

6 WORLD Israel: We reopened a key Gaza crossing after a rocket attack Russia launches a 'massive' missile and drone attack on Ukraine 8 NATION Modi slams Congress over Sam Pitroda's 'skin colour' remarks Priyanka campaigns for Rahul in Rae Bareilly, slams PM for Adani-Ambani jibe

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Modi leads BJP's charge as ex-PM Rajiv Gandhi advisor's racial analogy sparks hue and cry Pitroda stirs row with 'east people look like Chinese' remark

NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD, May 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the BJP's all-out attack on the Congress on Wednesday over Sam Pitroda's analogy to depict India's diversity as he slammed his comments as "racist" and asserted that people will not tolerate the attempt to insult them on the basis of their skin colour.



As Pitroda's remarks went viral and triggered a political firestorm, the Congress, like the last time, swiftly distanced itself from its overseas wing chairperson's remarks and even criticised those as "most unfortunate and unacceptable".

Gandhi family and launched a blistering attack. At his rallies in Telangana, Modi said he is livid with the racial profiling of Indians by the US-based "philosopher and uncle of shehzada (Rahul Gandhi)", and linked the Congress's opposition to Droupadi Murmu's presidential bid to its mindset, which saw her as an "African" because of the colour of her skin.

State records 81.71 pc polling in 3rd phase

GUWAHATI, May 8: An estimated 81.71 per cent of the 81.49 lakh eligible voters exercised their franchise in the elections held in four Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam on May 7, officials said on Wednesday. The final polling percentage could be further revised as compilation of figures are yet to be completed, an official said.



GUWAHATI, May 8: An estimated 81.71 per cent of the 81.49 lakh eligible voters exercised their franchise in the elections held in four Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam on May 7, officials said on Wednesday.

Supreme Court to pass order on interim bail to Delhi CM Kejriwal on May 10

NEW DELHI, May 8: The Supreme Court will deliver its order on granting interim bail to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam on May 10.

Services Tax, sought clarification on the listing of Kejriwal's plea. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader was arrested on March 21 and is currently lodged in Tihar Jail under judicial custody.



Indian Envoy in Canada warns of anti-India activities of Sikh separatist groups

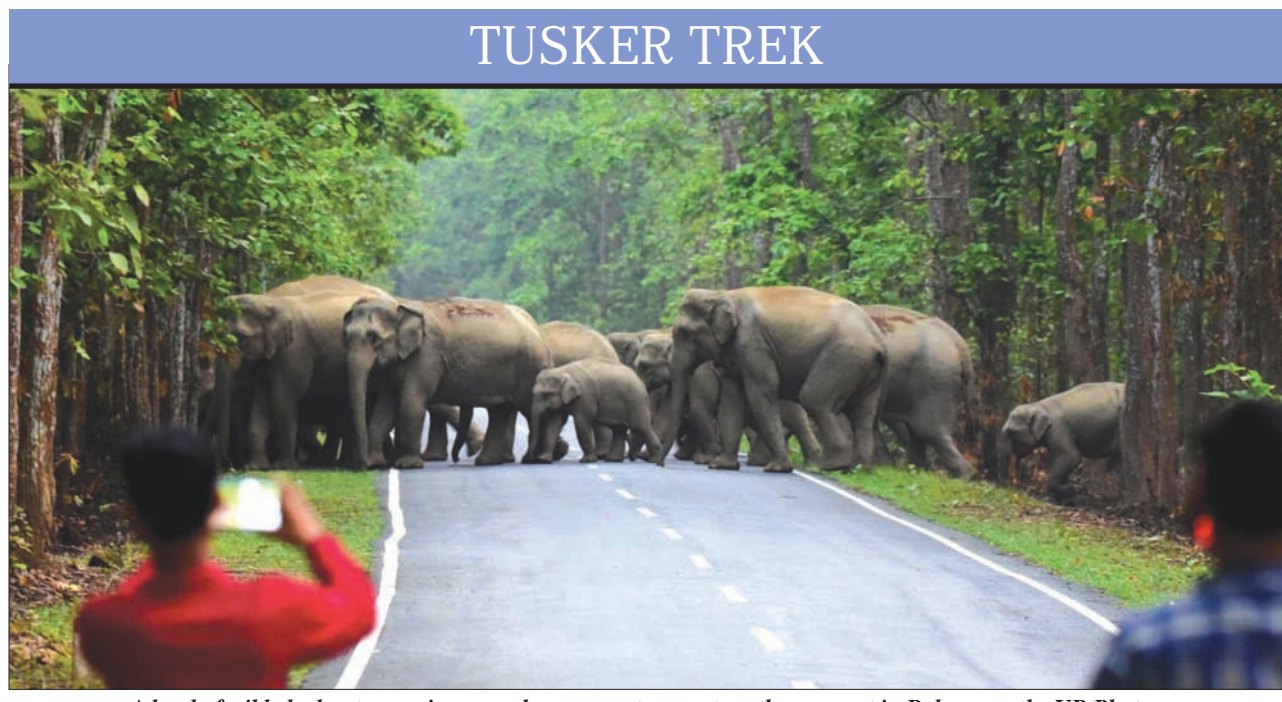
OTTAWA, May 8: Amidst the diplomatic strain in India-Canada relations, India's envoy here has warned that the Sikh separatist groups in Canada were crossing "a big red line" that New Delhi sees as a matter of national security and of the country's territorial integrity.



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INDIA bloc leaders to meet EC today over voter turnout

NEW DELHI, May 8: Leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc will meet the Election Commission on Thursday over their demand to promptly release the absolute voter turnout figures in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls after each phase, sources said.



A herd of wild elephants crossing a road as commuters capture the moment in Boko recently. UB Photos

Circle officer files police case against DC for 'mental harassment' during poll duty

GUWAHATI, May 8: A circle officer of Assam has filed a police complaint against the Nalbari district commissioner (DC), accusing the superior official of "mental harassment, public humiliation and threatening" during election duty.



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night after polling officials returned from their respective booths. "...when materials of only around seven polling stations of Tihu LAC were to be collected after 1 am, DC ma'am came and humiliated me and used slang words in front of officials. She tried to humiliate me on the ground that the trunks were still not taken to the designated places by labours," she added.

Cong's X account 'hacked', police complaint lodged

GUWAHATI, May 8: The official X account of Assam Congress was allegedly hacked on Wednesday with the profile name changed to "Tesla Event" and the profile picture to American electric carmaker Tesla's logo.

India contributes USD 500,000 to UN Counter-Terrorism Trust Fund

UNITED NATIONS, May 8: India has contributed USD 500,000 to the UN Counter-Terrorism Trust Fund, underscoring its unwavering commitment to support multilateral efforts in the global fight against the scourge of terrorism.

The month also saw the heaviest rain in the UAE in 75 years

April 2024 warmest ever, says European climate agency as temperature records topple

NEW DELHI, May 8: The world experienced the warmest April ever, with record heat, rain, and flooding crippling normal life in many countries, according to new data released on Wednesday.



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ature for the past 12 months (May 2023-April 2024) is the highest recorded, at 0.73 degrees Celsius above the 1991-2020 average and 1.61 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial average, the climate agency said.

PSUs not in disarray, but thriving under Modi regime: FM on Cong allegations

NEW DELHI, May 8: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday said PSUs have suffered under the Congress-led UPA government and previously neglected ones like, the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), have seen a 'resurgence' under the Modi government.

Rebutting allegations by the Congress party and its leader Rahul Gandhi that state-owned companies are in a disarray, Sitharaman said such claims are a textbook example of the pot calling the kettle black.

In a post on X, the Minister said that under the Modi-government, public sector undertakings (PSUs) are thriving, benefiting significantly from the culture of professionalism infused in them along with increased operational freedom. PSUs have suffered under the Congress-led UPA government, PSUs that were previously neglected under the UPA government, such as Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, have seen a resurgence under the Modi government, she said.

"Repeated claims from 'the @INCIndia ecosystem and @RahulGandhi in particular that Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) are being dismantled & are in disarray under the current government are a textbook example of 'Ulta Chor Kotwal Ko Daante' (pot calling the kettle black), as the facts reveal a very different picture," Sitharaman asserted.

Accusing Gandhi of "maliciously" attacking HAL, Sitharaman said, contrary to his claims,



HAL's market valuation has skyrocketed by 1,370 per cent in merely four years, rising from ₹ 17,398 crore in 2020, to ₹ 2.5 lakh crore as of May 7, 2024.

HAL on March 31, 2024 announced its highest-ever revenue of more than ₹ 29,810 crore for FY 2023-24 and has a robust order book of over ₹ 94,000 crore.

"These figures hardly suggest a 'weakening' institution but rather one experiencing significant fortification. Contrary to @RahulGandhi's claim, it was the Congress party that left India crippled, relying heavily on imports rather than empowering our own institutions like HAL," Sitharaman wrote.

Historically, Congress has shown a lack of faith in our nation's scientists and engineers, fostering a dependency on imports that branded India as the world's largest arms importer for many years, she said, adding it is only

tremendously increased in the last three years, she said, adding the total market cap of all 81 listed PSUs (62 CPSEs, 12 Public Sector Banks, 3 Public Sector Insurance Companies and IDBI Bank) has grown by 225 per cent.

Giving a comparative analysis of the performance of PSU stocks under former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpayee-led NDA government, via-a-vis the 10 year (2004-09) of UPA rule, she said during 1999-2004 (NDA): PSU index soared over 300 per cent, vastly outperforming the BSE Sensex's 70 per cent gain.

During 2004-09 (UPA I): The PSU index rose by 60 per cent, but this was only half the growth rate of the Sensex. During 2009-14 (UPA II): The PSU index declined by 6 per cent, while the benchmark surged by 73 per cent. Sitharaman said the increased defence spending and aim of achieving 'Atmanirbharta' in Defence has fuelled the growth of PSUs like Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), HAL, Mazagon Dock, etc.

"In FY 2023-24 alone, India has reported arms exports worth ₹ 21,000 crore. This achievement showcases our government's robust confidence in our scientists and engineers, a stark contrast to @INCIndia's approach," she said.

Stating that there has been a turnaround of companies like Air India and Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd (NIL) post privatisation, she said the Congress party is making false and baseless claims regarding people losing jobs after disinvestment. (PTI)

Due to better management of PSUs, their share prices have

HDFC Bank Parivartan to support start-ups with ₹ 19.6 cr grants

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: A total of 41 incubators and accelerators in the field of social impact entrepreneurship will receive grants totaling ₹ 19.6 crore to support 170 start-ups working across specific focus areas, said an official statement on Wednesday.

The development comes after HDFC Bank, India's leading private sector bank, announced the winners of its Parivartan Start-up Grants programme for FY2024.

As per the statement, this year's programme is undertaken in partnership with Atal Innovation Mission, a Government of India initiative under NITI Aayog.

The focus areas for the 2024 grants include Climate Innovation, Financial Inclusion, Agriculture and Sustainable Rural Economy, Accessible and Affordable Healthcare, Education and Livelihood Enhancement, Gender Diversity and Inclusion.

The statement further claimed that the start-ups that have received grants come from various states across the including Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Delhi, and Haryana, with the largest number originating from Maharashtra. Over a half of the 170 start-ups hail from over 60 tier II/III cities, it said.

"Our Parivartan Start-up Grants programme reaffirms our steadfast commitment to fostering social innovation and driving positive change in our communities. Innovation is the key to addressing the development needs of society. Through strategic collaborations and targeted investments, we aim to nurture and amplify the impact of innovative social start-ups across key sectors, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive future for all," said Nusrat Pathan, Head CSR, HDFC Bank.

The grants were awarded to leading and emerging incubators such as HTIC at IIT Madras, Awadh at IIT Ropar, T-Hub (Hyderabad), FITT - IIT Delhi, RISE Foundation at IISER (Kolkata), VJTI (Mumbai), Forge Forward (Coimbatore), NTBIF at NIFTM (Kindli). Some of this year's high-impact tracks were developed in association with nodal agencies - RBI-HI, MoFPI, NSDC and Goa Start-up Mission.

Through these incubators, the recipients of the grants include innovative start-ups demonstrating social and environmental impact while creating significant economic value add to economy.

Arup Rakshit, Group Head, Treasury, HDFC Bank said, "We are proud to support social start-ups that are driving positive change in our communities. By also supporting incubators and accelerators we are committed to developing and strengthening the entire start-up ecosystem in India."

Indian pet insurance market poised for exponential growth: Experts

KOLKATA, May 8: As the pet care market in India is growing at about 14 per cent and is expected to become over ₹ 6500 crore by 2025, insurance companies are aggressively trying to take a share of this sector.

Industry experts said insurance companies are trying to address this rapidly evolving market with bespoke plans to cater to the increasing rate of adoption of pets and the rising cost of medical treatment incurred to protect these furry companions.

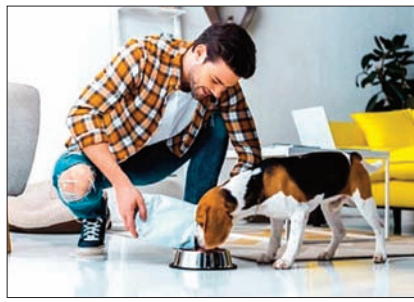
Future Generali India Insurance Chief Distribution Officer Ramit Goyal, said, "While pet insurance products have been in existence in India for some years now, it has witnessed a significant progression over the last few years post Covid with the rising pet ownership and affection for pets translating into a higher demand for pet insurance."

India is considered to be one of the fastest-growing pet markets in the world clocking an annual growth rate of nearly 14 per cent and the country's pet care market is likely to touch USD 800 million by 2025.

Dogs are the most popular pets in India, with an estimated 31 million pet dogs projected by the end of 2023. The country's veterinary healthcare market, which is currently valued at around USD 169 million, is also expected to reach USD 186 million by 2027 with pet owners in India spending an average of close to USD 52 (approx ₹ 4300) a month on their pets.

"Given the data, there's significant potential for pet insurance, especially for dogs, in India. The growth is driven by increased awareness of pet care responsibilities and rising veterinary costs. Insurers are responding to this need with tailored products. Future Generali was among the first to launch a product, FG Dog Health Cover, to help cover unexpected pet medical expenses," Goyal told PTI.

"Rising pet ownership, industry growth, proactive insurance companies, and pets being seen as family members are driving the increased awareness and uptake of pet insurance. As more homes welcome pets,



the demand for financial protection against unexpected pet medical expenses is set to grow," said T A Ramalingam, CTO, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance.

The change in the mindset of pet parents has contributed to the uptick in pet insurance adoption. Consequently, they are more willing to invest in pet insurance as a means of ensuring their pets receive the necessary medical care without financial constraints, Ramalingam said.

By taking the insurance, pet owners can choose to cover the pet's surgery, hospitalizations and OPD. They can also go for optional covers such as terminal illness, vet on call, emergency pet minding, lost & stolen, third-party liability and funeral costs among others. Some of the most common claims incurred by insurance companies are those pertaining to accidents, skin diseases and sickness like stomach and kidney ailments, the insurers said.

Parthani Ghosh, Director & Chief Business Officer, HDFC ERGO General Insurance said, "There is a considerable lack of awareness about the need for pet insurance and the benefits which this product can offer during emergencies. To boost awareness about this product, one of the initiatives by the company was to introduce a dedicated section on the pets ecosystem on an app, which is a unique insurance-led ecosystem."

Every year, 6.00.000 pets are adopted in India, out of which 63 per cent are dogs and 37 per cent are cats, he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Pitroda stirs row with 'east

east look like the Chinese, people in the west look like the Arabs, people in the north look like, maybe, white and people in the south look like Africans." "It does not matter. All of us are brothers and sisters. We respect different languages, different religions, different customs, different food," he said in the interview that was widely circulated on social media.

Campaigning for the BJP in Telangana, Modi pounced on Pitroda's comments to hit out at the Congress. "I am very angry today. I do not get angry if someone abuses me. Today, the philosopher of 'shehzada' (prince) has inflicted such a big abuse that I am full of anger. Will people's abilities in our country be decided by the colour of their skin? Who has allowed the shehzada to play this game of skin?" he said.

As a row erupted, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on X: "The analogies drawn by Mr Sam Pitroda in a podcast to illustrate India's diversity are most unfortunate and unacceptable. The Indian National Congress completely dissociates itself from these analogies."

The BJP dismissed the Congress's disassociation with the controversial comments as it noted at a press conference that Pitroda has a history of making "insulting and demeaning" comments, including on terrorism and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

His "hua to hua" (so what) reaction to a question on the 1984 communal violence and "it happens all the time" reference to the Pulwama terror attack, both in 2019 as the country was gearing up for the general election, had also created massive rows, while his party had sought to distance itself from those. At a press conference, Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar cited Pitroda's long association with the Gandhi family and said he is explaining Sonia Gandhi's and Rahul Gandhi's idea of India. When a senior Congress leader speaks such language, it reveals the mindset of the party's leadership, which is grounded in divisiveness, racism and ignorance, Chandrasekhar said. It is shameful, he said, and sought an apology from the Congress. He also asked the chief ministers of four southern states ruled by either the Congress or other opposition parties whether they agree with Pitroda's description of south Indians as Africans.

The Congress's stand is nothing but hypocrisy and they should sack him as the head of the Indian Overseas Congress, the minister said, alleging that Rahul Gandhi only echoes and amplifies Pitroda's views when he "runs down" Indian institutions and democracy during his travels abroad.

BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the Congress is getting more and more unmasked as the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls progress and the central issue is no longer election but India's existence. He said the polls have now become a battle between those under the influence of a foreign mindset in their definition of India and an India that is "aatmanirbhar" (self-reliant) and brimming with self-pride. Playing other remarks of Pitroda at the press conference, the BJP MP said the Congress leader believes that issues like Ram temple and Modi going to temples pose a challenge to India's democracy. It betrays his ignorance and contempt of India's fundamental identity as its spirit of democracy and harmonious co-existence is rooted in its culture and traditions, he added. (PTI)

State records 81.71 pc

are in the fray. In Guwahati, two women candidates Bijuli Kalita Medhi of BJP and Mira Borthakur Goswami are locked in a direct contest. Dhubri has the highest electorate of 26,63,987, while Kokrajhar has the lowest of 14,94,404 voters in this phase. In the first phase 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 electorate cast their votes to decide the fate of 61 candidates for Karimganj, Silchar(SC), Diphu (ST), Nagaon and Darrang-Udalguri. In the 2019 parliamentary polls, 81.55 per cent of the electorate had exercised their franchise in all the three-phased polls. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one each from the state. (PTI)

Supreme Court to pass

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who also appeared for the probe agency, had staunchly opposed showing any leniency to Kejriwal on account of the Lok Sabha polls and said granting interim bail to the AAP national convener would amount to creating a separate class for politicians. The bench has divided the hearing on Kejriwal's petition against his arrest into two parts. His main petition challenges his arrest by the ED and seeks it to be declared as illegal, while the second aspect pertains to grant of interim bail keeping in mind the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. The court reserved the order on the issue of grant of interim bail. On Tuesday, a Delhi court has extended Kejriwal's judicial custody in the money laundering case till May 20.

The Delhi High Court had on April 9 upheld Kejriwal's arrest, saying there was no illegality and the ED was left with "little option" after he skipped repeated summonses and refused to join the investigation.

The matter relates to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22. (PTI)

Indian Envoy in Canada

should not be a part of any civilised society. Democratic countries which respect the rule of law should not allow intimidation by radical elements in the name of freedom of expression. "We continue to remain concerned about the security of our diplomatic representatives in Canada and expect the Government of Canada to ensure that they are able to carry out their responsibilities without fear," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement in response to the violent imagery being used by extremist elements in Canada against India's political leadership. "We again call upon the Government of Canada to stop providing criminal and secessionist elements a safe haven and political space in Canada," the MEA spokesperson said in New Delhi.

Earlier on Tuesday, Canadian foreign minister Melanie Joly stood by allegations that the Indian government was complicit in the slaying of Nijjar last year. Nijjar, a Canadian citizen, was shot dead outside a gurdwara in Surrey on June 18, 2023. The killing sparked a wave of protests, with some Sikh groups circulating posters that threatened Indian diplomats in Canada by name. (PTI)

INDIA bloc leaders to meet

Lok Sabha polls on April 30. According to EC figures, 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. For the third phase of voting that took place on Tuesday, the EC's voter turnout app on Wednesday showed that 65.55 per cent voting had occurred. A press release on Monday by the EC also contained the total number of electors in every seat, along with the voting percentage figures. Opposition parties have however also sought the details of the number of voters who exercised their franchise. (PTI)

Circle officer files police

to record her because I had to keep proof of the harassment inflicted on me by DC ma'am. I tried to end the conversation on several occasions by saying 'Thank You etc' but she continuously kept questioning." Sarmah claimed that she then stopped recording on her phone and decided to carry the trunks herself with other staff, but Deka "attempted to snatch" her mobile.

"I told ma'am that she cannot touch my phone in an unauthorised manner and I literally fled away from the counters of 40-Tihu LAC," she added, requesting the police to crosscheck it from the CCTV footage. Sarmah then called her husband and fled towards Gurdon Tiniali as she was "scared and helpless" feeling that other colleagues may not be of much help in such a situation when a superior officer was involved. "I felt as if someone was running from behind towards me," she claimed in the complaint, which was filed at 2:09 am on Wednesday.

"Since I felt threatened, unsafe, therefore (my) husband and I rushed towards Nalbari police station to report the incident," Sarmah said, urging the police to protect her along with her three-and-half-year-old daughter and family "from DC ma'am Nalbari". When contacted, Deka told PTI that the complaint is "false, baseless and imaginary" with an intent to "defame" her. "Sarmah neglected her duty and abandoned her responsibilities at 2 am without completing the assigned job. The official process to take action against her has already been initiated," she added. Deka also claimed that by video recording inside an election material counter, the CO "vitiated" the atmosphere and "threatened" the security of the EVMs received from the polling booths.

Meanwhile, Nalbari Police Station officer-in-charge Arup Jyoti Baishya told PTI that an enquiry is going on and an FIR will be registered accordingly. Sarmah in her complaint also alleged that she has been facing "extreme mental harassment" since January and she was constantly being "scrutinised" by Deka with "malafide intentions to fix blames" on her on the "filmiest of grounds". The circumstances forced her to write to the Personnel Department on March 11 seeking extraordinary leave without allowance or "if my leave was not granted, then the same letter was to be treated as my 'Resignation Letter'", the complaint mentioned. Sarmah said she withdrew the letter after persuasion by the staff, well-wishers and the Environment and Forest minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, who is the local MLA. (PTI)

Cong's X account 'hacked',

silenced," APCC said. In the complaint filed at Bhangagarh police station in Guwahati, APCC Social Media & IT Chairman Ratul Kalita said that the account was hacked around 4 am on Wednesday. "This Twitter (sic) handle has many data of our party through which we have reached out to lakhs of people. I demand that the culprit be arrested for this... malicious intention," he added. (PTI)

India contributes USD

in October 2022 under India's presidency of the body. The statement said India's contribution would support UNOCT's global programmes -- mainly Countering Financing of Terrorism (CFT) and Countering Terrorist Travel Programme (CTTP). (PTI)

April 2024 warmest ever

Celsius compared to the average in 1850-1900 due to the rapidly increasing concentration of greenhouse gases -- primarily carbon dioxide and methane -- in the atmosphere. This warming is considered the reason behind record droughts, wildfires, and floods worldwide.

According to a recent study by scientists at Germany's Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, the impact of climate events could cost the global economy around USD 38 trillion a year by 2049, with countries least responsible for the problem and having minimum resources to adapt to impacts suffering the most.

Globally, 2023 was the warmest year in the 174-year observational record, with the global average temperature at 1.45 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial baseline (1850-1900).

The warming may set a new record in 2024 as scientists say El Nino -- periodic warming of the ocean surface in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean -- typically has the greatest impact on global climate in the second year of its development. El Nino continued to weaken towards neutral conditions, but marine air temperatures in general remained at an unusually high level in April. C3S scientists said. The world is witnessing weather extremes under the combined effect of the 2023-24 El Nino and human-caused climate change.

A brutal heat wave in Asia prompted the temporary closure of schools in the Philippines and broke temperature records in India, which is in the middle of a 44-day general election, apart from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar. The month also saw the heaviest rain in the UAE in 75 years. (PTI)

NAME CORRECTION

I, SOLEMAN ALI do hereby declare that I am a permanent resident of the below mentioned address AND CITIZEN OF India by birth. That my actual and correct name is SOLEMAN ALI and the same is recorded in my Voter ID card vide No - HCK5643492, Adhar card Vide No - 545875005727 and in my Passport bearing No- MO397153, date of issue 13/08/14 whereas my name is wrongly recorded as SULAMAN ALI. That Sulaman Ali and SOLEMAN ALI are the same and one person.

SD/-
SOLEMAN ALI
S/O- Fajal Rahman
R/O- Vill- Uttar Chuba
PO- Dhansiri Bazar.
PS- Orang, Dist- Udalguri

LONDON/NEW DELHI, May 8: UK-based pharmaceutical major AstraZeneca has started global withdrawal of its Covid-19 vaccine, which was provided in India as 'Covishield' in partnership with Serum Institute of India, days after it admitted to rare side effects of blood clotting and low platelet counts.

The withdrawal has been initiated due to a surplus of available updated vaccines since the pandemic, the company said in a statement. AstraZeneca had partnered with Oxford University to develop the Covid-19 vaccine, which was sold in India as Covishield and as Vaxzevria in Europe.

The European Medicines Agency, the medicines regulator for the European Union (EU), issued a notice on Tuesday to confirm that Vaxzevria -- known as Covishield in India -- is no longer authorised for use in the 27-member economic bloc after AstraZeneca (AZ) voluntarily withdrew its authorisation in March. It said it will similarly work with regulatory authorities worldwide to initiate marketing authorisation withdrawals for Vaxzevria as demand has been overtaken by the evolving nature of coronaviruses.

"AstraZeneca has therefore taken the decision to initiate withdrawal of the marketing authorisations for Vaxzevria within Europe. We will now work with regulators and our partners to align on a clear path forward to conclude this chapter and significant contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic," it said. "We will partner with regulatory authorities globally to initi-

ate marketing authorisation withdrawals for Vaxzevria, where no future commercial demand for the vaccine is expected," it was quoted by 'The Daily Telegraph' as saying.

Earlier, according to global media reports, AstraZeneca had admitted that its Covid-19 vaccines could in very rare cases have the potential to cause a rare side effect called -- Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS). In India, over 220 crore dosages of Covid-19 vaccines have been administered and a majority of those were Covishield.

"As multiple, variant Covid-19 vaccines have since been developed there is a surplus of available updated vaccines. This has led to a decline in demand for Vaxzevria, which is no longer being manufactured or supplied," it said.

The company further said, "We will now work with regulators and our partners to align on a clear path forward to conclude this chapter and significant contribution to the Covid-19 pandemic." AstraZeneca added that the company was "incredibly proud" of the role Vaxzevria played in ending the global pandemic.

"According to independent estimates, over 6.5 million lives were saved in the first year of use alone and over three billion doses were supplied globally. Our efforts have been recognised by governments around the world and are widely regarded as being a critical component of ending the global pandemic," the company said. (PTI)

Members of Assam State Commission for Women visit victim's house in Demow

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, May 8: Members of the Assam State Commission for Women visited the resident of Ponkhi Handique in Nitaipukhuri Duwarisiga Gaon near Demow in Sivasagar.

Ponkhi had reportedly been killed by her husband, Nitikesh Das in their rented house in Namrup in Dibrugarh district. The victim had married Das, a teacher and resident of Kathiya Khunda of Charaideo district. Their relationship had reportedly strained after the victim came to know about his having relations with various women, which led to frequent quarrels.

On May 3 the body of Ponkhi was recovered from their rented house in Namrup.

Meanwhile, Ponkhi's father Bhairab Handique claimed that his

daughter could not have committed suicide as she was a brave girl. He said that she had been the assistant general secretary of the Sivasagar College and had graduated with honours in English. Her parents have demanded justice and that the guilty should be punished.

Social media platforms are abuzz with comments, with people demanding justice for Ponkhi. The representatives of All Tai Ahom Students Union (ATASU), Asomiya Yuva Mancha, Manab Adhikar Workers, Sammillit Nari Adhikar Suraksha Mancha Assam

The Sivasagar district committee of ATASU in association with the locals will block the national highway at Demow Chariali on Thursday, demanding a proper investigation into the circumstances leading to the death of the victim.

CM Sarma to campaign for BJP in Odisha, West Bengal, other states from today

BJP's development works infused euphoria among voters: Himanta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has claimed that the BJP government's ten years of unprecedented development efforts has resulted in a great deal of excitement among senior citizens and first-time voters in the ensuing Lok Sabha election.

He said, "I have observed enough euphoria for the polls among new voters and senior citizens this time. This is a result of the BJP government's extraordinary development programs during the past ten years."

At a polling station in the Kamrup district, the chief minister cast his vote along with his wife Rinku Bhuyan Sarma and daughter Sukanya Sarma. It is the first time his daughter has exercised her



right to franchise. The state has seen a strong voters' turnout in previous phases and Sarma is quite impressed with that.

"In the last two phases, the state's vote percentage has exceeded 80 per cent," he said. CM Sarma expressed gratitude

to the public for voting in huge numbers despite the state's unfavorable weather.

He said that since the poll dates were released, there hasn't been a single unpleasant incident during the three phases of the Assam election.

The chief minister mentioned, "The peaceful election in the state signified that the state has been on the path of development."

He said, "The next four phases will see elections in important states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, etc. Every state has unique political dynamics that need to be considered."

Beginning on May 9, the chief minister will campaign for the BJP in Odisha, West Bengal, and in other states.

Police conducts drive against riding without helmet, seatbelt

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, May 8: The police have been conducting a drive against riding without helmet and seatbelt is underway for the last five days in Dima Hasao district.

The drive has been undertaken in the light of increasing road mishaps. The police have been checking vehicles on the roads and have already collected more than ₹ 5.3 lakhs in fines. The police have appealed to the people to obey the traffic rules and wear helmets while driving two-wheelers and wear seat belts while driving four-wheelers.

The fuel pumps have also been requested to not sell petrol or diesel to those driving vehicles without helmet and seatbelts.

Raid conducted in Margherita, 1 arrested

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, May 8: A man was arrested and illegal liquor seized during raids conducted in various places in Tinsukia district.

A team of officials of the state excise department in collaboration with the police conducted a raid on Tuesday night at Borbil, Begenabari, Lakhpathar, Bargolai, Lalgola, Nandang, Hamukjaan and Ledo in Tinsukia district. The excise team seized and destroyed articles including 60 litres illegal liquor, 2,700 litres of fermented wash 2700 litres, four sets of Da and 12 litres of beer meant for sale in Arunachal Pradesh only.

During the raid the police apprehended a person and registered a case against him under section 53(1)(a) of AE Act 2000 as amended.

Gamkharu organises husori, naam-prasanga in Mumbai

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, May 8: Gamkharu, an NGO, has been organising husori and naam-prasanga at the residences of Assamese people living in Mumbai during the month of Bohag.

The organisation organises such traditional practices with an aim to preserve and promote the Assamese tradition among the Assamese community living there.

Gamkharu is based in Mumbai and founded by the women from the state. The money, which has been raised through husori and naam-prasanga will be used in various social activities of the organisation.

Every year, the NGO reaches out to two women suffering from cancer. On Women's Day this year, they visit old-age homes and orphanages and distributed different things amongst their inmates. Currently, they are also sponsoring the education of two poor girls. Previously, they also helped a girl from Nagaon, Assam and sponsored her eye treatment. They also gave her mother a sewing machine.

The members of Gamkharu comprises of Jeoti Phukan, Rita Saikia, Udita Bhattacharya, Geeta Sharma, Meenakshi Phukan, Rekha Bora, Indrani Baishya, Indrani Dutta, Jyotsna Saikia, Rumi Deka, Protisha Borah, Rooplekha Kalita, Rinku Pathak, Avatika Das, Seema Chakraborty, Ashima Saikia, Jinty, Sheeba Borkakoti, Reena Borpatro Gohain, Nirmali Buzarbaruah and Deepali Baruah.

COMMUTING WOES



Passengers waiting for buses at a bus stop as the city reels under a shortage of public transport UB photos

Former AASU leader passes away

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, May 8: Former leader of the All Assam Students' Union, Rajib Kakati breathed his last at the Dr B Borooh Cancer Institute in Guwahati on Wednesday.

The 48-year-old Kakati was the joint secretary of Morigaon district Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP), former joint secretary of Morigaon District Yogi Sammilan and former secretary of the Natuwagaon Natasurya Phani Sarma Yuba Sangha.

Kakati had been undergoing treatment for cancer at the Dr B Borooh Cancer Institute.

He was popular for his kind and helpful nature in the society. After his death, the members of the Natasurya Phani Sharma Yubak Sangha, president and secretary of the Natuwagaon Gramya Unnayan Committee, Yogen Nath and secretary of the Morigaon District Yogi Sammilan, Someshwar Nath, MASS's secretary Manik Kr. Nath and Bandahoi '92' paid their last tributes to the departed soul. He is survived by his wife, two daughters, parents and many other relatives.

Public representatives must protect Khilonjiya people: Samujjal Bhattacharya

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: The chief advisor of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), Samujjal Bhattacharya, has said that public representatives have an obligation to protect the interests of the state's Khilonjiya people (original inhabitants).

Bhattacharya voted in Guwahati on Tuesday and told reporters, "It is encouraging to see that people have come out to vote despite the bad weather in the city on this festival of democracy."

The senior leader of the student's body also asserted that in a democracy, the general people are the king.

"Voters should make full use of their right to vote because they are important players in the elections," he stated.

The boundaries of the state's assembly and parliamentary constituencies were redrawn following the delimitation process.

Bhattacharya said, "The assembly constituency has changed, but my polling place has stayed the same. I am now a voter of New Guwahati assembly seat."

The number of assembly seats was increased in the Guwahati city as part of the delimitation exercise.



Human-elephant conflict affected villagers trained in Baksa, Tamulpur

Training imparted as part of Aaranyak's effort to facilitate human-elephant coexistence

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: Aaranyak has provided training to 64 villagers, including 28 women affected by human-elephant conflict in Baksa and Tamulpur districts of the state on administration of first-aid in two comprehensive workshops.

The training workshops were conducted in human-elephant conflict affected Madhupur of Baksa and Sonmoli of Tamulpur early this month as part of Aaranyak's relentless effort to facilitate human and elephant coexistence in the state.

As part of the training, local indigenous residents were taught lifesaving skills and prepared to deal with medical emergencies in the event of accidents related to human-elephant conflict.

These capacity building workshops are part of promoting human elephant co-existence by the organisation with support from SBI Foundation. A total of 28 women and 36 men actively participated in these sessions, highlighting the community's enthusiastic response and commitment to



building resilience.

"These workshops were particularly crucial due to the remote nature of these villages, which often lack access to medical facilities, emergency services and are also prone to negative human-elephant interactions," a press statement issued by Aaranyak says.

By imparting practical first aid skills, the workshops also aimed to minimise the impact of such incidents and enhance

the safety of local residents while promoting coexistence between elephants and communities.

The success of these workshops was possible because of Aaranyak's collaboration with the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) of Baksa. The event was facilitated by dedicated AAPDA Mitras from DDMA, including Dalim Kalita, Nabajyoti Talukdar, Ritupan Kalita, and

Sunnil Daimary, along with Aaranyak's Abhijit Saikia, Jiban Chetry, Jauga Basumatary, and Pradip Barman.

Training on providing first aid in human-elephant conflict areas enhances community resilience and facilitates their wellbeing, reduces fear and fosters empathy thereby promoting coexistence by empowering locals to respond effectively and compassionately to elephant encounters.

Bihu celebrations conclude in Bokajan

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, May 8: The Bihu celebrations organised by the 40th Bokajan Central Bihu Function Committee concluded on Wednesday in Bokajan.

On the first day of the programme on May 6, the president of the Bokajan Central Bihu Function Committee, Chandan Phukon hoisted the flag followed by paying of tribute to those who have passed away.

Various competitions on display of phulam gamusa, drawing, egg fight and recitation on Bihu was held. Bihu dance competition was held in which several dance troupes participated. Artists also staged the folk dances of Karbi, Bodo and Adivasi communities. In the evening singer Jonom Kashyap entertained the audience with his renditions. On the concluding day prizes were presented to the winners of the competitions.

In the evening of the concluding day, singer Roselina Deka performed on the stage. The concluding function was attended by Bokajan executive magistrate Saiki Kashyap, member of Autonomous Council, Madhurija Dhekiyal Phukon and others.

Anna Sewa project inaugurated for needy in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 8: 'Anna Sewa Project', a unique project for the poor, was ceremonially inaugurated in Nagaon on Wednesday.

Amar Krishna Paul, director of JNC Publication, Indrani Deka from the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Jinti Das and Bires Das inaugurated the project, symbolising a collective commitment for alleviating hunger and supporting the less fortunate.

The essence of the 'Anna Sewa Project' lies in its simplicity and inclusivity. Every individual who wishes to participate can contribute rice in a Matka (clay pot) daily. As the collection grows, it will be distributed to those in need, including residents of orphanages, old age homes and other deserving beneficiaries. This noble endeavour, conceptualised and championed by Yogacharya Subhashish Kar, founder president of the Indian Yoga Culture and Yoga Therapy Centre, embodies the spirit of selflessness and humanitarianism. Kar expressed profound grati-

tude to all supporters and emphasised on the transformative potential of collective action in addressing social challenges.

In addition to the 'Anna Sewa Project', the inauguration ceremony also witnessed the announcement of another impactful initiative by 'Assam Yoga Mahasanga.' In commemoration of the upcoming International Day of Yoga the organisation has declared its plans to organise two free yoga camps across all 32 districts of the state. This initiative aims to promote physical and mental well-being among citizens, fostering a culture of holistic health and harmony.

Besides, the Purbanchal Gramya Mahila Yoga Foundation unveiled its comprehensive agenda for promoting yoga in rural areas. The foundation plans to hold yoga camps in 10 areas inhabited by the Harijan community, bringing the benefits of yoga to those who need it the most. Yoga camps will also be conducted in 10 villages conducting to empower rural population with tools for holistic health and well-being.

NFR to operate special train between Hubballi Junction, Naharlagun

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: For the convenience of the passengers during the summer rush, the Northeast Frontier Railway will decide to operate AC summer special trains between SSS Hubballi Junction and Naharlagun.

The summer special train (SSS Hubballi Junction - Naharlagun - SSS Hubballi Junction) will operate for five trips each in both directions. Passengers on the waiting list of other trains travelling in this route can avail the opportunity to travel with comfort during this summer in this AC special train.

The special train (SSS Hubballi Junction - Naharlagun) will depart from SSS Hubballi Junction

at 12:05 hours from May 8 to June 5 on every Wednesday to reach Naharlagun at 23:00 hours on Friday. In the return direction, the (Naharlagun - SSS Hubballi Junction) train will depart from Naharlagun at 23:00 hours from May 11 to June 8 on every Saturday to reach SSS Hubballi Jn. 09:00 hours on Tuesday.

The AC special trains will consist of AC 2-tier, AC 3-tier, AC 3-tier economy coaches for the convenience of passengers. During its journey on both ways, the special train will run via Gadag, Hospet, Guntakal, Guntur, Vizianagaram, Bhubaneswar, Khurda Road, Kharagpur, New Jalpaiguri, New Bongaigaon and Rangapara North railway station.

Fatalities due to road mishaps decreased in Assam: Himanta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has claimed that for the past year, the state has seen a decrease in the number of fatalities from traffic accidents.

He lauded the state administration for the several steps it had taken to reduce mortality.

Additionally, the chief minister presented a comparative table that showed the decline in the number of traffic accidents.

There was a minimum 30.69 per cent drop in traffic accidents from December 2022 to December 2023. According to CM Sarma, the decline was 24.6 per cent between January 2023 and January 2024.

He presented a comparison of the state's road accident rate from January to April of 2023 and 2024, showing a 21.82 per cent decrease.

Taking to his X handle, Sarma wrote, "Due to our relentless efforts to enforce road safety measures, fatalities due to road accidents have come down drastically and consistently in the recent past."

"There has been an overall decline of 22% in road accident fatalities from Jan-Apr '23 to Jan-Apr '24," he added.

7th annual general meeting of Guwahati Realtors Association held



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: The 7th annual general meeting (AGM) of the Guwahati Realtors Association (GRA) were held in Guwahati.

GRA, an organisation of properties consultants of the state having over 50 members and its associates work to help people for buying and selling in real estate industry since its formation in 2017.

In this meeting a new committee formally took over the charge for 2024-26 under the leadership of Gaurav Agarwal as president, Amit Jain as vice-president, Abhimanyu Modi as secretary, Gautam Bhaty as joint secretary, Pabitra Kumar Deka as treasurer and Vishal Sharma as joint treasurer. Senior realtor, Sanjay Kumar Agarwal was also selected unanimously as the chairman of GRA. Apart from this 10 new members were also inducted into the organisation during the meeting. A workshop for realtors on Real

estate Regulatory Act was also held on the occasion.

In a statement GRA said that, Rajesh Baid, East Zone head of the National Association of Realtors (NAR) attended the meeting as the chief guest, while Mahesh Somani, vice-president of NAR and Babul Sarkar, president of the Durgapur Realtors Association were present as guest of honour and special guest respectively.

In his address, Mahesh Somani, chairman of RERA committee of NAR, appealed to all realtors to register themselves under state RERA authority to boost their activities in the right manner.

GRA further stated that all members attended the event and took the opportunity to learn about RERA challenges on real estate industries.

The event was started with a Ganesh bandanna performed by Sagun Agarwal, while Muskan Agarwal entertained everyone present with melodious songs.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Soul is the voice of the body's interests.
-George Santayana

Friction within BJP-RSS

With each passing phase of polling in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, the strain within the alliance of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seems to be widening, indicating a potential shift in dynamics within the saffron ecosystem. Despite efforts by top RSS leaders to rally support behind BJP candidates, there's a palpable unease among traditional BJP cadres and supporters. Many are apprehensive of what they perceive as a growing authoritarian streak in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. They fear that a BJP victory would consolidate Modi's power, potentially leading to autocratic tendencies. The disillusionment among cadres is evident in their reluctance to conform to the narrative of inevitable victory being pushed by RSS stalwarts. Many believe that while the BJP may emerge as the single largest party, it won't secure an outright majority. In response, Amit Shah, under Modi's direction, is reportedly seeking alliances with smaller parties to bolster the BJP's position. This discontent has prompted state-level RSS leaders and cadres to appeal to RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat and General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale for intervention. They question why no action was taken against Modi earlier for what they perceive as undermining the values of the organizations. Additionally, there are concerns about electoral manipulation, with accusations of the Election Commission being used to inflate voter turnout figures.

The recent phase of polling, notably in Uttar Pradesh, has been marred by reports of voter suppression, particularly in constituencies with significant Muslim and Dalit populations. Allegations suggest that police forces, under BJP-led state governments, intimidated voters, particularly those likely to support opposition parties. The reluctance of traditional BJP supporters to engage in the electoral process is striking. Many booth committees, typically manned by RSS and BJP cadres, were reportedly left unattended, leaving party leaders to pick up the slack. This lack of enthusiasm could pose a significant challenge for the BJP in retaining seats it previously won. Amidst these challenges, Prime Minister Modi's rhetoric has taken a sharp turn. Revisiting his "400 paar" (beyond 400 seats) aspiration, Modi's recent remarks reflect a renewed determination to secure a decisive victory. However, the ground reality, as evidenced by lower voter turnout in certain constituencies, suggests a more complex electoral landscape. The BJP's strategy also includes a concerted effort to discredit opposition leader Rahul Gandhi. By portraying him as inexperienced and disconnected from ground realities, the saffron ecosystem aims to sway public opinion. Yet, without the grassroots support of RSS volunteers, this tactic may prove ineffective. Modi's invocation of "Vote Jihad" and his attempt to exploit religious sentiments further underscores the intensity of the campaign.

However, amidst the turmoil, there are signs of dissent within the BJP ranks. Some senior leaders view Modi's tactics as desperate attempts to rally support rather than genuine expressions of confidence. They caution against complacency and urge BJP cadres to mobilize effectively. As the Lok Sabha elections progress, the widening chasm between the RSS and BJP highlights the evolving dynamics within the saffron fold. Whether this internal friction will impact the electoral outcome remains to be seen, but it underscores the complexities of India's political landscape. While the BJP's electoral strategy faces internal and external challenges, the true test lies in its ability to navigate these hurdles and emerge victorious.

Jose Raul Mulino elected new president of Panama in Prez polls on Sunday

By: Satyaki Chakraborty

Jose Raul Mulino was elected as the new president of the Central American country Panama in the national polls held on Sunday May 5. He got 34.35 per cent of the votes as against 24.83 per cent received by his closest rival Ricardo Lombana. There were five more candidates. Mulino will take over the presidency on July 1 this year for a period of five years.

Mulino, whose last position in politics was as minister of security in then president Ricardo Martinelli's 2009-2014 administration, was initially set to be the former leader's running mate. But Martinelli was disqualified from running for the presidential elections after he was sentenced to prison for ten years for a money laundering case. Mulino then replaced him and got the full backing of his former president.

Mulino became known as a successful businessman who took part in a civil movement against the dictatorship of General Manuel Antonio Noriega, who was ousted by the U.S. on December 20, 1989. He has been active in politics all through. As president, he has promised to stop rising levels of migration through the Darien forests- the only land route connecting the American continents. More than half a million Panamians crossed last year to other countries.

The main tasks for the new leader include dealing with the Central American country's woes with government corruption, a severe drought that has affected maritime traffic in the economically important Panama Canal, as well as US-bound migrants passing through Panama's jungles in droves. Mulino has to create substantial job opportunities in the country with three million eligible voters to stop migration of the educated youth to the other countries of the continent.

Voters were highly concerned about corruption and the economy. The term of outgoing President Laurentino Cortizo of the majority Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) was marred by allegations of widespread official

corruption, declining foreign investment and high public debt. The outgoing president Laurentino Cortizo of the majority Democratic Revolutionary Party faced huge protests during his tenure against the government decision to offer concessions to Canadian companies for copper mining. The country also faces high income inequality, with unemployment close to 10 percent, and gross domestic product (GDP) growth is forecast to slow from 7.3 percent in 2023 to 2.5 percent this year, according to the International Monetary Fund. Lying at the crossroads of the North and South American continents and the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, Panama is of immense strategic importance.

This has made it the frequent object of US attention. The United States supported its secession from Colombia in 1903, and secured a sovereign zone in which to build the Panama Canal - which remained under US control from 1914 until 1999.

The US invaded in 1989 to depose a former ally, military ruler Manuel Noriega, over his repressive rule and use of the country as a centre for drug trafficking. Panama has the largest rainforest in the Western Hemisphere outside the Amazon Basin.

However, it is for a feat of engineering, the canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, that Panama is famous. Every year more than 15,000 vessels make the eight-hour journey through the waterway, which makes a substantial contribution to the economy.

In the recent years, in many Latin American countries, the left wing parties achieved victory in presidential elections and running the governments. There has been a resurgence of the left in many countries but right wing parties are unitedly taking on the left. Last year in Argentina, the left wing president was ousted by the right wing candidate. In Panama, the conservatives and the parties allied to the US are ruling for decades. The same will continue with Mulino taking over as the next president this year. (IPA Service)

Mayawati has turned BSP into the BJP's B-team at Modi-Shah's behest

If Mayawati, the Czarina of Dalits, has betrayed her Dalit comrades, the self-proclaimed Vishwa Guru and the public face of Hindutva, Narendra Modi, has lost the trust of the Hindus. Mayawati has been known for her cunningly crafted political stratagem, but the manner in which Modi's lieutenant Amit Shah coerced her to withdraw her party candidates right in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections, has portrayed her as an object for pity and mercy.

With consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Modi had tried to create an illusory impression that the Hindus of the country, especially of Uttar Pradesh, a saffron bastion for a decade now, were with him and would vote for BJP. But the turnout of the voters during the first two phases has made it clear that there's no Ram Temple wave. Even while the voters were getting acquainted with the candidates, Shah forced Mayawati to change/call back her candidates.

The most amazing feature has been Mayawati obliging him without any surrurate. She chose to ignore the impact her step would have on her dalit cadres and supporters. She took this stand even while her hold on her core vote bank witnessed decline, corresponding with failure to draw in other castes and sub-castes, developing a deep distrust of Muslim voters, and her imperious approach. Over the last two decades, Mayawati has lost around 21 per cent of her core vote.

BSP got 30.43% of the total votes in 2007 assembly polls in UP when she won absolute majority crated through the support of Brahmins, Muslims, OBCs and Dalits. In 2012, votes share declined to 25.95% which fur-

ther came down to 22.23% in 2017. Despite the alliance with SP and RLD in 2019, the BSP could manage 19.26% votes in UP which is 0.51% less than its 2014 vote-share.

The moot question neverthless has been what prompted Amit Shah to force Mayawati to change her candidates and why has Mayawati bowed to Shah's diktat? Most intriguing has been Mayawati pushing her nephew Akash Anand outside the boundary line of the political arena, even before completing one year of his stay in politics. Mayawati had on December 10, 2023 had named Akash Anand as her successor, the party chief. The meeting, convened by Mayawati, was held to look into the party's preparations for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, where Akash was also given the responsibility to strengthen the BSP ahead of elections.

BSP sources said that Akash has the basic competence to emerge as a formidable dalit leader. While he has aggression, he has an analytical mind too. Akash Anand was being perceived as a leader who could lead the Dalit people from the front and provide a new dimension to the Dalit politics. A case that filed against him for allegedly "using unparliamentary words and making a statement to create enmity between people" during a rally in Sitapur on Sunday that has acted as a major hindrance in his political trajectory.

While the Dalits and EBCs of late have been turning against BJP and Modi, the most severe and potent threat has come from the upper caste Rajputs, especially in eastern Uttar Pradesh. On her own Mayawati fielded strong candidates in such constituencies. But realising that



Mayawati's candidates were jeopardising the interest of the BJP candidates, Shah forced her to replace them with comparatively weak candidates. Ever since Yogi Adityanath came to occupy the office of the chief minister, he dictated the political course of action.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
Arun Srivastava

But this is for the first time, Yogi was replaced by Shah insofar as decision-making is concerned.

The sources confide that the names of Mayawati's BSP candidates were decided in Amit Shah's room. Within the next 48 hours, Mayawati changed at least seven candidates. Mayawati has fielded candidates for 72 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh for the Lok Sabha elections. As expected, she had nominated maximum number of Muslim candidates, obviously with the intention to cut into the Muslim vote shifting en bloc to Congress. Mayawati had fielded Srikala Reddy, wife of former MP Dhananjay Singh, a known Muslim leader. The MP-MLA court in Jaunpur on March 6 had sentenced Singh and his associate Santosh Vikram to seven years of rigorous imprisonment in a 2020 case of kidnapping and extortion of Namami Gange proj-

ect manager, Abhinav Singhal. Since Srikala Reddy was posing a serious threat to the BJP candidate, Mayawati replaced her with sitting MP Shyam Singh Yadav. He was informed of his candidature at around 1 AM in the night.

Yet another don Raja Bhaiya was summoned by Shah and asked to shift his candidate to some other constituency. Surprising indeed Jansatta Dal (Loktantrik) president and Uttar Pradesh's Kunda MLA Raghu Prasad Singh alias Raja Bhaiya, who does not go to the houses of the leaders, in an unusual development, rushed to Bengaluru to meet Amit Shah. After meeting Shah, Raja Bhaiya said he would support the BJP candidate from Kaushambi seat.

He was initially uncomfortable with Kaushambi MP Vinod Sonkar, who was again fielded by the BJP from Kaushambi, as Sonkar had openly opposed him on many occasions. However, in the meeting, held amidst changed circumstances, Raja Bhaiya assured Shah that he would support Sonkar.

Mayawati has fielded around 30 per cent Muslim candidates in the Lok Sabha election in UP.

This is in sharp contrast to BSP nominating six candidates in 2019 general elections out of 38 it fielded, a meagre 15%.

In the third phase being held on May 7 on ten seats, Muslim candidates on BSP tickets are contesting from Sambhal, Firozabad, Aonla, Badaun and Pilibhit. In the eight seats of west UP that went to polls in the first phase on April 19, BSP had fielded Muslims in Saharanpur, Rampur, Moradabad and Pilibhit. In the second phase, for which voting was held on April 26 on eight seats in west UP, BSP fielded a Muslim candidate in Amroha.

The top ten constituencies with highest Muslim population are in west UP. Rampur has 50.1% Muslims, while Moradabad has 45.5%, Bijnor 41.7%, Saharanpur has 39.1%, Muzaffarnagar has 38.1%, Amroha 38%, Bahraich 34.8%, Bareilly 33.9%, Meerut 32.6% and Kairana 30%. Mayawati's changing the candidates at the eleventh hour at the directive of Modi which reached her through Amit Shah simply underscores the apprehension that she had been working as the B-Team of BJP. Had it not been the case, she would not have obliged Shah. (IPA Service)

World's first organised labour movement took place in Kashmir in 1865

By: Iftikhar Gilani

Across the globe, people observe Labour Day on May 1 to commemorate the protests in 1886 at Haymarket Square, Chicago and express solidarity with workers. But not many people know that much before this incident, the world's first organised labour and trade union movement had taken place in the streets in Srinagar - the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir.

Almost 21 years before the Haymarket incident, weavers and workers associated with shawl weaving took to the streets of Srinagar on April 29, 1865, protesting against high taxes. At least 28 workers were killed and hundreds injured by the State action by the Dogra administration, which ruled the independent country of J&K at that time.

For centuries, Kashmiri shawls - soft rugs loosely worn over shoulders - have mesmerised the world receiving accolades from even Napoleon Bonaparte, whose ever-extravagant wife, Josephine, is said to have owned as many as 60 of them that Napoleon had taken from the Turkish treasury in Egypt.

Not only was the Kashmiri pashmina shawl a symbol of high fashion in Europe, where it is better known as Cashmere, and elsewhere, because of its soft material and exquisite designs, but its high cost also made it a status symbol. Almost 21 years before the Haymarket incident, weavers and workers associated with shawl weaving took to the streets of Srinagar on April 29, 1865, protesting against high taxes. It is said that Mughal emperors were fond of Pashmina shawls and would often gift them to foreign dignitaries, contributing to their popularity in Europe.

Experts say the history of shawl weaving in the region dates back to ancient times. Historian Zain-ul-Abideen Rahinuma, while listing many things that Hazrat Khadija brought along with her when she married Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the year 595, also mentions a Kashmiri shawl. Rahinuma has written an elaborate profile of Hazrat Khadija and has listed the items she carried in her trousseau.

According to the Treaty of Amritsar of 1846, between the British East India Company and the Dogra ruler, Gulab Singh, the latter was expected to annu-

ally give the British government three Pashmina shawls.

Article 10 of the treaty states, "Maharaja Gulab Singh acknowledges the supremacy of the British government and will in token of such supremacy present annually to the British government one horse, twelve shawl goats of approved breed (six male and six female) and three pairs of Cashmere shawls."

Despite the popularity of this loom, historians have recorded that back in Kashmir, the condition of those associated with the production of shawls was pathetic. According to Mridu Rai, author of Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir, the system of taxation imposed by Hindu Dogra rulers in the region was such that only the barest margin of subsistence was allowed to the Muslim Kashmiri workers.

The production of silk, saffron, paper, tobacco, wine and salt was a State monopoly. A duty of 85 percent was levied on all woollen manufacturers. Under these pitiable working conditions, the shawl weaver could, thus, hardly earn seven rupees (US \$0.092) per month.

From this earning, the workers had to pay five rupees (US \$0.066) as tax, as recorded by British army officer Lord Birdwood. The amount left with workers also included the cost of wool, etc., and they could not afford to buy cereals or vegetables and would eat only water chestnuts to keep a connection with the soil.

"The shawl weavers were allowed neither to leave Kashmir nor change their employment so that they were nearly in the position of slaves. Because there was fear with the Hindu ruler that migration of the weavers will reduce his revenue," writes a European traveller Andrew Wilson, in his book The Abode of Snow: Observations on a Journey from Chinese Tibet to the Indian Caucasus through the Upper Valleys of the Himalaya. He had visited the region in 1873.

The special taxation department called Daag-e-shawl was known for arbitrarily collecting exorbitant taxes for the ruler and regulating the work of weavers with factory owners or proprietors. "In case a weaver left work, the Daag-e-shawl would arrest his wife, children, and parents and impound his house," records the book.

Further, a new practice started that the ruler would auction this

department to a contractor, who would, in turn, collect taxes. In 1865, the ruler had contracted this department to a wealthy Kashmiri, Raj Kak Dhar, in return for 2 million rupees (US \$26,402). "This left Dhar entirely free to realise this amount through arbitrarily fixed tax rates and employing soldiers to fleece workers," says historian Mohammad Yusuf Saraf.

Nearly 125,000 people in Kashmir were associated with this trade in 1865, which included weavers, washermen and other skilled labourers. According to revenue records, this industry would annually generate five million rupees (US \$6,594) - a handsome amount in the 19th century.

Their patience reached a limit and the weavers took out a procession against high taxation and miserable working conditions and demanded nominal wages on April 29, 1865. They also demanded an end to the ban on their migration as well as bars on opting for another profession. They were also asking for a meeting with the diwan, a representative of the ruler in Srinagar.

But a column of the Dogra Army under Col. Bijje Singh stopped them at the narrow Haji Pather Bridge over River Jhelum. Historians have recorded that in the stampede, 28 unarmed weavers were thrown into the river and scores were injured by bullet shots.

"Next day, the dead bodies were recovered from the stream and were paraded by the weavers to drive the attention of the ruler. The organisers of the procession were stopped and arrested and even flogged," says Rekha Chowdhary, a teacher at the University of Jammu.

Rasool Sheikh, Ali Pal, Abdul Qudus and Sona Shah - the leaders who had led the procession - were imprisoned in Bahu Fort prison in the Jammu region. They never returned to Kashmir and died in jail. Neither was an inquiry instituted, nor any memorial ever dedicated to the first trade union movement of the world, which happened much before the Chicago incident or even before the Russian or Chinese communist revolutions, which were a result of workers' resistance to exploitation.

Ironically, this movement has not even received any recognition from trade unions or global labour movements. This piece of history is also lost to oblivion in the Kashmir region. (IPA Service)

Sunita Williams' space mission delayed, new launch dates explored

By: Girish Linganna

The launch of Boeing's new CST-100 Starliner spacecraft, which was scheduled to carry astronaut Sunita Williams, an astronaut of Indian descent, into space for her third mission, has been delayed because of a technical issue. No new launch date has been announced. This was set to be the third space mission for Williams, who has spent 322 days in space and previously held the record for the most spacewalk hours by a woman, a title now held by Peggy Whitson.

Williams, 59, an inspiration for women aiming for space careers, was scheduled to fly again on Tuesday (May 7, 2024) in the new Boeing Starliner spacecraft. The launch was planned to take place at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, at 8:04 am (IST). However, with just 90 minutes left for launch, the Atlas V rocket's liftoff was called off. NASA identified an issue with an oxygen relief valve on the rocket's Centaur upper stages as the reason for the postponement.

Sunita Williams and NASA's Barry Wilmore, who were scheduled to fly the Starliner to the International Space Station (ISS), have safely left the spacecraft. Although no new launch date has been announced, there are several backup options for rescheduling the launch as early as on Tuesday (May 7-May 8 in India), or Friday (May 10-May 11 in India).

The Atlas V rocket, built by United Launch Alliance, has been launching successfully since 2002, maintaining a perfect track record. However, this launch marks its first mission carrying astronauts. The CST-100 Starliner's first trip with astronauts to the ISS was eagerly awaited and frequently postponed. Boeing is working hard to catch up with Elon Musk's SpaceX in competing for NASA contracts. Two years after its initial unmanned test flight to the orbital lab, the gumdrop-shaped Starliner capsule is set for this mission. Its first solo journey to the ISS in 2019 did not succeed.

Boeing is under close public watch following a series of setbacks in its commercial airplane division, including a plane door plug incident in January. Boeing has faced a challenging journey getting the Starliner ready, experiencing numerous development delays and incurring over \$1.5 billion in extra costs on a \$4.2-billion fixed-price contract with NASA. The company is keen to launch its Starliner space project successfully to demonstrate progress and recover from delays and the over-\$1.5-billion cost overruns.

While Boeing has faced challenges, SpaceX has established itself as a reliable orbital transporter for NASA. The space agency supports a new wave of privately developed spacecraft that can transport astronauts and other clients to the ISS. Under NASA's ambitious Artemis programme, these spacecraft are also aimed at future missions to the moon and Mars.

While Boeing has been relatively quiet about its intentions to offer commercial Starliner flights, the spacecraft is set to directly compete with SpaceX's Crew Dragon capsule. Since 2020, the Crew Dragon has been the sole spacecraft used by NASA to launch ISS crew into orbit from the US.

Once it takes off, the capsule will reach the space station in about 26 hours and connect with the orbiting research station, which is located approximately 250 miles (400 km) above Earth. The current ISS crew, consisting of four US astronauts and three Russian cosmonauts, will welcome them upon arrival.

Wilmore and Williams plan to stay at the space station for roughly a week before returning to Earth aboard the Starliner, which will make a parachute and airbag-assisted landing in the US Desert Southwest. This will be the first time such a landing system is used for a crewed NASA mission. This test flight is particularly crucial for Boeing, which is currently addressing issues in its airplane business, including a recent incident where a cabin panel door plug blew out on a nearly new 737 MAX 9 in January, along with the earlier fatal crashes involving two 737 MAX jets.

NASA aims to maintain two different American transport options to the ISS, which is anticipated to be decommissioned around 2030. The agency is promoting the private development of new space stations that could succeed the ISS, potentially offering new destinations for the Starliner in future. The future performance of the Starliner will determine its schedule, but it is currently slated to conduct at least six more crewed missions to the space station for NASA, contingent on the success of the forthcoming flight test. (IPA Service)

As wetlands of Assam's Majuli island go dry, ecology thrown out of balance

By: Bikash Kumar Bhattacharya

Legend has it that in a village on the island of Majuli in Assam, whenever someone needed something, they would go to a nearby beel (wetland) and pray to the water god (devata) and their wish would be fulfilled. Even today, the wetland is known as Bhakati beel, meaning "the beel of devotion".

"Symbolically, this legend shows the significance of wetlands in the life of the people of Majuli," says Gobin Kumar Khound, a writer and local environmental activist in the island. "Beels are the arteries of Majuli."

Situated in the middle of the Brahmaputra, the landscape of Majuli is dotted with a string of beels. The variety of these wetlands is so rich that there's an elaborate indigenous taxonomy of water bodies in Majuli.

In the book, *Slow Disaster: Political Ecology of Hazards and Everyday Life in the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam (2023)*, political ecologist Mitul Barua writes, local people in Majuli divide the wetlands into many categories depending on their size and characteristics, such as beel, jan, suti, erasuti, dubi, ghuli, hola, pitoni and so on.

"A string of beels in a landscape indicates the presence of major rivers in it in the past, which may have migrated channels over time. Majuli is a classic case of that, given the elaborate network of beels found all over the island," writes Barua.

In 1917, there were 49 named streams draining Majuli, which

decreased to seven by 1972. Today, there's only one drainage channel, Kakorikata, that drains the whole of Majuli. And Tuni, the only river in Majuli, that once meandered through the island like a serpent has ceased to flow.

Sand deposits and silt have choked water bodies across the island. Larger wetlands have reduced in size and many smaller ones have disappeared. A combination of factors is contributing to the decline of wetlands in Majuli, including building of embankments and consequent lack of natural flood water circulation in large parts of the island, expansion of agriculture and infrastructure and erosion.

The lifeline of Majuli

Beels are the primary wetlands in Majuli. A beel is a billabong or a lake-like wetland with static water, typically formed by the inundation of low-lying lands during flooding where some water gets trapped even after floodwaters recede. Beels are perennial water bodies.

In the upper Brahmaputra valley, where Majuli is located, a large number of people depend on a range of ecosystem services provided by wetlands. According to a study published in the *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics* in 2022, an estimated 200,000 people depend on fishing activities in the wetlands of the region.

In Majuli, beels ensured food security of the local populace, including marginal communities such as the Mishing and the Koibarta. However, with the decline of the wetlands, fish production in Majuli has reduced drastically over the past few

decades. Tilak Chandra Sarmah, a grassroots conservationist in Majuli, says, "Now the situation is so dire that if there is ujan [shoaling or schooling of fish] in a beel that has only a small number of fishes, hundreds of people will queue for a catch."

The scarcity of local fish in Majuli is so high that for the last several years, fish has been imported to meet the local demand, adds Sarmah.

The decline of wetlands has impacted other local livelihoods as well. As wetland areas in Majuli decrease, the local demand for boats has dwindled, forcing traditional boat-makers of the island to look for other occupations, states a 2020 study on the impacts of wetland degradation on local livelihoods in Majuli.

Paradise for birds in decline
Majuli's fertile floodplains and once highly productive wetlands used to provide an ideal habitat for a plethora of resident and migratory birds, more than 250 species. Historically, the wetlands of Majuli were well known for birds, and Ahom monarchs used to visit the island for falconry. One such historical bird habitat in the island is Sorai Chung wetland. Considered as an Important Bird Area (IBA), local communities believe Sorai Chung to be one of the oldest royal bird sanctuaries in the world.

Khound, who has recently published a novel titled *Sorai Chung* set in the history of the area, says that this historical wetland has now shrunk to about 5 square kilometres. "The shrinkage of the wetlands has led to a decrease in the water bird population in Ma-

juli," Shyamal Saikia, a research scholar at Assam University who is working on grassland birds of Majuli, says. "Decrease in the fish population in beels has in turn impacted the birds dependent on fish."

In Ujani Majuli revenue circle, migratory birds frequent wetlands like Bordoloni, Aaroi Khowa, Bokajan, Goriya Beel, Sengeli Mora, Gulgeli, Koroyoni, Xoriyotoli, Nangoli Mukh, Aamguri, Kotai, Rotiram Jan, Kotai Nahoroni, Sorola Pothar. Many of these wetlands are under encroachment. Nevertheless, Saikia says that some wetlands are still in healthy condition and have the potential for development of sustainable ecotourism.

"Unfortunately," writes political ecologist Barua in *Slow Disaster*, "despite the presence of hundreds of beels in Majuli, some of them with great historical and ecological significance, none of the beels have been designated as a Ramsar site. Such a recognition could have perhaps helped conserve these wetlands better."

1950 earthquake, series of floods

In 1950, an earthquake of 8.6 Richter scale, changed the Brahmaputra valley, including Majuli's wetlands, forever. The earthquake radically reconfigured the courses and configurations of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, and raised the riverbed of the Brahmaputra by a few metres.

In his account, *The Great Assam Earthquake 1950*, Frank Kingdon-Ward, a British botanist who was travelling to the upper reaches of the region at the time, stated that the earthquake resulted

in multiple landslides in the hills and the rivers got flooded with enormous amounts of sediments, which led to a change in the river pattern. Following the earthquake of 1950, three heavy floods occurred during 1951, 1954, and 1962, the last being the most severe according to the people of Majuli. A 2014 study states that Majuli has lost a huge area "due to combined effects of earthquake and consequent deposition of excessive sediment in river bed transported from the geologically fragile upper hilly catchments causing the river to braid erratically." Locals say that several wetlands turned shallow following the earthquake of 1950, ultimately leading to drying up of the water.

"For example, Pahumara jan was a run-off from the Tuni river and flowed to the Kherkatia suti," says Sarmah. "Now, Pahumara jan has transformed into a patchwork of paddy fields and a few small water bodies called dubi."

Similarly, Polonga beel and Phuloni beel, located in Phuloni, have shrunk considerably following the earthquake of 1950. Parts of these wetlands have now been turned into agricultural fields. Locals say, about 50 years ago, Polonga beel was a favourite spot for resident and migratory birds.

Yet another wetland, Gela beel, has vanished as a result of the geomorphological changes triggered by the 1950 earthquake.

Erosion and embankments
According to government data, Majuli has reduced in size from 1,250 square kilometre at the beginning of the 20th century to 483 square kilometre by 2014.

Many wetlands have been lost to erosion. For example, Keturi beel, located to the east of Salmora, behind a village called Lahkar Gaon, has been lost to erosion. No traces are left of Lahkar Gaon and Keturi beel.

Erosion-induced migration and increasing population pressure as the island continues to lose its landmass, have triggered encroachment on wetlands. "With pressure on land increasing, people have turned several wetlands into paddy fields and homestead," says Khound.

More than 100 kilometres of embankments have been constructed in Majuli as part of flood prevention measures. All water channels, which are linked with the Brahmaputra and other major rivers, have been blocked by embankments surrounding the island. "This has divided the island into two distinct geographies," says Jaya Kalita Gogoi, assistant professor of geography in Majuli College. "The area inside the embankments has stopped seeing natural flood, while areas outside the embankments experience heavy flood." Consequently, silt deposits, water hyacinth, grass, and solid waste accumulated over the years has made wetlands inside the embankments shallow, impacting aquatic life. "Certain amount of flooding is necessary to keep the beels alive, while excessive flooding may be harmful," says Gogoi. On the other hand, when floods breach embankments, it leads to heavy siltation in these wetlands.

One morning in September 2023, thousands of fish turned dead in Kakorikata beel, a large

wetland in the Chilakola area of the island. Local forest officials said this was caused by lack of oxygen in the wetland, as the beel was choked by sand deposits, solid waste, and water hyacinth.

Some water bodies are being dug as part of the Amrit Sarovar Scheme in order to rejuvenate.

"However, only time will tell what results this scheme yields," Sarmah says. "What is concerning is that no environmental agency is involved in the scheme's implementation." Further, there's a concern that schemes like this may turn parts of natural wetlands to culture fisheries.

Potential solutions

"The potential solution," according to Sarmah, "is to make the natural water flow happen through Majuli."

"Revival of the Tuni river is vital for the survival and rejuvenation of Majuli's wetlands as all the beels are connected to this river," Sarmah says. "The major water bodies should be made weed-free and degraded bodies de-silted." Tuni, the only river in Majuli, has been blocked by an embankment towards its lower reaches in a place called Patia. As a result, the river's capacity to flow has reduced considerably, and water hyacinth, sand deposits, and waste materials have choked the river and slowly pushed it to death.

"While constructing embankments and infrastructures, it needs to be ensured that natural floodwater is able to enter the landscape and pass through it," Sarmah adds. (Courtesy: [Scroll.in](#))

They swim and they spin: Meet the aquatic spiders

By: Amber Dance

Shrubbery, toolsheds, basements — these are places one might expect to find spiders. But what about the beach? Or in a stream? Some spiders make their homes near or, more rarely, in water: tucking into the base of kelp stalks, spinning watertight cocoons in ponds or lakes, hiding under pebbles at the seaside or creek bank.

"Spiders are surprisingly adaptable, which is one of the reasons they can inhabit this environment," says Ximena Nelson, a behavioral biologist at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Finding aquatic or semiaquatic spiders is difficult work, Nelson says: She and a student have spent four years chasing a jumping spider known as *Marpissa marina* around the pebbly seaside beaches it likes, but too often, as soon as they manage to find one it disappears again under rocks. And sadly, some aquatic spiders may disappear altogether before they come to scientists' attention, as their watery habitats shrivel due to climate change and other human activities.

What scientists do know is that dozens of described spider species spend at least some of their time in or near the water, and more are almost surely awaiting discovery, says Sarah Crews, an arachnologist at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. It also appears that spiders evolved aquatic preferences on several distinct occasions during the history of this arthropod order. Crews and colleagues surveyed spiders and reported in 2019 that 21 taxonomic families include semiaquatic species, suggesting that the evolutionary event occurred multiple independent times. Only a swashbuckling few — not even 0.3 percent of described spider species — are seashore spiders; many more have been found near fresh water, says Nelson.

It's not clear what would induce successful land-dwelling critters to move to watery habitats. Spiders, as a group, probably evolved about 400 million years ago from chunkier creatures that had recently left the water. These arthropods lacked the skinny waist sported by modern spiders. Presumably, the spiders that later returned to a life aquatic were strongly drawn by something to eat there, or driven by unsafe conditions on land, says Geerat Vermeij, a paleobiologist and professor emeritus at the University of California, Davis — because water would have presented major survival challenges. "Since they depend on air so

much, they are severely limited in whether they can do anything at all when they are submerged, other than just toughing it out," says Vermeij. Newly aquatic spiders would have had to compete with predators better adapted to watery conditions, such as crustaceans, with competition particularly fierce in the oceans, Vermeij says. And if water floods a spider's air circulation system, it will die, so adaptations were obviously needed.

But spiders as a group already possess several water-friendly features, suggests Crews. They have waxy, water-repellent exteriors, often covered in hairs that conveniently trap air bubbles. Even having eight legs is helpful, says Nelson: Spiders can distribute their weight nicely while they skitter across a water surface, or use their octet of appendages to row along.

Some spiders take their aquatic adaptations to the next level, though. Consider the diving bell spider, *Argyroneta aquatica*, an overachieving arachnid that is the only one known to do it all under water: breathe, hunt, dine on insects and their larvae, and make spiderlings. Found in fresh water in Europe and parts of Asia, it spins a silken underwater canopy and brings air bubbles from the surface to its submerged home via its body hairs. When it goes out, it carries a smaller air bubble, like a

(b). Other spiders burrow under the sand and surround their nests with waterproof silken barriers to stay safe when the tide is high (c). *Desis marina* builds its own watertight silk nest in the holdfast where bull kelp attaches to rocks (d). Other spiders, such as *Marpissa marina*, build their waterproof nests inside old seashells (e).

A spider that's even occasionally submerged in saltwater or eating briny seafood will also have to maintain proper internal salt levels. "Presumably, they will be able to concentrate the salt somehow and then poo it out," Nelson says. Scientists don't know how marine spiders pull this off. And at least one intertidal-zone spider, *Desis formidabilis* of South Africa's cape, comfortably maintains an interior salt concentration much like the crustaceans it eats, according to a 1984 study.

When a spider hides out with a limited air supply for days or weeks at a time, oxygen levels also may become a critical issue. Intriguingly, researchers have identified gene variants within the oxygen-guzzling, energy-making mitochondria of aquatic spiders that may help them cope with low-oxygen environments.

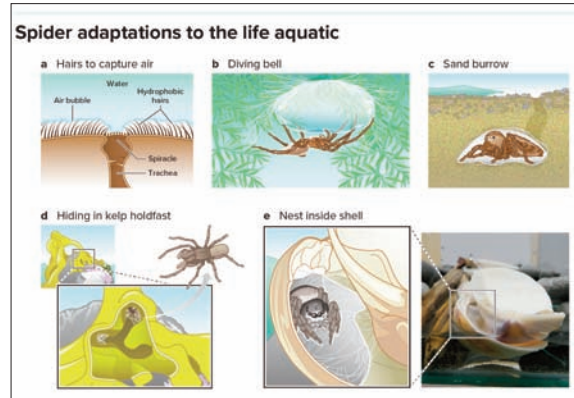
These changes mirror beneficial changes to mitochondrial genes in birds that live in high-altitude, low-oxygen environments. In another study, researchers investigated the genes used in the silk glands of aquatic and land spiders. They found that water-spider silk seems to have a high proportion of the water-repelling amino acid pair glycine and valine — which might also be an adaptation, they suggest.

Creeping extinction
But all the adaptations in the world might not be enough to save some water spiders. Nelson's *M. marina*, for example, seems to be very particular about the beaches it occupies. The pebbles must be just right, not too big or small. If sea level rise inundates *M. marina*'s beaches, it's possible the spiders will have nowhere else to go, Nelson says. "So those spiders will be lost."

Marco Isaia, an arachnologist at the University of Turin, Italy, investigated the wetland habitats of the diving bell spider and the fen raft spider, *Dolomedes plantarius*. As wetlands continue to disappear, the habitats available to each species will contract by more than 25 percent over a decade, and their ideal ranges will move northward, Isaia and colleagues predicted in a 2022 study.

It would be difficult for the spiders to cross dry land for new wetlands, and north European winters might prove too cold anyway. "The loss and degradation of wetland habitats is expected to have serious impacts on their survival," says Isaia, "and an increase in their extinction risk."

Given these risks, some aquatic spiders might go the way of the dodo before science gets a handle on them. "I suspect in every rocky bed of beach or river, there are probably spiders that we just don't know exist there," says Nelson. "Because they're hiding." (Courtesy: [The Wire](#))



little s c u b a tank, on its back. Seashore spiders face particularly daunting conditions, says Nelson, who authored an article about

adaptations of marine spiders for the 2024 Annual Review of Entomology. "There's a splash zone," she says. "It's kind of a wild environment." A spider might be baking in hot sun one minute, drenched in chilly saltwater the next. Some spiders migrate up and down their beaches with the tides; Nelson speculates that they might monitor lunar cycles to anticipate when to move.

Other seashore spiders spin watertight nests where they hide out for hours while the tide is in. *M. marina*, for example, seeks seashells with nice, concave spaces in which to spin safe tents.

Another spider, *Desis marina*, hides in holdfasts where bull kelp attaches to rocks, lining the holdfast's interior with silk to create an air-filled pocket and staying submerged for as long as 19 days. *D. marina* emerges only when the tide is going out, to hunt for invertebrates like shrimp.

Spiders already possess some adaptations that help in the water, such as hairs that repel water and trap air around them (a). The diving bell spider *Argyroneta aquatica* uses these hairs to transport a large volume of air to its underwater canopy

Burdened beast: India's donkeys are disappearing; here is why

By: Shagun

Every evening, Mohammad Iqbal takes his donkey to the Old Delhi railway station to deploy the animal for moving gravel and sand used in railway track repairs. On some days, Iqbal, a resident of Shahdara district in the national capital, takes his donkey to construction sites for similar work.

"I earn Rs 600 for working six hours at my will, more than what I would earn from a full day of manual labour or any other job," he said, adding that the donkey is not just a steed. His family of five depends on this income for survival.

Like Iqbal, several smallholders and rural communities across India depend on donkeys. The animal finds use in places untouched by mechanisation, like brick kilns, where its small size helps it move quickly through narrow entrances.

A 2013 survey by the Indian unit of Brooke, a UK-based international non-profit that works on the use and protection of horses, mules and donkeys, finds that of the total annual income earned by equine-owning families working in 50 brick kilns in 10 districts of Uttar Pradesh, 80 per cent came from their animals' transport of bricks. For 47 of the 200 equine owners surveyed, the animals were the only source of income. Similarly, dairy suppliers in Gujarat use donkeys to carry milk across rough terrain, while potters in Lucknow use them to transport clay. The equine also serves as a draught animal in farms. "Donkeys have a financial impact on households and the economy," said Habibur Rahman, regional representative for South Asia at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Nairobi.

Rapid disappearance

Estimating the economic value of donkeys is not as simple as with other livestock animals, as there is a lack of evidence on their socio-economic and cultural benefits. Livestock policies have largely overlooked these animals and excluded communities that rear them from availing any incentives or subsidies other livestock farmers may receive. Donkeys are not part of the income-generating milk, meat and fibre production systems in livestock farming. Slaughter of donkeys and trade of their meat and hide is illegal in India, says Gopal R Surabathula, an activist with Animal Rescue Organisation, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh.

Moreover, with more mechanisation across sectors, donkeys now find little use as load-carrying animals. The subsequent reduction in demand reflects in the huge decline in their population. According to the "20th Livestock Census" released in 2019, India has 0.12 million donkeys — 62 per cent lower than the 0.32 million recorded in 2012.

Other equines — mules, horses and ponies — also saw a decrease in numbers, while the populations of cattle, buffaloes, sheep and goats rose in 2012-19. The rate of decline in the donkey population is also increasing exponentially. In 1992, the first year for which data is publicly available with the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying under the Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, the donkey population was 0.96 million. This decreased 8 per cent in the 1997 census, 26 per cent in 2003, 32 per cent in 2007 and 73 per cent in 2012.

ILRI is conducting a scoping study to identify the usage patterns of donkeys and the reasons for their decline.

Preliminary findings, said Rahman, show that mechanisation, communities moving to other occupations due to better education, lack of government support or policy and increase in the cost of maintaining the animal are contributing factors. Experience on the ground shows this as well. Mohammad Ilyas, a resident of Kabir Nagar, tucked in the narrow bylanes of Shahdara, had five donkeys until 2012 he used to carry heavy loads.

After small trollies became common, he and other residents found little need for the animal. Ilyas points out that Kabir Nagar was once known as Gadhapuri as almost every family owned two to four donkeys.

"Now, one can see mules and a few horses, but no donkeys," said Ilyas. He now works as a manual labourer.

Underground trade

Another reason for the decline in donkey population may be the significant demand for its meat. Although trade is illegal, there is rampant smuggling both inside the country and abroad. Donkey meat is consumed in southern states, particularly Andhra Pradesh and parts of Telangana, where people believe it can ease back pain and asthma and increase virility in men.

The practice originated around 40 years ago in Stuartpuram town in Andhra Pradesh's Prakasam district, which was a hub for thieves, says Surabathula. "Dacoits and thieves believed that consuming donkey meat and drinking its blood would make them strong," he said. This belief spread to other districts such as Guntur, Eluru, Krishna and Bapatla and to regions now in Telangana.

In 2017, responding to a petition Surabathula filed against donkey slaughtering, the Andhra Pradesh high court banned the display, sale and consumption of the meat. "Before this order, donkeys were slaughtered in the open; now, it is done in secret," said Surabathula. "Fewer people consume the blood but use it to feed catfish, whose diet consists of animal meat and blood," he added.

A similar illegal market exists for donkey hide, but this is mainly for exports to China. In traditional Chinese medicine, boiling donkey skin produces a gelatin called ejiao, which can be consumed or mixed with cosmetic products to treat conditions such as insomnia, dry cough and poor blood circulation.

In a 2019 study, Donkey Sanctuary India, which works for the welfare of the animal, notes that 4-10 million donkeys are likely slaughtered every year to fulfill demand for the skin in China.

As the country's donkey population is shrinking — from 11 million in 1992 to 2.6 million in 2019 — it has turned to other nations.

"China first started sourcing from Africa and then expanded to other lower- and middle-income countries, including India," said Priya Pandey, senior programme leader for external affairs at Brooke India. A study by the non-profit in 2021 records illegal export of live donkeys, hide and meat from states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.

Opportunity for use

The abysmal state of donkeys in the country has not gone unnoticed — the government is considering measures to reverse the population decline. On No-

vember 3, officials from ILRI, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS) and several non-profits met to discuss revival of donkeys and mules.

Bhupender Nath Tripathi, deputy director general (animal sciences), ICAR, proposed a national policy that would arrest the decline in numbers, facilitate breeding, improve healthcare and explore use. There was an emphasis on the use of donkey milk. Trilochan Mohapatra, president, NAAS, had highlighted that creating awareness of the health benefits of donkey milk will protect the welfare of the farmers dependent on the animals.

"Donkey milk is nutritious and has less fat content compared to bovine milk. But there is not much awareness and market for it," Rahman told Down To Earth (DTE).

Some people, such as the Maldhari community of Gujarat that rears Halari donkeys (a breed native to the state), also consume their milk to treat health ailments, added DK Sadana, former head of genetic animal resources at ICAR-National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources in Karnal, Haryana.

Donkey milk is currently sold informally for around Rs 2,000-5,000 a litre, said Yash Pal, director of ICAR-National Research Centre on Equines (NRCE) in Hissar, Haryana. However, donkeys are known to have low yield of milk, about 200 ml to 1.5 litre a day. ICAR-NRCE is studying the properties of the milk and working on improving the yield. It has established a dairy with 30 Halari donkeys and made health drinks for research.

The institute has applied for certification with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India allowing consumption of the products, Pal told DTE. The institute has held training sessions over the past two years for entrepreneurs interested in rearing donkeys. Most participants were from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

There are also start-ups like Organiko in Delhi and Aadvik Foods in Gujarat that are offering donkey milk products. Pooja Kaul, founder of Organiko, which makes soap using donkey milk, said the startup works with 34 donkey-rearing families in the National Capital Region and Hapur and Meerut, Uttar Pradesh.

Kaul has also collaborated with communities in Ladakh to open up a donkey conservation park, where around 190 stray or abandoned donkeys are reared.

"This is not a shelter home for donkeys. Ladakh has a history of rearing donkeys but now the animal has lost its use. In this park, the local community rears donkeys and we buy milk from them. We also promote tourism to help people get familiar with donkeys," she said. There is also a need to explore the load-carrying capacity of donkeys, the primary use of breeds found in India. Rapid mechanisation in agriculture and construction should be balanced with use of donkeys.

"ICAR institutes conduct research, but we have suggested to the government that a wing for dedicated focus on donkeys should be set up under the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying. People should also be able to get loans easily for donkey-rearing, like they do for other livestock," said Rahman. (Courtesy: [Down To Earth](#))

The Israeli military says it has reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza

Israel: We reopened a key Gaza crossing after a rocket attack

JERUSALEM, May 8: The Israeli military said on Wednesday that it has reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza, a key terminal for the entry of humanitarian aid that was closed over the weekend after a Hamas rocket attack killed four Israeli soldiers nearby.

But the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said no aid has yet entered and there is no one to receive it on the Palestinian side. Workers fled during an incursion by an Israeli tank brigade on Tuesday that captured the nearby Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, which remains closed.

That limited incursion did not appear to be the start of the full-scale invasion of Rafah that Israel has repeatedly promised. But the prolonged closure of the two main crossings could exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where the U.N. says a "full-blown famine" is already underway in the north.

The United States paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching a decision on launching a full-scale assault on Rafah, in a further widening of divisions between the two close allies.

The U.S. says it is concerned over the fate of around 1.3 million



Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom fled fighting elsewhere. Israel says Rafah is Hamas' last stronghold and that a wider offensive there is needed to dismantle the group's military and governing capabilities.

The U.S., Egypt and Qatar are meanwhile ramping up efforts to close the gaps in a possible agreement for at least a temporary cease-fire and the release of some of the scores of Israeli hostages still held by Hamas. Israel has linked the threatened Rafah operation to the fate of those negotiations.

The Rafah crossing has been a vital conduit for humanitarian aid since the start of the war and is the only place where people can enter and exit. Kerem Shalom is Gaza's main cargo terminal. Israel now controls all of Gaza's crossings for

the first time since it withdrew troops and settlers from the territory nearly two decades ago, though it has maintained a blockade with Egypt's cooperation for most of that time.

Associated Press journalists heard sporadic explosions and gunfire in the area of the Rafah crossing overnight, including two large blasts early Wednesday. The Israeli military reported six launches from Rafah toward the Kerem Shalom crossing on Tuesday.

COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs, said the Kerem Shalom crossing reopened early Wednesday. But Juliette Touma, the director of communications for UNRWA, said no aid had entered as of midday Wednesday and that the U.N. agency had been forced to

ration fuel, which is imported through Rafah.

Gaza's Health Ministry meanwhile said at least 46 patients and wounded people who had been scheduled to leave Tuesday for medical treatment have been left stranded.

U.N. agencies and aid groups have ramped up humanitarian assistance in recent weeks as Israel has lifted some restrictions and opened an additional crossing in the north under pressure from the United States, its closest ally.

But aid workers say the closure of Rafah, which is the only gateway for the entry of fuel for trucks and generators, could have severe repercussions, and the U.N. says northern Gaza is already in a state of "full-blown famine."

COGAT said 60 aid trucks entered through the northern crossing on Tuesday. Some 500 trucks entered Gaza every day before the war.

The war began when Hamas militants breached Israel's defenses on Oct. 7 and swept through nearby army bases and farming communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Hamas is still believed to be holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others after most of the rest

were released during a November cease-fire.

The war has killed over 34,700 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and has driven some 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes. Israel's military campaign has been one of the deadliest and most destructive in recent history, reducing large parts of Gaza to rubble.

Biden has repeatedly warned Netanyahu against launching an invasion of Rafah. But Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners have threatened to bring down his government if he calls off an offensive or makes too many concessions in the cease-fire talks.

The U.S. has historically provided Israel enormous amounts of military aid, which has only accelerated since the start of the war.

The paused shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 smaller ones, with the U.S. concern focused on how the larger bombs could be used in a dense urban setting, a U.S. official said Tuesday on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The official said no final decision had been made yet on proceeding with the shipment.

(AP)

Israeli ambassador apologises for a sensitive post on Palestine published in March: Minister



SINGAPORE, May 8: Israel's Ambassador to Singapore Elyahu Vered Hazan has apologised for a Facebook post on Palestine that its embassy there published in March, Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam said on Wednesday.

Ambassador Hazan in a meeting with Shanmugam last week said it was wrong for the post to have been put up and that the post was not authored by him, Shanmugam told Parliament. The ambassador has also assured that the officer responsible will be sent back, Shanmugam said.

"And he said that this will never happen again."

The minister was responding to a question by Member of Parliament Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim who asked whether further steps would be taken in this matter and the person responsible would enjoy diplomatic immunity.

In a Facebook post on March 24, the embassy compared mentions of Israel and Palestine in the Quran and added that documents and maps "link the land of Israel to the Jewish people as the indigenous people of the land".

The post said, "Israel is mentioned 43 times in the Quran. On the other hand, Palestine is not mentioned even once." "Each and every archaeological evidence - maps, documents, coins, link the land of Israel to the Jewish people as the indigenous people of the land."

The post has since been removed. Singapore, a multi-racial nation, is home to a considerable number of Malays who are Muslim.

Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs had informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which had told Israel's embassy to immediately take down the post.

The minister said the police received a report on the post and assessed in consultation with the Attorney-General's Chambers that "no further action was to be taken".

"The Israeli embassy's actions are covered by the principle of sovereign immunity," Channel News Asia quoted Shanmugam as saying in the house on Wednesday.

According to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, diplomats are immune from criminal jurisdiction in their host country, although immunity can be waived by the diplomat's state.

The meeting with Shanmugam was requested by Israel's ambassador. The minister said: "I pointed out to him that embassies are entitled to have their point of view."

"But where what has been said affects Singapore, in this case, the harmony and safety within Singapore, especially the security as well of our minority communities, we have to step in."

Shanmugam also provided an update on reports of alleged offensive remarks or actions against the Jewish or Muslim communities in Singapore. Between October 7 last year and March 31, 2024, the police received 43 such reports, the minister said.

A previous update stated that the police received eight such reports in October 2023.

Describing the conflict in the Middle East as "emotionally charged", Shanmugam said deeply held feelings could result in words or actions that offended other communities.

(PTI)

Russia launches a 'massive' missile and drone attack on Ukraine's energy facilities

KYIV, May 8: Russian forces unleashed a nighttime barrage of more than 50 cruise missiles and explosive drones at Ukraine's power grid on Wednesday, targeting a wide area in what President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called a "massive" attack.

The bombardment blasted targets in seven Ukrainian regions, including the Kyiv area and parts of the south and west, damaging homes and the country's rail network, authorities said. Three people, including an 8-year-old girl, were injured, according to officials.

Russia has repeatedly pounded Ukraine's energy infrastructure during the war that is stretching into its third year and has claimed thousands of lives. By taking out the power, the Kremlin's forces aim to rob Ukrainian manufacturing of its energy supply, especially military plants, and crush public morale.

The mass barrages also drain Ukrainian air defenses of ammunition as Kyiv's depleted forces await delivery of the latest batch of promised Western military support. Ukrainian officials have been pleading for more NATO-standard air defense systems, such as Patriots.

Russia pummeled Ukraine's energy infrastructure during the "black-out winter" of 2022-23. In March, it launched a new wave of attacks, one of which completely destroyed the Trypilka power plant near Kyiv, one of the country's biggest.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has framed the attacks as retaliation

for Ukrainian long-range strikes on Russian oil refineries. On Wednesday, a Ukrainian attack hit an oil terminal, injuring five workers and starting a fire, Russia-appointed authorities in the partially occupied Luhansk region said.

Russian bombardments, though frequent, have become less regular in recent weeks, and Ukrainian officials suspect Moscow is stockpiling resources ahead of a major battlefield offensive that could come within weeks.

The 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line has changed little since the early months of the war, but Russia has recently made small but steady gains in some areas as Ukraine battles with a lack of manpower and a shortage of weapons.

In a social media post, Zelenskyy noted that Wednesday's attacks occurred on the day that Ukraine observes the end of European fighting in World War II and equated Ukraine's current struggle with that conflict. National electrical grid operator Ukrrenergoproekt said facilities were hit in the Vinnytsia, Zaporizhzhia, Kirovohrad, Poltava and Ivano-Frankivsk regions.

Two energy facilities were hit in the Lviv region, which is in the country's far west and distant from the fighting's front lines, according to regional Governor Maksym Kozlytskyi.

DTEK, Ukraine's biggest private energy supplier, said the attack "seriously damaged" equipment at three of its thermal power plants. (AP)

Former Chinese Defence Minister emerges in public after prolonged absence

BEIJING, May 8: China's former Defence Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe whose prolonged absence from the public has sparked speculation about his fate after he paid tribute to a senior Chinese legislator who passed away early this week suggesting that he was politically safe, a media report said on Wednesday.

A floral tribute at the funeral of a senior official on Monday suggests Wei, 70, could be politically safe, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. However, there is no word about the fate of Wei's successor Gen. Li Shangfu who disappeared from the public and was later sacked.

Former Foreign Minister Qin Gang too suffered a similar fate. Both were not seen in public yet. Wei's name was spotted on a wreath at the funeral of Ouyunmag, 81, who served as vice-chairwoman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee from 2008-2013.

In a prime-time news bulletin on state broadcaster CCTV, Wei's tribute was visible among those from other former state councillors at the side of the funeral hall, with wreaths from President Xi Jinping and other incumbent officials in the middle.

Wei, who headed the PLA Rocket Force, the new name for China's missile force since its formation on December 31, 2015, as part of Xi's military overhaul, disappeared from the public eye after his successor, Li was abruptly sacked as defence minister in October last year, without explanation.

Li, who like Wei spent most of his career in the PLA's rocket wing, was also stripped of his rank as a state councillor and removed from the top decision-making body the Central Military Commission (CMC). (PTI)

North Korean official whose propaganda helped build the Kim dynasty dies at 94

SEOUL, May 8: Kim Ki Nam, a North Korean propaganda chief who helped build personality cults around the country's three dynastic leaders, has died at 94, the North's state media said.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said the country's current leader, Kim Jong Un, visited the body of Kim Ki Nam at a funeral hall in the capital, Pyongyang, early on Wednesday and expressed condolences to family members. The agency said Kim Jong Un will lead the state funeral committee for Kim Ki Nam, who will be buried on Thursday.

KCNA said Kim Ki Nam, a former secretary of the ruling Workers' Party's central committee, "devoted his all to the sacred struggle for defending and strengthening the ideological purity of our revolution and firmly guaranteeing the steady victory of the socialist cause."

The agency said he died Tuesday after being treated for age-related illnesses and multiple organ dysfunctions for

the past year.

Kim Ki Nam's role as the country's chief propagandist earned him notoriety in South Korea, where media nicknamed him the "North Korean Goebbels," after Nazi Germany's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels.

He also led the delegation to South Korea in 2009 that attended the funeral of former South Korean President

Kim Dae-jung, who had pursued engagement with the North and held a summit with former North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, the father of the current ruler.

Kim Ki Nam was one of the seven senior officials who joined Kim Jong Un in accompanying the hearse of the late leader Kim Jong Il following his death in 2011.

Kim Ki Nam was a professor at Kim Il Sung University and the chief editorial writer of the state-run Rodong Sinmun newspaper before taking leadership roles in the ruling Worker's Party's propaganda departments starting in the 1980s. (AP)



Protest song 'Glory to Hong Kong' now banned in city after appeals court overturns ruling

HONG KONG, May 8: An appeals court on Wednesday granted the Hong Kong government's request to ban a popular protest song, overturning an earlier ruling and deepening concerns over the erosion of freedoms in the once-free-wheeling global financial hub.

"Glory to Hong Kong" was often sung by demonstrators during the huge anti-government protests in 2019. The song was later mistakenly played as the city's anthem at international sporting events, instead of China's "March of the Volunteers", in mix-ups that upset city officials.

Critics have said prohibiting broadcast or distribution of the song further reduces freedom of expression since Beijing launched a crackdown in Hong Kong following the 2019 protests.

They have also warned the ban might disrupt the operation of tech giants and hurt the city's appeal as a business centre.

Judge Jeremy Poon wrote that the composer intended for the song to

be a "weapon" and so it had become, pointing to its power in arousing emotions among some residents of the city.

"We accept the assessment of the executive that prosecutions alone are clearly not adequate to tackle the acute criminal problems and that there is a compelling need for an injunction," he said.

He added the injunction was necessary to persuade internet platform operators to remove "the problematic videos in connection with the song" from their platforms.

The ban would target anyone

who broadcast or distributed the song to advocate for the separation of Hong Kong from China. It would also prohibit any actions using the song to misrepresent it as the national anthem with the intent to insult the anthem. But it would exempt lawful journalistic and academic activities.

As of mid-afternoon on Wednesday, "Glory to Hong Kong", whose artist is credited as "Thomas and the Hong Kong people", was still available on Spotify and Apple Music in both English and Cantonese. A search on YouTube for the song also

displayed multiple videos and renditions. Google, Spotify and Apple did not immediately comment.

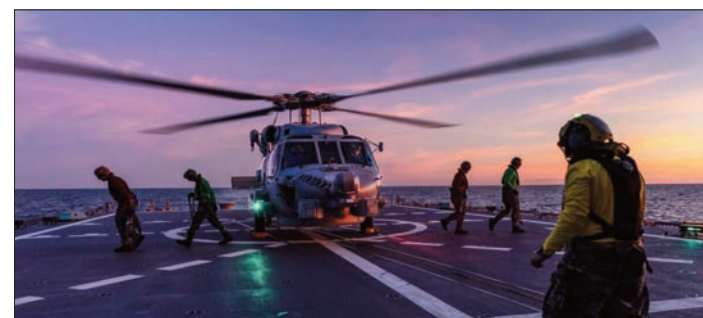
The government went to the court last year after Google resisted pressure to display China's national anthem as the top result in searches for the city's anthem instead of the protest song.

But a lower court rejected its initial bid last July and the development was widely seen as a setback for officials who are seeking to crush dissidents following the protests.

The government's appeal argued that if the executive authority considered a measure necessary, the court should allow it, unless it considered it will have no effect, according to a legal document on the government's website.

The government had already asked schools to ban the protest song on campuses. It previously said it respected freedoms protected by the city's constitution, "but freedom of speech is not absolute". (AP)

Albanese rejects China's argument that Australia was at fault for dangerous aircraft encounter



MELBOURNE, May 8: China's account blaming Australia for a dangerous clash between their military aircraft in international airspace over the Yellow Sea failed to undermine Australian objections, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Wednesday.

The Chinese and Australians lodged official protests and blamed each other for a Chinese warplane's extraordinary use of flares against an Australian navy helicopter Saturday.

The Seahawk's pilot had to "take evasive action" to avoid flares that were dropped in the helicopter's flightpath by a Chinese Chengdu J-10 fighter jet, Australian officials said.

There was no injury or damage done, although experts warned the helicopter could have been forced to ditch at sea if an engine had been struck by a flare.

Australia publicly accused China of unprofessional and unacceptable behavior, while China retorted that the Seahawk deliberately flew close to China's airspace in a "provocative move."

Albanese said he rejected China's argument that the Australians had been at fault.

He highlighted Foreign Ministry

spokesperson Lin Jian's statement that the helicopter "flew within close range of China's airspace" in attacking the Chinese case.

"That's a confirmation that this chopper was in international airspace," Albanese told Perth Radio 6PR.

Albanese also noted the helicopter had been upholding international law at the time as part of the crew an Australian air warfare destroyer that was enforcing U.N. Security Council sanctions against North Korea.

"This was unprofessional and unacceptable. And the Chinese spokesperson's comments do nothing to undermine or to question what is the Australian Defense Force's assessment of the P.L.A.'s unsafe behavior," Albanese said, referring to China's People's Liberation Army.

It was the most serious encounter between the two nations' forces since Australia accused the Chinese destroyer CNS Ningbo of injuring Australian navy divers with sonar pulses in Japanese waters in November.

Albanese said the weekend encounter would be raised with Chinese Premier Li Qiang when he visits Australia next month. (AP)

Taliban reject claims of Afghan involvement in recent attacks in Pak

ISLAMABAD, May 8: The Taliban on Wednesday rejected claims of Afghan involvement in recent attacks in Pakistan, calling it "irresponsible and far from the reality".

Pakistan's military said on Tuesday a suicide bombing that killed five Chinese engineers and a Pakistani driver in March was planned in neighbouring Afghanistan and that the bomber was an Afghan citizen.

Maj. Gen. Ahmad Sharif, a spokesman for Pakistan's army, has said that four men behind the March 26 attack in Bisham, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, had been arrested.

Enayatullah Khawarazmi, a spokesman for the Taliban's Ministry of Defence, said in a statement on Wednesday that "blaming Afghanistan for such incidents is a failed attempt to divert attention from the truth of the matter and we strongly reject it".

"The killing of Chinese citizens in an area of ??Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that is under tight security cover by the Pakistan Army shows the weakness of the Pakistani security agencies," said Khawarazmi.

He added that the Islamic Emirate has assured China that Afghans were not involved.

Sharif said the Afghan Taliban had failed to honour promises they made to the international community before coming to power, vowing no one would be allowed to use Afghan soil for attacks against any country.

Khawarazmi countered that Afghanistan has evidence of Islamic state members coming to Afghanistan from Pakistan, and "Pakistan territory being used against us, for which Pakistan should answer". (AP)



US emphasises importance of ex-Pak PM Imran Khan's safety in jail

ISLAMABAD, May 8: The US has emphasised the importance of ensuring the safety and security of all prisoners in Pakistan, including jailed former prime minister Imran Khan.

State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller in a press briefing on Tuesday, acknowledging a meeting between US Ambassador Donald Blome and leaders of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), including Opposition leader Omar Ayub Khan, said the US envoy discussed with the leader of the Opposition and other senior members of the PTI party a broader range of issues important to the bilateral relationship, including continuing US economic support to Islamabad.

About discussions with PTI on "fabricated" charges against 71-year-old Khan, Miller reiterated the US stance on political neutrality, Dawn News reported. "Our position is the same as we have stated previously, which is we take no position on elections in Pakistan," he said.

Miller emphasised the importance of upholding basic human rights while maintaining impartiality towards political parties.

Miller also addressed the issue of US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's reported warning to Pakistan about the safety of the imprisoned former premier and affirmed the United States' commitment to human rights.

Miller said Senator Schumer might have coordinated with the State Department while telling the Pakistani ambassador that Khan's safety was a high priority in Washington but he was unaware of such conversation.

Residents of Punjab Lane to relocate to permanent location: DyCM Prestone Tynsong



SHILLONG, May 8: Meghalaya deputy chief minister Prestone Tynsong said the residents of the Punjabi Lane area here have decided to relocate to a permanent location and a final decision will be taken early next month. Tynsong who is also the chairman of the High-Level Committee constituted by the state government on the matter, also met members of the Harijan Panchayat Committee and deputy chief minister Sniawbhalang Dhar who is also in charge of the Urban Affairs department. Meghalaya has two deputy chief ministers - Prestone Tynsong and Sniawbhalang Dhar.

"In the meeting, we have decided to go for complete relocation which means a permanent relocation," Tynsong said on Tuesday.

He said the decision was taken after meeting with Harijan Panchayat Committee (HPC) on the ongoing talks to relocate 342 families from Them Lew Mawlong to another location identified, that is the old office of Shillong Municipal Board (SMB).

Tynsong informed that it was a fruitful meeting and the delegation of the HPC has requested the government to allow them to have one more meeting with the residents of Them Lew Mawlong before both parties came to a conclusion.

On reports of disparity on the actual numbers of settlers who are to benefit from the settlement, Tynsong said, "I have already referred this particular case to the director of Urban Affairs to verify on the report, so now, we are waiting for that".

"Let me just tell you one thing as far as the number of families is concerned, let the verification be over once the verification is done, then I will be able to come out clearly and justify on the RTI report" he added.

Meanwhile, general secretary of the Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee, Jagdeep Singh said that the residents of Them Lew Mawlong as well as the state government want an amicable solution with regard to relocation. Singh said that the discussion on relocation is not about the number of families residing in Them Lew Mawlong but a discussion for a permanent solution for all 342 families.

He added the people residing in Them Lew Mawlong have been residing in the areas for centuries hence, a proper relocation is the need of the hour for all families who have served the state. (PTI)

IPS officer Idashisha Nongrang to be appointed as acting DGP

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: The Meghalaya government might appoint Idashisha Nongrang, a 1992-batch IPS officer, as the acting Director General of Police (DGP) after incumbent DGP Lajja Ram Bishnoi retires on May 19, 2024. Bishnoi will be completing his two-year term as the Director General of Meghalaya Police as per the notification issued on December 2nd, 2022.

The decision to appoint an acting DGP comes due to the ongoing model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections, which bar the SSC from convening to select a permanent replacement.

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) had previously recommended three candidates for the DGP post, including Nongrang himself. The three candidates are all from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre. They include Idashisha Nongrang (1992 batch), Ram Prasad Meena (1993), and Deepak Kumar (1994).

Of them, Nongrang had already served as acting DGP in December 2021 following the retirement of the then-state police chief.

It may be mentioned that the permanent replacement is expected to take place following the elections.

Over 5000 immigrants detected in Manipur: CM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday said that the government has detected a total of 5457 illegal immigrants in the state.

CM Singh in a post on X (Formerly Twitter) said that the government has detected a total of 5457 illegal immigrants in Kamjong district, Manipur as on May 7th, 2024. "Out of the total, biometric data of 5173 such illegal immigrants have been collected so far," CM Singh said in the post.

Singh added that the deportation process is underway and that the government has been providing humanitarian aid to all the illegal immigrants who have been detected.

"Despite being an alarming situation, we have been handling it with utmost sensitivity," said the Manipur CM. This news comes amidst a growing concern over illegal immigration in India. The Indian government has been taking steps to identify and deport illegal immigrants, including the implementation of a National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Tripura CM to campaign for BJP candidates in West Bengal

AGARTALA, May 8: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha will campaign for BJP candidates in the Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, an official said on Wednesday. Around 14 Tripura BJP leaders including state BJP president Rajib Bhattacharjee are engaged in election work in West Bengal.

"Chief Minister Manik Saha is scheduled to leave for Kolkata on May 9 to address a BJP election rally at North Kolkata on the following day in favour of party candidate Tapas Roy. He will return to the state either on May 10 or 11," said a CMO official. (PTI)

Eco-Park will be developed as part of the Nagaland Forest Management Project with assistance from the Japanese govt

Japan envoy expresses condolences to war victims

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 8: Japanese ambassador to India Hiroshi Suzuki on Wednesday expressed his deepest sympathy and condolences to the people of Nagaland who were caught in the crossfire during World War II between Japanese and the British Commonwealth forces 80 years ago.

He said the people of Nagaland, who had nothing to do with the war, inevitably had to go through a great ordeal where many were coerced into cooperation and many people lost their lives and many were forced to flee the land of their ancestors.

Suzuki was speaking as the special guest at the soft inauguration programme of the Kohima Peace Memorial and Eco Park in Kohima. He was on a two-day visit to the state.

He said he was deeply honoured to witness the inauguration of the Kohima Peace Memorial which enabled him to offer his most solemn prayers to all the victims of the battle.

Suzuki expressed his gratitude to the peo-



ple of Nagaland for their warm welcome and support provided to the Kohima-Japan bone collection team and enabling former soldiers and their families to collect the remains of

the fallen soldiers.

He said the Eco-Park will be developed as part of the Nagaland Forest Management Project with official development assistance

from the Japanese government.

He also expressed his sincere gratitude to Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio and the people of the state for erecting the peace memorial and hoped that it would be a reason for more Japanese people to visit Kohima.

"I am convinced that the friendship originally fostered through the remains collection between Japan and Nagaland will be further strengthened through the construction of the Eco-Park as well as the exchange of young people. They will become new bridges between India and Japan," the envoy said.

In his address, Rio said the event marked an important milestone in the narrative of Naga-Japan partnership, which though started under the cloud of conflict, has today matured into one for advocating peace and brotherhood of humanity, the message that has been embodied by the Kohima Peace Memorial.

Later, the Japanese envoy, along with his entourage, visited the World War II museum at Kisama, Kohima War Cemetery, Kohima Cathedral and Kohima village.

Students' union seeks M'laya govt intervention for re-conducting NEET examination



SHILLONG, May 8: The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) and the Jaintia Students' Union (JSU) recently sought the intervention of Meghalaya state government for re-conducting the NEET examination for students from Jaintia Hills region, following alleged discrepancies and mismanagement in the conduct of the just concluded examination.

In a joint petition to education minister, Rakkam A Sangma, the KSU and the JSU said, "Without prejudice to the rights and interests of our student candidates, it is hereby requested that a re-examination of the NEET exam be conducted."

They alleged that grave discrepancies were observed during the NEET exam conducted on May 5 at Jowai in West Jaintia Hills district.

"While we appreciate the gov-

ernment's initiative to hold such exams in Jaintia Hills for the first time, we are deeply troubled by the mismanagement and distress caused to nearly 400 students, who appeared for the exam. It has come to our notice that during the exam, students were provided with two sets of question papers labelled MNOP and QRST respectively. This led to confusion among candidates and even the exam management was initially clueless about which set to attempt," the petition said.

The petition also said that subsequently, it was clarified that questions from QRST were the genuine ones, causing significant mental distress to students who had already wasted precious time attempting the MNOP set. Furthermore, despite attempts by some candidates to seek clarification from exam management, they

were unsuccessful. Additionally, students were not allowed to submit their admit cards until late in the evening resulting in a rush and inconvenience. Moreover, students from far-flung villages were unable to submit their admit cards to date.

"This situation is deeply concerning as students, through no fault of their own, have been subjected to the consequences of mismanagement by untrained invigilators. The provision of multiple sets of question papers without adequate guidance and the failure to allocate extra time to compensate for the time lost after the clarification of the correct set exacerbates the issue," the two organisations further said.

They added that many students who appeared for the aforementioned exam invested significant time, effort, and financial resources in preparation, with the ultimate goal of security admission to medical institutions for pursuing MBBS studies.

"Therefore, in the interest of upholding fairness and ensuring equal opportunities for all candidates, a re-examination is deemed necessary to rectify the discrepancies and provide a level playing field," they demanded while asserting that it is imperative that steps are taken to prevent such incidents from occurring again, and that well-being and interests of students are prioritized in all examination processes. (NNN)

Banned outfit's cadre held

IMPHAL, May 8: A 33-year-old cadre of the banned National Revolutionary Front of Manipur was arrested from Imphal, police said on Wednesday. He isnam James Singh, an active member of the proscribed outfit, was involved in extortion and apprehended from the vicinity of the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences here on Tuesday, a police statement said. A two-wheeler was seized from his possession, it said. Search operations and area domination by security forces continued in the fringe and vulnerable areas of hill and valley districts in ethnic strife-torn Manipur, police said.

More than 219 people were killed and thousands displaced from homes after ethnic clashes broke out on May 3 last year in Manipur, when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribals - Nagas and Kukis - constitute little over 40 per cent and reside in the hill districts. (PTI)

M'laya CM takes stock of alleged irregularities of NEET exam

SHILLONG, May 8: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma recently said that the state government has taken up with the central government following the alleged irregularities surrounding the National Testing Agency's (NTA) National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) held at Jowai in West Jaintia Hills district.

This came after organisations including the Khasi Students' Union and the Jaintia Students' Union have demanded a re-conduction of the examination.

Taking to social media, Sangma said, "The NEET exams are conducted by a central agency namely the National Testing Agency (NTA). In regards to the concerns on the recent exams conducted in different parts of the state, the matter is being taken up with the concerned central agency."

The KSU and the JSU have alleged grave discrepancies during the NEET examination held in Jowai on Sunday. The alleged mismanagement of the examination was the distribution of two sets of question papers labeled as MNOP and QRST. This has led to significant distress among over 400 candidates, as they were initially unsure which set to attempt

"This situation is deeply concerning as students, through no fault of their own, have been subjected to the consequences of mismanagement by untrained invigilators. The provision of multiple sets of question papers without adequate guidance and the failure to allocate extra time to compensate for the time lost after the clarification of the correct set exacerbates the issue," the two organisations said. (NNN)

CM urges railway ministry for immediate action

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: Tripura chief minister Prof Dr Manik Saha has urgently contacted Union railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw amidst the fuel crisis gripping Tripura, seeking a prompt resolution to the state's pressing issue.

The crisis escalated following a recent derailment incident between Jatinga Lampur and New Harangajao in Assam, causing disruptions in goods train services and exacerbating the fuel shortage in Tripura.

However, efforts to restore normalcy are already in progress.

Sources close to the chief minister revealed that Prof (Dr) Manik Saha penned a letter to Union Rail-

way Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw yesterday, emphasizing the critical need for swift measures to alleviate the petrol and diesel scarcity in the state.

"The chief minister is actively monitoring the situation and has received assurances from railway authorities regarding their commitment to taking necessary actions within the next two to three days," stated the insider.

Furthermore, it has been disclosed that fuel trucks are currently en route to Tripura, with anticipated arrival tomorrow, offering hope for relief from the crisis looming over Agartala and the entirety of the state.

'Naga Plebiscite Day' on May 16 'Nagalim national constitution is duly recognised'

DIMAPUR, May 8: The NSCN-IM, while notifying that 'Naga Plebiscite Day' will be commemorated on May 16, said that "the political significance of Naga Plebiscite Day of May 16, 1951, had been bolstered by the Amsterdam Joint Communiqué of July 11, 2002, regarding recognition of the unique history and situation of the Naga people and Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015 demonstrating that Nagalim was never a part of the Indian Union or Myanmar either by consent or conquest".

Secondly, the NSCN-IM said the Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015, was signed based on the principle of sovereignty. "Since sovereignty constitutes the identity of a nation, the sovereign Nagalim national flag and the sovereign Nagalim national constitution are duly recognized and acknowledged in the letter and spirit of Framework Agreement," it added.

The statement of the NSCN-IM also said that it is "our bounden duty" towards our Naga nation to be steadfast in



"our commitment" and uphold the sanctity of the Naga national principle.

Meanwhile, the NSCN-IM said that, pursuant to Joint Council Meeting held on April 30, 2024, at the Council Headquarters, Hebron (NSCN-IM headquarters near Dimapur), the undersigned, it issued this notification that the Naga

Plebiscite Day of May 16, 1951, will be commemorated with thanksgiving and prayer at the General Headquarters Church, Naga Army.

Therefore, all the NSCN-IM members and GPRN functionaries are informed to attend the celebration and be a part of this "historic event". (NNN)

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Branch Office : 2nd Floor, C/o - Steel Traders, Maruti Sadan, N S Avenue, Above Corporation Bank, Opp. City Hospital, Silchar (Assam) 788005		
Demand Notice Under Section 13 (2) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.		
Undersigned being the Authorized officer of M/s Bajaj Finance Limited, hereby gives the following notice to the Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s) who have failed to discharge their liability i.e. defaulted in the repayment of principal as well as the interest and other charges accrued there-on for Home Loan(s)/Loan(s) against Property advanced to them by Bajaj Finance Limited and as a consequence the loan(s) have become Non Performing Assets (NPA's). Accordingly, notices were issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and rules there-to, on their last known addresses, however the same have been returned un-served/undelivered, as such the Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s) are hereby intimated/informed by way of this publication notice to clear their outstanding dues under the loan facilities availed by them from time to time.		
Loan Account No./ Name of the Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s) & Addresses	Address of the Secured/ Mortgaged Immovable Asset/ Property to be enforced	Demand Notice Date and Amount
Branch: Silchar, LAM: PU30PBL3248022 Borrower's/Co-Borrower's- 1. Hassan North East Car Bazar Thr. Its Prop. R/o N.H. Way Holding No.209 Ward No. 17 Silchar Assam 788003	All that piece and parcel of Mouza-Bilnicha PT-1, Porgana, P.S. & Sub Registrar Hailakandi - 788151 DAG No. 375, 378, 382, 384, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 420, 414, 427, 429, 423 & 424, Patta No. 90, 165 & 166 along with proportionate share in common areas (Area Admeasuring - 12960 Sq.Fts.) Boundaries:- On East - N.H. 154; On West - Land of Khursadia Madrasa and Pond; On North - Residence of Jamal Uddin; On South- Bye Lane thereafter Land of Abdul Hussain and Ors.	05.04.2024 Rs. 30,84,524/- (Rupees Thirty Lakhs Eighty Four Thousand Five Hundred Twenty Four Only) as on 05.04.2024
2. Masim Uddin Choudhary 3. M Shama Uddin Choudhary R/o VIII/Town Chiparsangan-1 P.S. Panchgram Sub Div-Hailakandi Dist.-Hailakandi Silchar Assam 788001		
This step is being taken for substituted service of notice. The above Borrowers and/or Co-Borrowers Guarantors are advised to make the payments of outstanding along with future interest within 60 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which (without prejudice to any other right remedy available with Bajaj Finance Limited) further steps for taking possession of the Secured Assets/ Mortgaged property will be initiated as per the provisions of Sec. 13(4) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002. The parties named above are also advised not to alienate, create third party interest in the above mentioned properties. On which Bajaj Finance Limited has the charge.		
Place : Silchar (Assam) Date : 09-05-2024		For M/s Bajaj Finance Limited Authorized Officer

Modi slams Congress over Sam Pitroda's 'skin colour' remarks, hits out at Rahul Gandhi

Pitroda's comments that people in the Eastern parts of the country resembled the Chinese, while those from the South looked like Africans, had kicked up a row

HYDERABAD, May 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday attacked the Congress over its party leader Sam Pitroda's comments over skin colour and asserted that the countrymen would not tolerate insult on the basis of skin colour.

Hitting out at top Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Modi said he has now understood that the national party sought to defeat President Droupadi Murmu in the presidential poll as her "skin colour is dark".

As Pitroda's reported comments kicked up a row, Modi asked, "will the ability of people be decided in my country on the basis of skin colour?"

"Who gave the permission to 'shehzada' for this game of skin colour," he asked while addressing an election rally at Warangal in the state.

Pitroda's comments that people in the Eastern parts of the country resembled the Chinese, while those from the South looked like Africans, had kicked up a row.

"I am angry today. If anyone abuses me, I don't get angry, I can tolerate that. But, the philosopher of 'shehzada' gave such a big abuse which has filled me with anger," Modi said.

Referring to Rahul Gandhi showing Constitution in his election rallies, he asked whether those who dance by keeping Constitution on their head were insulting the



countrymen on the basis of skin colour.

India would not tolerate insult to the countrymen on the basis of skin colour, he said, adding 'shehzade' (Rahul Gandhi) must answer.

Modi also said he has now come to know as to why Congress had sought to defeat Murmu in the presidential elections in 2022 despite her having a great reputation.

"I came to know today that an uncle of 'shehzada' lives in America. The uncle is his philosopher and guide," he said in an apparent reference to Sam Pitroda.

"Shehzada's philosopher and guide uncle has opened a big secret. He said those whose skin colour is dark, they are all from Africa,"

he said.

That means, he (Pitroda) has abused so many people of the country on the basis of skin colour, he alleged.

Whatever is the colour of skin, the countrymen worship Lord Sri Krishna whose skin colour was like all of us, Modi said.

Earlier, at Vemulavada in Karimnagar, Modi attacked Congress over the "Ambani-Adani" issue, demanding that the party explain to people why it has stopped raising the matter. Congress' 'Shehzada' used to do for the past five years, Modi said and asked if the party has struck a 'deal'.

Have "tempo loads of notes (money)" reached the Congress that it has stopped targeting "Ambani-Adani," Modi asked.

"Ever since elections have been announced, these people (Congress) have stopped abusing Ambani-Adani. I want to ask from Telangana soil, let the Shehzada announce, how much has been lifted from Ambani-Adani. Has tempo loads of notes (currency) reached the Congress? What deal has been arrived at, that abusing Ambani-Adani has stopped overnight," he asked.

"Certainly something is fishy. For five years, (they) abused Adani-Ambani and it stopped overnight. It means you have received some tempo loads of 'chori ka maal' (loot). You have to answer the nation," the Prime Minister said.

The Congress has been attacking the Modi government, accusing the Prime Minister of favouring the top five industrialists in the country, including Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani.

Addressing the rally after the third phase of general elections (May 7), Modi also said the phase has blown the third 'fuse' of Congress and its INDI Alliance. Congress leaders were searching for seats using magnifying glass after the latest round of polling.

In fourth phase, they will have to use microscope, he said.

He added four phases of polling are left and with the blessings of the people, the BJP and NDA were marching toward victory.

Attacking the Congress and K Chandrasekhar Rao-led BRS in Telangana, Modi said while the BJP believes in the 'nation first' principle, for the two parties it is 'family first'.

The BRS and Congress openly criticise each other on corruption, but it is a common factor between these parties, he charged.

Taking a veiled swipe at Rahul Gandhi and Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, he said there is a lot of discussion up to Delhi on the "double R (RR)" tax in the state. He also claimed Congress will do away with reservation for SC/ST and OBCs and give it to Muslims. (PTI)

PM Modi's chair shaking, he has started attacking his own friends: Congress

NEW DELHI, May 8: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's chair is "shaking" after three phases of the Lok Sabha polls as he has started attacking his own "friends" and this shows the "real trend" of the result.

His remarks came after the prime minister during an election rally in Telangana said the Congress should explain to people why it has stopped raising the "Ambani-Adani" issue as its "Shehzada" used to do for the past five years and asked if it has struck a "deal".

"The times are changing. Friends are no longer friends...! After the completion of three phases of elections, today the prime minister has started attacking his own friends. It is becoming clear that Modiji's chair is shaking. This is the real trend of the results," Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

At a poll rally in Telangana's Vemulavada, Modi said, "Ever since elections have been announced, these people (Congress) have stopped abusing Ambani-Adani. I want to ask from Telangana soil, let the Shehzada announce, how much has been lifted from Ambani-Adani. Has tempo loads of notes (currency) reached the Congress? What deal has been arrived at, that abusing Ambani-Adani has stopped overnight."

"Certainly something is fishy. For five years, (they) abused Adani-Ambani and it stopped overnight. It means you have received some tempo loads of 'chori ka maal' (loot). You have to answer the nation," the prime minister further said. After PM's attack, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the tide of this election has turned so "violently" that the "Pappa" of "Hum Do Hamare Do" is turning on his own children.

"Defeat is a foregone conclusion. The prime minister is now spooked even by his own shadow," he said in a post on X and shared a picture of Modi along with his shadow.

The Congress leader said, "The man who collected ₹ 8,200 crore of Electoral Bonds for his party - a scam so egregious that even the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional - is today levelling allegations on others."

"Remember that through his 'Chaar Raaste', the prime minister has given contracts and licenses worth ₹ 4 lakh crore to his cronies in return for their donations. If today, 21 Indian billionaires have as much wealth as 70 crore Indians, it is all thanks to the PM's intentions and his policies. It also goes without saying that 'Hamare Do' are key figures in those 21," Ramesh claimed.

He said that since January 28, 2023, the Congress party has repeatedly demanded the formation of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to investigate the "Modani scam".

"We reiterated this demand even after the elections began - on April 23, 2024, and just five days ago, on May 3, 2024. Since April 3, 2024, Rahul Gandhi has mentioned Adani 103 times and Ambani more than 30 times in his speeches.

"A JPC will be formed as soon as the India alliance comes to power on June 4, 2024, to investigate the Modani Scam - which has an estimated price tag of at least ₹ 2 lakh crores," the Congress leader said.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi said the prime minister knows that people now understand the reality that he has handed over all wealth to big businessmen and he is now clarifying after getting nervous.

Another party leader Pawan Khara said that PM Modi is disturbed after three phases of elections and realises that the ground is shaking. He claimed the prime minister has collected ₹ 8,200 crore from his "friends" and when he was losing the polls, he has turned against them.

"When you cannot be theirs, how can you be ours or anyone else's in the country," he posed, adding the Congress does not fear anyone or anything.

Congress leader Supriya Shrinete said the prime minister is making serious allegations of corruption against the two big industrialists and asked when would a CBI, ED or Income Tax raid happen against them.

The Congress has been attacking the Modi government, accusing the prime minister of favouring the top five industrialists in the country, including Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani. (PTI)

Those speaking Pak's language should be charged with treason, sent to jail: Shinde

THANE, May 8: Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has said those speaking Pakistan's language while living in India should be charged with treason and put behind bars as he dubbed the statements of opposition leaders Vijay Wadetiwar and Farooq Abdullah their frustration about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rise.

"These people are speaking Pakistan's language. Is it not treason against the nation? They are not able to tolerate the wave of patriotism that has spread out across the country under PM Modi's leadership. It's like Congress ka haath, Pakistan ke saath," Shinde told PTI here. He also hit out at former Maharashtra Chief Minister and former Union minister Sharad Pawar for doing "nothing" for the state during his long stints in the state and Centre.

"He has been in Maharashtra politics, national politics for such a long time. Maharashtra should have progressed so much during this time. He was also the agriculture minister. What our government has done for farmers, no other government has been able to do so far. That I can say with full confidence," Shinde said. He said ₹ 6,000 is being given by the Centre and the state government is adding another ₹ 6,000 to it, making it ₹ 12,000 for farmers every year.

"They are getting crop insurance for free. There are so many schemes for farmers and our government gives them top priority," he said.

On what he called anti-India statements by several opposition leaders, the Shiv Sena leader said, "They are speaking in Pakistan's favour and in their language. This is their misfortune only. But we will not leave those who speak against our country. These people should be jailed after being charged with treason."

"These people live in India and praise Pakistan. If Farooq Abdullah asks whether Pakistan is wearing bangles, who are these people? Are they Pakistani or Hindustani? Are they traitors or our own citizens? Such people should be put behind bars after charging them with treason," Shinde told PTI. (PTI)

BJP paying money to buy votes: Mamata

KOLKATA, May 8: West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday alleged that the BJP is paying money to people to buy votes. Speaking at an election rally at Arambagh in support of Trinamool Congress candidate Mitali Bagh, Banerjee alleged that the saffron party is paying money to the extent of ₹ 5,000, ₹ 10,000 and ₹ 15,000 to people to purchase votes. "The BJP leaders at present are former CPI(M) 'harmads' (anti-socials). If you don't want a reign of terror to usher in, then refrain from voting for the BJP", she said. Banerjee said this election is to change the power equation in Delhi. "This power equation in Delhi has to be altered and change has to be brought in", she said.

The TMC supremo said the BJP is in the habit of "defaming" the people of

Bengal. "See how they have dishonoured the women of Sandeshkhali by paying money to make false rape allegations", she said. She also alleged that BJP had also snatched away 26,000 jobs of teachers in West Bengal. "But truth has prevailed. After the Supreme Court verdict yesterday, I felt really contended with the jobs being saved for the time being." Attacking the BJP, she alleged that Prime Minister Narendra is always resorting to lies from morning till night. "The BJP will drive away people using CAA and NRC. Minorities, advasis and OBCs will face existential crisis if Modi comes to power again", she said.

The Trinamool Congress leader said "Modi says that money meant for 100 days work had been pilfered by our party. Rather ₹ 24 crore had been saved by the state government under 100 days work", she said. (PTI)

PDP is fighting to safeguard future of J-K's youth: Mehbooba

SRINAGAR, May 8: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday said her party is fighting to safeguard the future of the youth of Jammu and Kashmir. The former chief minister also said she is pained when women talk about their sons and young relatives who are behind bars. "We are fighting for the future of our younger generations and the rights of our people. The PDP has been targeted as it stood with the people of Jammu and Kashmir and voiced their aspirations," Mufti said while addressing an election rally in Char-e-Sharif area of Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency. PDP youth president Waheed Para is a party candidate from Srinagar seat. Para is pitted against National Congress leader Aga Ruhuallah. "These mothers come and say 'our children are in a Haryana jail or a Punjab jail'. The case proceedings are not held and the youth continue to languish in jails. You (the BJP) are saying that stone pelting has ended. If that is the case, why are the youth in jails? Mufti said. "You are claiming that militancy (in J-K) has ended. Then why are you arresting the youth? Why are employees being terminated from service merely on suspicion? Why are passports not being issued to (some of) us?" she asked. (PTI)

Priyanka campaigns for Rahul in Rae Bareilly, slams PM for Adani-Ambani jibe

RAEBARELLI (UP), May 8: Hitting back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his Adani-Ambani jibe, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday charged that the BJP has a nexus with industrialists and waived their loans worth ₹16 lakh crore.

She also alleged that the entire BJP machinery is engaged in spreading "lies" about Rahul Gandhi.

Referring to the prime minister's remarks at a rally in Telangana that the Congress should explain to people why it has stopped raising the 'Ambani-Adani' issue as its 'Shehzada' used to do for the past five years, Priyanka Gandhi said, "Today he (Modi) is saying Rahul does not take the name of Adani, Ambani....He does so every day. He brings their truth in front of you every day".

"We say every day that they (BJP) have a nexus with industrialists. You must understand that Prime Minister Modi has waived off ₹ 16 lakh crore of big billionaires. Whose money is this? This is not Modi ji's money. That is the country's money," she said at public meetings here while campaigning for her brother Rahul Gandhi from the family bastion.

"BJP leaders are not even talking about inflation and unemployment. They will come here and in their speeches talk about religion, caste, temples and mosques but will not talk about your real problems," she said.

The Modi government is also not paying adequate attention to farmers' problems and employment and by giving 5 kg of food-grains to the poor, they wish to make people dependent, she alleged.

Flaying the government on the issue of unemployment, she said, "There are 30 lakh posts lying vacant at the Centre under the BJP government. The BJP does not bring schemes to remove unemployment but instead brings schemes that break your expectations."

Speaking about her family's association with the people of Rae Bareilly, she said Gandhi parivar has had personal bond with Rae Bareilly since the days of Indira Gandhi.

"In electing Rahul Gandhi, Rae Bareilly will get two 'saansads' - her brother and she herself, who will always stand to solve people's problems," she said.

Priyanka Gandhi asserted that the people of Rae Bareilly understand leaders well.

"When they did not like some



policy of Indira Gandhi (Indira Gandhi) they defeated her also. Indira did not get angry but did introspection. You elected her again. It is a speciality of the people of Rae Bareilly that they understand leaders," she said while addressing a street meeting at Thulwasa in the constituency.

She also charged the BJP wanted to change the Constitution but when it realised they would have to suffer losses in the election, the prime minister said they had no such plans.

Speaking about her brother, she said, "You must know how much Rahul ji has struggled. He is such a person in our country about whom the entire BJP machinery has spread falsehoods and lies in every possible way. How many attacks were made against him? He was expelled from Parliament...he was thrown out of his house but

Rahul ji did not back down. It is his character that when he sees injustice happening, he fights for justice and does not step back".

"That is why Rahul covered four thousand kilometres from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and then travelled from Manipur to Mumbai. These were journeys to understand your problems. These were trips that told the country that the direction of politics in the country was going wrong. We have to fix that," the Congress general secretary said.

Priyanka Gandhi also talked about scrapping the Agniveer scheme for recruitment in the armed forces and restoring the earlier permanent recruitment programme and filling 30 lakh vacant posts in the central government ministries.

Earlier in a post on X, she said her party's 100-year-old relationship with the people of Rae Bareilly has entered a new era and the people of the constituency are once again ready for its leadership.

The BJP has fielded its UP minister Dinesh Pratap Singh from the seat, which will see voting in the fifth phase on May 20.

Rahul Gandhi had filed nomination from Rae Bareilly constituency on Friday last. (PTI)

India to formally convey to ATCM its plans to built new research station in Antarctica

NEW DELHI, May 8: India will formally convey to the governing authority of Antarctica its plans to develop a new research station in the icy continent when the body meets for its annual meeting in Kochi later this month.

The 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) and the 26th Meeting of the Committee for Environmental Protection will be held in Kochi from May 20-30 where countries engaged in research in the southern polar region will share the outcome of their scientific pursuits and also their future plans.

"This year, we are going to inform the ATCM that we are planning to go for a revamp of our research station Maitri. Revamp means, Maitri is very old, we have to re-construct," M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said in an interaction with PTI Editors here.

India has two active research stations - Maitri and Bharti - in Antarctica. The first research station, Dakshin Gangotri, set up in 1983, had to be abandoned



after it sank in the snow.

Among the scientific community, Maitri, which was built about 35 years ago, is called a village, while the 12-

year-old Bharti is a state-of-the-art facility with all the trappings of a luxury hotel, but without the elaborate staff. "Our Maitri station was built more

than 30 years back. So, it is now an old building. We have to rebuild the Maitri station. We are planning to rebuild the new Maitri station very near to the ex-

isting station. We will inform the ATCM about our plans," said Vijay Kumar, senior scientist in the Ministry of Earth Sciences and Head of the Host Country Secretariat of the ATCM.

He said the approval of the ATCM is required for any big activity in the Antarctic region.

Once the Maitri-2 research station is built, the Maitri station is expected to be turned into a summer camp and designated as a monument.

Also on the agenda of the ATCM are plans to regulate tourism in Antarctica, which is the Earth's only continent without an indigenous population and is governed by the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) which was signed in 1961.

For the 2022-23 season, the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) reported 32,730 cruise-only visitors, 71,346 landed visitors and 821 deep-field visitors.

"The problem is that tourism in Antarctica is not properly regulated, so this year there is a discussion of the regulation of that," he said.

The last major decision on tourism was a measure passed in 2009 that prohibited cruise ships carrying more than 500 passengers from making landings in Antarctica.

Key items on the ATCM agenda include strategic planning for sustainable management of Antarctica and its resources; policy, legal, and institutional operations; biodiversity prospecting; inspections and exchange of information and data; research, collaboration, capacity building and cooperation; addressing climate change impacts; development of tourism framework; and promoting awareness.

India has proposed the name of senior diplomat and former Deputy National Security Advisor Pankaj Saran as the Chair of the 46th ATCM.

Over 350 delegates from more than 60 countries are expected to attend the ATCM and CEP meetings this year hosted by the National Centre for Polar and Oceanic Research (NCPOR) at Lulu Bolgatty International Convention Centre (LBICC) in Kochi. (PTI)

Live-in relationship an imported philosophy, against expectations of Indian tenets: Chhattisgarh HC

BILASPUR, May 8: Live-in relationship is an "imported philosophy" and against the "expectations of Indian tenets", the Chhattisgarh High Court has observed, holding that the institution of marriage no longer controls the people as it did in the past.

The division bench of Justices Goutam Bhaduri and Sanjay S Agrawal made the observation while dismissing an appeal of a man seeking custody of a child born from his live-in relationship with a 36-year-old woman.

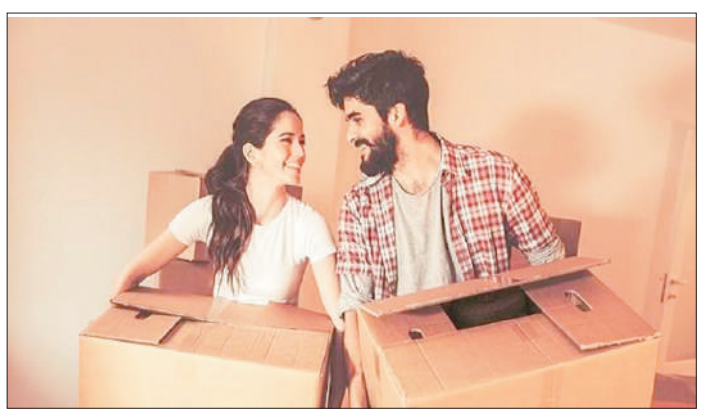
The HC said that "live-in relationship which is followed in certain sect of the society still continues as a stigma in the Indian culture as it is an imported philosophy contrary to the general expectations of Indian tenets".

The order was passed on April 30 and a copy was made available recently.

In his plea, Abdul Hameed Siddiqui (43) of Dantewada district said that he was in a live-in relationship with a woman from a different faith and she gave birth to a child.

He moved the HC, located in the state's Bilaspur district, after a family court in Dantewada in December last year rejected his plea for the child's custody, he said.

As per the HC's order, Siddiqui in his petition said he was in a live-in re-



lationship with the woman for three years before marrying her in 2021 without conversion.

As per Siddiqui's petition, the order said, a child was born out of their relationship on August 31, 2021. On August 10, 2023, he found the mother and child missing. That year, he filed a habeas corpus petition seeking that the woman be produced before the HC.

The woman had told the HC that she was living with her parents as per her own wish. Later, Siddiqui again moved the HC after the Dantewada family court did not give him the child's custody.

The respondent (the woman) was his second wife, while Siddiqui had three children from his first wife, as per

the HC order.

In the HC, Siddiqui's counsel said the two had married under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, as it was an inter-faith union. Under the Mahomedan Law, the counsel claimed, Siddiqui was allowed to perform a second marriage. Calling the marriage between Siddiqui and the woman valid, the counsel said his client was entitled to the child's custody as he was the natural guardian. He prayed that the family court's order be set aside.

The woman's lawyer contended that since she did not convert, the claim of a valid second marriage and to bring it under the ambit of the Act of 1954 "when the first wife is living" is not permissible.

In such a situation, Siddiqui cannot claim to be a legal guardian of the child born out of a live-in relationship, argued the woman's lawyer.

Dismissing Siddiqui's plea, the HC said it was not inclined to stay the family court's decision.

The HC said that "the provisions of personal law cannot be invoked before any court of law until and unless the same is pleaded and proved as custom".

"...The close inspection of society shows that the institution of marriage no longer controls the people as it did in the past due to cultural influence of the Western Countries and this significant shifts and apathy towards matrimonial duties has probably given rise to the concept of live-in relationship," the court said.

However, it is crucial to understand and protect the women in such relationships, as they are most often the complainant and victim of violence by the inmate partners of live-in relationships, held the court.

"It is very easy for the married man to walk out of the live-in relationship and in such case the courts cannot shut their eyes to the vulnerable condition of the survivor of such a distressful live-in relationship and children born out of such relationship," it added. (PTI)

CBI takes over probe in INLD leader Nafe Singh Rathee murder case

NEW DELHI, May 8: The CBI has taken over the investigation into the killing of the Indian National Lok Dal's Haryana unit president Nafe Singh Rathee and a party worker by unidentified gunmen in February in Bahadurgarh near Delhi, officials said.

During the attack, three private gunmen hired by Rathee for security had also sustained injuries when the assailants opened fire on the former MLA's SUV.



The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has re-registered the case on the recommendation of the Haryana government, the officials said, adding that it was routed to the agency by the Centre through a notification on April 26.

The central probe agency has named seven accused, including former BJP MLA Nareesh Kaushik, in its case, the officials said.

The other six accused are Karambir Rathee, Ramesh Rathee, Satish Rathee, Gaurav Rathee, Rahul and Kamal, they said.

They added that an FIR filed under IPC sections of criminal conspiracy, murder, among others has

been filed against the accused in the case.

The 67-year-old MLA from Bahadurgarh and INLD worker Jai Kishan were killed when unidentified assailants opened fire on Rathee's SUV on February 25.

Rathee was elected from Bahadurgarh twice in 1996 and 2005.

The attack, which took place two months before the Lok Sabha elections, drew sharp criticism from the opposition parties which questioned the law and order condition in the BJP-ruled state.

According to the statement of surviving driver Rakesh, a white-coloured car was following their vehicle.

Rakesh tried to speed away but had to stop as the Barahi railway crossing was shut.

Suddenly, five assailants came out of the car and shouted that they teach them a lesson for their enmity with Satish, Karambir, Ramesh and Nareesh and opened fire at them, Rakesh said in his complaint, which is a part of the CBI's FIR, the officials said. (PTI)

Fire breaks out at Patna Museum complex



PATNA, May 8: A fire broke out on Wednesday in a new building of the Patna Museum complex, which underwent a major revamp in the past few years, according to officials.

The historic Patna Museum, home to a collection of rich artefacts, rare paintings and 200 million-year-old fossilised tree trunk, has been closed for visitors since June 1 last year to undertake a revamp of its 96-year-old building.

"The fire broke out in a section of a newly constructed building, which is an extension of the old heritage building of the Patna Museum. Several fire tenders were pressed into service. However, no major injury has been reported so far," a senior official at the museum said.

This new wing, built to the west of the old museum building, will also house a gallery, he said, adding the fire has been contained.

It remains to be ascertained if any damage was caused to any artefacts in the incident. A project on redevelopment of the museum building, located on the old Patna-Gaya Road, is currently underway, whose foundation stone was laid by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in August 2020.

Besides, refurbishment of the heritage building being done as part of a redevelopment project, its old galleries will be redesigned, rearranged and curated in a new way to showcase the artefacts and other historic items in a better manner, officials had earlier said. Many old artefacts, which were earlier housed in the heritage building of the museum, have been shifted to the storage space located in one of the new extension wings.

One of the most striking and recognisable buildings of the capital city, the Patna Museum building was constructed in 1928 with two identical ornate gateways - the 'In Gate' and the 'Out Gate'. The old heritage gates of the museum were recently demolished and replaced with new gates built in similar style, sparking criticism from various scholars and heritage lovers.

The 'Out Gate' had suffered damage in early 2023 and later the 'In Gate' was also damaged during the redevelopment work, and heritage lovers had appealed to the government to repair and restore the old gates. (PTI)

Railways laid on an average 7.41 km tracks daily in 10 years, RTI response reveals

NEW DELHI, May 8: The Indian Railways has laid on an average 7.41 km of tracks, which include new line construction as well as doubling, tripling and gauge conversion of existing lines in the past ten years, a response of an application under the Right to Information (RTI) Act from the Railways Ministry revealed.

According to data provided by the ministry, it laid a total of 27057.7 kms of railway tracks in ten years from 2014-15 to 2023-24 which covers construction of new lines, doubling as well as tripling of existing lines and conversion from meter gauge to broad gauge.

"When I calculate the data, the daily average km of track-laying work in ten years comes around 7.41 km," said Madhya Pradesh-based Chandra Shekhar Gaur, who had filed the application. Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw during recent press briefings said the Indian Railways is currently adding about 15 km of new tracks every day.

"Last year, the Railways added 5,200 km of new tracks which is equivalent to the entire network of Switzerland. This year we are adding 5,500 kms. From 4 km per day in 2014, we are now adding about 15 km per day of the new tracks," Vaishnaw said during a press conference in the Rail Bhawan on February 2, 2024.

The RTI response shows that in 2022-23, the Railways laid 3,901 km total tracks, including new (473 km), doubling (3185.53 km) and gauge conversion (242.2).

The Indian Railways' website, which shows such statistics, hasn't been updated as it still shows data up to 2021-22. The officials said that 2022-23 can be seen as an unprecedented year for the Railways as it laid the highest kms of tracks ever in its history.

"In July 2021, Ashwini Vaishnaw was given charge of the Railway Ministry and it was under his leadership that the Railways achieved a historic feat by laying 3,901 km of tracks which comes around 10.68 km per day. This was unprecedented," said a railway official, close to infrastructure projects.

He added, "The significant achievement was made due to increase in budgetary allocation, simplification of the work allotment process and expediting the process of work order."

Gaur said that the Railways, despite making significant progress, failed to continue the momentum as the total track laying work came down from 3,901 km in 2022-23 to 2,966 km in 2023-24 making it 8.12 km per day. (PTI)

AI Express cancels over 90 flights on cabin crew woes; thousands of passengers stranded at airports

NEW DELHI/KOCHI, May 8: Air India Express has cancelled more than 90 flights since Tuesday night with a section of senior cabin crew reporting sick to protest against alleged mismanagement at the Tata Group-owned airline, leaving thousands of passengers stranded at various airports in the country. Scores of flights have also been delayed and the airline's passengers, mostly scheduled to travel to the Gulf nations, protested at airports in Kerala against flight cancellations as many of them were informed only after the security checks.

The civil aviation ministry on Wednesday sought a report from Air India Express on the flight cancellations and also asked the airline to resolve the issues promptly.

On Wednesday, sources told PTI that more than 200 cabin crew are believed to have reported sick to protest against the alleged mismanagement at the airline.

The cabin crew shortage has resulted in the cancellation of more than 90 flights since Tuesday night and scores of flights were delayed.

Flight disruptions are happening at various airports, including Kochi, Calicut, Delhi and Bengaluru. Domestic as well as international services, including to various Gulf countries, have also been hit, they added.

An Air India Express spokesperson said the airline is engaging with the cabin crew members to understand the reasons for reporting sick and also apologised for the flight disruptions. Discontent has been brewing among a section of the cabin crew at the low-cost carrier for some time now, especially after the start of the process to merge AIX Connect, formerly AirAsia India, with itself.

The latest development at Air India Express comes a month after Tata Group full-service carrier Vistara witnessed pilot woes, forcing it to temporarily cut down capacity by 10 per cent, or 25-30 flights daily.

As part of consolidating its airline business, Tata Group is merging Air India Express and AIX Connect, as well as Vistara with Air India.

The sources also said there was chaos at some airports due to the sudden cancellation of flights, including to overseas destinations.

The airline is to operate 360 daily flights during the summer schedule that started in the last week of March.

"A section of our cabin crew has reported sick at the last minute, starting last night, resulting in flight delays and cancellations."

"While we are engaging with the crew to understand the reasons behind these occurrences, our teams are actively addressing this issue to minimise any inconvenience caused to our guests as a result," the Air India Express spokesperson said in a statement.

Apologising to the customers for the "unexpected disruption", the spokesperson said those impacted by the cancellations will be offered a full refund or complimentary rescheduling to another date.

Last month, a union representing a section of the Air India Express cabin crew alleged that the airline is being mismanaged and there is a lack of equality in the treatment of the staff.

Air India Express Employees Union (AIXEU), a registered union, which claims to represent around 300 cabin crew members, mostly seniors, had also alleged

that mismanagement of the affairs has affected the morale of the employees.

On Wednesday, a woman passenger, who was to travel from Kannur to Sharjah with twin babies and her husband on an Air India Express flight, said she has to rejoin work on May 9, but the airline was offering her a flight from Kochi only on May 10.

"What would be the point in me travelling on May 10? If I do not reach there before May 9, my boss will say not to come and I will lose my job," she told the media. "Guests flying with us today are requested to check if their flight is affected, before heading to the airport," the airline spokesperson said.

A civil aviation ministry official on Wednesday said the ministry has called for a report from Air India Express regarding cancellation of flights and asked them to resolve issues promptly.

The airline has also been advised to ensure facilities to passengers as per DGCA norms, the official said.

Meanwhile, the Leader of Opposition in Kerala Assembly V D Satheesan wrote to Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Sinha highlighting the plight of the passengers and seeking his urgent intervention to ensure alternative travel arrangements for the affected people.

"Many people heading to the Middle East face the risk of losing their employment since they will be unable to return on time," Satheesan said.

CPI state secretary Binoy Viswam too sought urgent intervention of the ministry to solve the travel problems of passengers. (PTI)

News channel cameraman killed in elephant attack; Kerala CM, LoP condole

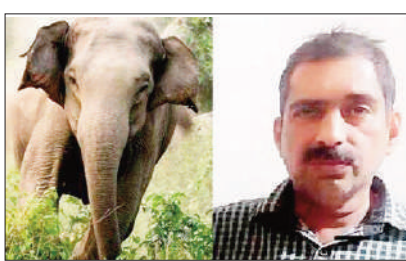
PALAKKAD (KERALA), May 8: In a shocking incident, a cameraman of a leading Malayalam news channel was killed in a wild elephant attack while reporting in this north Kerala district on Wednesday.

A V Mukesh (34), working with Mathrubhumi News, was seriously injured in the elephant attack when he and the reporter were capturing visuals of the movement of the strayed elephant herd, channel sources said.

The tragedy struck the hapless cameraman when he was shooting the visuals of jumbos crossing a river in a place located between Malambuzha and Kanjikode.

It is an area that witnesses frequent straying of wild elephants, locals said.

Though the reporter and the driver of the vehicle could manage to run away to safety, Mukesh was attacked and seriously



injured by a jumbo.

He was rushed to a nearby hospital but he could not be saved, they said.

Hailing from Parappanangadi in Malappuram district, Mukesh had been working in the Palakkad bureau of the Mathrubhumi News for the last one year.

He had been part of the New Delhi bureau of the channel for several years.

Mukesh also proved his skills in report-

ing by penning over 100 articles in Mathrubhumi online as part of a column titled "Athijeevanam", in which he depicted the lives of marginalised people.

His colleagues remembered that his articles in the column helped invite attention of authorities and the general public to the plight of the poor and marginalised.

They also said Mukesh used to provide financial assistance to those persons whom he had mentioned in his column by collecting money from his salary.

He is survived by his wife.

Meanwhile, people from various walks of life, including Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly V D Satheesan and ministers A K Saseendran, M B Rajesh, Saji Cheriyan and others condoned the shocking demise of the cameraman. (PTI)

'Wrinkles Acche Hain': Un-ironed clothes can help fight climate change

NEW DELHI, May 8: Nearly 1,25,000 kg of carbon emission can be saved every Monday through the 'Wrinkles Acche Hain', an initiative under which CSIR workforce can now wear un-ironed clothes on Mondays, Prof Chetan Singh Solanki of IIT Bombay said.

However, the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), has clarified that no circular or official order has been issued by the CSIR HQ to its labs asking the staff to refrain from wearing ironed clothes.

"To put the record straight, during the Earth Day Celebrations on April 23, 2024, Prof. Chetan Solanki from IIT-Bombay, after installing the climate clock at CSIR-HQ, had in his speech expressed his view on these

lines," the CSIR said in a post.

The 'Wrinkles Acche Hain' initiative aims to remind everyone about saving energy, protecting the environment, and spreading awareness about climate change.

Chetan Singh Solanki, founder of the Energy Swaraj Movement, said, "We are saving nearly 1,25,000 kg of carbon emission every Monday. One of the simplest solutions to climate change is 'Not-Doing-Something' (NDS)".

"Our 'Wrinkles Achhe Hain' (WAH) campaign is picking up. In this, we are asking people to wear non-ironed clothes on Monday," he said. By not ironing one pair of clothes, we can save up to 200 grams of carbon emission, he said. (PTI)

IIT Madras raised record ₹ 513 crore from alumni, corporates in 2023-24



NEW DELHI, May 8: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras raised a record funding of Rs 513 crore from its alumni, industry and individual donors during 2023-24, officials said on Wednesday.

The institute also attracted total new pledges of ₹ 717 crore from alumni and corporate partners during FY 2023-24.

"The funds received would be used for technology research and development as well as for deploying technology already built by IIT Madras, in

various parts of the country based on the societal needs. In addition, it is also used to support deserving students with scholarships as well as the Sports Excellence Admission programme which is also being supported from this year's philanthropic funds raised.

"Steep academic growth needs steep rise in funding. Thanks to all CSR partners and alumni of IIT Madras for trusting and support us in raising this all-time high amount of funding," V Kamakoti, Director, IIT Madras said.

For the second consecutive year, the

institute set a new record for the highest funding raised in one financial year by an academic institute to undertake tech research, student projects as well as to develop cutting-edge infrastructure in the campus.

"This historic high of ₹ 513 crore is a 135 per cent increase from the amount raised in the previous financial year of 2022-23, when ₹ 218 crore was raised. The number of donors giving over ₹ one crore to the institute is 48 (16 alumni donors and 32 corporate partners).

"The funds were raised from IIT Madras alumni and individual philanthropists in addition to the CSR (corporate social responsibility) funds and grants from Indian as well as multinational corporate firms," Kamakoti said.

The fund-raising was led by IIT Madras' Office of Institutional Advancement, overseen by the IIT Madras Alumni Charitable Trust. The total amount raised through alumni alone during 2023-24 was Rs 367 crore, which is an increase of 282 per cent as compared to the previous year. Their focus areas included cutting-edge research across various social impact themes, infrastructure, and scholarships for students, besides establishing Chair Professorships for research in specific areas. (PTI)

DRDO to collaborate with IIT Bhubaneswar for AI-driven surveillance, other projects



BHUBANESWAR, May 8: Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will collaborate with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar for artificial intelligence (AI) driven surveillance and other projects, officials said.

A meeting was held between DRDO and IIT Bhubaneswar officials here on Tuesday. Binay Das,

director general (DG) of Electronics and Communication Systems (ECS) cluster, DRDO, and many senior scientists and officials of both institutions were present in the meeting.

During the meeting, nine sanctioned projects of the ECS Cluster of DRDO were handed over to IIT Bhubaneswar while another 7 projects are in process to be sanctioned

with ₹ 18 crore funding.

IIT Bhubaneswar will work on the sanctioned projects, which would be beneficial in electronics warfare, AI-driven surveillance, power systems, radar systems etc, officials said.

S R Samantaray, head of the School of Electrical sciences of IIT Bhubaneswar and DRDO will con-

tribute to the emerging research and development need of defence applications, creating a platform for 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat'.

This form of collaboration will enhance the sustainability of defence research programmes and will be part of the eco-system for nation building, he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Binay Das advised researchers and faculty members associated with various DRDO-sanctioned projects to work systematically with proper review and risk management systems to complete the projects in time and come up with unique solutions. He said that DRDO is going through a transformation from technology chasers to become technology enablers and trendsetters.

"The goal is now to move beyond attaining self-reliance to setting standards for the Indian armed forces, for others across the globe, to emulate. In this context, this collaboration, and the further opportunity to set up a Centre of Excellence at IIT Bhubaneswar would prove crucial," he added. (PTI)

Huma Qureshi returning as Pushpa Pandey for 'Jolly LLB 3'

'Freedom at Midnight' ropes in five international actors to cast



NEW DELHI, May 8: The makers of political thriller series "Freedom at Midnight" have added five international actors to the cast.

The five actors -- Luke McGibney, Andrew Cullum, Richard Teverson, Alistair Finlay, and Cordelia Bugeja -- will play pivotal roles in the Sony LIV series, which comes from filmmaker Nikkhil Advani and aims to bring alive defining moments from India's partition, a press release said.

StudioNext and Advani's EMMY Entertainment are co-producing the show, based on the book of the same name by Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins.

"Jubilee" star Sidhant Gupta, Chirag Vohra of "Scam 1992" fame and popular TV actor Rajendra Chawla are playing Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, respectively, in the series.

McGibney and Bugeja are essaying the roles of Lord Louis Mountbatten and Lady Edwina Mountbatten, the last Viceroy and Vicereine of India, respectively.

Finlay has been cast as Archibald Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief and Viceroy of India preceding Mountbatten. Cullum is portraying Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1945 to 1951.

Teverson is starring as Cyril Radcliffe, the chairman of the Boundary Commission for the Partition of India. According to the makers, "Freedom at Midnight" is an epic political thriller drama that highlights "several incidents from the year of India's independence and interconnected stories about crucial events and personalities who played a significant role in writing the country's history as we know today".

Advani is attached as the showrunner and director on the series. The story is penned by Abhinandan Gupta, Adwitiya Kareng Das, Gundeep Kaur, Divya Nidhi Sharma, Revanta Sarabhai, and Ethan Taylor. (PTI)

MUMBAI, May 8: Actor Huma Qureshi is set to reprise her role of Pushpa Pandey in the third installment of the courtroom comedy franchise "Jolly LLB".

Actors Akshay Kumar and Arshad Warsi recently started filming for the project, titled "Jolly LLB 3". Warsi played the role of Jagdish Tyagi aka Jolly in 2013's "Jolly LLB" and Kumar starred in the 2017 sequel, titled "Jolly LLB 2", as Jagdishwar Mishra.

Qureshi had featured as Pandey, the wife of Kumar's Jagdishwar Mishra, in "Jolly LLB 2".

"Pushpa Pandey is backkkkk and looking pretty in Pink #JollyLLB3. Clicked by the one and only @akshaykumar #pushpa #pink #onset @kangratalgies #nofilter needed when ur happy #blessed," the 37-year-old actor posted on Instagram on Tuesday evening.

Besides Warsi and Kumar, seasoned actor Saurabh Shukla, who essayed the role of Justice Sunderlal Tripathi in the earlier two movies, is also coming back for the third part, "Jolly LLB 3" is directed by Subhash Kapoor, and produced by Star Studios and Kangra Talkies.

Qureshi was most recently seen in "Tarla" as well as the third season of her hit series "Maharani". Her upcoming movie is "Pooja Meri Jaan", co-starring Mrunal Thakur. (PTI)



GRATITUDE FOREVER: Allu Arjun on 20 years of his Telugu hit 'Arya'

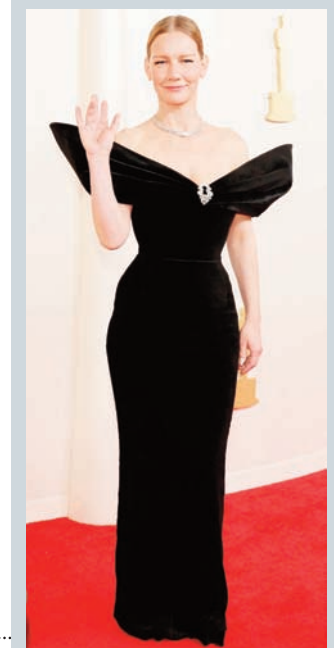
NEW DELHI, May 8: National Award-winning actor Allu Arjun on Tuesday marked the 20th anniversary of his blockbuster movie "Arya". The 2004 film was a major milestone in Arjun's career after he made his debut in Telugu cinema with 2003's "Gangotri". "Twenty years of 'Arya'. It's not just a movie... It's a moment in time that changed the course of my life. Gratitude forever," the 42-year-old star wrote in a post on social media platform X.

"Arya", in which Arjun played the role of the titular protagonist, a free-spirited guy who falls in love with a girl named Geetha, had marked the directorial debut of popular filmmaker Sukumar.

The actor and the filmmaker later collaborated for "Arya 2", the 2009 follow-up that also featured Kajal Aggarwal and Navdeep. After the "Arya" films, Arjun and Sukumar reunited for the 2021 blockbuster movie "Pushpa 1: The Rise", which went on to become one of the biggest money-spinners of the year earning over Rs 350 crore. The film depicted the rise of a low-wage labourer (played by Arjun) in the smuggling syndicate of red sandalwood, a rare wood that grows only in the Seshachalam Hills of Andhra Pradesh state.

The duo are currently awaiting "Pushpa 2: The Rule", which is currently slated for release on August 15. (PTI)

Sandra Huller, Willem Dafoe team up for 'Late Flame'



LOS ANGELES, May 8: Oscar-nominated actors Sandra Huller and Willem Dafoe are set to feature together in the upcoming movie 'Late Flame'.

Kent Jones, who made his feature directorial debut with 2018's 'Diane', will helm the movie from a script by 'May December' scribe Samy Burch. It will be produced by Pamela Koffler and Christine Vachon for Killer Films.

'Late Flame' follows the story of "Ed Saxberger (Dafoe), who wrote a book of poetry a long time ago that no one ever cared about. When a group of young artists rediscover his work, he must reassess his genius."

The wild card in the group is Gloria (Huller), a talented and mercurial theatre actress who is all set to be admired by Saxberger, this legendary figure from a gritty New York golden age, according to the official synopsis.

Huller, 46, was recently seen in two Oscar-nominated movies -- Jonathan Glazer's 'The Zone of Interest' and Justine Triet's 'Anatomy of a Fall'.

"The Zone of Interest" had won the Oscar for Best International Feature at the 2024 Academy Awards. Dafoe has been nominated four times at the Oscars. He earned nods for his performances in 'At Eternity's Gate', 'Platoon', 'Shadow Of The Vampire' and 'The Florida Project'. (PTI)

Met Gala 2024: Alia Bhatt walks in floral saree by Sabyasachi Mukherjee

NEW DELHI, May 8: Bollywood star Alia Bhatt returned to the Met Gala carpet, this year opting for a floral saree by ace designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee.

In her second outing at the prestigious fashion gala, held annually at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the actor garnered spotlight with her elegant saree which extended into a 30-foot-trail.

Bhatt's couture saree, crafted by 163 artisans, paid homage to the official dress code for the 2024 Met Gala -- "The Garden of Time".

It featured extensive hand embroidery with silk floss, beads, sequins, semi-precious stones and fringed with glass beads.

The hand-crafted blouse was studded with emeralds, Basra pearls, tourmalines and multi-coloured sapphires, according to the official Instagram page of the designer.

To complete the look, Bhatt wore Sabyasachi High Jewellery's Bengal Royal collection studded with tourmalines, sapphires, emeralds and diamonds.

The 31-year-old actor had made her debut at the Met Gala in 2023 with a Prabal Gurung gown.

In her Instagram post, Bhatt said the outfit took "a life of its own" as the team went about creating an Indian interpretation of Gala's universal theme.

"Creating this has been quite an experience... fun and stressful in equal parts. It has taken a collective effort of 163 dedicated individuals, including master craftspeople, embroiderers, artists, and dyers, investing a total of 1965-man hours to create this ethereal saree."

"As I wear this outfit, I feel incredibly grateful to embody this exquisite creation, a testament to boundless love and painstaking effort," the actor wrote, while giving a shout-out to her collaborators for the dress.

Bhatt was not the only Indian personality to walk the Met Gala carpet.

Industrialist Isha Ambani dazzled in a couture saree gown by Rahul Mishra, featuring a stunning long floral train and intricate hand embroidery.

Socialite Natasha Poonawalla, who has been regular at the Met Gala, also turned heads in a custom-made ensemble dress from Maison Margiela's Artisanal Collection, curated by iconic designer John Galiano. (PTI)



The Olympic torch is being welcomed in French port city of Marseille with fanfare and high security

MARSEILLE (FRANCE), May 8: Paris Games organizers have promised "fantastic" celebrations as the arrival of a majestic ship carrying the Olympic torch from Greece is expected to draw a huge crowd Wednesday in the southern French city of Marseille, where the Old Port has been placed under high security.

Paris 2024 Olympics Organizing Committee President Tony Estanguet expressed his emotion at the torch's arrival in France.

"The return of the Games to our country will be a fantastic celebration," he said.

The torch was lit in Greece last month before it was offi-

cially handed to France. It left Athens aboard a three-mast ship named Belem, which was first used in 1896, and spent twelve days at sea.

More than a thousand boats will accompany the Belem's parade around the Bay of Marseille. The ship will then dock on a pontoon that looks like an athletics track in the Old Port.

The welcoming ceremony will include a demonstration by the jets of the Patrouille de France, the acrobatic team of the French air force.

"As a former athlete, I know how important the start of a competition is. That is why we chose Marseille, because it's definitely one of the cities

most in love with sports," said Estanguet, a former Olympic canoeing star with gold medals from the 2000, 2004 and 2012 Games.

Olympic swimmer Florent Manaudou has been chosen to be the first carrier of the flame in France. Manaudou won four Olympic medals and he's the brother of swimmer Laure Manaudou, who won three Olympic medals at Athens in 2004. "We are extremely proud," Marseille mayor Benoît Payan said. "This is where it all begins."

The show will "dazzle the world," said Payan, adding that up to 150,000 spectators are expected in the Old Port.



Marseille people "have a sense of celebration, a sense of the game, sport and Olympism in their guts," he said, recalling that the city was founded by Greek colonists some 2,600 years ago.

Payan said all efforts have

been made to ensure security underwater, at sea, in the air and on the ground.

Heavy police and military presence was seen patrolling Marseille's city center Tuesday, as a military helicopter flew over the Old Port, where a wide range of barriers have been set up.

"There are various security threats that weigh on this event," the biggest being "the terrorist threat," French Interior Ministry spokesperson Camille Chaize said.

"We're employing various measures, notably the elite National Gendarmerie Intervention Group unit, which will be present in the torch relay from

beginning to end," she said.

The torch relay will start Thursday in Marseille, before heading to Paris through iconic places across the country, from the world-famous Mont Saint-Michel to D-Day landing beaches in Normandy and the Versailles Palace.

The Olympic cauldron will be lit after the Games' opening ceremony that will take place on the River Seine on July 26.

The cauldron will be lit at a location in Paris that is being kept top-secret until the day itself. Among reported options are such iconic spots as the Eiffel Tower and the Tuileries Gardens outside the Louvre Museum. (AP)

Dortmund beat PSG 1-0 to reach Champions League final

PARIS, May 8: London's calling, but not for Kylian Mbappé. When Borussia Dortmund's players rushed over to their fans wearing yellow "London 24" T-shirts and joined in the celebrations after knocking out Paris Saint-Germain to reach the Champions League final on Tuesday, Mbappé had long left the field.

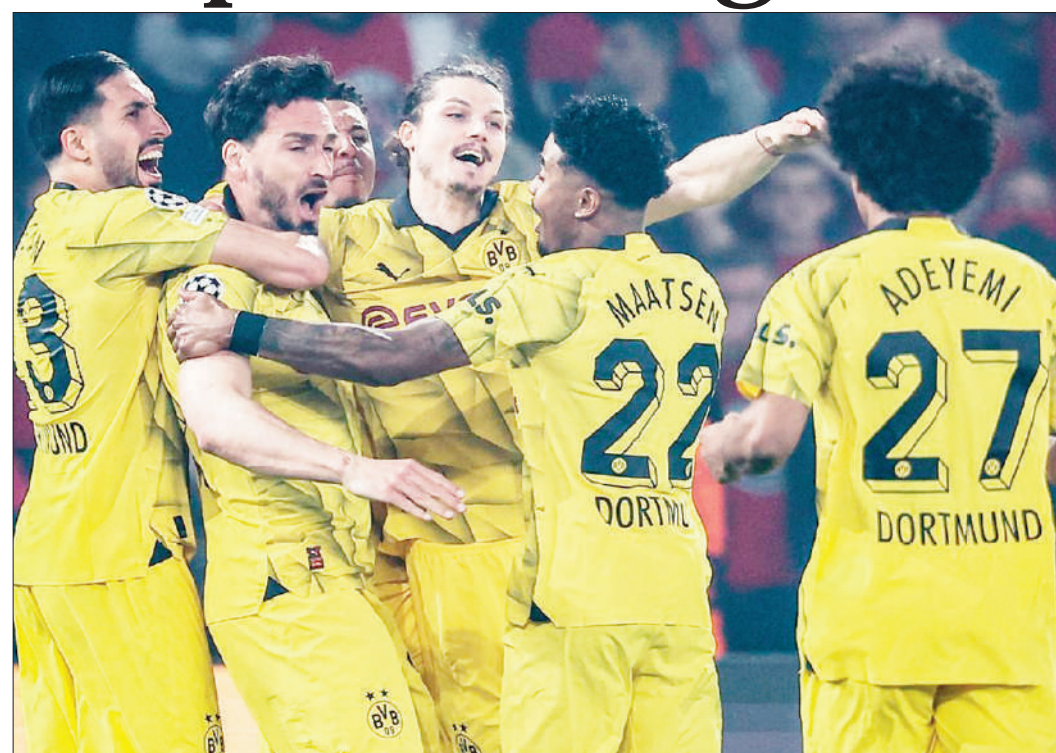
Wembley Stadium on June 1 is the final stop on Dortmund's quest for the Champions League trophy, by which time Mbappé will have played his last game for PSG having failed to win the trophy the club's cash-rich Qatari owners so crave.

Central defender Mats Hummels headed Dortmund into the final as the German team won 1-0 at PSG.

Moments after Warren Zaïre-Emery missed an open goal for PSG, Hummels rose unchallenged to head in Julian Brandt's corner from the left in the 50th minute.

Dortmund advanced 2-0 on aggregate and largely contained Mbappé, who is leaving at the end of the season.

PSG exerted late pressure. Goalkeeper Gregor Kobel palmed away Mbappé's low shot, then pushed Mbappé's deflected close-range effort onto the crossbar with a superb one-handed save. The Parc des



Princes crowd groaned when midfielder Vitorino's thumping 25-meter strike rattled the woodwork. Coach Edin Terzic's team will play either record 14-time champion Real Madrid or six-time winner Bayern Munich on June 1 at Wembley Stadium. Madrid and Bayern drew 2-2 in the first leg and play on Wednesday.

"Extremely proud. I'm very happy," Terzic said. "We beat a team like PSG two times and we again kept a clean sheet. We started really well and kept them away from the goal."

Dortmund is on course for its second Champions League trophy after winning in 1997 and a third European trophy, having

won the now defunct UEFA Cup Winners' Cup in 1966. Dortmund also reached the Champions League final in 2013, losing to Bayern.

"Indescribable. After more than 10 years, I am in the final with Borussia again," said Marco Reus, Dortmund's veteran midfielder who is leaving

the team after this season. "How we won the game, no one will ask tomorrow. Shots against the post won't matter tomorrow."

For PSG, it's another season ending without raising the trophy its cash-rich Qatari owners have chased after by spending huge amounts on star players like Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Neymar, Lionel Messi and Mbappé. PSG lost its only Champions League final in 2020 to Bayern.

"Efficiency, that's what we were missing," PSG captain Marquinhos said. "We should have defended better. They scored from a corner and a counter-attack (in the first leg). We created more chances but they won both games."

As Dortmund's players celebrated, Mbappé looked dejected as he trudged for the last time in a Champions League game wearing a PSG jersey. He is widely expected to join Madrid.

Moments before Dortmund's goal, Zaïre-Emery somehow hit the post from two meters out after Gonçalo Ramos flicked on Mbappé's cross from the left.

Now it's a do-or-die situation for all Indian wrestlers at Istanbul where the two finalists in each category will be awarded the quotas. A third quota will be given to the wrestlers who emerges winner in the bout between the two bronze medalists.

ISTANBUL, May 8: The immensely-talented Aman Sehrawat and the experienced Deepak Punia will be followed keenly when they take to the mat to lock the men's freestyle quotas for Paris Olympics at the World Qualifiers beginning here on Thursday.

It is the last event to secure spot for the Paris Games.

There were high hopes that U23 world champion Aman would qualify for the Games either at the World Championships or the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek but both the chances were lost.

While Aman (57kg) bumped into a strong opponent in Gulomjon Abdullaev in the quota-deciding bout in Bishkek, both World Championships silver medallist Deepak (86kg) and Sujet Kalkal (65kg) could not reach Bishkek on time after being stuck in Dubai due to storm.

Now it's a do-or-die situation for all Indian wrestlers at Istanbul where the two finalists in each category will be awarded the quotas. A third quota will be given to the wrestlers who emerges winner in the bout between the two bronze medalists.

The tournament will begin with Greco Roman style and followed by women's and freestyle on the last two days of the four-day qualifying competition.

None of the Indian men's wrestlers has so far got a quota and drawing a blank will be a huge embarrassment for the country that took some major strides in international wrestling before the protest against former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh halted the progress.

Endurance has always been the strong point of Indian wrestlers but their preparations have suffered in the absence of national camps and competitions due to protest.

Usually, the Indian wrestlers tire their opponents out but for that to happen, it is important to stretch the bout to full six minutes. It's a strategy that Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya have employed although the latter has always been aggressive and finishes the bout in a jiffy.

"If the bouts lasts full distance, Aman can beat any wrestler, so managing the first three minutes are crucial. He was obviously very disappointed for what happened in Bishkek," said coach Praveen Dahiya who trained him for four years before being shifted out of Chattrasal Stadium.

"There is no national camp for some time and because of that the sport has suffered. It has impacted the preparations adversely, then change in coaching staff also affects. The wrestler has a certain comfort and tuning with coaches they train and when they get changed, that also affects them I feel," he added.

If Aman fails to lock a quota, it would also mean that Tokyo Games silver medallist Ravi Dahiya would also lose a chance to compete in Paris.

He would bounce back in contention if Aman gets the 57kg quota and the national federation decides to have one final trial to decide who represents the country in the Summer Games, starting July 26.

Jaideep (74kg) Deepak (97kg) and Sumit Malik (125kg) also have one last chance to make the cut in men's free style. (PTI)

AIFF executive committee approves federation's PoSH Policy

NEW DELHI, May 8: Rocked by allegations of physical assault against its executive member Deepak Sharma, the All India Football Federation on Wednesday approved and implemented the AIFF Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Policy with immediate effect.

The decision was arrived at by the AIFF executive committee, following thorough deliberations and careful consideration, the federation said in a statement.

The AIFF PoSH Policy, which is based on the PoSH Act 2013, is aimed at ensuring a safe and inclusive environment within the football community.

It has been crafted and vetted by the AIFF legal team.

The decision comes weeks after allegations of physical abuse against Sharma. The executive committee member who is also the owner of Himachal Pradesh-based football club Khad FC was accused by two women footballers of physically assaulting them on the night of March 28 in a drunken state.

Following the incident, Sharma was arrested by Goa Police and was later released on bail.

In another case, a woman employee at the AIFF headquarters here had lodged a "verbal" com-

Soccer fans now have a day to celebrate the world's most popular sport - May 25

UNITED NATIONS, May 8: Soccer fans around the world will now have a day to celebrate the world's most popular sport every year - May 25.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution Tuesday proclaiming May 25 as World Football Day. The sport is called football outside of the United States. The day marks the 100th anniversary of the first international soccer tournament in history with the representation of all regions which took place on May 25, 1924 during the summer Olympic games held in Paris, according to the resolution. The 193-member General Assembly adopted the resolution by consensus with

a bang of the gavel by its president, Dennis Francis, to applause from diplomats in the assembly chamber. It was co-sponsored by more than 160 countries. Libya's U.N. Ambassador Taher El-Sonni, who introduced the resolution, told the assembly, "Football or soccer as others call it is the number one game played and followed around the globe." But he stressed that soccer is more than just a game played by all ages on streets, in villages, schools and courtyards for fun and in competitions.

Because of its "unparalleled position" in the world of sports, El-Sonni said, "football serves as a universal language spoken across the globe, cutting across national,

cultural and socio-economic barriers." He said the game has become "a pivotal platform" championing gender equality and social inclusion, "a common ground where individuals from varying backgrounds converge, promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, respect and solidarity."

The resolution acknowledges "the global reach of football and its impact in various spheres, including commerce, peace and diplomacy, and recognizing that football creates a space for cooperation." It also recognizes "the fundamental role" of soccer's international governing body, FIFA, and the important role of regional and national soccer federations, as well as

relevant associations, in promoting the game. The resolution encourages all countries to support soccer and other sports as a tool to promote peace, development and the empowerment of women and girls. And it also encourages countries to adopt policies and programs to promote football and other sports and physical activities.

On May 25, the resolution "invites" all nations, U.N. bodies, international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector to observe World Football Day in line with national priorities "and to disseminate the advantages of football for all, including through educational and public awareness-raising activities." (AP)

Asia needs its best players to compete in own tournaments: ATF President Yuriy Polskiy

NEW DELHI, May 8: Determined to change the face of Asian tennis in his tenure, Yuriy Polskiy, the youngest ATF President, has exhorted the best players from the region to compete in Asian events before travelling abroad and has set his sights on developing the game in smaller tennis-playing nations such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Syria.

The 36-year-old Polskiy had won the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) presidential elections in December last year on the back of reforms in his home country Kazakhstan and wants to use his trouble-shooting experience to help nations struggling to popularise the game.

Polskiy is clear that Asia's strong players need to compete in their own events which should help upcoming players with exposure and learning, and a robust Asian tour and programme for U14 players with considerable financial support is the need of the hour. He is also clear that ATF would work in tandem with ATP

rather than competing with them and create a viable Asian tour with lots of tournaments in close vicinity that will reduce the travel expenses of players from the region.

Asia has only six players in the world's top-100 and it worries Polskiy.

"Asian tennis needs the participation of the best Asian players in Asian tournaments, because, quite often, they go to Europe, they go to North America, South America and it means that the local Asian players don't have a chance to compete with the best," Polskiy told PTI in an interview.

"And to go to Europe, it's very costly. So the ones who are good, they spend a lot of money, which can be redistributed, you know, in order to increase the base, like you will send not only the best ones to the tournaments, but the number two, three, four, because with the kids, you never know who will eventually be the best player.

"So, you need the competition inside the country, you need the competition inside of your region,



and you need the high competition in Asia."

Polskiy understands that Asia is very strong in the eastern countries such as Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, India, Thailand and Kazakhstan but the continent needs more tennis-playing nations.

"In recent years, Uzbekistan (grew), also Iran has a big history, and I feel that smaller nations like Iraq, Syria, Nepal, Myanmar, Timor-Leste and others, also deserve a chance, and they have big

population."

Polskiy said they are now working with the Grand Slams, with ITF, in order to improve the quality of tournaments in Asia. The ATF President said the players will get incentives for playing in Asia.

"We (should) give extra incentives to good Asian players to play on Asian circuit. So they don't spend their time competing for nothing, there is something meaningful they get, they get the ranking, they get the grants, there is an

Resurgent RCB take on erratic PBKS in battle of survival

DHARAMSALA, May 8: A resurgent Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look for their fourth consecutive victory when they face an unpredictable Punjab Kings as the two sides fight for survival in the Indian Premier League, here on Thursday.

After a horrendous start to the season, RCB have managed to claw their way back into the tournament. They have the winning momentum on their side, having won their last three games comprehensively.

The wins have not only boosted their sagging morale but also taken them to the seventh spot in the points table.

With eight points from 11 games, RCB can still make the playoffs if they win all their remaining three fixtures although the chances are slim.

Punjab Kings too stare at a similar situation. They occupy the eighth spot, having collected eight points from 11 games.

However, between the two -- only one team can reach the all-important 14 points mark.

Having beaten PBKS earlier in the season and heading to this clash with three wins on the trot, RCB will feel more confident than the hosts.

Virat Kohli remains consistent at the top, while skipper Faf du Plessis broke his string of poor scores with a belligerent knock in the last game.

Will Jacks also impressed with a match-winning century against GT, and



Cameron Green showcased his all-round skills with crucial contributions in runs and wickets against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Their bowling department has started clicking with Mohammed Siraj, who is in India's T20 World Cup squad, finally finding his rhythm.

Yash Dayal and Vijaykumar Vyshak also did well against GT and RCB will expect them to continue in the same vein.

PBKS, on the other hand, will be low on confidence having suffered an inex-

pliable batting collapse against Chennai Super Kings.

The Kings showcased their very best and worst against CSK. Their bowlers were all over the CSK batters but the batting unit choked.

It was an example of how Punjab's season has been this year -- unpredictable.

They have showcased their potential with away wins over Kolkata Knight Riders, when they recorded the highest successful run chase in T20 cricket, and CSK.

However, they have faced difficulties

getting the job done at home. They won just one out of five games in Mullanpur, their main home ground.

A change in venue to the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium also didn't go their way in the previous game here.

The team would hope to end its home run on a high but for that to happen, the PBKS unit has to fire in unison.

Squads:
Punjab Kings: Sam Curran (c), Matthew Short, Jonny Bairstow (wk), Prabhsharan Singh (wk), Jitesh Sharma (wk), Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidwath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Faf du Plessis (c), Glenn Maxwell, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar, Anuj Rawat, Dinesh Karthik, Suyash Prabhudessai, Will Jacks, Mahipal Lomror, Karn Sharma, Manoj Bhandage, Mayank Dagar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Akash Deep, Mohammed Siraj, Reece Topley, Himanshu Sharma, Rajan Kumar, Cameron Green, Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal, Tom Curran, Lockie Ferguson, Swapnil Singh, Saurav Chauhan.

Match starts 7.30 PM IST. (PTI)

India women eye T20I series clean-sweep against Bangladesh



SYLHET (BANGLADESH), May 8: The Indian women's cricket team would look to complete a 5-0 series whitewash when it faces a vanquished Bangladesh in the fifth and final T20 International of a weather-hit series here on Thursday.

The Indian bowlers have outperformed the batters, though two matches out of the four have been curtailed due to inclement weather. In the second match, India were to chase just 29 runs from 5.2 overs, and the batters got less overs to score.

Across four matches, India have only one fifty to show, by Shafali Verma (51) in the first match. Smriti Mandhana has a highest of 47 and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur has managed a best knock of 39 so far.

The performance does not reflect well on the team's batting core, considering that Bangladesh will host the women's T20 World Cup in October.

Mandhana and Kaur would be looking to grab the opportunity on Thursday and score big.

Kaur, especially, would be looking to carry the momentum after her 39 off 26 in the last match on Monday, which was a 14-over-a-side affair. India won the match by 56 runs under Duckworth-Lewis method. Shafali has been inconsistent, though she is the highest scorer for India with 84 runs in this series, which is one more than Mandhana (83). Kaur has 75 runs from the four matches.

On Thursday, the Indian batters will have the last chance to take as many lessons as possible from this tour, regarding conditions and pitches.

Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana's form has declined after a half century in her first match. She totals 86 runs from four matches.

Sultana will once again be the key for

Bangladesh's fortunes though she has not been among too many runs after making 51 in the first match on April 28.

The Indian bowlers have, however, done well on the slow pitches on offer here, with left-arm spinner Radha Yadav leading the chart with seven wickets.

She has found able support from pacers Pooja Vastrakar (5 wickets) and Renuka Singh (4), and off-spinner Shreyanka Patil (4).

Veteran Deepti Sharma has also taken five wickets after her fine 2/13 performance in the fourth match on Monday.

Bangladesh's Rabeya Khan is currently second in the bowling chart with six wickets from four matches. The 19-year-old pacer Marufa Akter has also impressed with five wickets from four matches.

On the batting front, Bangladesh will bank on Sultana to counter the experienced Indian attack. But she will need support from the likes of Dilara Akter and Murshida Khatun if Bangladesh are to snatch a consolation win.

Bangladesh's last T20I win over India came in 2023 at Mirpur, and Sultana was a part of that match.

The Teams (from):

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana, Dayalan Hemalatha, Deepti Sharma, S Sajana, Shafali Verma, Shreyanka Patil, Amanjot Kaur, Pooja Vastrakar, Asha Sobhana, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh, Radha Yadav, Renuka Singh Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Saika Ishaque.

Bangladesh: Nigar Sultana (c&wk), Murshida Khatun, Rubya Haider, Sobhana Mostary, Shorna Akter, Shorifa Khatun, Dilara Akter, Nahida Akter, Sultana Khatun, Ritu Moni, Rabeya Khan, Fahima Khatun, Marufa Akter, Fariha Trisna, Habiba Islam.

Match starts at 3.30 PM IST. (PTI)

Jaiswal has got very good chance of breaking my records: Brian Lara



NEW DELHI, May 8: Yashasvi Jaiswal's Test career is just nine games old but the great Brian Lara feels if there is anyone who can get close to his lofty feats, including the record 400 not out, it is the 22-year-old southpaw from India. Lara's high praise for Jaiswal doesn't come out of the blue. The left two-handers share a special bond, having spent a lot of time over the past year following their "4 am conversation" during the IPL when the West Indian was coaching Sunrisers Hyderabad and the young opener was in the Rajasthan Royals and SRH clash in the ongoing season.

A lot has changed since IPL 2023 with Jaiswal now becoming an integral part of India's Test and T20 team.

His exploits in the longest format stand out as he averages close to 70 with three hundreds including two double tons in the recent home series against England. What has impressed Lara is Jaiswal's ability to change gears as per the situation of the game.

"If I feel my records are threatened, Jaiswal has got a very good chance to do so. He has got capabilities, couple of double hundreds already. He is that good," Lara told PTI editors at its headquarters

in an interaction arranged by Star Sports where he is a commentator and expert for the ongoing IPL.

Lara, who recently turned 55, is one of the all-time greats of the game having amassed close to 12,000 runs in Tests and over 10,000 runs in ODIs. His record of the highest individual total, 400 not out against England in 2004, still stands tall.

Lara fondly looked back at his first meeting with Jaiswal when asked about a light moment they shared on the sidelines of the Rajasthan Royals and SRH clash in the ongoing season.

"The only thing I can reveal about that (conversation) is I think he is an outstanding young cricketer. What I like about him is that he is very humble and willing to work. The first time I met him (last year), I immediately found myself attached to him.

"After the game (SRH vs Royals), I went to the hotel with a friend of mine from the Caribbean who knew Jos Buttler. It was midnight and Jaiswal found me. I promise you I left the hotel at 4 in the morning.

"He just wanted to hear more and more and more. That is one of his amazing traits. His ability to

want to learn as much as possible. Our conversations are about trying to make him a better cricketer. I am available for anyone that has my number. I am happy to talk cricket."

Being a left-hander himself, it is natural for Lara to be biased towards that tribe. Another southpaw he has great admiration for is Abhishek Sharma with whom he spent time at SRH.

"Again he is someone who I met while I was batting coach of SRH. I spent two years there. I am allowed to a bit biased when I see a left-hander, I just love a left-hander. Myself and Abhishek have developed a very good relationship, these youngsters are very humble, they want to learn.

"What I like about these two, they want to get to great heights. I have great admiration for both."

The legend from Trinidad reckons that usually records are threatened by batters who score quickly and Jaiswal has that ability along with the hunger to bat long.

His 400 not out has not been surpassed in 20 years and Lara hopes he is still around to see the day when his record is broken.

"I think now, the pace that these guys are batting at. And you look at the guys over the years who have challenged that 300-mark and plus."

It's Chris Gayle. It's Virender Sehwag. It's Sanath Jayasuriya, It's Inzamam-ul-Haq. It's Matthew Hayden. These are guys who destroy bowling attacks.

"...you would not say that for a Rahul Dravid or Steve Smith in the present case. But a player who likes to score quickly, will have an opportunity. You know, Jaiswal, I mean, I was in Australia when David Warner came close and you know, he's an aggressive player.

"So I believe yes, I think it will be broken at some point in time, I think it has to be that person's destiny. Everything has to fall into place. And... I look forward to that time. I hope it happens, while I'm still around," he said. (PTI)

Nadal's clay game is rounding into form just in time for the French Open

ROME, May 8: Rafael Nadal's clay-court form is slowly rounding into shape. Not that nearly invincible shape that the tennis world grew accustomed to over the past two decades. But a shape that the 22-time Grand Slam champion is starting to feel good about as he prepares to play what will likely be his final French Open.

"It's a good moment, even if the results are not what they used to be," Nadal said at the Italian Open on Wednesday. "But I am increasing my feeling, my level... I want to keep going."

The 37-year-old Nadal, who has indicated that this will be his final year on tour, has played only nine matches this year after missing nearly all of 2023 due to a hip injury that required surgery.

But he's coming off his most encouraging performance of the year, having put together three straight wins at the Madrid Open last week before losing in straight sets to 31st-ranked Jiri Lehecka in the fourth round.

Before Madrid, he won only one match in Barcelona.

"The line is going up, without a doubt," Nadal said, making a gesture with his hand to demonstrate his improvement. "Happy to be today where I am because one month ago for me was almost impossible to think that I will be able to play in Barcelona, then in Madrid, and now being here in Rome. ... Things are happening."

"All the matches are tough for me today and difficult and more unpredictable than what the matches used to be for me, especially on clay," Nadal added. "I accept that role. I accept that challenge. I am excited about the way that I can be able to play if I keep working the proper way and my body allows me."

Nadal is hoping to be competitive one last time at Roland Garros, where he is the record 14-time champion. Rome is his last big warmup tournament before the clay-court Grand Slam starts on May 26.

"First of all, I want to play Rome. That's the tournament that I am (at) today. I don't think after that," said Nadal, who had his 1-year-old son court-side for his practice sessions at the Foro Italico this week. Nadal's opening match in Rome is scheduled for Thursday against Belgian qualifier Zizou Bergs, who is ranked No. 108.

Top-ranked Novak Djokovic, who is also back in Rome after a month out, is on the opposite half of the draw from Nadal. But second-ranked Janik Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz both withdrew because of injuries.

Nadal has won the Italian Open a record 10 times and he rated his first two titles at the Foro Italico as his most memorable: five-set victories over Guillermo Coria and Roger Federer in 2005 and 2006, respectively.

Starting in 2007, the Rome final was switched to a best-of-three-sets format.

"Most of (the) important moments of tennis have been playing in matches best-of-five because at the end of the day that makes the matches more emotional, more dramatic, the people get more involved," Nadal said. (AP)

India picking 4 spinners for T20 World Cup not surprising, it's their strength: Walsh

NEW DELHI, May 8: West Indies pace legend Courtney Walsh is not surprised by India's decision to pick four spinners in their T20 World Cup squad, saying the move aligns with their strengths.

India's selectors named Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja in their 15-man squad for the marquee event, starting June 1 in the USA and West Indies. "India picking four spinners I'm not surprised... it seems to be their strength," Walsh told PTI on the sidelines of the launch of the Big Cricket League here. "West Indies have picked three spinners. It's going to be different conditions and everybody has to balance the team," Walsh added. India skipper Rohit Sharma last week said that he wanted four spinners in the side but did not specifically mention the reason behind the move. It could be because of the slow sluggish wickets in the West Indies or the unusually early starts. Walsh, regarded as one of the most admired cricketers, feels India have a quality pace-bowling unit to complement their spinners.

"India still have quality fast bowlers, most of the teams do, so it will be a very competitive tournament. The majority of the teams have good-quality fast bowlers and spinners. "It's (the tournament) going to be dominated by the bat possibly. But it is difficult to predict who is going to win it, difficult to predict which bowler is going to be a standout. The teams that execute well will be successful." West Indies are co-hosting the tournament and former captain Walsh is optimistic about the two-time champions' chances at the T20 World Cup this summer.

"I'm expecting them to do very well. It's a nice balanced team and I am very optimistic that they'll play quality cricket. The group is not the easiest but once we reach the super sixes, there's a really good chance."

The first bowler to reach 500 Test wickets graced the field from 1984 to 2001. During that period he took 519 scalps from 132 Tests. (PTI)

We should have seen game home: Rajasthan Royals head coach Sangakkara

NEW DELHI, May 8: Skipper Sanju Samson's departure left Rajasthan Royals in a tight spot but the team still should have won the IPL match against Delhi Capitals here, says their head coach Kumar Sangakkara.

In a chase of 222, Samson got out after making 86 off 46 balls. His dismissal left the Royals with a task of getting 60 runs from 27 balls and eventually they fell short by 20 runs Tuesday night.

A win would have ensured a play-off spot for the Royals and exit for the Capitals but the result meant that the hosts stayed alive in the tournament.

"Irrespective of that dismissal, we still should have probably seen that game home," Sangakkara said at the post-match press conference.

"Losses happen. We had a great run at the start of the season. We bowled brilliantly in this game, especially Ashwin but once you make too many casual mistakes, it becomes very hard. At the end of the day it's about execution."

Samson was not a happy man when he left the field because there were doubts if Shai Hope, who caught him at the boundary ropes, had touched the fence.



The decision was referred to the TV umpire who ruled Samson out but the Royals skipper chose to argue with on-field umpire before walking back.

Sangakkara said it is difficult sometimes even for the third umpire to make a call.

"It depends on replays and angles, and sometimes you think the foot's touched. But it is a difficult one for the third umpire to judge. The game was at a crucial stage, so

that happens in cricket.

"We have different perspectives on it. At the end of the day, you have to stand by that decision in terms of what the umpires did. If we have any other kind of opinion on it, we will share it with the umpire and sort it out." The coach was happy with Samson's batting approach.

"Sanju Samson has a lot of clarity about the way he should bat. There are certain

Hayden lauds Samson's IPL show, says he is handling both spin and pace with finesse

NEW DELHI, May 8: Former Australian opener Mathew Hayden is mighty impressed with the IPL performance of Sanju Samson and has lauded the T20 World Cup-bound power-hitter for "handling both spin and pace with finesse."

Samson was in his elements on Tuesday when he nearly guided Rajasthan Royals to a win over Delhi Capitals with his 86-run knock here. The visitors eventually fell short by 20 runs. He is currently third on the top-scorers chart with 471 runs in 11 matches so far.

"Sanju Samson was batting like a dream, scoring 86 off 46 balls. He's proven his worth time and again... Throughout the tournament, he's been a master blaster, handling both spin and pace with finesse," Hayden told Star Sports' 'Cricket Live'.

"He times his innings well. He's got the power. And the power is a big thing in T20 cricket. Yet, what stands out is his commitment to his team. He just needed a bit of luck, especially towards the end of the match," he added.

Samson, who is the captain of Rajasthan Royals, has taken the second wicket-keeper's slot in the Indian team for the T20 World Cup starting June 1 in the Americas. Former India cricketer Varun Aaron also praised his performance.

"I think Sanju Samson has been batting really well. Bowlers are keen on dismissing him, evident from their reluctance to bowl bouncers despite being allowed two per over in this IPL. "Interestingly, the over he got out, Khaleel Ahmed bowled the first bouncer to him in the match. This seemed to disrupt his footwork, as the subsequent wide slow ball, which he typically dispatches for six over covers, resulted in his dismissal," he said. (PTI)

stages where he seems to lose his concentration a little bit and we worked on that in the off season. It is really important for him, not just as a captain but as a batter. He is exceptionally talented," he said, adding that he takes very good care of the group.

The catch by Hope, who stumbled before regaining his balance, was hailed by Capitals' assistant coach Pravin Amre.

"In IPL some moments are very crucial, and it was a deciding moment in the game," Amre said.

"Sanju was batting so well. We have to give credit to the way Hope judged that catch. Umpires are there, and there is so much technology.

"We also thought from the dugout that he has (touched the boundary) but it (happens) in the game, and the umpire's decision is the final decision. It wasn't an easy catch, it was really travelling. After the game also I spoke to him and he said the ball came very, very fast."

Delhi Capitals moved up a place to fifth in the points table after Tuesday's win. They now have 12 points and can get a maximum of 16 while there are teams that have a chance of getting to 18 points and qualify for the play-offs. (PTI)