasure Trove of Knowledge' at its college premises in Dhekiajuli.

The programme started with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by the president of the governing body Jogenendra Saikia, principal the Lokanayak Omeo Kumar Das College, Sukdev Adhikari and Sangeeta Gogoi, director-in-charge of the Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, who was also the resource person of the programme.

Sukdev Adhikari emphasised the importance of oral history and field work for the study of history in his welcome address. This was followed by a Jyoti Sangeet by Mamata Boro.

## Aaranyak-DSWF initiative educates over 400 students on rhino conservation

Students educated on diverse aspects of rhinos, their characteristics, habitat, their role in eco systems

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** Aaranyak's flagship campaign 'Rhino Goes to School' was organised as a series for over 400 students of three schools located near two rhino bearing areas of the state.

One of the programmes was organised at the Luit Jatiya Vidyalaya at Sengelimora in Orang in collaboration with the administration of the Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve, in which over 250 students participated.

As part of the awareness campaign, students were educated on diverse aspects of rhinos, the animal's characteristics and habitat as well as the role they play in eco systems and for our well-being.

An engaging open quiz contest was also organised in conjunction with the visual presentation on the subject, interactions on animals like the one-horned rhinoceros and talks on local flora and fauna.



Headmaster of the school, Baharul Islam, president of Fatasimolu Block DC, Abul Kalam, president of Fatasimolu NC, EDC, Khairul Basher, local conservationist, Babukanta Daw and Bipul Gonju and mem-

bers of Aaranyak were also present in the programme.

Another such awareness event was organised by Aaranyak in collaboration with the Orang National Park and Tiger Reserve au-

thority at the Vidyasagar Jatiya Vidyalaya in Rowmari in Orang, where over 120 students participated.

One more such outreach event was conducted at the Medokgaon ME School in Bonkual in Golaghat district. Over 50 students participated in the programme. Babukanta Daw and Akash Morang, members of Aaranyak were also present.

Arif Hussain, manager of Aaranyak's Rhino Research and Conservation Division attended the series of programmes as resource person, which was supported by the UK-based David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation.

It is an ambitious campaign designed to raise awareness about conservation among students living on the edge of rhino-bearing areas. As such, the outreach event also emphasised on the importance of citizens sustaining wildlife and maintaining the balance of the eco system in order to protect wildlife.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Problems are not the problem; coping is the problem.*  
-Virginia Satir

## Promise and peril of Lithium

In the relentless pursuit of sustainable energy solutions, the global spotlight has shifted to the Lithium Triangle, encompassing Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile. Nestled within the vast Andean landscapes lies the world's largest lithium reserves, housed beneath the shimmering expanse of the Salar de Uyuni. This strategic reservoir of lithium, a fundamental component of lithium-ion batteries, serves as the linchpin for powering the technological innovations defining our era. The burgeoning market for lithium-ion batteries, valued at \$58.21 billion in 2022 and projected to soar to an estimated \$293.24 billion by 2032, underscores the pivotal role these batteries play in propelling our transition towards electrification. At the forefront of this paradigm shift are electric vehicles (EVs), heralded as the vanguard in combatting fossil fuel dependence. Lithium-ion batteries, with their rechargeable prowess and compact energy storage capabilities, emerge as the cornerstone technology driving this automotive revolution. Yet, amidst the fervour surrounding lithium's transformative potential, a confluence of environmental and safety concerns casts a sobering shadow over its ascendancy. The extraction of lithium, a process intricately tied to the mining of underground brine, exacts a toll on the delicate ecosystems of the Lithium Triangle. Reports emanating from these regions paint a grim tableau of environmental degradation, as communities grapple with the depletion of vital water resources and the encroachment of toxic pollutants.

The extraction process itself, reliant on copious water consumption and chemical agents such as sulphuric acid and sodium hydroxide, exacerbates the ecological strain. Each ton of lithium harvested precipitates the evaporation of approximately 2 million liters of water, further straining already parched landscapes and jeopardizing local livelihoods. The deleterious impacts extend beyond the terrestrial realm, as dwindling water levels imperil the fragile habitats of indigenous fauna, evidenced by heightened mortality rates among flamingos and camelids. Moreover, the proliferation of lithium-ion batteries introduces a new frontier of safety hazards, punctuated by sporadic incidents of thermal runaway and combustion. Instances of battery ignition, ranging from cell phones to electric vehicles, underscore the imperative of stringent safety protocols in managing these volatile energy sources. The spectre of fire hazards looms large, with the potential for cascading environmental and human health ramifications. To navigate this precarious terrain, a multifaceted approach is indispensable. From regulatory oversight to technological innovation, concerted efforts must be marshalled to mitigate the ecological and safety risks attendant to lithium extraction and battery utilization.

Moreover, investments in research and development hold the promise of unlocking breakthroughs in battery technology, ushering in a new era of safer and more efficient energy storage solutions. Collaborative partnerships between industry stakeholders, government agencies, and environmental advocacy groups are essential in charting a course towards a greener, more sustainable future. While the allure of lithium as a panacea for our energy needs is undeniable, its ascent must be tempered by a sober reckoning of its environmental and safety ramifications. As stewards of our planet, we bear a collective responsibility to tread cautiously, mindful of the delicate equilibrium between progress and preservation. Only through prudent stewardship and unwavering commitment to sustainability can we harness the transformative potential of lithium while safeguarding the ecological integrity of our planet for generations to come.

## Time for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to call early general elections

By: Ben Chacko

The Tories are imploding. That is the story of local election results following the polls to the councils throughout Britain, hundreds of Conservative seats lost, and gains for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. Keir Starmer says Rishi Sunak should take the hint and call a general election. Pressure should be put on the Tories to do so, though many of their MPs may be keen to postpone, while they can, the reckoning they so richly deserve.

It's traditional to talk of failing prime ministers as "lame ducks." Sunak has more than once been compared to one, and there is no shortage of Tories saying the government has lost its sense of purpose. Unfortunately that isn't true. The Conservatives may be headed for disaster but they retain a big parliamentary majority, and they're reusing it. Repressive legislation has barely let up since 2019, as citizens' rights to protest, strikes and free speech are ripped up.

More may be on its way: the unelected advisers on extremism and political violence have been lobbying for bans on protest outside Parliament, MPs' offices and council chambers, and for tougher crackdowns on Palestine solidarity and non-conforming media. Time may be running low, but as we saw with passage of the disgraceful Rwanda deportations law, the government is not above fast-tracking highly controversial legislation. Even now a Bill to criminalise homelessness, as cruel as it is absurd, is making its way through the Commons.

So the Tories need to be stopped, and the sooner the better. The longer they are in office the worse things will get. The case to do so is not weakened by the reality that Starmer's Labour is on board with most Tory policy. Labour has been marching right in the wake of the Tories.

Its commitment to retain Tory anti-protest laws, its hints that it might even keep the Rwanda deportations, underline the need to stop the Tories passing yet more reactionary legislation Labour

would simply keep. The attacks on British democracy are cross-party, and Starmer plays a key role in them, but he will find it easier to avoid reversing Tory laws than to pass new ones. So "Tories out!" remains a rallying cry across the left.

We should also note where Labour has done badly: particularly in areas with high Muslim populations. The loss of Oldham council is a case in point. We will not know till tomorrow who has won the West Midlands mayoralty, but Labour has been briefing the BBC it expects a loss with a "senior party source" putting a typical imperialist, indeed racist, spin on losing votes to a Palestine solidarity candidate: "It's the Middle East, not the West Midlands, that will have won [Tory] Andy Street the mayoralty. Once again Hamas are the real villains."

The anonymous briefing oozes contempt for voters protesting at Labour complicity in genocide. But the lesson is that Palestine matters, and should encourage the No Ceasefire, No Vote movement to demand more from Labour representatives if they wish to avoid challenges.

Finally, Britain's mass media tend to treat local elections as omens, which experts pick over to predict general election outcomes, rather than of significance in themselves. That reflects the loss of real authority by councils, their lack of financial autonomy and limited ability to make a difference on the ground.

But we face devastating cuts to local services in coming months, in every corner of the country; and local government needs to start fighting back for the communities it represents. We have seen too many sorry examples of cuts, punitive attacks on the poorest and even union-busting from Labour councils to imagine electing them means winning the battle.

A mass, grassroots movement to see off cuts and force the hand of councils and government alike, much like that being planned in Birmingham by the Brum, Rise Up! alliance of unions and campaigns, needs to start taking shape. (IPA Service)

## SC decision on Hindu marriage praiseworthy

By delivering a major decision on Hindu marriage, the Supreme Court has not only confirmed rites, rituals and traditional customs of Hindu marriage, but has also accepted them as necessary from the legal point of view. Today, when the sanctity, social acceptance and efficacy of Hindu marriage is getting undervalued due to so-called modern life under influence of western culture, there was a dire need to reinforce it.

Those who consider marriage ceremonies just as a registration need to be wary. They have to understand the underlying meaning of taking seven rounds around the altar; without these seven rounds, Hindu customs and wedding ceremonies will not be valid in the eyes of the law. The latest decision of the Supreme Court on Hindu marriage is welcome, and its long-term consequences will be pleasant for society. This decision will reinforce Hindu culture and traditions. The institution of family will get strengthened.

While rendering this decision related to Hindu marriage, the Supreme Court said that marriage is not an occasion just for 'singing and dancing', 'drinking and eating' or for demanding dowry and gifts by exerting undue pressure. Hindu marriage is not a commercial transaction. It is a serious basic cultural and family event which is celebrated to create a relationship between a man and a woman who attain the status of husband and wife for a good family in the future. It is a basic unit of the Indian Hindu social system, which has a strong cultural and religious dimension.

In fact, the Supreme Court has made it clear that Hindu marriage cannot be recognized without tak-

ing seven rounds around the altar, that is, the rules and provisions made in the Hindu Marriage Act will have to be followed strictly for solemnizing the marriage. In this way, the Court in its decision has clarified the legal requirements of solemnizing a Hindu marriage under the Hindu Marriage Act 1955.

According to the Act, a Hindu marriage shall be solemnized according to traditional rites, rituals and ceremonies of either party. The ceremonies include Saptapadi (the taking of seven steps jointly around the sacred fire by the bride and groom both); the marriage becomes complete and binding when they take the seventh step together. Overall, Hindu marriage is an institution, a ritual and the marriage is not a commercial transaction.

The Supreme Court has stressed that proper rites like Saptapadi (seven rounds around the sacred fire) and associated rituals and ceremonies are necessary for the validity of a Hindu marriage. In case of later disputes between husband and wife, it is necessary to present proof of the solemnizing of the marriage ceremony.

This effort of the Supreme Court to explain the value of the seven rounds and the ceremony related to it will not only strengthen the institution of Hindu marriage, but will also reinforce the values that are getting blurred in the storm of modernity. There is no doubt that the basic importance of marriage ceremony has reduced in the modern times as compared to the earlier times; now marriage has become just a show, compulsion or compromise

for many.

Justice B Nagarathna in her relevant and useful judgment has rightly said that Hindu marriage is a sacrament, which should be given status of an institution of great value in the Indian society. A marriage without traditional rites or rituals like seven rounds around the sacred fire will not be considered a Hindu marriage as per Section 7 of the Hindu Marriage Act. For this reason, the Court has urged young men and women to think deeply about the institution of marriage before entering into it; and to consider how sacred they said institution is in Indian society.

The question is why did the Supreme Court need to stress upon Hindu marriage and strengthen Hindu values? In fact, many cases have been coming to the court's doorstep regarding the rituals and traditional customs related to Hindu marriage, and every time the court has been presenting its view on the matters related to the institution of marriage with alertness, foresight and prudence.

The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court recently held that as per the Hindu Marriage Act, the ceremony of Kanyadaan is not necessary to solemnize a Hindu marriage. The importance of Saptapadi was also shown in that decision. In the decision of a family court of Madhya Pradesh, it was explained to the woman's side that applying vermilion is a religious duty of a married Hindu woman.

A similar attempt at persuasion is reflected in the latest decision of the Supreme Court. Overall, the message of the court is that the

basic meaning of marriage should be understood, while avoiding unnecessary pomp and show. There is now a need for more clarity regarding Hindu marriage and especially to emphasize Hindu rituals and culture; because the family institution continues to exist in India, the reason for this is Hindu values and traditions. In this way, the Court in its decision has clarified the legal requirements and sanctity of Hindu marriage under the Hindu Marriage Act 1955.

Hindu marriage is an ideal tradition and culture. In Hindu religion, marriage is considered one of the sixteen sacraments; Marriage or Vivaah, hence its literal meaning is to bear special responsibility. The marriage ceremony is commonly known as Hindu marriage. In other religions, marriage is a kind of contract between husband and wife which can be broken under special circumstances, but Hindu marriage is a relationship between husband and wife for many births which cannot be broken under any circumstances.

By taking seven rounds of sacred fire and keeping the Pole Star as witness, the two bodies, mind and soul get tied in a sacred bond. It is also a union of two families. In Hindu marriage, there is more spiritual relationship between husband and wife than physical relationship and this relationship is considered extremely sacred.

Hindu marriage not only contains family, social and cultural significance, but it also has deep spiritual significance. Hinduism has prescribed four purusharthas (four basic pursuits of life), i.e. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. The purpose of the marriage ceremony is to complete the effort of 'Kama' and then gradually move towards 'Moksha'.

Many important things in the life of a man and woman are associated with marriage; for example, love between man and woman, their relationship, children, their parents, various happy events falling in course of their life, social status and prosperity.

In Hindu society, a married woman is viewed with utmost respect. The sight of a woman with kumkum-sindoor on her forehead, wearing a mangalsutra around her neck, green bangles, toe rings and a six or nine-yard saree automatically generates respect for her in the mind of an observer.

Of the seven Hindu marriage vows, there are at least three where the couple promises to take care of their elders. The fifth promise is to have children and take care of them.

In recent years, many anomalies and distortions have been added to the Hindu marriage tradition and culture in India. With the introduction of dating culture, the prevalence of love marriage has increased. Potential brides and grooms prefer to choose life partners on their own. Today's romantic relationships are not actually marriage, but a new practice, which has the opposite effect of disintegrating the family institution.

Along with marriage, the practice of pre-wedding has also become the carrier of many distortions, big grand events and hotel culture has also blurred the sanctity of marriage. Widespread use of alcohol and other drugs at events has also become a cause of accidents. Due to which cracks are seen appearing in marriage bonds even before it takes place.

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## Regular workers' real wages declined by one percent every year

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Regular workers' real wages have been declining by one per cent every year under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's regime. However, BJP's election manifesto and Modi's guarantees have left this issue untouched, and used the word "wages" only twice, while giving the guarantee of periodic review of national floor wages. There is no guarantee of protection from declining real wages.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Instituted for Human Development (IHD) has calculated in their recently published study that over the decade until 2022, the average monthly real earnings of salaried workers in India declined by 1 per cent every year (CAGR) since 2012. Regular monthly real wage in 2012 was ₹ 12,100 which came down to ₹ 11,155 in 2019, and ₹ 10,925 in 2022. The decline was 1.2 per cent yearly upto 2019, and then 0.7 per cent as of 2022. In 2023, the average monthly real wage for adults further declined to ₹ 10,790.

Similarly, the average monthly real earnings of self-employed individuals declined annually by 0.8 per cent, from 7,017 rupees in 2019 to 6,843 rupees in 2022. In 2023, earnings of self-employed have marginally increased to ₹ 7,060. The average real monthly earnings of casual workers increased by 2.4 per cent annually, from 3,701 rupees in 2012 to 4,364 rupees in 2019, and by 2.6 per cent annually, to 4,712 rupees in 2022. However their earnings have declined to ₹ 4,671 in 2023.

The declining real earnings of regular salaried workers and the self-employed,

along with only a small increase in real wages for casual workers in India, indicates that the quality of employment generation was poor between 2000 and 2022.

The average real monthly earnings for both youths and adults engaged in regular salaried work and self-employment remained nearly stable or declined between 2012 and 2022, whereas the average real wages of those involved in casual work had a small increase. This trend underscores a high incidence of low earnings and low-paying employment among youths in the labour market. There was annual growth in real monthly earnings for youths in regular employment, of 0.4 per cent, between 2012 and 2022, while average earnings for adults experienced a negative annual growth, at -1.6 per cent, over the same period.

Likewise, average real earnings in self-employment for both youths and adults showed negative growth, at -0.7 per cent and -0.4 per cent annually. But monthly earnings in casual work grew at an annual rate of 2.6 per cent for youths and 2.4 per cent for adults over the same period. There was a gender gap in real earnings for youths in casual work, but it narrowed over the years. Female youths' real earnings and wages in self-employment and casual work declined, 'while male youths' real earnings in self-employment increased marginally and real wages in casual work remained stable.

The real earnings for regular salaried workers declined for both men and women between 2022 and 2023. Female youth casual workers' real earning declined from ₹ 3,374 monthly in 2022 to ₹ 3,017 per month in 2023, regular workers' from ₹ 9,281 to ₹

8193, and self-employed from ₹ 2,546 to ₹ 2363.

The gender gap was very wide in 2023, when male youth casual workers earned ₹ 5345. Regular male workers were earning ₹ 7913 in 2023, which was less than female youths. Self-employed males were earning ₹ 7082 per month in 2023.

Modi government can't deny this data since these data are taken from government data only, including the Periodical Labour Force Surveys (PLFS). "While wages of casual labourers maintained a modest upward trend during 2012-22, real wages of regular workers either remained stagnant or declined.

Self-employed real earnings also declined after 2019. Overall, wages have remained low. As much as 62 per cent of the unskilled casual agriculture workers and 70 per cent of such workers in the construction sector at the all-India level did not receive the prescribed daily minimum wages in 2022," the India Employment Report 2024 has stated.

In 2022, regular workers earned an average of 19,010 rupees per month, followed by self-employed individuals earning 11,973 rupees and casual workers earning 8,267 rupees. As against ₹ 20,033 per month earning for male regular workers, self-employed male workers earned ₹ 13,386 and casual male workers earned ₹ 9,086 only. For female workers these figures were ₹ 15,398, ₹ 5,424, and ₹ 5,548 respectively. The gender gap in the average monthly earnings was thus well pronounced, which has widened in the case of earnings for casual work and self-employment.

## Saudi Arabia has its pivotal moment in the pursuit of international clout

By: MA Hossain

In the vibrant heart of Riyadh, amidst its soaring skyline and lively thoroughfares, a momentous gathering of global leaders, policymakers, and influential business figures recently unfolded. The occasion? The World Economic Forum's Special Meeting in the Kingdom—an event of profound significance, highlighting Saudi Arabia's escalating prominence on the international platform and marking a pivotal juncture in the region's course. As delegates from every corner of the globe converged, the conversations transcended mere economic discourse, delving deeply into the intricate realms of geopolitics, ideological currents, and the very future trajectory of the Middle East.

At the heart of these discussions lies Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030—a holistic strategy for economic diversification, social transformation, and national revitalization. After eight years of implementation, the Kingdom's visionary agenda is yielding tangible results, ushering in a period of advancement, creativity, and societal integration.

Against this dynamic backdrop, the World Economic Forum provided a stage to highlight Saudi Arabia's evolving role—a symbol of promise and potential in a region historically marred by unrest and unpredictability.

Within the esteemed confines of the forum, what unfolded transcended traditional rhetoric and dialogue, encapsulating a profound shift in the geopolitical paradigm—a shift defined by the rise of a new catalyst for positive change, prosperity, and regional cohesion. As eloquently articulated by a participant, this phenomenon signals the Middle East's "1989 moment"—an analogy drawn to the pivotal events that redefined the global landscape three decades prior. Thus, the discussions and interactions at the forum symbolized not just discourse, but a pivotal moment in the ongoing narrative of regional and global transformation.

Just as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of communism in Eastern Europe marked the onset of a transformative era, the developments transpiring in Riyadh signify a monumental shift in the Middle Eastern landscape.

The era of entrenched authoritarian rule and ideological steadfastness is waning, making way for a fresh ethos characterized by pragmatism, collaboration, and forward-thinking strategies. It's a time where the region is embracing a new dawn of possibilities and progress.

The recent statements by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized the significant decision confronting the region: the choice between a trajectory marked by discord and turmoil or one defined by unity, security, and peace. As a crucial player in the region, the United States has unequivocally stated its position—a dedication to nurturing enhanced collaboration and stability that transcends historical rifts and ideological differences. This commitment signals a pivotal step towards fostering a more harmonious and secure future for all involved.

Central to this equation is the evolving relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia—a relationship marked by a convergence of interests and a shared vision for the future. Despite initial skepticism and geopolitical complexities, recent overtures signal a renewed sense of partnership and collaboration, extending beyond conventional security concerns to encompass a broad spectrum of mutual interests, from economic cooperation to technological innovation.

However, despite these diplomatic manoeuvres and tactical adjustments, formidable obstacles persist. Foremost among them is the persistent Israeli-Palestinian conflict—a perennial source of tension that remains resistant to resolution. Saudi Arabia's willingness to endorse Israel's inclusion in the Arab and Muslim spheres is contingent upon a genuine dedication to pursuing a viable two-state resolution—a proposition entangled with intricate complexities and deep-rooted historical grievances. Addressing this

issue remains a critical challenge in the pursuit of regional stability and harmony.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stands at a crucial juncture, torn between the demands of peace and the complexities of domestic politics. His decision not only shapes Israel's trajectory but also resonates throughout the region, holding significant implications for lasting peace and stability.

Similarly, Hamas, entangled in a deadly conflict with Israel, faces the harsh realities of war juxtaposed with the necessity for peace. The pressing nature of the situation, compounded by humanitarian crises and regional dynamics, accentuates the need for prompt and resolute action. Both Netanyahu's choices and Hamas's responses are pivotal in determining the course of events, with far-reaching consequences for the prospects of peace and stability in the region.

Meanwhile, the spectre of Iran looms large, casting a shadow over regional dynamics and geopolitical calculations. The Saudi-Iranian détente of March 2023 marked a significant milestone—a testament to the potential for rapprochement and cooperation in a region long characterized by animosity and mistrust.

However, underlying tensions persist, underscoring the fragility of the regional equilibrium and the complexities of navigating geopolitical fault lines.

At this pivotal moment, the Middle East finds itself at a decisive crossroads—a point in history marked by choices whose consequences will echo for generations. As key players navigate the intricate terrain of geopolitics and the urgent need for peace, the road ahead appears both uncertain and pregnant with potential. Within the corridors of power and the arenas of diplomacy, the destiny of nations teeters on the edge of a poignant reminder of the enduring significance of visionary leadership, boldness, and diplomatic acumen in shaping not only the region's fate but also the broader global landscape. (IPA Service)

# Younger generations have less freedom and independence – and it is affecting their happiness

By: Fiorentina Sterkaj

Experts often highlight social media and harsh economic times as key reasons why young people are getting unhappier. And while those factors are important, I would like to emphasise another.

Younger generations have less freedom and independence than previous generations did. The area where children are allowed to range unsupervised outside has shrunk by 90% since the 1970s.

Parents increasingly organise entertainment – ranging from play dates and sports and music classes to family cinema trips – for their children, rather than letting them come up with it themselves. Perhaps this can help explain recent reports that many teenagers today choose to be holed up in their bedrooms.

The lack of childhood freedom isn't just a result of parental control. Societal expectations and school policies also have huge influences.

It is important to note that constraints to freedom often stem from well-meaning intentions, such as safety concerns (location tracking, for example) or cultural norms. Understandably, nobody wants to be the parent who lets their kid take (perceived) risks if others don't. But there are risks to over-protecting children too. It can inadvertently hinder their psychological development.

## Emotional, social cognitive effects

Psychologist Jean Piaget emphasised the importance of exploration and experimentation in cognitive development in the 1950s. He noted that children construct their understanding of the world through active engagement with their environment. By restricting children's freedom to explore and take age-appropriate risks, we deprive them of opportunities for intellectual curiosity and innovation.

A lack of independence can undermine young people's sense of agency and control over their lives. And research in psychology consistently demonstrates that when people, young or old, feel powerless and constrained by external forces, such as parental supervision or societal expectations, it can lead to frustration, helplessness and low self-esteem.

Moreover, the absence of autonomy limits young people's opportunities for self-discovery, creativity and personal growth. When children are constantly guided and supervised, they miss out on the invaluable experiences of problem-solving, decision-making and learning from mistakes.

The decline in independence can have

implications for social and emotional development. Children may get love, support and attention within the family unit. But spending too much time with parents may lead to difficulties getting on with peers, who don't provide the same unconditional love and support.

Indeed, when children are constantly surrounded by adults and structured activities, they may struggle to develop meaningful relationships, assertiveness and resilience. Research highlights the importance of peer interactions in shaping social competence and emotional intelligence. After all, parents may not require you to empathise with them, but friends will.

By orchestrating play dates and entertainment, parents may therefore inadvertently limit their children's ability to navigate social dynamics. This will include learning empathy and developing interpersonal skills independently.

It will also set an expectation that children will come to internalise the idea that "parents will do things so I don't

have to" – leading to further lack of accomplishment.

The lack of independence can also contribute to feelings of boredom, restlessness and disengagement. Humans need to be engaged in activities that challenge and absorb our attention, leading to feelings of fulfilment and happiness.

When children are constantly entertained and supervised, they may struggle to find activities that naturally capture their interest and provide a sense of purpose and enjoyment.

This is important. In defining happiness, positive psychology emphasises both the emotional aspect, such as experiencing positive emotions, and the cognitive aspect, which involves a sense of overall satisfaction with one's life, including meaning and purpose.

Research has shown that parenting that supports autonomy, encouraging children to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their actions, is linked to better psychological wellbeing in adolescents. Conversely, excessive parental control is associated with higher levels of emotional distress and lower

levels of life satisfaction among adolescents.

The school environment also plays a significant role. Zero-tolerance policies, strict disciplinary measures and standardised testing are commonplace. But overly strict and punitive disciplinary practices are associated with decreased intrinsic motivation and academic engagement among students.

Recent developments in response to safety concerns, such as increased surveillance and monitoring within schools, further intrude upon students' autonomy and independence. Metal detectors, security cameras and random searches ultimately create an atmosphere of surveillance and control.

**Age-appropriate freedom**  
Evidence supports the idea that freedom and independence is crucial for the happiness and wellbeing of young people.

There are ways to let your children have age-appropriate freedoms. A five-year-old, for example, can be allowed



and encouraged to butter their own toast, make their bed, or play on their own in the garden.

A 10-year-old, meanwhile, should be able

to walk to and from school on their own, be responsible for their homework and keep their space tidy. And when children reach the age of 15, you can encourage them to cook a family meal, do laundry and arrange travel to school, clubs or friends' houses independently rather than be chauffeured by their parents.

It can also be useful to decline to provide entertainment from time to time, letting them work something out on their own. Children are wonderfully creative and if there is nothing to do, they will often think of something eventually. This could even apply to play dates. It is OK to invite a child's friend over with no specific entertainment in mind.

Moving forward, it is essential to promote environments that foster autonomy, self-expression and independent learning, both at home and in educational institutions, to support the development and happiness of young people. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

# The corporate takeover of India's media

By: R Srinivasan

December 30, 2022, was a day to forget for India's already badly mauled and tamed media.

For, that day, influential – and, for many, controversial – Indian businessman Gautam Adani, then the world's third richest man, took nearly full control of the much-respected and revered NDTV after his Adani Enterprises acquired 27.26 per cent additional shares, taking his total holdings to 64.71 per cent.

A few months before delivering this coup de grace, Adani's media company, AMG Media Networks, had hired a new CEO and a retinue of government-friendly journalists.

His tail up, Adani's next target was The Quint which, like NDTV, wore its anti-establishment badge with pride. On March 27, 2023, AMG Media Networks acquired 49 per cent stake in Quintillion Business Media Pvt Ltd, The Quint's holding company. This happened five years after central tax authorities raided The Quint's offices in Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

Over the last 15 years or so, large and powerful corporate houses such as Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) and Adani Enterprises have exercised diverse strategies to acquire several well-established media companies.

What has arguably worked to favour the Ambanis and the Adanis is their closeness to Narendra Modi's government.

While one 2019 report said that Reliance "controlled" 72 television channels across India, the company does not shy away from claiming that it has an "omni-channel presence". This brings to sharp relief the issue of diversity, or the lack of it, in Indian media.

The government has made no secret of its intent to control the media narrative.

India leads the world in government-ordered take-

downs of social media posts across platforms like YouTube, micro-blogging platform X (formerly Twitter) etc.

Recently, X blocked dozens of accounts backing farmers protesting government policy on agricultural prices, while journalists and media outlets perceived as being "unfriendly" to the Modi government have faced arrests, tax raids and other coercive action by government agencies.

On paper, India is one of the world's largest and most diverse media markets. There are more than 140,000 registered newspapers and periodicals, of which more than 22,000 are daily newspapers. These are published in an astonishing 189 languages and dialects, covering not only all the multiplicity of tongues, but many foreign languages as well.

There are more than 900 television channels, of which more than 350 are news channels, with a majority of them broadcasting 24/7. India also has more than 850 FM radio channels, of which only the state-owned All India Radio is officially allowed to broadcast news.

Rapid expansion in broadband internet access has also led to an explosion of digital news media outlets.

While there are no estimates of the number of digital news media sites in India, many of the legacy print publications and TV news channels also have a digital presence, while the number of digital only news sites continues to soar with rising internet penetration. At last count, India had more than 820 million active internet users.

There is, however, another yardstick which is of more fundamental importance to plurality of news and opinion – media ownership.

Organised mass media is no longer the purvey of journalist-entrepreneurs. It is a large scale business requiring heavy capital in-

vestment and lots of working capital. This has increasingly led to a growing corporatisation of media – in India and elsewhere – bringing large business conglomerates into play as media owners.

While the takeover of major Indian media networks by large corporate conglomerates is legion, increasing control by business houses poses a threat to the untrammelled working of the media. A problem which has been recognised elsewhere too.

Two years ago a senior Bangladeshi editor of an English newspaper wrote: "As our business houses increase in number, they are investing resource and power, into newspapers (read media in general) that can serve as a part of their arsenal for business growth, fighting rivals and frightening others from exposing their malpractices."

It is a no-brainer why business houses seek to control media.

First, there are collateral benefits of proximity to the powers-that-be. Second, there is the attraction of posting greater profits.

One estimate pegs the Indian media and entertainment sector's revenues to hit about ₹ 2.6 trillion (US\$31.15 billion) this year. Another estimate states that by 2026, India will be the world's fifth largest media market by value, in both print and broadcast television. Such mammoth numbers make media a legitimate focus of interest for businesses.

However, a consequence of this growing corporatisation has been the dominance of business interests in the decision-making processes in media houses, which has hampered editorial independence.

Heavy reliance on advertising revenues is the other threat to genuine media independence.

In 2022, while Indian print media generated ₹ 165.95 billion (US\$1.9 bn) in advertising revenues, circulation revenues were only a fraction of this at an

estimated ₹ 76.30 billion (US\$0.9 bn).

This means that advertising – and as a corollary, the need to keep advertisers happy – is of prime importance, further weakening the freedom of editors and journalists. This is true for broadcast television, which has seen advertising revenues rise while subscription revenues have fallen.

No less significant is the rise of publicly listed media enterprises, with a large number of public shareholders. With managements under pressure to deliver dividends to shareholders, the pursuit of profit is the paramount objective.

Increasingly blurred lines across channels – both newspapers and TV channels also run websites, which compete with similar digital-only websites – has meant that news is no longer news – it is content.

And what content is produced and presented is driven more by algorithms than the informed decisions of editors. This has changed the reader/viewer from a citizen and a key stakeholder in the democratic process to a consumer and a target for advertisers.

But perhaps the most singular threat to a diversity of voices in the media is posed by the growing concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few.

A 2018 research project found that the print media market is highly concentrated. Just four publications – Dainik Jagran, Hindustan, Amar Ujala and Dainik Bhaskar – capture three out of four readers in Hindi.

With no laws or regulations in India on cross-holdings, a few powerful conglomerates now control a significant slice of the media audience in India.

This makes it easier for vested interests to assert control through opaque and non-public means and reduces plurality and diversity in the marketplace. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

# What can I do to make my cough go away naturally?

By: Jayne Leonard and Jenna Fletcher

Allergies, infections, and acid reflux are just a few possible causes of a cough. Some natural remedies may help relieve a cough.

This article reviews natural remedies that may help treat a cough. It is important to remember that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not monitor herbs and supplements, so people who use them may be at risk of using low quality products with impurities.

People who want to try natural remedies to treat their cough should consider researching sources and brands. Additionally, some herbs and supplements can interfere with medications, which may result in unwanted side effects. It is best to consult a doctor before taking supplements.

## 12 natural cough remedies

People use a range of natural remedies to treat a persistent cough. While they may help some people, it is important to note that some of the following remedies have limited evidence to support their use.

This means a person may or may not find that the remedies work for them.

### 1. Honey

According to research, honey may relieve a cough. In a 2021 review of studies, researchers looked at the effect of using honey to treat coughs in upper respiratory infections.

The researchers found that honey was superior to usual care, both in suppressing the cough and in helping prevent the need for antibiotics.

In another study, researchers compared honey with dextromethorphan, a common cough suppressant.

The researchers found that both honey and dextromethorphan worked to suppress coughs. They noted that honey scored slightly higher in one trial and on par with dextromethorphan in another. A person can use this remedy by swallowing a spoonful of honey or adding it to a hot drink, such as an herbal tea.

### 2. Ginger

Ginger may ease a dry or asthmatic cough, as it has anti-in-

flammatory properties. It may also relieve nausea and pain.

Only a few older studies have looked at ginger's effect on coughs. A study from 2015 examined 10 different natural products used in traditional Asian medicines, including ginger.

The researchers found that ginger and other remedies, including honey, have played a continued role in traditional medicine.

While a long history of use can have valuable implications for a treatment's effectiveness, the researchers noted that their study may provide future researchers with a place to start when examining natural solutions to coughs.

People often add ginger to dishes or drink it in tea. However, in some cases, ginger tea can cause stomach upset or heartburn.

### 3. Hot fluids

While current research is lacking, an older study from 2008 Trusted Source showed that drinking liquids at room temperature may alleviate a cough, runny nose, and sneezing.

However, people with additional cold or flu symptoms may benefit from warming up their beverages. The same study reports that hot beverages alleviate even more symptoms, including a sore throat, chills, and fatigue.

The symptom relief was immediate and remained for a continued period after finishing the hot beverage. Hot beverages that may be comforting include:

- clear broths
- herbal teas
- decaffeinated black tea
- warm water
- warm fruit juices

### 4. Steam

A wet cough, which is one that produces mucus or phlegm, may improve with steam. To try this method, a person should take a hot shower or bath and allow the bathroom to fill with steam. They should stay in this steam for a few minutes until symptoms subside. They can drink a glass of water afterward to cool down and prevent dehydration.

Alternatively, people can make a steam bowl. A person can do this by:

- filling a large bowl with hot water
- adding herbs or essential oils, such as eucalyptus or rosemary,

which may help relieve congestion.

- leaning over the bowl and placing a towel over the head, which traps the steam so the person can breathe it in

- breathing in the steam for about 10–15 minutes

A person may find steaming helpful when done one to two times per day. While many believe steam will help with cough and other symptoms, not all evidence supports this. For example, a 2017 study looking at the use of steam for common cold symptoms found that it did not noticeably improve a person's symptoms.

### 5. Marshmallow root

Marshmallow root is an herb with a long history of use as a treatment for coughs and sore throats. The herb can ease irritation resulting from coughing because of its high mucilage content. Mucilage is a thick, gluey substance that coats the throat.

One older, small study found that an herbal cough syrup containing marshmallow root, along with thyme and ivy, effectively relieved coughs resulting from common colds and respiratory tract infections.

After 12 days of taking the syrup, 90% of the participants rated its effectiveness as good or very good. In a 2020 in vitro study, researchers also noted the coating effect of marshmallow root extract.

They found that the root extract has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties and provided similar relief to dicyclanec, a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medication.

Marshmallow root is also available as a dried herb or a bagged tea. A person should add hot water to either and then drink it immediately or allow it to cool first. The longer the marshmallow root steeps in the water, the more mucilage will be in the drink.

Side effects can include stomach upset, but it may be possible to counter this by drinking extra fluids. Marshmallow root is available for purchase in health stores or online.

### 6. Saltwater gargle

People have used saltwater

to relieve sore throat and symptoms associated with the common cold. It may help loosen mucus and alleviate some pain. However, it likely will not help reduce viral load.

In a 2021 study, researchers compared different antiseptic mouthwashes to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. They found that several commercial brands helped with reducing viral load, but a lab-made saltwater solution did not effectively kill the virus.

A person can make a saltwater gargle by:

- stirring 1/2 teaspoon of salt into a cup of warm water until it dissolves

- allowing the solution to cool slightly before using it to gargle

- letting the mixture sit at the back of the throat for a few moments before spitting it out

- doing this several times each day until the cough improves

Young children and people with high blood pressure should avoid using saltwater gargles

### 7. Bromelain

Bromelain is an enzyme that comes from pineapples. It is most plentiful in the core of the fruit.

It has anti-inflammatory properties and may also have mucolytic properties, which means it can break down mucus and remove it from the body.

Some people drink pineapple juice daily to reduce mucus in the throat and suppress coughing. However, there may not be enough bromelain in the juice to relieve symptoms.

Bromelain supplements are available and may be more effective at relieving coughs. However, it is best for a person to speak with a doctor before trying any new supplements.

Bromelain is a potential allergen, and the substance may also cause side effects and interact with medications. People who take blood thinners or specific antibiotics should not take bromelain.

### 8. Thyme

Thyme has both culinary and medicinal uses and is a commonly used remedy for a cough, sore throat, bronchitis, and digestive issues.

In a 2015 meta-analysis of several studies, researchers noted

that strong evidence suggests that using thyme preparations helped alleviate people's cough symptoms.

However, they noted that additional studies are needed to demonstrate its overall effectiveness.

A more recent study in 2021 showed that people using a combination of thyme and ivy drops showed improvement in bronchitis symptoms, cough, and overall quality of life.

They also noted that people experienced few side effects using the drops. To treat coughs using thyme, a person can look for a cough syrup that contains this herb.

### 9. Dietary changes for acid reflux

Acid reflux is a common cause of a cough. Avoiding foods that can trigger acid reflux is one of the best ways to manage this condition and reduce the cough that accompanies it.

Every individual may have different reflux triggers that they need to avoid. People who are unsure of what causes their reflux can begin by eliminating the most common triggers from their diet and monitoring their symptoms.

The foods and beverages that most commonly trigger acid reflux include:

- alcohol
- caffeine
- chocolate
- citrus foods
- fried and fatty foods
- garlic and onions
- mint
- spices and spicy foods
- tomatoes and tomato-based products

### 10. Slippery elm

Native Americans traditionally used slippery elm bark to treat coughing and digestive issues.

Slippery elm is similar to marshmallow root as it contains a high level of mucilage, which helps to soothe a sore throat and cough.

A person can make slippery elm tea by adding 1 teaspoon of the dried herb to a cup of hot water and allowing it to steep for at least 10 minutes before drinking.

It is important to note that slippery elm may interfere with the absorption of medications, so a

person should talk with a doctor before making a tea or using another supplement.

Slippery elm is available in powder and capsule form in health stores and online.

### 11. N-acetylcysteine (NAC)

NAC is a supplement that comes from the amino acid L-cysteine. Taking a daily dose may lessen the frequency and severity of a wet cough by reducing mucus in the airways.

A meta-analysis of 13 studies suggests that NAC can significantly and consistently reduce symptoms in people with chronic bronchitis.

Chronic bronchitis is a prolonged inflammation of the airways that causes mucus buildup, a cough, and other symptoms.

The researchers suggest a daily dose of 600 milligrams (mg) of NAC for people without airway obstruction and up to 1,200 mg where there is an obstruction.

NAC can have severe side effects, including hives, swelling, fever, and difficulty breathing. Anyone considering this approach should speak with a doctor first.

### 12. Probiotics

Probiotics do not directly relieve a cough, but they may boost the immune system by balancing the bacteria in the gut.

A healthy immune system can help to fight off infections that may be causing the cough.

One type of probiotic, a bacteria called Lactobacillus, provides a modest benefit in helping prevent the common cold, according to an older study published in 2013.

Another meta-analysis published in 2016 found that taking probiotics helped reduce the number of times children came down with respiratory tract infections, which could indirectly reduce coughing.

Supplements containing Lactobacillus and other probiotics are available at health and drug stores.

Some foods are also naturally rich in probiotics, including:

- miso soup
- natural yogurt
- kimchi
- sauerkraut

However, the number and diversity of probiotic units in foods can vary greatly. It may be best

The announcement complicates last-ditch efforts by international mediators, including the director of the CIA, to broker a cease-fire

## Israeli army tells Palestinians to evacuate parts of Rafah ahead of an expected assault

**JERUSALEM, May 6:** The Israeli army on Monday ordered tens of thousands of people in the southern city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip to begin evacuating, signaling that a long-promised ground invasion could be imminent.

The announcement complicated last-ditch efforts by international mediators, including the director of the CIA, to broker a cease-fire. Hamas and Qatar, a key mediator, have warned that an invasion of Rafah could derail the talks.

Israel has described Rafah as the last significant Hamas stronghold after seven months of war, and its leaders have repeatedly said they need to carry out a ground invasion to defeat the Islamic militant group.

Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an army spokesman, said some 100,000 people were being ordered to move to a nearby Israel-declared humanitarian zone called Muwasi. He said Israel was preparing a "limited scope operation" and would not say whether this was the beginning of a broader invasion of the city. But last October following the unprecedented Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel by Hamas, Israel did not formally announce the launch of a ground invasion that continues to this day.

The move comes a day after Hamas militants carried out a deadly rocket attack from the Rafah area that killed three Israeli soldiers.

Shoshani said Israel published a map of the evacuation area, and that orders were being issued through air-dropped leaflets, text messages and radio broadcasts. He said Israel has expanded humanitarian aid into Muwasi, including field hospitals, tents, food and water.

Israel's army said on the social platform X



it would act with "extreme force" against militants, and urged the population to evacuate immediately for their safety.

Israel's plan to invade Rafah has raised global alarm because of the potential for harm to more than a million Palestinian civilians sheltering there.

About 1.4 million Palestinians — more than half of Gaza's population — are jammed into the town and its surroundings. Most of them fled their homes elsewhere in the territory to escape Israel's onslaught and now face another wrenching move, or the danger of facing the brunt of a new assault. They live in densely packed tent camps, overflowing U.N. shelters or crowded apartments, and are dependent on international aid for food, with sanitation systems and medical facilities infrastructure crippled.

The U.N. agency that has helped millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank for decades, known as UNRWA, warned Monday of devastating consequences of a Rafah offensive, including more civilian suffering and deaths. The agency said it would not leave but stay in Rafah as long as possible to continue providing lifesaving assistance.

Shoshani would not say whether the up-

coming Rafah operation is a response to Sunday's killing. He said the incident would have no effect on the amounts of badly needed aid entering Gaza because other crossing points remain operational.

He wouldn't comment, however, on U.S. warnings not to invade and wasn't clear on whether the evacuation was coordinated with Egypt, Egypt, a strategic partner of Israel, has said that an Israeli military seizure of the Gaza-Egypt border — which is supposed to be demilitarized — or any move to push Palestinians into Egypt would threaten its four-decade-old peace agreement with Israel.

In Rafah, people received flyers Monday morning in Arabic detailing which neighborhood blocks needed to leave and where humanitarian zones had expanded to. The flyers said that aid services would spread from Deir al Balah in the north to the center of Khan Yunis city in the middle of the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians in Rafah said people gathered to discuss their options after receiving the flyers. Most said they did not want to move alone and preferred to travel in groups.

"So many people here are displaced and now they have to move again, but no one will stay here it's not safe," Nidal Alzaanin told The Associated Press by phone.

Alzaanin, a father of five, works for an international aid group and was displaced to Rafah from Beit Hanoun in the north at the start of the war. He said people are concerned since Israeli troops shot at Palestinians as they moved during previous evacuation orders.

Alzaanin said he has packed his documents and bags but will wait 24 hours to see what others do before relocating. He said he has a friend in Khan Yunis whom he hopes can pitch a tent for his family. (AP)

## UN nuclear watchdog chief travels to Iran as its monitoring remains hampered

**JERUSALEM, May 6:** The head of the United Nations' atomic watchdog traveled on Monday to Iran, where his agency faces increasing difficulty in monitoring the Islamic Republic's rapidly advancing nuclear program as tensions remain high in the wider Middle East over the Israel-Hamas war.

Rafael Mariano Grossi already has warned Tehran has enough uranium enriched to near-weapons-grade levels to make "several" nuclear bombs if it chose to do so. He has acknowledged the agency can't guarantee that none of Iran's centrifuges may have been peeled away for clandestine enrichment.

Those challenges now find themselves entangled in attacks between Israel and Iran, with the city of Isfahan apparently coming under Israeli fire in recent weeks despite it being surrounded by sensitive nuclear sites. Grossi is likely to attend an Iranian nuclear conference

there while on his two-day trip to Iran. "Problems will not disappear," Grossi told an International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors' meeting in March. "They will only get worse. So, we need to address this in a serious way."

Iranian media said Grossi arrived to Tehran would meet with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on Monday afternoon. Grossi will travel to Isfahan on Tuesday before heading back to Vienna, where he plans to give an update to journalists there.

Tensions have grown between Iran and the IAEA since then-President Donald Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. Since then, Iran has abandoned all limits the deal put on its program and enriches uranium to 60% purity — near weapons-grade levels of 90%.

IAEA surveillance cameras have been disrupted, while Iran has

barred some of the agency's most experienced inspectors.

Meanwhile, Iranian officials have increasingly threatened they could pursue atomic weapons.

"For us, making the atomic bomb is easier than not building atomic bomb," said Mahmoud Reza Aghamiri, the chancellor of Tehran Shahid Beheshti University and a specialist in nuclear physics.

Iranian media quoted Aghamiri acknowledging Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had previously said making an atomic bomb is forbidden.

"But if his fatwa and viewpoint is changed, we have ability to build atomic bomb, too," Aghamiri added.

Aghamiri's comments follow a drumroll of others by Iranian lawmakers, those in its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and a former head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran suggesting Tehran could build the bomb. (AP)

## Macron sets trade and Ukraine as top priority as China's Xi Jinping pays a state visit to France

**PARIS, May 6:** China's President Xi Jinping arrived at the French presidential palace on Monday for a two-day state visit that is expected to focus both on trade disputes and diplomatic efforts to convince Beijing to use its influence to move Russia toward ending the war in Ukraine.

In Paris, Xi first joined a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen meant to address broader EU concerns. Macron said in his introductory remarks the meeting would first address trade issues and how to ensure "fair competition," and then the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

"We are at a turning point in our history" as the Europe-China relationship is faced with challenges, Macron said.

The talks are aimed at sharing "both our shared positions and our

concerns, to try to overcome them, because the future of our continent will very clearly also depend on our ability to develop balanced relations with China," he said.

Macron, a strong advocate of Europe's economic sovereignty, wants to raise French concerns about a Chinese antidumping investigation into cognac and other European brandy, and tensions over French cosmetics and other sectors.

In a recent speech, he denounced trade practices of both China and the United States as shoring up protections and subsidies.

At the start of the meeting in Paris, Xi said "the world today has entered a new period of turbulence

and change." "As two important forces in the world, China and Europe should ... continuously make new contributions to world peace and development," he said.

The EU launched an investigation last fall into Chinese subsidies and could impose tariffs on electric vehicles exported from China.

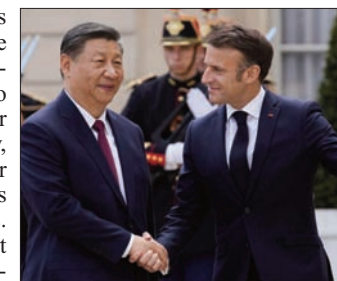
"The European Union and China want good relations," von der Leyen said. "We have a substantial EU-China economic relationship. ... But this relationship is also challenged, for example, through state-induced overcapacity, unequal market access and overdependencies."

Paris is the first stop on Xi's European trip, seeking to rebuild rela-

tions at a time of global tensions. After France on Monday and Tuesday, he will head to Serbia and Hungary. France hopes the discussions will help convince China to use its leverage with Moscow to "contribute to a resolution of the conflict" in Ukraine, according to a French presidential official. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently announced plans to visit China this month.

Macron will press Xi over supplies from Chinese companies supporting the Russian war effort despite EU sanctions, he said. China claims neutrality in the Ukraine conflict. France also wants China to maintain a dialogue with Kyiv, added the official, who was not authorized to be identified according to presidential policy.

Last year, Macron appealed to Xi to "bring Russia to its senses," but the call was not followed by any apparent action by Beijing. (AP)



## Panama's new president-elect, José Raúl Mulino, was a late entry in the race



**PANAMA CITY, May 6:** José Raúl Mulino said he was practically retired from politics just over six months ago. Now, he'll be Panama's president for the next five years.

Standing before a pack of supporters Sunday night, Mulino said: "I never imagined this."

In a historic and tumultuous election, preliminary results put Mulino on top to lead the normally sleepy Central American nation through a moment of political tension, historic migration and a struggling economy.

The 64-year-old lawyer, whose last position in politics was as minister of security in then President Ricardo Martinelli's 2009-2014 administration, was initially tapped by the popular former leader to be his running mate after Martinelli's wife declined. But then Martinelli was disqualified from running after he was sentenced to more than 10 years in prison for a money laundering conviction. Mulino took his place, and ended up winning Sunday's presidential election with 35% of the vote and a nine-point lead over his nearest opponent after dodging constitutional challenges to his own candidacy.

The president-elect got there with strong support from Martinelli, arguably the most important tool in Mulino's campaign as he rode the fiery ex-leader's popularity to victory.

While he lacks Martinelli's

charisma, the economic boom seen under his ally pushed many voters to support Mulino at a time that Panama's economy has lagged.

The former president, who has been sheltering in the Nicaraguan Embassy since February after receiving political asylum, said his trust for Mulino dates back 30 years.

"Mulino seems a little tough, but he is a good guy, serious, and is the only one prepared to take on this great challenge and knows how the economy works to lift the country," Martinelli said in a video broadcast to supporters at Mulino's campaign close.

A maritime law attorney who graduated from Tulane University in New Orleans, Mulino became known as a private business leader who took part in a civil movement against the dictatorship of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, who was ousted by an American invasion on Dec. 20, 1989.

He acted as vice minister of foreign affairs in the 1989-1994 administration of President Guillermo Endara, who took office after the fall of Noriega and the end of the Panamanian military regime. Mulino later remained in charge of the country's international policy in the last part of that administration.

Mulino remained active in politics and more than a decade later backed Martinelli in the election that the supermarket magnate won in 2009. Mulino was appointed minister of the interior and justice, later taking the reins of the public security office.

Mulino says one of the achievements during that time was to "re-cover" a swath of Panama on the border with Colombia, known as the Darien Gap, which "was in the hands of the narco-guerrillas" of the neighboring country. (AP)

## Danish King Frederik and his Australian-born wife visit Sweden on their first official trip abroad

**COPENHAGEN, May 6:** Denmark's King Frederik X arrived in Stockholm on Monday with his Australian-born wife Queen Mary, as they begin their first official visit abroad as new Danish monarchs.

The 55-year-old Frederik was proclaimed king on Jan. 14 after his 83-year-old mother, Queen Margrethe II, who was Europe's longest-reigning monarch, abdicated.

In the Swedish capital, Frederik and Mary were first greeted by Crown Princess Victoria and her husband Prince Daniel, who boarded the Danish royal yacht Dannebrog. They then took the gilded Swedish Royal Barge to shore and were welcomed there by King Carl XVI Gustaf, Sweden's longest-reigning monarch, and German-Brazilian-born Queen Silvia. The welcome also included a cannon salute and music by Sweden's



Royal Guards, lined up on the quay at the foot of the Swedish royal palace.

Relations between the two royal houses are close. Frederik's grandmother, Queen Ingrid who died in 2000, was a Swedish princess. The May 6-7 visit includes meetings with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the speaker of the Swedish Parliament. A visit to a military facility is also scheduled.

Danish government members also ac-

## Indian-origin astronaut Sunita Williams set to fly into space for a third time today

**WASHINGTON, May 6:** Indian-origin astronaut Sunita Williams is ready to fly into space for the third time on Tuesday as the pilot aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft in its first crewed test flight.

Boeing's Starliner will blast off for the International Space Station from Cape Canaveral in Florida.

Starliner will carry Williams, 58, and Butch Wilmore to the International Space Station, marking what could be a momentous and long-awaited victory for the beleaguered Boeing programme.

The scheduled lift-off is set for 22:34 local time on Mon-

day (8:04 am IST on Tuesday) "We are all here because we are all ready. Our friends and family have heard about it and we've talked about it and they are happy and proud that we are part of the process to fix it all,"

BBC quoted Williams as saying The mission has been delayed for several years because of setbacks in the spacecraft's development.

If it is successful, it will become the second private firm able to provide crew transport to and from the ISS, alongside Elon Musk's SpaceX.

Such a scenario — with both SpaceX's Crew Dragon

and Starliner flying regularly — is one for which the US space agency has long waited.

"Design and development is hard — particularly with a human space vehicle," said Mark Nappi, vice president and Starliner programme manager at Boeing, during a Thursday news briefing.

"There's a number of things that were surprises along the way that we had to overcome. ... It certainly made the team very, very strong. I'm very proud of how they've overcome every single issue that we've encountered and gotten us to this point," Nappi said.

"This is history in the making," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said of the upcoming Starliner mission during a March 22 news conference. "We're now in the golden era of space exploration." SpaceX

and Boeing developed their respective vehicles under NASA's Commercial Crew Programme, a partnership with private industry contractors. From the outset, the space agency aimed to have both companies operating at once. The Crew Dragon and Starliner spacecraft would each serve as a backup to the other, giving astronauts the option to keep flying, even if technical issues or other setbacks grounded one spacecraft.

Williams received her commission as an Ensign in the United States Navy from the United States Naval Academy in May 1987.

Williams was selected as an astronaut by NASA in 1998 and is a veteran of two space missions, Expeditions 14/15 and 32/33. (PTI)

## Chad holds presidential election after years of military rule

**N'DJAMENA, May 6:** Voters in Chad headed to the polls on Monday to cast their ballot in a long delayed presidential election that is set to end three years of military rule under interim president, Mahamat Debby Itno.

Debby Itno seized power after his father who ran the country for more than three decades was killed fighting rebels in 2021. Last year, the government announced it was extending the 18-month transition for two more years, which provoked protests across the country.

There are 10 candidates on the ballot, including a woman. Analysts say Debby Itno is expected to emerge among the front runners. The main opposition figure Yaya Dillo, the current president's cousin, was killed in February in circumstances that remain unclear. "For years now, we've had to cope with the high cost of living, without any solution," said Adoumadi Jean, a teacher at a state secondary school in Moyen-Chari province, in an interview with The Associated Press. "We want a change this year through this election," he added.

Along with high food prices partly caused by the war in Ukraine, Chad has absorbed a wave of over half a million refugees from neighboring Sudan, and is dealing with a threat from the Boko Haram insurgency spilling over from its southwestern border with Nigeria. Boko Haram launched an insurgency more than a decade ago against Western education and seeks to establish Islamic law in Nigeria's northeast. The insurgency has spread to West African neighbors including Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

In March, an attack the government blamed on Boko Haram killed 7 soldiers, reviving fears of violence in the Lake Chad area after a period of peace following a successful operation launched in 2020 by the Chadian army to destroy the extremist group's bases there. Schools, mosques and churches reopened and humanitarian organizations returned.

Human rights groups have called for an investigation in to the killing of Chad's main opposition figure, Dillo. The government has said Dillo was killed during an attack on the the National State Security Agency by his group, known as The Socialist Party Without Borders. But a photo of Dillo showed he was killed by a single bullet wound to the head.

Human Rights Watch said the killing raised serious concerns about the environment for the election. "With his most significant opponents either co-opted or eliminated, and critical electoral institutions stacked with his supporters, Debby Itno's victory is all but certain," wrote Michelle Gavin for the Council of Foreign Relations, a Washington DC based think tank. (AP)

# Educational institutions to remain close for two days in Manipur

Powerful hailstorms accompanied by heavy rain lashed several parts of the state in the afternoon

**IMPHAL, May 6:** All educational institutions will remain close for two days in Manipur in the wake of heavy rains affecting the state.

The state govt resorted to this decision after houses and educational institutions were damaged by the Sunday hailstorm accompanied by heavy rain that affected several parts of Manipur wreaking havoc in the state.

It can be noted here that a man was killed after being hit by lightning on Sunday in Kakching district.

In the wake of widespread damages to the houses after being hit by hailstorms, the Manipur government made functional helpline numbers in each district to seek urgent assistance from the government.

Powerful hailstorms accompanied by heavy rain lashed several parts of the state in the afternoon. The powerful storm razed hundreds of houses besides tennis ball-size hail inflicting substantial damages on tin roofs.

A large number of chicken and other fowls were killed after the



roofs of the poultry farms were blown out and then hit by the hails that followed.

Many roads across Imphal city saw hailstones pile up to around one inch, disturbing the normal vehicular movement. Many streets, squares and even gardens were briefly transformed into winter landscapes by the heavy hailstorms. People compared the

scene that witnessed in the city to winter streets of Kashmir.

Many streets were inundated with the hailstones melted minutes later.

Trees and electric poles were uprooted, causing power outages in several parts of the state.

Meanwhile, Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh assured swift assistance to the affected people

while informing about the opening of helpline numbers for each district, in his post on the internet.

"In the wake of today's hailstorm impacting several areas across Manipur, our priority is ensuring swift assistance for those in need. To extend support, we've established helpline numbers in various districts," he wrote.

While providing the helpline numbers of each district, he further wrote "Your safety is our priority. Please reach out without hesitation if you require assistance. We're here to support you through this challenging time."

Deputy commissioners of each district have also issued notices asking the affected persons to submit the damage report indicating the extent of damage along with photographs to the sub-deputy collector or sub-divisional officer of their respective jurisdiction.

Manipur has been experiencing such natural furies in the last few weeks causing widespread damages to the standing crops, houses and other structures. (NNN)

## Cache of arms, ammunition recovered in Manipur



**IMPHAL, May 6:** A combined team of Manipur police and central forces recovered a cache of weapons, explosive materials and warlike stores during an operation in the adjoining area of Bishnupur and Kangpokpi district in the last 24 hours, the police said on Monday. The recovered items were one carbine with two magazine, one 9mm pistol with magazine, four HE grenades, 50 rounds of live ammunition, five PEK sticks of IED weighing 750 grams, six SLR tube launcher, one 75-detonator, eight hand grenade arming ring, two ballistic cartridge, one tear gas shell, one C90 MK-3 grenade, two grenade MK-1 (WP), one Bicard Strip and two walkie-talkie with one charger. The combined team launched the joint search operation Aimal village of Kangpokpi and its adjoining Irengbam Maning in Bishnupur district acting on intelligence input, the police said. No arrest was made during the search operation. The seized items have been handed over to the relevant police stations for further investigation, the police added. Aftermath impact of nature's fury: People throng at hardware stores for roofing sheets, government authorizes DCs to monitor stores. (NNN)

In her address, Dr Mawlong informed that the mission was to sensitise the general population on cancer screening and its curability when detected early. The aim was to also detect cancer at its early stage thereby reducing the rate of cancer and mortality rate associated with the disease in the state.

Meghalaya being ranked No 1

State Nodal Officer, Dr Anisha Mawlong, state cancer society of Meghalaya along with her team visited Resubelpara CHC where she actively emphasized the gathering on the importance of early cancer detection and its prevention.

At present Shillong Civil Hospital, NEIGRIMS and Tura civil hospital are catering to cancer care and services.

Dr Anisha Mawlong added that in order to facilitate prevention and control of cancer in the region, district medical staffs, mid level health provider (MLHP) and ANM would be equipped with capacity building to fight against the rise of cancer.

At the grassroot level, Village health council and religious leaders shall also be imparted knowledge on the early warning signs of cancer and early detection.

At the present scenario, the state has been recording cancer of the head and neck as the most

prevalent type of cancer.

Findings indicates that habitual use of betel nut and tobacco has been the rising cause of cancer related disease in the state.

Dr Anisha Mawlong further urged the gathering to do away with the fear related to cancer and take the opportunity by coming forward and getting screened for the disease being provided by the government free of cost.

Senior medical & health officer, Resubelpara CHC, Dr Rezia K Sangma elaborated the importance of cancer screening programme and early signs and symptoms of cancer.

Dr Rezia appraised the gathering that the hospital is equipped with basic testing facilities for screening of cancer and MHIS beneficiaries can avail the treatment free of cost.

She also appealed the gathering to take advantage of the programme by supporting the cause to fight against cancer.

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** In a bid to sensitise the general populace on the importance of early detection of cancer, the State Cancer Society of Meghalaya held a one day cancer screening and awareness programme on Monday at Resubelpara Community Health Centre.

The arrested woman has been identified as Sushmita Sarkar. Her arrest follows the arrest of Pradyut Dhar Chowdhury, 65. Deb was shot dead at point-blank range inside his car on April 30 near Shalbagan.

Police suspect the killing is linked to a dispute between rival

groups within the club.

Deb's body was taken to a private hospital mortuary.

Sarkar and Chowdhury were both remanded to police custody for further investigation.

The police suspect the masked assailant approached Deb's car, demanded he lower the window, and then fired three shots at close range.

The Tripura West District Superintendent of Police, Kiran Kumar, suggested the murder stemmed from an existing enmity between local factions of the club.

## Tripura police find breakthrough in BRS club sec murder case

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** Tripura Police have arrested a 22-year-old woman in connection with the murder of Durga Prasanna Deb (alias Viki Deb), secretary of the prominent Bharat Ratna Sangha club.

The arrested woman has been identified as Sushmita Sarkar. Her arrest follows the arrest of Pradyut Dhar Chowdhury, 65. Deb was shot dead at point-blank range inside his car on April 30 near Shalbagan.

Police suspect the killing is linked to a dispute between rival

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The Tripura West District Superintendent of Police, Kiran Kumar, suggested the murder stemmed from an existing enmity between local factions of the club.

## Japanese ambassador to pay 2-day visit to Nagaland



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIMAPUR, May 6:** Japanese ambassador to India Hiroshi Suzuki will pay a two-day visit

to Nagaland from May 7.

On the first day of his visit, the ambassador will attend a cultural programme at the State

Banquet Hall, Kohima.

On May 8, Suzuki will participate in the soft inauguration of the Kohima Peace Memorial and Eco Park. He will lay the foundation stone of the park and take part in a ceremonial plantation in the morning.

He will then visit the Kohima War Cemetery to lay wreaths. Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio will accompany the ambassador to lay wreath at the cemetery.

Later in the day, the ambassador and other Japanese delegates will visit the Kohima Cathedral and the World War II Museum at Naga Heritage Village, Kisama.

The visit is expected to further strengthen the cultural and diplomatic ties between Japan and Nagaland.

## Rally against fencing of India-Myanmar border

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 6:** Zo Re-Unification Organisation (ZORO) in Mizoram has announced its plan to organize a rally on May 16 at the India-Myanmar border.

The rally aims to protest against the central government's recent decision to fence the India-Myanmar border in the Northeast and scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) between the two countries.

This decision followed a meeting held at the ZORO headquarters at Treasury Square in Aizawl city of Mizoram.

The meeting was chaired by R Sangkawia, president of ZORO.

Discussions during the meeting centred on the potential ramifications of fencing the India-Myanmar border.

Members voiced opposition to the scrapping of the FMR, arguing that it signifies a divisive move that further 'marginalizes' Zo

communities. They reiterated their stance against the decision and announced plans for the rally to be held along the Myanmar border.

ZORO has issued a call to action, inviting all Mizo people and individuals from Myanmar to participate in the rally in solidarity.

Moreover, they have urged villages in India along the Myanmar border to actively join the protest.

This announcement follows a previous demonstration held in February at the Vanapa Hall premises in Aizawl city of Mizoram, where the NGO Coordination Committee (NGOCC) in Mizoram, consisting of five major NGOs, expressed staunch opposition to the scrapping of the FMR.

During the demonstration, hundreds of protestors spanning various age groups assembled, brandishing placards bearing slogans such as: "We don't want border fencing."

## Tripura to plant five lakh saplings to increase forest coverage: Forest minister

**AGARTALA, May 6:** The Tripura government will plant five lakh saplings in a day to enhance the northeastern state's forest coverage, Forest minister Animesh Debbarma said on Monday.

Currently, the state's forest coverage is 66 per cent.

"A scorching heatwave is sweeping the entire state. Since plantation plays a key role to battle against global warming, the forest department has decided to plant five lakh saplings to boost the state's forest coverage," Debbarma told PTI.

The forest department has already



chalked out a plan to go for a massive plantation drive in a phased manner, he said, adding the five lakh saplings will be planted in a single day in the first week of July without specifying the date on which the saplings will be planted.

"We don't want saplings to die after plantation. Steps will also be taken to nurture the planted saplings so that the forest coverage could be expanded in the northeastern state", he said.

The Forest minister appealed to people, social organisations and clubs to come forward to join hands with the Forest department for a massive tree plantation drive.

Debbarma said the Forest department has to cut down trees to facilitate development works like the expansion of national highways. (PTI)

## 483 houses affected due to storm in Meghalaya



**SHILLONG, May 6:** Meghalaya Minister of Revenue and Disaster Management, Kyrmen Shylla today informed that a total of 483 houses were damaged in 29 villages under seven districts of Meghalaya during the incidents of heavy rainfall, cyclonic storm and hailstorm occurred on Sunday thereby affecting over 949 people.

Of these, 14 villages are in Eastern West Khasi Hills, 6 South West Khasi Hills, 3 West Jaintia Hills, 2 East Jain-

tia Hills, 3 East Khasi Hills, 1 West Khasi Hills. A total 282 houses were damaged by hailstorm in Baghmara and 10 in Chokpot in South Garo Hills, he said.

The minister also informed that two school buildings were also damaged at Nongpriang and at Sohbsen village in Eastern West Khasi Hills district and a church roof top was damaged in Wapung in East Jaintia Hills.

Shylla also informed that a total of 10 villages in two

C&RD blocks - Mairang and Mawthadraishan - were also affected due to rain related incidents today (May 6) affecting over 400 people.

These include Nongkhaw, Mawiongkhri, Nongthyllep, Mawnai, Umshyap, Phudbah, Demdngiem, Myriaw, Permadan and Mawkhan.

The minister informed that immediate relief is being provided to affected families by the respective deputy commissioners.

"Actually, funds parked with the deputy commissioners was Rs 20 lakh but we have increased the amount now. The DC can utilize this fund for providing immediate relief to affected families," he said. He said that all districts are being kept on high alert. "All districts have been instructed to take necessary action on relief distribution and assistance to the affected people," he added. (NNN)

## People throng stores to buy metal roofing sheets in Manipur

Incessant rain leads to replacement of existing roofing

**IMPHAL, May 6:** Barely a day after unprecedented heavy hailstorm caused widespread destruction of roofs, people queued up at hardware stores to buy metal roofing sheets.

Manipur witnessed widespread devastation as a powerful storm and fierce hailstorm accompanied by heavy rain caused widespread destruction, leaving roofs of dwelling houses and other structures with perforated roofs, needing immediate replacement.

With the affected people rushing, besides having a briskly business, the hardware shops dealing with tin sheets across Imphal and its outskirts faced stock exhaustion.

Similar situations were witnessed in almost all the markets across the regions affected by the natural fury.

The scenes at the hardware stores where the staff have to deal with the customers even by issuing tokens so that they could deal with them on a first come first serve basis.

The system made it easier for the staff to deal with the customers. However, the customers were apprehensive of stock exhaustion before their turn as they would need the roofing sheet urgently.

The scenes at the hardware stores have also drawn the attention of the



many organisations if the dealers hike the prices of the roofing materials taking advantage of the sudden raise in the demands.

Members of some organisations visited and checked the store for both price hike and stock positions. They also appealed to the dealers not to take advantage of the prevailing grim situation.

In the meantime, the Manipur gov-

ernment has authorized the deputy commissioners of each district to monitor the prices of the roofing materials including CGI sheets to ensure availability at reasonable rates.

Following the order of the consumer affairs, food and public distribution (CAF&PD), the deputy commissioner of Imphal West district today issued a set of regulations which came into ef-

fect with immediate effect for a week.

In the order, the DC said that the steps were being taken up considering the urgent need for proper rationalization of all the available roofing materials in the district and also ensuring that it reaches to all the genuinely affected family members.

As per the regulations, all whole-sellers, retailers and shops by any nomenclature shall remain open on all days including holidays and Sunday.


The stock position, brand, thickness and prices shall be affixed outside their shop/establishment for general awareness. A copy of the same shall have to be made available to the DC, Imphal West through DSO, CAF and PD.

The rates of April 30, 2024 (or lower rates, wherever possible) shall be used as the market rate/price of the material.

No bulk purchase/buying, including by private parties, shall be allowed in any of the centre/shops/establishments.

All sales shall be only for the hailstorm affected families and details of the sales to be indicated in the records of the establishment.

The order further stated that the district supply officer of the CAF & PD and representative of district SP shall monitor the entire operation of the shop/establishment in the district. (NNN)



**केन्द्रीय विद्यालय दिफु/KENDRIYA VIDYALAYA DIPHU**  
कार्बी अंगलॉन्ग, असम-782462/KARBI ANGLONG, ASSAM-782462  
विद्यालय कोड: 200019, स्टेशन कोड: 1967, रजिस्ट्रार कार्यालय, गुवाहाटी, असम  
दूरभाष/टोल: 0361-2795104/वेब: www.diphu.kvs.ac.in  
ई-मेल: principal.diphu2@gmail.com

CBSE Affn. No. - 200019, CBSE School Code- 39274, School Code-1967, Station Code-487, Region-Guwahati, Region Code-10

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F.NO. KVD/1867/1/1/Admission /2024-25/ Dated: 06/05/2024

**Kendriya Vidyalaya Diphu**

**Offline Registration Notice for admission to Class Balvatika-3 and Class -1 for session 2024-2025 for SC and OBC (NCL) Category of Vacant Seats only.**

Registration will commence from 08.05.2024 to 15.05.2024. Reckoning of age for Balvatika-3 is 5 years but less than 6 years and for class -1 is 6 years but less than 8 years of age as on 31.03.2024 or 1.4.2024 and admission will be as per KVS admission guidelines 2024-2025. Registration form can be obtained from the School office from 9 AM to 1:40PM. Display of list and admission will be from 22.5.2024 to 27.5.2024.

HELP DESK: 8638416113, Email: principal.diphu2@gmail.com, Website: <https://diphu.kvs.ac.in>

**VACANCY POSITION**

Sl. No.	CLASS	VACANT POSITION	
1	BALVATIKA 3	SC	2
		OBC (NCL)	9
2	1 (ONE)	SC	3
		OBC (NCL)	9

Sd/-  
(Dr. Surender Singh)  
PRINCIPAL

# BJD govt will expire on June 4: PM Modi in Odisha

**BERHAMPUR/NABARANGPUR (ODISHA), May 6:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday called himself "son of Lord Jagannath" and asserted that the expiry date of a BJD government in Odisha is June 4, the day the assembly election results will be announced. Addressing his first election rally in the state, Modi urged people to give a chance to the BJP to make Odisha the number one state in the country.

In an apparent dig at BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the prime minister said, "Odisha needs a CM who understands Odia language and culture." "The BJP will form a double-engine government here after the ongoing elections. The expiry date of the BJD government is June 4, 2024," Modi said at the Berhampur rally.

Addressing another rally in Nabarangpur, the tribal heartland of Odisha, the prime minister claimed that his government has been working for the welfare of indigenous people.

"You have seen the track record of ten years of Modi's leadership. Modi increased the budget for tribal welfare by five times than the earlier allocation," the PM said at the Nabarangpur rally.

Taking a reference to the cash seizure in Jharkhand, the prime minister also claimed, "Modi is being criticised for stopping corruption and loot".

Notably, the Enforcement Directorate on Monday claimed to have recovered a huge amount of "unaccounted" cash during searches at the premises of a domestic help allegedly linked to the secretary of Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam.

Modi said that his government at the Centre has set up 'Eklavya Model Residential' schools in tribal areas and the number of such schools has crossed 400, he said.

"People belonging to ST, SC and OBC categories comprise seven per cent of his ministry," he said.

PM Modi also claimed that Odisha has not benefitted from the Ayushman Bharat Yojana as the "BJD government did not implement" it in the state.

The Centre gave Rs 10,000 crore under the 'Jal Jeevan Mission' scheme to Odisha but the "BJD dispensation could not spend the money properly", he said, adding that Paddy farmers in Chhattisgarh get MSP of Rs 3,100 per quintal, but those in Odisha receive Rs 2,100.

He also accused the BJD government of "not allowing schemes



made by Modi to be implemented in Odisha".

The prime minister claimed that the people of Odisha have strength and passion, but the BJD government did not give them the right opportunities.

"You have given 50 years to Congress and 25 years to BJD. Just give five years to the BJP. We will make Odisha the number one state in the country," Modi said at the rally.

He also said, "We released a visionary manifesto for Odisha promising jobs for youths and women and health facilities for senior citizens. BJP fulfils what it says."

The assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Odisha will be held simultaneously.

"I have come here to invite you to the swearing-in ceremony of BJP's CM on June 10. On that day, we will implement the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, which the Naveen Patnaik government has been resisting. This son of Lord Jagannath will take care of all senior citizens under this scheme," Modi said.

Responding to Modi's claim, senior BJD leader and Naveen Patnaik's close aide VK Pandian said, "Patnaik would take oath as the chief minister of Odisha for the sixth consecutive time between

11.30 am to 1.30 pm on June 9." PM Modi, however, said Odisha would get "new energy and new leadership after the assembly elections".

"A person, who lives, understands and takes pride in Odia culture and tradition, can help resolve the problems of Odisha at a faster pace..." the PM said.

It is alleged that BJD chief Naveen Patnaik does not have command over the Odia language.

Odisha has fertile land, mineral resources, and sea coasts, but people are still poor, Modi claimed.

The prime minister also said Odisha lags behind in every development parameter despite having huge resources like mineral wealth, and a vast coastline.

"Who is responsible for Odisha's backwardness? Why are the people of resource-rich Odisha still poor? The answer is rampant loot by Congress, which ruled the state for 50 years, and then the BJD for the next 25 years. The BJD is sinking, while the Congress is a spent force and the BJP is the only ray of hope for the people," he said.

The prime minister also said that the BJP has given the country's highest post to a daughter of Odisha. (PTI)

## Punjab top poll official seeks reports over BJP candidates being 'prevented' from campaigning



**CHANDIGARH, May 6:** The Punjab chief electoral officer Monday sought an action taken report from the state DGP after a BJP delegation raised concern over the law and order situation, claiming that its party candidates were being prevented from campaigning in the state.

The delegation of the BJP leaders, led by state unit chief Sunil Jakhar submitted a memorandum to Punjab Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Sibin C, claiming that the state machinery has miserably failed to ensure the right of campaign of the BJP candidates in the poll fray.

It also raised concern over the conduct of free and fair elections and the right to campaign. They expressed apprehension on the safety of their candidates during elections in the state.

The delegation submitted a detailed complaint letter and subsequently, the CEO asked the DGP to submit a fact-finding and action taken report in this regard, according to an official statement.

Earlier, Jakhar sought the intervention of the CEO, claiming that the party nominees were "being forced to withdraw from campaigns".

Jakhar expressed the apprehension on the "possible collusion" of the ruling AAP and other parties in causing obstructions and encumbrances in the campaign of the BJP candidates.

The BJP candidates and leaders have been facing protests from the farmers while campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls.

As part of the protests, the farmers ask questions to the BJP leaders and show them black flags for not agreeing to their demands.

Without providing an equal platform to campaign, the election process will be rendered futile, claimed Jakhar, who was flanked by party leaders Parminder Brar and Vineet Joshi.

"While the BJP has always stood for the rights of the farmers believing in dialogue as the way forward, such unchecked protests against the BJP candidates, who are being forced to withdraw from campaigns in parts of Punjab, can lead to unforeseeable consequences and untoward incidents of violence and clashes," Jakhar said in the memorandum.

"The possibility of anti-social elements sneaking in under the garb of the farmer protest and creating havoc cannot be ruled out. This would vitiate the elections rendering both the process and the final outcome unfair," he said.

Jakhar said if the election machinery does not intervene to check this "well-planned conspiracy"

against the BJP, it will vitiate the elections rendering both the process and the final outcome unfair.

"This epistle is to bring to your notice and highlight our apprehension of a well-calibrated 'sponsored' denial of the right of the BJP candidates to campaign in Punjab in the backdrop of the deteriorating law and order situation under the incumbent AAP government led by Bhagwant Mann," said Jakhar.

He alleged that the law and order is deteriorating in Punjab and underlined that the ongoing disruptions are denying the BJP candidates their right to campaign.

"It remains the responsibility of the Punjab Electoral Office, the state administrative and the police apparatus to ensure the BJP candidates have unhindered access to every part to exert their democratic right to campaign," he said.

However, he added, dozens of incidents in the recent past and the latest incident in Patiala, where a farmer died falling on his own on a road during the campaign of BJP candidate (from Patiala) Preet Kaur, need immediate attention.

The apprehension of "collusion" of the political parties including the AAP, the SAD and the Congress in scripting such "disruptions" for the BJP candidates looms large, Jakhar said.

The state machinery, he added, cannot act as a "conduit" to facilitate such obstructions. Jakhar said these parties are clearly "rattled" by the increasing footprints of the BJP in Punjab.

He further said, "We would also like to bring to your notice the recent statement of Punjab Advocate General Gurinder Singh before the Supreme Court where he flagged security issues in the state underlining the threat perception that exists."

"He cited the case of the murder of singer-turned-politician Sidhu Moosewala who was killed days after his security cover was downgraded and publicized. He also made a reference to an RPG attack. In light of this, safety of BJP candidates is paramount and the office of CEO Punjab should ensure this," said Jakhar.

The Punjab BJP president said the protests undertaken by the farmers are a legitimate tool, but need to be exercised with restraint and caution given that the candidates too have their right to campaign and access to the villages.

While the BJP does not want to foresee any escalation or repeat of such incidents, the present situation on ground if not checked has the potential to spiral out of control, resulting in derailing or unsettling the election process in Punjab, he added. (PTI)

## TMC asks CEC to 'urgently furnish' seat-wise voter turnout figures for first 2 LS poll phases

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The Trinamool Congress on Monday urged Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar to "urgently furnish" the constituency-wise voter turnout in absolute numbers for the first two phases of Lok Sabha polls and also sought an explanation over the "delay" in releasing the figures.

Amid the opposition's allegations of delay by the Election Commission in sharing voter turnout data, the poll body last Friday asserted that booth-wise data of "actual number of votes polled" is available with the candidates soon after the voting ends. In a letter addressed to the CEC, the Trinamool Congress said the poll panel released the voter turnout percentage for the first two phases "belatedly" on April 30, but the report had no information on the total figure of eligible electors and the number of actual votes cast.

"This is a paradigm shift from the previous voter turnout report(s) from a past election(s), where the ECI provided a detailed report in this regard," the TMC said. The party claimed the report also exhibits notable discrepancies and inconsistencies in the percentages that were initially given. For the first phase, the voter turnout percentage was shown to be 60 on April 19. Later the combined voter turnout report on April 30 records the percentage of votes cast in phase one as 66.14 per cent, the TMC said. The party said the 11-day delay in releasing the final voter turnout percentages of phase one and a "significant 5.75 per cent surge in phase one voter participation

being reported almost four days after the conclusion of phase two without any proper explanation sparks a serious concern and doubt in the minds of the electorate". It said that under Rule 49S of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, the presiding officer shall prepare an account of votes recorded in Form 17C and furnish it to every polling agent in which the actual number of electors, number of people voted and the total number of votes recorded in EVMS. In the letter to the chief election commissioner, the TMC mentioned certain polling stations where the presiding officer "omitted" the provision for giving the number of voters who physically came to cast their votes as per the "Register for Voters".

The TMC said "discrepancies" in Form 17C are "indicative of the rampant disregard and lackadaisical attitude with which the ECI is proceeding to conduct the ensuing elections". "It also suggests the possibility of similar occurrences in other booths, which raises serious concerns about the accuracy of voter turnout percentages reported and published by the ECI. The ECI's failure to address such discrepancies would undermine the public trust in the electoral process," they said.

The TMC demanded that the ECI publish the total number of registered electors in each seat, the total number of voters physically turned up as per the "Register for Voters", and the number of voters as per the EVM, for all constituencies which had gone to polls in phases one and two.

"Urgently furnish the Parliamentary constituency-wise precise voter turnout figures for phase one and two of the ensuing general elections and clarification for the delay in releasing the voter turnout report dated 30.04.2024, without disclosing/revealing the details of the total number of voter turnout (in figures) and the total number of eligible electors for the said phases," it said.

The party also sought that a detailed report should be published after the completion of polling in each of the upcoming phases.

"Publication of precise numerical data of voter turnout is essential to ensure transparency in the electoral process and is the only medium through which the common citizens can access such information. Such publication would also eliminate the possibility of any form of manipulation of official records and foster public confidence in the entire polling process," the TMC said.

The Election Commission officially shared the turnout figure on April 30. According to it, a voter turnout of 66.14 per cent was recorded in phase one and 66.71 per cent in phase two of the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

The Congress, CPI-M and TMC had questioned the EC over the delay in announcing the final voter turnout figures for the first two phases of the Lok Sabha polls, 11 days after the first round of polling on April 19. The opposition parties are also demanding that the absolute number of voters be made public. (PTI)

## Modi govt has diluted reservations through privatisation: Cong

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The Congress on Monday alleged that the Modi government has "diluted" reservations through privatisation and claimed that the BJP's "willy-nilly" handover of state assets to a couple of "the PM's friends" shows that for him, corporate interests will always trump the wellbeing of people.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said that each privatisation is accompanied by the end of reservations in employment for Dalits, Adivasis, and OBC families.

"Each contractualisation is a way of sidestepping reservations for Dalit, Adivasi, and OBC families," he said in a post on X.

"The Modi government has diluted reservations through privatisation. These are the facts: 2.7 lakh central PSU workers have lost their jobs in PM Modi's Anyay Kaal. Share of contract workers has shot up from 19% in 2013 to 43% in 2022! PM Modi has overseen 72% of all disinvestments since the beginning of the disinvestment process in 1991," Ramesh said.

He said each privatisation is accompanied by the end of reservations in employment for Dalit, Adivasi, and OBC families.

"Each contractualisation is a way of sidestepping reservations for Dalit, Adivasi, and OBC families," Ramesh said.

PSUs play a crucial role in inclusive growth, both through the development of backward regions and through the generation of employment for vulnerable communities, he said.

"The BJP's willy-nilly handover of state assets to a couple of the PM's friends at throwaway prices, and the massive job losses that followed have highlighted that for PM Modi, corporate interests will always trump the wellbeing of the people," Ramesh alleged. (PTI)

## Women of country will give you answer: Cong hits out at PM

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Stepping up attack on the BJP over sexual abuse allegations against JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna in Karnataka, the Congress of Monday alleged that the Modi government has "always protected" those who commit crimes against women.

Former All India Mahila Congress chief Netta D'Souza said the BJP has only given slogans such as 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao', but the reality is there before the people of the country. "Be it the brave women wrestlers or daughters like Ankita Bhandari, the prime minister did not try to provide justice to any daughter. The BJP government has always protected those who commit crimes against women," she alleged at a press conference at the AICC headquarters here.

"The women of the country are very angry on the issue of Prajwal Revanna. Women are forced to think that the real character of the person, who was under the protection of Modi ji inside Parliament for the last 5 years, has been revealed to the country," she said.

"If someone else had done the same thing then Modi ji would have been saying all over the country -- 'Look, we have caught the criminal to protect our daughters'," D'Souza said. "But now when it comes to his favourite person, his attitude is in front of the entire country," she said. While the Congress has been attacking the BJP over the allegations of sexual abuse against leaders of its ally JD(S), the BJP has blamed the Congress government in Karnataka for the "delayed" action against the accused and said it would push for the full might of law against the accused. D'Souza said PM Modi had shared the stage with Prajwal Revanna, who is seeking re-election from Hassan Lok Sabha seat, and sought votes for him.

"If Modi is there, then it is possible for Prajwal Revanna to flee abroad. If Modi is there, then it was possible for Prajwal Revanna to sit in Parliament. But today Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and Smriti Irani are silent," she said. (PTI)

## VCs, other academicians accuse Rahul of spreading falsehood on varsity appointments

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** As many as 181 academicians, including vice chancellors and former VCs, have accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of spreading "falsehood" regarding the appointment process for university heads and sought lawful action against him.

In an open letter, they said the Congress leader has alleged that vice chancellors are appointed solely on the basis of affiliation with some organisation rather than merit as they slammed his claims. The process by which VCs are selected is characterised by stringent and transparent rigorous procedure grounded in the values of meritocracy, scholarly distinction and integrity, they claimed.

Jawaharlal University Vice Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit, Delhi University VC Yogesh Singh and AICTE Chairman T G Sitharam are among the academicians who have signed onto the letter. The selection has been completely based on academic and administrative prowess and with a vision to take universities ahead, they said.

Though they did not quote Gandhi's specific claims, the Congress leader has in the past alleged that affiliations with the Hindutva organisation RSS is often the guiding factor in appointments to academia. Among the signatories to the letter are Vinay Pathak, VC, CSJM University, Kanpur, Bhagwati Prakash

Sharma, Chancellor, Pacific University, Udaipur, N C Gautam, former VC, Mahatma Gandhi Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, Chitrakoot, Alok Chakkarval, VC, Guru Ghasidas Central University, Bilaspur and Vinay Kapoor, former VC, BR Ambedkar National Law University, Sonapat.

Universities in India have undergone a significant transition as evident in their ascent in global rankings, prominent accreditations, world class research and innovations, curriculum facelift narrowing the industry academia gap and higher placement prospects reaffirming their commitment to academic quality and societal relevance, they asserted. (PTI)

# Delhi HC asks cops to explain steps for safe evacuation of school kids on receipt of bomb threats

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The Delhi High Court on Monday asked the city police to give details of the steps taken to ensure safe evacuation of school children in case of a bomb threat with least dependency on parents and without causing any panic.

The high court directed the Delhi Police and the Delhi government to file affidavits giving data on the number of schools in each zone, the nodal authority in each zone which will be responsible for taking action in case of receipt of a threat, the time required for taking action on receipt of a bomb threat, and the number of mock drills that have been conducted under supervision of police and other departments.

Justice Subramonium Prasad said though police have filed a status report listing the standard operating procedure (SOP) for bomb detection and disposal squads and the guidelines to deal with bomb threats in schools, they have not submitted data on several key aspects.

The affidavits, to be filed by the city police and the government, shall include "the action taken to ensure least dependence on parents, who would be working at far away places, for evacuating children



from the schools since the primary responsibility for evacuating will be on the schools and on the authorities".

The court said the affidavits, to be filed within 10 days, must also have information about various relevant circulars issued by the Delhi government from time to time.

The Delhi Police shall also indicate the action they have taken to investigate the hoax bomb threat calls received by schools, Justice

Prasad said, and listed the matter for further hearing on May 20.

The high court was hearing a petition expressing concern about bomb threats to schools in the recent past. Petitioner Arpit Bhargava, a lawyer, moved the court in 2023 in the wake of a hoax bomb threat to Delhi Public School (DPS) on Mathura Road here.

During the hearing, advocate Beenashaw Soni, appearing for the petitioner, mentioned the recent

bomb threat email received by around 200 schools in the Delhi-NCR area which later turned out to be hoax.

She submitted there were only 18 bomb detection and disposal squads with the city police and wanted to know how they possibly could reach 200 schools as was the case recently.

"This time everyone was affected as every household has a kid. Schools gave a call to parents to

come from their offices and pick up their children. The parents are traumatised and insecure. Are we waiting for a bomb to explode to bring these measures in line? It is like sending children to a war zone," she argued.

Delhi government standing counsel Santosh Kumar Tripathi, who was also representing the Delhi Police, submitted that deployment of constabulary in each and every school with modern equipment was not possible.

Police have issued SOP and all private schools have been informed about it. The SOP includes disaster management practices and also explains bomb threat situations.

After going through the SOPs, the court said they were general in nature and did not pertain to bomb threats to schools.

"There are certain institutions which require special treatment, for example hospitals where patients are finding it difficult to come out and schools where there are children right from nursery to 12th standard.

"What is it that you have done to ensure that children studying in schools are evacuated? Do you have any special kind of SOP to handle such a kind of problem or

not?" the court asked.

It asked which authority would be alerted first and which would be the first to respond in the event of such a threat.

"What is the time period that you are giving to yourself from the time of receipt of bomb threat to actual action taken?" the court asked. Tripathi told the court it would not take more than 5 minutes.

On being asked about how many times mock drills have been conducted in schools, the government counsel said the exercise is conducted every three months.

The claim was disputed by the petitioner as also the judge who said, "I don't think the information or the instruction is correct."

The Director of Education, who was present during the hearing, said the department issues instructions to schools to conduct mock drills quarterly after which they send action taken reports.

The Directorate of Education (DoE), in a recent status report, said it has "zero-tolerance policy" in matters of safety in schools and its officials are doing their best to ensure effective implementation of the guidelines for dealing with disasters, including bomb threats. (PTI)



## Ashoka University students ask VC to cut ties with Israel's Tel Aviv University

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Students at Ashoka University have joined the chorus of protests against the ongoing war in Gaza and have urged the vice-chancellor to end all academic and research collaborations with Israel-based Tel Aviv University.

Ashoka University student government, an elected student body, said in a letter to the vice chancellor that the university's collaboration with institutions involved in human rights violations undermines its commitment to justice and human rights.

"We are deeply concerned about the ongoing genocide in Palestine in which at least 34,596 Palestinians have lost their lives and 77,816 have been injured due to the Israeli war on Gaza. As the Israeli military's brutality persists...students across universities are now actively calling on their institutions to boycott Israeli universities and exchange programmes, to have open dialogue about the war on Gaza.

"The spirit and the results of ongoing protests in the universities in the form of encampments -- embarked on by the students of Columbia University -- are live examples," the students body said in the letter.

The students claimed that Ashoka University, based in Haryana's Sonapat, has research partnerships with Tel



Aviv University, ongoing faculty visits for teaching, student mobility (outbound and inbound), research collaboration, short-term study opportunities as well as joint programmes.

"In light of the evidence presented regarding Tel Aviv University's actions, we urge our institution to sever all ties with Tel Aviv University until tangible steps are taken to address the issues.

"Tel Aviv University's close ties with the Israeli military and its support for the occupation of Palestinian territories raise serious ethical questions. The university's collaboration with institutions involved in human rights violations undermines our commitment to justice and human rights.

"This includes Tel Aviv's ties with Israeli weapons manufacturers like Elbit Systems. Professors from Tel Aviv University have been involved

in drafting the IOF's code of ethics, providing legal defense to IOF members for war crimes and drafting doctrines that dictate military operations," the students' body alleged.

The student government's petition also mentioned the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which calls for the boycott of companies accused of being complicit in the war on Gaza.

It further said that all Palestinian universities had been demolished by the Israeli forces, Tel Aviv University "continue to exist to stifle conversation around the Palestinian people and to prevent Palestinian scholarly work" and that the institution allegedly receives funding and benefits from ties with weapons manufacturers and Israeli intelligence agencies, such as Shin Bet and Mossad.

The petition said that Tel Aviv University has a responsibility to uphold the principles of academic freedom, social justice and human rights.

"By maintaining ties with a university linked to systematic human rights abuses, Ashoka University is complicit in these violations," it said, adding that with the international community raising concerns over the war, Ashoka University should demonstrate its commitment to ethical conduct and human rights. (PTI)

## CISCE results: Pass percentage in Class 10, 12 board exams rises; merit lists discontinued

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Girls outshone boys yet again in Class 10 and 12 board exams conducted by the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), while the pass percentage for both the classes recorded an increase.

The results were announced Monday morning. The board also discontinued the practice of issuing merit lists from this year to avoid unhealthy competition among students.

The pass percentage for Class 10 is 99.47, while it is 98.19 for Class 12. Last year, the respective pass percentage was 98.94 and 96.93.

"In Class 10, the pass percentage of boys is 99.31 per cent while that of girls is 99.65 per cent. Similarly, boys have achieved a pass percentage of 97.53 per cent in class 12 exams while the pass percentage of girls stood at 98.92 per cent," CISCE Chief Executive and Secretary Joseph Emmanuel said.

"We have discontinued the practice of issuing merit lists for board exams from this year. The move is aimed at avoiding unhealthy competition among students," he added.

The CBSE had last year stopped the practice of announcing merit lists for the both these board classes.



During the pandemic, when board exams were not conducted due to closure of schools and students were marked using alternative evaluation methods, both CBSE and CISCE had not issued any merit list. However, the practice was resumed after the schools reopened.

In Class 10, the best-performing schools abroad are from Indonesia, Singapore and Dubai with a pass percentage of 100. In class 12, the best-performing schools are from

Singapore and Dubai. The ICSE examination (Class 10) was conducted in 60 written subjects of which 20 were Indian languages, 13 were foreign languages and one classical language.

The ICSE exams started on February 21 and concluded on March 28. They were conducted on 18 days.

The ISC examination (Class 12) was conducted in 47 written subjects of which 12 were Indian languages,

four foreign languages and two classical languages.

For ISC, the exams began on February 12 and concluded on April 4. They were conducted on 28 days.

A total 2,695 schools presented candidates for the Class 10 exams with 82.48 per cent (2223) schools attaining a pass percentage of 100.

For class 12, a total of 1,366 schools presented candidates with 66.18 per cent (904) schools attaining a pass percentage of 100.

Over 2.43 lakh candidates had appeared in Class 10 examination while the number of students who appeared for class 12 examination stood at 99,901.

In Class 10, the western region recorded the highest pass percentage (99.91) followed by the southern region (99.88). Southern region has the highest percentage of girls (49.52) who had appeared in the Class 10 examination.

In Class 12, the Southern region recorded the highest pass percentage (99.53)

followed by the western region having a pass percentage of 99.32. The Western region has the highest percentage of girls (50.55), who had appeared in the examination. (PTI)

## Illegal sand mining and cop murder in MP: Houses of 2 accused demolished, tractor owner held



**SHAHDOL (MP), May 6:** Authorities have demolished the houses of two persons accused in a case of crushing a policeman to death by a tractor-trolley transporting illegally mined sand in Madhya Pradesh's Shahdol district, an official said on Monday.

The police also arrested the absconding tractor-trolley owner, Surendra Singh, late Sunday night, Superintendent of Police Kumar Prateek told PTI. Surendra Singh's son Ashutosh Singh, who was piloting the tractor, and vehicle driver Raj Rawat were arrested earlier in connection with the incident which took place on the intervening night of Saturday-Sunday in Badoli village under Beohari police station limits.

A proposal to give an assistance of Rs 1 crore to the family of the deceased assistant sub-inspector (ASI), Mahendra Bagri, will be sent to the Election Commission for approval (in view of the model code of conduct in force), the Chief Minister's Office said.

ASI Bagri, posted at the Beohari police station, was going along with two colleagues to arrest a person in some case. On the way, they saw a sand-laden tractor-trolley coming towards their direction and tried to stop it, SP Prateek said on Sunday.

Bagri and the other policemen gave a signal to the driver to stop the tractor carrying the illegally mined sand. But he did not stop and the vehicle ran over the ASI, the official said.

District Collector Tarun Bhatnagar said the tractor driver's house valued at around Rs 4 lakh was demolished on Sunday evening.

Two houses, valued at Rs 10 lakh and Rs 4 lakh, of tractor owner Surendra Singh were also demolished, he added.

SP Prateek said Beohari police station in-charge Munnal Rahangdale has been line-attached (removed from field duty).

A proposal to extern the accused father-son duo from the district has been sent for approval of the district collector, he said.

A case was registered against the accused on charges of murder and illegal sand mining under provisions of the Indian Penal Code and the Mines Act, the official said.

"Piloting" in Shahdol is used to refer to moving ahead a vehicle while seeing the road is clear and no checking is being done by authorities.

In November last year, a local revenue department official was crushed to death by a tractor-trolley used for transporting illegally mined sand from the Son river in Gopalpur area of Shahdol district. (PTI)

## Gujarat HC acquits ex-BJP MP, 6 others in RTI activist Amit Jethwa murder case

**AHMEDABAD, May 6:** The Gujarat High Court on Monday allowed the appeals of former BJP MP Dinu Solanki and six others against their conviction by a CBI court in the case of RTI activist Amit Jethwa's murder in 2010.

Observing that the trial court conducted proceedings with a "predetermined notion of conviction," a division bench of Justices AS Supreya and Vimal K Vyas quashed the CBI court's order sentencing Solanki and the six others to life imprisonment. Jethwa was shot dead outside the high court premises here on July 20, 2010.

Solanki and six others were sentenced to life imprisonment by the CBI court in 2019 and ordered to pay a fine of Rs 15 lakh in the case of murder and criminal conspiracy.

The high court had later suspended the life sentences of Dinu Solanki and his nephew Shiva Solanki, who was also convicted in the case.

"We reiterate that the entire investigation right from the inception of the offence appears to be perfunctory and prejudiced. The prosecution has failed to secure the confidence of the witnesses," the HC bench said in its order.

The trial court on a "preconceived notion of



conviction has analysed the evidence divorced from statutes and legal precedence," it said.

The HC said the trial court was duty-bound to apply the law as written, "not as per its instinct".

"Resultantly the common judgment on order of conviction dated July 11, 2019 passed by the special judge, CBI court...whereby the accused have been convicted for the offence under section 302 (murder) and section 120 (B) (criminal conspiracy) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence) of Indian Penal Code (IPC) and are sentenced is quashed and set aside," the HC order said.

The high court further observed that the sur-

vival of democracy and the unity and integrity of the nation depends upon the realisation that "constitutional morality is no less essential than constitutional legality."

Jethwa was shot dead outside the Gujarat High Court on July 20, 2010 after he tried to expose illegal mining activities allegedly involving Dinu Solanki by seeking information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

An FIR was then lodged against two unidentified assailants and the investigation was transferred to the state police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which later filed a chargesheet.

In September 2012, the high court handed over the investigation to the Central Bureau of Investigation. The CBI arrested Dinu Solanki in November 2013. On July 11, 2019, Dinu Solanki and his nephew were convicted in the case of Jethwa's murder.

The high court in September 2021 suspended Dinu Solanki's sentence pending his appeal against conviction by the CBI court.

Last year, the HC also suspended the life sentence of his nephew Shiva Solanki and granted him bail pending hearing of his appeal against his conviction by the CBI court. (PTI)

## SC asks Maharashtra to implement its directions issued in 1992-93 Mumbai riots case

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Maharashtra government to implement its directions such as ensuring disposal of cases, grant of compensation to the kith and kin of the missing victims of the 1992 Mumbai riots and undertaking police reforms.

Irked over the non-compliance of its directions issued in a judgment of November 4, 2022, a bench comprising justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the Maharashtra DGP and the secretary of the state home department to look into the recommendations of the Justice B N Srikrishna Commission and file a "better compliance" report.

"The state shall file a better compliance report by July 19, 2024," the bench said and fixed a suo motu plea on the issue for hearing on July 26.

Dealing with one aspect, the bench noted that presently there are 2.30 lakh police personnel in the state force and the administration is under an obligation to construct dwelling units for them. The state government, on January 25, 1993, had set up a commission under the Commissions

of Inquiry Act headed by Justice Srikrishna, the then judge of the Bombay High Court, to deal with aspects such as circumstances, events and immediate causes of the Mumbai riots on and after December 6, 1992 following the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

The bench, which had noted that the recommendations of the commission were accepted by the state government in 2022, issued a slew of directions in its judgment.

"The State Government shall provide details of 97 cases on dormant files to the Registrar General of the Bombay High Court within one month from today. On receipt of the details, the High Court on the Administrative side shall issue necessary communication to the concerned Courts in which the cases are pending to take necessary steps to trace the accused."

"The State Government shall immediately constitute a Special Cell to trace the absconding/missing accused in these cases and to assist the concerned Courts so that the Trial can proceed against them," the top court

had said.

It had also directed the state government to provide details of the "only pending riot related criminal case before the Sessions Court at Mumbai to the Registrar General of the Bombay High Court" which shall bring it to the notice of the concerned court for its disposal at the earliest.

"The State Government shall expeditiously implement all the recommendations made by the Commission on the issue of reforms in the police force which were accepted by it," the 2022 judgment had said.

The top court, in its judgment, had also directed the state government to submit a report containing details of 168 people, who were reported to have gone missing during the 1992-93 communal riots in Mumbai.

It had observed that a March 2020 affidavit filed before it by the principal secretary of the home department of the state noted that 900 people died in riots and 168 persons were reported missing and compensation has been paid to the legal heirs of these deceased and family members of 60 missing people. (PTI)

## Reports of NEET-UG question paper leak baseless, every single paper has been accounted for: NTA

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The reports claiming question paper leak in the medical entrance exam NEET-UG are "completely baseless and without any ground", the National Testing Agency (NTA) clarified on Monday.

Stressing that every question paper has been "accounted for", the NTA said that purported images of the question paper circulating on social media have no relation with the actual paper.

"It has been ascertained from NTA's security protocols and Standard Operating Procedures that the social media posts pointing towards any paper leak are completely baseless and without any ground."

"To put rumours to rest, it is also stated that every single question paper has been accounted for," said

Sadhana Parashar, Senior Director, NTA. Parashar said that no external person or agency can access the centres once the examination starts.

She said that after the gates of the examination centres are closed, no one from outside is permitted access inside the halls, which are under CCTV surveillance.

"All other photographs of question papers circulating in social media have no relation to the actual examination question paper which has been administered," she added.

The entrance exam was conducted on Sunday at 4,750 centres in 571 cities including 14 cities abroad.

While the reports suggesting question paper leak have been doing rounds on social media since Sunday, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has also raised the issue.

"Once again, there are reports of NEET paper leak. The future of 24 lakh youth of the country has been messed up again. This trend that has been going on with crores of

promising youth for the last ten years is not stopping.

"Will the Prime Minister of the country say anything about this? To pacify the youth, a law was passed in the Parliament against paper leak. Where is that law? Why is it not implemented?" she wrote on X.

The NTA had on Sunday claimed that the distribution of wrong question papers at an exam centre in Rajasthan led to some candidates walking out with the papers. The agency had denied any leak of the question paper.

"The integrity of the examination process was not compromised. The exam was later reconducted for the 120 affected candidates at the centre,"

Parashar had said on Sunday.

The NTA, however, admitted that there have been cases of malpractice and impersonation and strict action has been taken against the involved candidates.

"NTA also conducts post-exam data analysis to detect cases of unfair means, action on which is taken as per rules including cancellation of candidature and debarment from future examinations," the official said.

This year, a record over 24 lakh candidates registered for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test - Undergraduate (NEET-UG), which has administered," she added.

of which over 10 lakh were male students, over 13 lakh were girls and 24 students registered under the third gender category.

Region-wise, Uttar Pradesh had registered the highest number of candidates at 3,39,125, followed by Maharashtra at 2,79,904 and Rajasthan at 1,96,139. Tamil Nadu saw 1,55,216 registrations and Karnataka 1,54,210.

In 2023, a total of 20,87,449 candidates had registered for NEET-UG and the exam was held on May 7. The NTA had recorded 97.7 per cent attendance in the exam. (PTI)

## Bombay HC stays notification giving conditional exemption from 25 pc RTE quota to pvt unaided schools



**MUMBAI, May 6:** The Bombay High Court on Monday stayed a notification issued by the Maha-

rastra government that exempted private unaided schools from admitting students under Right to Ed-

ucation (RTE) quota if there is a government-run school within a 1 kilometre radius.

A division bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Arif Doctor said the issue concerned "overwhelming public interest" and that the impugned notification, issued on February 9, contravened provisions of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, also known as RTE.

Under the RTE Act, 25 per cent seats at the entry point - Class 1 or pre-primary section - in private unaided schools should be reserved for children from economically weaker and disadvantaged sections. These students get free education free, while the government reimburses their tuition fees to schools.

The notification, however, exempted private unaided schools within 1 kilometre radius of a government-run or aided school from reserving 25 per cent seats for economically weaker and disadvantaged children.

The bench on Monday noted

that such a notification would hamper free education being provided to children.

"Any subordinate legislation cannot be made in contravention of the principal Act; even otherwise by appending impugned proviso to the RTE Act," the court said.

The bench said the notification was "prima facie" ultra vires to the Constitution and stayed it until further orders.

The court was hearing a bunch of petitions challenging the notification. As per the petitioners, the notification was unconstitutional and contrary to RTE Act, which entitles children from weaker section and disadvantaged section to free education.

Additional government pleader Jyoti Chavan said the notification applied only to those unaided private schools situated in areas where there is a government or aided school.

The HC has kept the matter for further hearing on Tuesday. (PTI)

# Karan Johar criticises comic for mimicking him, Kettan Singh offers apology

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** A comic mimicking him on a reality show was in 'exceptionally poor taste', said Karan Johar who happened to come across a clip when he was watching television with his mother. Though he didn't take any names, comic Kettan Singh quickly apologised, saying the intention was not to cause hurt.

On Sunday, Johar shared an Instagram Story in which he wrote about feeling sad about being disrespected by industry colleagues.

"I was sitting and watching television with my mom... and saw a promo of a reality comedy show on a supposedly respectable channel... a comic was mimicking me in exceptionally poor taste... I expect this from trolls and faceless and nameless people," said the filmmaker, often subjected to abuse and trolling on social media.

"But when your own industry can disrespect someone who has been in the business for over 25 years it speaks volumes about the times we live in... this doesn't even anger me it just makes me sad!" he wrote in the post.

Later in the evening, comic-actor Kettan Singh tendered an apology, saying he was a 'huge fan' of the director.

"I would like to apologise to Karan sir. First of all, whatever impersonation I do because I watch a lot of Karan Johar on the coffee show," Singh told Times Now while referring to the promo of the show Madness Machayenge - India Ko Hasayenge with Huma Qureshi.

The comic had shared the video of the promo from the reality comedy show, which premieres on Sony TV channel over the weekend, on his Instagram page.

In the clip, Singh can be



seen impersonating Johar in a skit called Toffee With Churan, modelled on Johar's popular celebrity talk show Koffee With Karan.

"If my actions hurt him, I would like to apologise to him. My intention was not to hurt him. I just wanted to entertain the audience but if I did some-

thing extra, I would like to say sorry to him. I don't want to offend, sir," the comic further said. Singh, who previously mimicked Johar on The Kapil Sharma Show, is also known for featuring in the Marathi film Vicky Velingkar and writing the movie Johnny Jumper. (PTI)

## Makers of 'Gen V' won't recast Chance Perdomo's role following actor's death



**LOS ANGELES, May 6:** The producers of the superhero action series "Gen V" have announced they will not recast Chance Perdomo's role following his death, saying no one can replace the actor who died in March.

Perdomo, who played the role of Andre Anderson in Prime Video's spin-off series of "The Boys", died in a motorcycle crash at the age of 27. In the show, Andre is a popular student at Godolkin University with the ability to manipulate things magnetically.

The makers of "Gen V" shared the announcement in a social media statement on Sunday. "As we continue to navigate the tragic loss of Chance Perdomo, everyone at Gen V is determined to find the best way to pay respect to his memory. We won't be recasting the role, because no one can replace Chance," they said.

The storyline of the second season, set to start shooting this month, is being rewritten to incorporate Perdomo's demise.

"Instead, we have been taking the time and space to recraft our season 2 storylines as we begin production in May," the "Gen V" producers added.

Perdomo made his small screen debut with a recurring role in the third series of the CBBC adaptation of "Hetty Feather" in 2017 and next year, earned a British Academy Television Award nomination for his performance in the BBC Three film "Killed by My Debt".

He rose to prominence with the role of Ambrose Spellman, Sabrina's (Kiernan Shipka) cousin, in the Netflix series "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina". His character often served as Sabrina's conscience, confidant and accomplice. (PTI)



## William Shatner says reprising his 'Star Trek' role is an intriguing idea

**LOS ANGELES, May 6:** Actor William Shatner, best known for his portrayal of Admiral James Kirk in the popular TV series Star Trek, says he is open to reprising his character of the legendary captain of the starship Enterprise in future. The 93-year-old star said he would love to give the role another shot if there was a 'genuine reason' for his reappearance in the franchise. "It's an intriguing idea. It's almost impossible but it was a great role and so well-written and if there were a reason to be there not just to make a cameo appearance, but if there were a genuine reason for the character appearing, I might consider it," Shatner told The Canada Press news agency. He appeared as James Kirk in all the episodes of the 1966 TV show Star Trek: The Original Series, 21 of the 22 episodes of Star Trek: The Animated Series, and the first seven Star Trek movies. The Boston Legal actor has written a series of books chronicling his experiences before, during and after his time in a Starfleet uniform in the Star Trek franchise. (PTI)

## Shooting begins on Mari Selvaraj's 'Bison Kaalamaan' starring Dhruv Vikram

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** "Bison Kaalamaan", directed by Mari Selvaraj and starring Dhruv Vikram, has started filming, the makers announced on Monday.

The upcoming Tamil movie marks the first collaboration between Applause Entertainment and Neelam Studios, co-founded by Pa Ranjith, under their multi-deal partnership.

"Bison Kaalamaan", featuring Dhruv in the title role, is billed as an immersive experience that celebrates the triumph of the human spirit in the rich tapestry of Tamil cinema.

"The extraordinary partnership between Applause Entertainment and Neelam Studios brings a tale of grit, glory and finding a path to peace, the story of a warrior," the makers said in a press release.

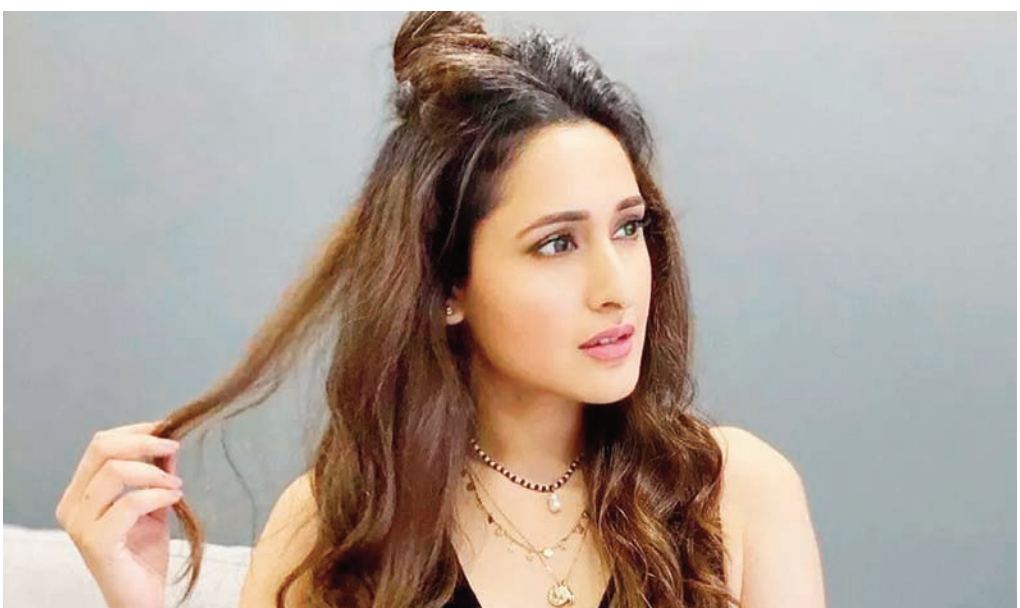
Anupama Parameswaran, Lal, Pasupathy, Kalaiyaran, Rajisha Vijayan, Hari Krishnan, Azhagam Perumal and Aruvi Madhan also round out the cast of the film.

It also marks the reunion of Selvaraj with producer Ranjith after the path-breaking 2018 drama "Pariyerum Perumal".

Nivas K Prasanna will compose music for "Bison Kaalamaan", with Ezhil Arasu K as director of photography, Kumar Gangappan as art director, and Dhilip Subbarayan as action director on the film. (PTI)



## Pragya Jaiswal on working in Akshay Kumar's 'Khel Khel Mein': It's a beautiful coincidence



**MUMBAI, May 6:** Pragya Jaiswal says it is a beautiful coincidence that in her first Hindi film "Khel Khel Mein", she is sharing the screen space with Akshay Kumar.

The Jabalpur-born actor had auditioned for Kumar's 2014 movie "Gabbar Is Back", which was directed by Telugu director Krish Jagarlamudi. Though she didn't get the part, the filmmaker later roped her in for his 2015 movie "Kanche", opposite Varun Tej.

"It's a beautiful coincidence. I auditioned for a film which was to be with Akshay sir. But I ended up debuting in the south because of that. And after doing so many films in the south, I'm finally doing my first hindi film with him. I'm just grateful for

the opportunity and journey," the 36-year-old actor told PTI in an interview.

After "Kanche", Jaiswal starred in Telugu movies such as "Om Namoh Shri Krishna", "Gunturodu", "Nakshatram", "Akhanda" and "Son of India".

In "Khel Khel Mein", the actor features alongside an ensemble cast that also includes Taapsee Pannu, Vaani Kapoor, Fardeen Khan, Ammy Virk and Aditya Seal.

The comedy-drama is written and directed by Mudassar Aziz of "Happy Bhag Jayegi" and "Pati Patni Aur Woh" fame.

"For me, it is always about doing the right project. When this one came my way, I felt like it's a lovely role and I'd love to be a part of this film.

Things happen when they are supposed to happen. You just have to be patient and work hard. It's an individual journey. I think this film happened at a time when I'm ready for it," she said.

Jaiswal said she was initially intimidated by the presence of a star like Kumar but soon realised there is no scope for nervousness on the set.

"You don't have scope to be nervous because you're in your character and you have to justify every word, line and moment of being in front of the camera. So I went to sir and introduced myself.

"I made the effort to go and chat with everyone because I wanted to get comfortable with them, it was important for all of

us to have that camaraderie that reflects on screen," she added.

Going forward, Jaiswal said she wants to work with "best directors and biggest superstars".

"I want to get the best roles and scripts. That's the driving force of every actor. We are all hungry. We want to do the best of work... I think you just have to grab the opportunity, make the most of it, and hope that it will lead to your dreams one day. I'm hoping that all these opportunities will land me something greater," the actor said. "Khel Khel Mein" is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Vipul D Shah, Ashwin Varde, Rajesh Bahl, Shashikant Sinha and Ajay Rai. It is scheduled for release in theatres on September 6. (PTI)

# Klopp keeps the drama going to the end as Liverpool beats Spurs 4-2



**LIVERPOOL, May 6:** The smile is back on Jurgen Klopp's face — even if his Liverpool players seem intent on testing his nerves right to the end.

The Premier League title may be all but beyond the Merseyside club, but that doesn't mean the drama is over for Klopp, who will step down at the end of the season.

Last week he was arguing on

the sideline with Mohamed Salah as Liverpool effectively dropped out of the title race. And while Salah opened the scoring in a 4-2 win against Tottenham at Anfield on Sunday, it was Harvey Elliott who appeared to bring the broadest smile to Klopp's face with a wonderful long-range goal in what looked like being a cakewalk for Klopp's team.

"What a goal," the Liverpool manager said. "In the game you only see it flying in and I thought, 'That was a good shot.' The goal I saw afterwards, there was not a lot of space left or right. It went exactly where it should be. Top goal."

Elliott's strike, after goals from Salah, Andy Robertson and Cody Gakpo, fired Liverpool into a 4-0 lead before the

game had even reached the hour mark. What followed was the unlikeliest of fightbacks from Spurs that might have made this another frustrating day in what has ultimately been a disappointing finale for Klopp at the end of nearly nine trophy-filled years.

Goals from Richarlison and Son Heung-min made it a much closer contest than it had ever

looked like being. And it needed two outstanding saves from Alisson, a goal-line clearance from Joe Gomez and a VAR call to prevent it from being closer still.

"It's a little bit of a mirror of the season. Really, really, good until we were really rubbish and then, we were okay again," Klopp said.

A nervy finish didn't stop the home fans from beckoning Klopp to produce his trademark post-match triple fist pump to the crowd after his penultimate home game in charge, with Feyenoord coach Arne Slot set to take over next season.

Mathematically, at least, it is not over for third-place Liverpool, which sits five points adrift of leader Arsenal with two games remaining. But, in reality, a late-season slump has killed Klopp's hopes of walking away with a second Premier League crown of his reign.

His team had been heavily rebuilt over the past two seasons and was not expected to contend at the top so soon. But this season at one point offered Liverpool the hope of a quadruple of trophies. Now it feels like it is ending on an underwhelming note.

Still, Klopp, who delivered the English League Cup in February, will walk away from a team that is on the up and leave his successor with plenty of young talent to work with. (AP)

## Roma draws 1-1 against Juventus; Milan ultras protest during 3-3 draw with Genoa - (A)

**MILAN, May 6:** Roma attempted to bounce back from European disappointment but could only draw 1-1 against Juventus in Serie A on Sunday in a result that did little to help its hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League.

Bremer canceled out Romelu Lukaku's first goal from open play against Juventus. Both teams also hit the woodwork as Juve's winless run continued.

Third-place Juventus, which is winless in its last five matches, is six points ahead of fifth-place Roma with three rounds remaining. The top five in Serie A qualify for the Champions League after Italy earned an extra spot in next season's competition.

Roma is just three points above sixth-place Atalanta, which has also played two matches fewer.

Roma was looking to recover from a 2-0 loss to Bayer Leverkusen in the first leg of the Europa League semifinals on Thursday, and started positively with Rasmus Kristensen's header coming off the crossbar in the 11th minute.

The capital side took the lead just four minutes later in somewhat chaotic circumstances. Paulo Dybala pulled the ball back from the byline and Bryan Cristante's shot was blocked by Juventus defender Federico Gatti on the line but went straight to Lukaku for the tap in.

It was his first goal against Juventus from open play after netting from the spot against the Bianconeri for Inter.

Juve leveled in the 31st minute when Federico Chiesa whipped in a cross from the right and Bremer headed it in at the back post.

Chiesa came close to firing his team in front right at the start of the second half but his effort went off the right post and across the face of goal.

AC Milan's hardcore fans protested during the team's 3-3 draw against Genoa.

There was a strange atmosphere at San Siro as the Milan ultras —

who also unveiled banners calling for more ambition, communication and a clear transfer strategy — remained silent during the match and left 10 minutes before the final whistle.

Milan was leading 3-2 by then, after recovering from Mateo Retegui's early penalty, but conceded a comical third goal as Morten Thorsby's cross ricocheted off Retegui and home defenders Fikayo Tomori and Malick Thiaw. It went down as an own-goal by Thiaw.

It was a sixth straight match without a win for Milan, which nevertheless is second and mathematically assured of Champions League soccer next season.

Hellas Verona boosted its chances of Serie A survival with a 2-1 win over Fiorentina as fellow strugglers Empoli and Frosinone played out a disappointing 0-0 draw. All three teams had been locked on 31 points ahead of the weekend, just two points above the relegation zone.

Verona was helped by Fiorentina coach Vincenzo Italiano opting to rotate his team ahead of the second leg of the Europa Conference League semifinal on Wednesday. Fiorentina beat Club Brugge 3-2 in the first leg last week.

And the visitors gifted Verona the opener Sunday in the 13th minute when, in a mix-up with Fiorentina defender Luca Ranieri, goalkeeper Oliver Christensen failed to gather an innocuously seeming long ball and instead brought down Tijjani Noslin.

Darko Lazovic converted the resulting penalty.

Gaetano Castrovilli, who had earlier hit the post, leveled shortly before halftime for his first goal since returning recently from a knee injury that had sidelined him for almost a year.

Verona restored its lead in the 59th when Nikola Milenkovic could only send Darko Lazovic's cross as far as Noslin, who thumped it into the roof of the net. (PTI)

## Hrádecký sets record for foreign goalkeeper with 292 Bundesliga appearances

**FRANKFURT, May 6:** Bayer Leverkusen's Lukáš Hrádecký set a record for a foreign goalkeeper in the Bundesliga on Sunday by making his 292nd appearance. The 34-year-old Finnish keeper played in Leverkusen's 5-1 win at his former club Eintracht Frankfurt, breaking the record previously held by Borussia Mönchengladbach and Bayern Munich goalkeeper Yann Sommer of Switzerland.

"I like to read the newspapers or

matchday papers before the game and I saw it there today," Hrádecký told broadcaster DAZN afterward. "It fills me full of pride and honor that I can play in such a lovely country and league, and for two fantastic clubs."

Hrádecký joined Frankfurt in 2015 and went on to make 101 appearances for the club before switching to Leverkusen in 2018. Sunday's game was his 191st league appearance for Leverkusen.

It was also the first time he had won

with Leverkusen in Frankfurt since his switch. "The curse has finally been broken after five years," Hrádecký said. "It always felt good to win here with the home team and this time we managed it with the away team."

Hrádecký won the Bundesliga with Leverkusen this season with five rounds to spare. The team is on a record 48-game unbeaten streak across all competitions since the start of the season.

"The run keeps going, hopefully for

another five games. It's simply a joy to play with Bayer at the moment," Hrádecký said. Leverkusen next faces Roma in the second leg of their Europa League semifinal. Leverkusen won the first leg 2-0 in Rome last week.

Then it visits Bochum for its penultimate Bundesliga game. Bochum was the last team to beat Leverkusen on the final day last season. The German champion will finish its league campaign at home to Augsburg. (AP)

## Indian women's and men's 4x400m relay teams qualify for Paris Olympics

**NASSAU (BAHAMAS), May 6:** The Indian men's and women's 4x400m relay teams qualified for Paris Olympics after finishing second in their respective second-round heats at the World Athletics Relays here on Monday.

In the women's competition, the quartet of Rupal Chaudhary, M R Poovamma, Jyothika Sri Dandi and Subha Venkatesan clocked 3 minutes and 29.35 seconds to finish second behind Jamaica (3:28.54) in heat number one to book a Paris Games ticket.

Later, the men's squad of Muhammed Anas, Yahiya, Muhammed Ajmal, Arokia Rajiv and Amoj Jacob finished with a collective timing of 3 minutes and 3.23 seconds to also finish second in their heat, behind USA (2:59.95).

The top two teams in each of the three heats in the second round were to qualify for the Olympics to be held from July 26 to August 11. It was a sort of a surprise that the women's 4x400m team qualified for the Olympics as the focus was more on the men's 4x400m team which has broken Asian record in back-to-back global events -- Tokyo Olympics and 2023 World Championships -- as well as winning 2023 Asian Games gold.

The Indian women's team had finished fifth in the first-round qualifying heat on Sunday with a time of 3 minutes and 29.74 seconds.

The men's team had failed to finish in the first-round qualifying heat after second leg runner Ramesh pulled out midway due to cramps. Arokia Rajiv took the place of Ramesh in the team and he ran the third leg after Anas and Ajmal.

The Indian men's 4x400m team was on third position when anchor-leg runner Jacob took the baton from Arokia but the Delhi

boy ran a fantastic race to overtake his Mexican opponent and finish second. It was not about the timing but more about Olympics qualification for the Indian men's team which ran 3:00.25 at the Tokyo Olympics for the then Asian record before bettering it during the 2023 World Championships with yet another Asian record of 2:59.05. Monday's timing was well below the team's best. India had even given a mighty scare to formidable USA during the heat race at the 2023 Budapest World Championships before settling for the second place.

Meanwhile, India pulled out of the mixed 4x400m relay second round heat races on Monday as Ramesh was not available after suffering muscle cramps while running the men's 4x400m first round heat on Sunday.

Ramesh had run both the mixed 4x400m and men's 4x400m races on Sunday. India had featured in mixed 4x400m relay in the Tokyo Olympics where the event made its debut.

The Indian women's 4x400m relay team will be returning to Olympics after missing out in Tokyo Games. The Paris participation will be the eighth time for the Indian women's 4x400m team, the first being in 1984 Games.

For the men's 4x400m, this will be the fourth time India will be taking part in the Olympics, the first being in the 2000 Sydney Games.

With this, India now have at least 19 Paris-bound track and field athletes and the list includes defending javelin throw champion Neeraj Chopra among others.

The athletics events at the Games will begin on August 1.

A total of 70 teams have qualified for relay events at the Paris Olympics following two days of thrilling action at the World Athletics Relays Bahamas. (PTI)

## There's terror threat to T20 WC, reveals Trinidad PM; ICC says robust security plan in place

**PORT OF SPAIN, May 6:** The T20 World Cup in the Americas has received a terror threat, Trinidad's Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley has revealed even as the ICC asserted that a "comprehensive and robust security plan" is in place to "mitigate any risks" to the showpiece beginning June 1.

The tournament -- featuring 20 teams, including India -- is scattered across nine venues, six of them in the West Indies.

As of now, the threat, according to media reports, is specific to the West Indies, which aside from some preliminary matches, will be hosting the entire Super 8 stage along with the semifinals

and the final on June 29.

"Unfortunately, the threat of terrorism in its many and varied expressions is an ever-present danger in the world of the 21st century," Rowley was quoted as saying by 'Trinidad Daily Express' here.

Rowley did not name any organisation but reports here stated that the Islamic State made the threat through its propaganda channel.

The ICC responded to the de-escalation with a statement assuring preparedness.

"Safety and security of everyone at the event is our number one priority and we have a comprehensive and robust security

plan in place," a spokesperson of the global body said in a statement issued to PTI.

"We work closely with authorities in our host countries and continually monitor and evaluate the global landscape to ensure appropriate plans are in place to mitigate any risks identified to our event."

Rowley said "extra effort in national security preparations and response readiness" will be put in to neutralise the danger.

"Given the fact that bad actors can choose to misbehave in any way possible, it makes it virtually impossible to completely seal off all opportunities," he said.

"However, in order to ameliorate these dangers, we at the local and regional levels have remained alert to many threats and singularly or together have our intelligence and other security agencies working to protect the population in countries and at venues throughout the tournament," he added.

The World Cup matches in the West Indies will be held in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadine, Trinidad and Tobago. The US leg will feature games in Florida, New York and Texas.

New York will host the marquee India-Pakistan clash on June 9.

Cricket West Indies said everything is being done to ensure foolproof security at the mega-event.

"We work closely with authorities in the host countries and cities, and continually monitor and evaluate the global landscape to ensure appropriate plans are in place to mitigate any risks identified to our event," CWI CEO Jonny Graves told 'Cricbuzz'.

"We want to assure all stakeholders that safety and security of everyone at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup is our number one priority and we have a comprehensive and robust security plan in place," he added. (PTI)

## César Luis Menotti, coach who led Argentina to its first World Cup title in 1978, dies at 85

**BUENOS AIRES, May 6:** César Luis Menotti, the charismatic coach who led Argentina to its first World Cup title in 1978, has died, the Argentine Football Association said Sunday. He was 85.

"Goodbye, dear Flaco!" the association's statement added, using Menotti's nickname which means "the thin one."

The association did not give a cause of death. Local media reports said Menotti was admitted to a clinic in March with severe anemia. He reportedly underwent surgery for phlebitis in April and subsequently returned home.

Passion for soccer and a sharp ability to explain its mechanics were Menotti's hallmark characteristics as a trainer, and he was considered one of the most emblematic and influential coaches in Argentine soccer.

Menotti was a political activist and an affiliate member of the Argentine Communist Party, a boxing fan and an admirer of

the works of Latin American writers Mario Benedetti, Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Mario Sábato and Joan Manuel Serrat, among others.

"Once I was interviewed by Borges, and when I asked him if it bothered him that I smoked, he told me: 'What intoxicates me is not the cigarette, but the stupid conversations,'" Menotti recalled in one of his last interviews.

"So, I asked about everything ... but not about soccer, because I know about soccer!" he added.

He launched his career as a player for Rosario Central (1960-1963 and 1967), then went to Racing Club (1964) and Boca Juniors (1965-1966), all Argentine clubs. Menotti played for the New York Generals in the U.S. (1967), followed by Brazil's Santos (1968) and Italy's Juventus (1969-1970).

At Santos, he played alongside Pelé, whom he never hesitated to qualify as the best



player among legends.

Menotti coached Argentina's national team between 1974 and 1983. He was convinced the side did not get the recognition it deserved when it won the World Cup in 1978 because the country was ruled by a military junta responsible for widespread human rights violations. His detractors would often recall a photo in which Menotti,

after the World Cup victory, shook hands with Jorge Rafael Videla, head of the military junta.

On the eve of the World Cup, Menotti left a 17-year-old Maradona off the squad — a decision the coach later said soured their relations for years.

Menotti coached Mexico's national team in 1991-1992. He also led Barcelona (1983-1984),

where he had Maradona on his squad; Atletico Madrid (1987-88); Uruguay's Penarol (1990-91); Italy's Sampdoria (1997) and Mexico's Tecos (2007) — his last coaching job.

For years, Menotti often had a cigarette hanging between his lips, but he mostly quit the habit in 2011 following a three-day hospitalization stemming from his tobacco addiction.

He also was known for wearing hair long but neat. He said he didn't rely on hairdressers. "I cut my own hair. I take the scissors, I cut the ends."

Menotti began leaving his hair long in the early 1970s. "One day I said to myself: I won't cut my hair until we lose. And we went 10 games undefeated, so it all started as a joke," he said.

In his later years, Menotti said he didn't fear death. "It's the only thing I'm sure of. I don't know anyone who hasn't died at some point," he said in 2014. (AP)

# Must-win game for DC: All eyes on Fraser-McGurk and Pant against rampaging Royals



**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Delhi Capitals would require Rishabh Pant's killer instinct and Jake Fraser-McGurk's unbelievable flair in their bid to stay alive in the IPL playoff race when they square off against a rampaging Rajasthan Royals in a must-win game here on Tuesday.

The Capitals have been inconsistent so far, winning five and losing six of their last 11 games. While winning the remaining three games is a must for Pant's men, even that will only take them to 16

points which might not be enough to qualify for the last four stage of the tournament.

Apart from KKR (16 from 11 games) and RR (16 from 10 games), there are at least three teams, namely Chennai Super Kings (12 from 11), Sunrisers Hyderabad (12 from 10 games) and Lucknow Super Giants (12 from 11 games), who can go beyond the 16-point mark.

Given the situation, DC's best might not be enough for qualification, but Pant would look to only

"control the controllables," a policy advocated by his mentor Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

On a flat Feroz Shah Kotla deck, the challenge will be two-fold for the DC skipper.

At one end, he would want the Khaleel Ahmeds, Ishant Sharmas and Kuldeep Yadavs to restrict the Yashasvi Jaiswals, Sanju Samsons, and Riyan Parags to a manageable level but then with barely 60-metre boundary on one side, it will be a challenge to stop a team, whose jersey's colour (Pink) resembles

their overall health.

With 380 runs to his credit and three impactful half-centuries in his kitty, Pant would like to once again perform, especially when his team has been pushed to the wall. He will have new Aussie sensation Fraser-McGurk, who has gone off the boil in the last couple of games.

These two batters can individually change the complexion of a game, but DC will be wary of the Royals' bowling attack, which will pose a very different challenge at the Kotla compared to Sawai Man Singh.

Facing spinners of Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin's calibre isn't easy, and in veteran Sandeep Sharma, RR has a bowler, who can take pace off the deliveries.

The Rajasthan bowling attack has been able to maintain a decent economy rate but for DC, only Axar Patel (ER of 7.24) and Kuldeep (ER 8.45) have shown the wherewithal to stop opposition batters on their tracks.

It is time that Khaleel (ER 9.47) and Mukesh Kumar (ER 11.05) also show more consistency. South African pacers Lizaad Williams (ER 12 in 2 games) and Anrich Nortje (ER 13.36) have simply not looked the part.

The last time the two teams met was in Jaipur in March and DC then had lost control during the second half of their bowling in-

nings with Riyan playing a superb innings.

The Royals batters would be licking their lips after having a look at the surface which can't get flatter than what it is right now.

Riyan, skipper Sanju Samson, the dashing Yashasvi, along with finishers Rovman Powell, Shimron Hetmyer and Dhruv Jurel give Royal a very scary look and DC bowlers can only pray that it doesn't turn out to be 'Nightmare 2.0' for the hosts.

**Teams:**

**Delhi Capitals:** Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra, Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Mitchell Marsh, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.

**Rajasthan Royals:** Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Keshav Maharaj, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dube, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger.

Match starts at 7.30 PM. (PTI)

## India's first-ever 'hybrid pitch' unveiled in Dharamsala



**DHARAMSALA, May 6:** India's first-ever 'hybrid pitch' was unveiled at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association (HPCA) stadium in a grand ceremony here on Monday.

The event was attended by IPL Chairman Arun Dhumal and cricket dignitaries including Paul Taylor, a former England cricketer and SIS's international cricket director.

"The introduction of hybrid pitches is set to revolutionize cricket in India, following their success in iconic venues like Lord's and The Oval in England," said Dhumal, who hails from Himachal Pradesh.

The hybrid pitch, which combines natural turf with synthetic fibres, promises enhanced durability and consistent playability, reducing the strain on ground staff and maintaining quality playing conditions.

With only 5% synthetic fibres, the pitch ensures that the natural characteristics essential for cricket are preserved.

Taylor expressed gratitude towards the HPCA for their col-

laboration on this pioneering project.

"With the ICC's approval, we're excited to see the positive impact these pitches will have on the sport, starting with installations in Mumbai and Ahmedabad next," he said.

The 'Universal Machine', a critical component in installing the hybrid surface, was developed by SISGrass in 2017 and has been instrumental in the rollout of similar pitches across England's county cricket grounds.

This innovation aligns with the ICC's recent sanctioning of hybrid pitches for T20 and one-day international matches, with plans to expand their use in four-day county championships starting this year.

The integration of technologies like SISAir, a root aeration system, further underscores the commitment to enhancing cricket infrastructure in India. This system improves the pitch's health and resilience, benefiting players with better and safer playing conditions. (PTI)

## 3rd Bhim Ray Memorial Knock Out Cricket Tournament 2024 kicks off

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, May 6:** The 3rd edition of the Bhim Ray Memorial Knock Out Cricket Tournament 2024 kicked off at Rangapahar, Saiding Playground in Dhansiri, Karbi Anglong, Assam on Sunday.

The tournament has been organised by Dhansiri Cricket Club and sponsored by Gayatri Kandha Ray, wife of Late Bhim Ray. On the opening day, Saiding Sports Team (SST) won against Dhansiri Cricket Club.

Gayatri Kandha Ray mentioned that the cricket Knockout tournament was organised in memory of her husband to encourage young players to participate in sports activities, as he was a good cricketer who loved playing and encouraging young players.

Gayatri informed that 14 teams including those from Diphu, Nagaland and Guwahati participated in the tournament. The winning team will receive a cash prize of ₹ 1 Lakh.

## Rublev praises doctors after winning Madrid Open for the 1st time

**MADRID, May 6:** Despite sleepless nights struggling with a fever, Andrey Rublev found a way to fight back and win the Madrid Open for the first time.

Rublev was feeling sick all week but rallied to beat Felix Auger-Aliassime in three sets on Sunday and clinch his second Masters 1000 title.

Rublev won 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 after Auger-Aliassime double-faulted on the last point of the final at the clay-court tournament in the Spanish capital.

"I would say this is the most proud title of my career," Rublev said. "I was almost dead every day. I was not sleeping at night. The last three, four days I didn't sleep."

Rublev gave "full credit to the doctors," who were "doing some tricky things" just to make sure he could play.

"I have no words," the eighth-ranked Rublev said. "If you knew what I had been through in the past nine days you would not imagine that I would be able to win a title."

The 26-year-old Russian won his first Masters 1000 title at Monte Carlo last year. Auger-Aliassime was playing in his first final at this level.

Rublev entered Madrid on a four-match losing streak after early exits at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and Barcelona. One of his victories in Madrid came in the quarterfinals against home-crowd favorite Carlos Alcaraz.

He now has 16 career titles, and two this season after Hong Kong in January. He had arrived with a 5-1 record against Auger-Aliassime, including a win in their sole matchup on clay. (AP)

## Babar Azam backs Gary Kirsten to bring in positive changes in Pakistan cricket

**LAHORE, May 6:** Pakistan limited overs skipper Babar Azam is optimistic that Gary Kirsten's appointment as head coach of Pakistan's white ball side will certainly improve its performance.

The South African was roped in as the team's limited overs head coach last month on a two-year contract, and this would be his third outing as an international coach, having guided India (2008-11) and South Africa (2011-13).

"He (Kirsten) is a very experienced coach, and his presence should be beneficial for us all. He is already taking a lot of interest in the planning for the World Cup and discussing strategy with the team management," Babar told a media conference in Lahore on Monday.

Babar said Kirsten was in touch with the side daily, receiving reports about what they were doing and how they were planning things.

"He (Kirsten) shares his plans with us, discussions are happening with coaches about our planning, and we update him on net practice plans, like how the bowling practice went today," he said. Babar said there was already steady line of communication between him and Kirsten and he is looking forward to his arrival.

The Pakistan skipper also dismissed concerns over some selections as the squad leaves for Ireland.

Pakistani selectors will finalize the final 15-member squad for the global tournament from the same 18 players based on the form and fitness of players in Ireland and England. Kirsten is expected to join the team in England.

"There is no issue about the top order as to who will open from



amongst me, Rizwan, Saim or Fakhar. All decisions will be based on keeping in mind the team's interests. There is no confusion there," Babar said.

He clarified that young and new players like Ayub, Azam, Irfan Khan and Usman Khan would require time to settle down in international cricket, and the management would back them completely in the lead-up to the World Cup.

"I think there is little time for rotation now because the World Cup is around the corner, and in the remaining matches. We will try to give the team we want to play with in the World Cup a proper opportunity," Babar continued.

"We will sort out whatever our bowling and batting combination is, and we have almost done that. We will play with our best possible XI in the remaining matches."

Asked if Pakistan was specifi-

cally strategizing to stop India's in-form batter Virat Kohli from scoring against them, Babar said that as a team, one always looked at the best players in an opposing team as the aim was to win against eleven players.

"The thing is, we plan against all eleven players of a team, and we don't know much about how the conditions will be in New York. But yes, he [Kohli] is one of the best players, and we will plan against him as well," Babar said.

Babar also made it clear there were no internal rifts in the team over the captaincy issue, and he was also excited about his second stint as Pakistan captain.

"Whatever success I achieved previously as captain was because of the players who supported me, and the same is true now. Important is the board is backing us completely to do well," he concluded. (PTI)

## We are focussed on following template set by Gambhir: Harshit Rana



**LUCKNOW, May 6:** Young pacer Harshit Rana feels Kolkata Knight Riders are reaping the rewards by following the winning template set by two-time IPL winner and current mentor Gautam Gambhir as they continued their sensational run to grab the top position in the IPL points table.

Gambhir had led KKR to the IPL crown twice with the team also qualifying for the playoffs five times during his stint from 2011 to 2017. He had also guided KKR to the finals of the now-defunct Champions League T20 in 2014.

However, in the last seven years, KKR could reach the playoffs only twice.

Gambhir's return to the KKR camp as a mentor this year turned things around as the Kolkata-based franchise moved to the top of the table with 16 points following a dominating 98-run over Lucknow Super Giants -- 8th win in 11 games -- on Sunday night.

"Not only this match, this entire

season we have been focussing a lot on the style of cricket that Gautam Gambhir wants us to play. He has a lot of knowledge on how to turn games in our favour and it helps us a lot in the middle," Rana said during the press conference.

"Like today he gave the bowlers a free hand, to find the length to bowl depending on the wicket, and not to try too many things," he added.

Rana (3/24 in 3.1 overs) played a crucial role in the win by taking three wickets while defending a target of 235.

"KKR read the wicket very well. The areas we had to bowl, we targeted the right places," Rana said.

IPL's biggest buy Mitchell Starc has proved expensive this season but Rana said the team management is not at all bothered about his economy rate and has faith on the Australian speedster.

"We have not cared even for a bit on how expensive Mitchell Starc has been in IPL 2024. He

has full faith in him and he won us the last game and we have no doubts on him whatsoever.

"He has such a great influence on the younger players, he has such a huge wealth of knowledge," Rana said.

Rana said his dream is to play for India and is focussing on his performance.

"My aim is to play for India but whatever franchise I play for I try to give my best on the day of the match. I will be selected based on my performance and performance alone," Rana said.

It was yet another sparkling fifty by Sunil Narine (81 off 39) which helped KKR post a massive 235 for six and LSG fast bowler Naveen Ul Haq conceded that all their plans failed against the star West Indian allrounder.

"I think he played quite well. We had a plan of bowling bouncers and yorkers and mixing it up and not being predictable against him. We did that but he played quite a brilliant innings to be hon-

est," he said.

"It wasn't like he was slogging and everything was going top edge or anything like slicing the ball. He was properly middling it and that's the case like from the beginning of the season.

"He's been middling it. Everything going his way. So yeah, it was a great knock by him."

The Afghan seamer said LSG could have produced a better show with the bat but they can't dwell on defeat too much as they need to focus on the next game.

"The amount of games that we have played in Lucknow, I think this was the best wicket to bat on. We did not do the things in the chase that we did - say in the game at Chepauk, where the target was very high. It was not like bad or anything, there was nothing for the bowlers," Naveen said.

"Pressure is always there on whatever score you are chasing. Every team has a bad day, and we cannot keep focusing on that, we have to move on." (PTI)