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Rahul's 'Maoist' language hinders investment in Cong-ruled states: PM

JAMSHEDPUR (JHARKHAND), May 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lashed out at the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi, asserting that any industrialist will think 50 times before investing in states ruled by the party, owing to the "shehzada's use of Maoist language".

Modi, addressing a poll rally here, also accused the grand old party of patronising dynastic politics and considering Lok Sabha seats as "ancestral properties".

"The language used by the Congress 'shehzada' will make any industrialist think 50 times before investing in states ruled by the party... The 'shehzada' is using language spoken by Maoists and is extorting money through innovative methods," the PM said, in an apparent reference to Gandhi.



Modi said like the Maoists, the language used by Gandhi was to extort money from industrialists.

The prime minister's allegations came in the backdrop of the Congress leader's recent comments, referring to a speech by Modi in which he had stated that the party received money from top industrialists.

Gandhi, a former Congress president, had on Saturday said in New Delhi: "I'm ready to debate with PM Modi whenever and wherever he wants, but I'm sure he won't come. The first question I would ask PM Modi is what is his relationship with Adani..."

"The PM talks about the Congress getting tempo-loads of money from Adani-Ambani, but he doesn't dare to get it probed," Gandhi (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amethi, Rae Bareilly among high-profile contests; EC flags urban apathy

Fifth phase: Voting on 49 LS seats to be held today

MUMBAI/LUCKNOW, May 19: Polling will be held on Monday in 49 constituencies in six states and two UTs in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections that will decide the electoral fate of several prominent leaders like former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Smriti Irani and former J-K chief minister Omar Abdullah.

Over 8.95 crore people, including 4.26 crore females and 5,409 third-gender electors, are eligible to vote in this round and 9.47 lakh polling officials have been deployed across 94,732 polling stations.

Among the seats going to polls, 13 are in Maharashtra, 14 in Uttar Pradesh, seven in West Bengal, five in Bihar, three in Jharkhand, five in Odisha, one in J-K and the lone seat in Ladakh. This round



covers the least number of seats (49) in the seven-phase elections.

It is another important phase for the BJP as over 40 of these seats were with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

On the eve of polling, the Election Commission on Sunday pointed out that Mumbai, Thane

and Lucknow have shown apathy towards voting in the past and asked city dwellers there to turn out in higher numbers.

The poll authority noted that in the past these cities have "suffered" from urban apathy in voting. "The Commission especially calls upon these city dwellers to erase the stigma by turning out in higher numbers," it said.

So far, the last four phases have registered a total voter turnout of 66.95 per cent.

Other prominent candidates include Union ministers Piyush Goyal (Mumbai North, Maharashtra), Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti (Fatehpur, UP) and Shantanu Thakur (Bangaon, WB); LJP (Ram Vilas) leader Chirag Paswan (Hajipur, Bihar), Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde (Kalyan, Maharashtra), and BJP's Rajiv Pratap Rudy and RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya (both Saran, Bihar).

Voting will also be held in 35 assembly constituencies in Odisha, where BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is among the candidates. In Maharashtra, where (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Heroin worth ₹ 105 cr seized in Assam

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 19: Heroin worth ₹ 105 crore has been recovered in Assam's Cachar district, said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday.

He further said that the contraband weighing over 10 kg was being transported from a neighbouring state.

"Massive drug haul of 105 cr. In a major crackdown on the drugs network, @cacharpolice conducted a special operation and confiscated 10.333kg heroin transported from a neighbouring State," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

He also reiterated the government's commitment to continue the drive against drug trafficking and ensure that the youths do not fall into such a trap.

The chief minister shared a photograph of the seized drugs along with two accused persons on social media. (PTI)

Tea major B&A Ltd ventures into retail segment

GUWAHATI, May 19: For the first time in its over-100-year history, B&A Ltd has forayed into the retail segment through its 'Gatoonga' brand of black tea, a top company official said.

The brand was launched in Assam on Saturday, with the company looking to tap the market in the home state before entering other parts of the country, B&A Ltd managing director Somnath Chatterjee said.

"The company's retail foray has begun with 'Gatoonga' brand by tapping the Assam market and it will (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'More and more BJP leaders using anti-Muslim tropes'

NEW DELHI, May 19: Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Sitaram Yechury on Sunday wrote to the Election Commission alleging poll code violations by BJP leaders, and claimed more and more leaders of the saffron party are now "resorting to inciting hatred using anti-Muslim tropes".

Yechury, in a post on X, shared a copy of his complaint to the EC, and said the poll panel must act immediately.

"The ECI must act immediately. ECI cannot consciously remain silent which is tantamount to the betrayal of its constitutional mandate to conduct free and fair polls," Yechury said.

In his letter, he said the CPI(M) has filed a series of complaints against BJP leaders for Model Code of Conduct violation.

"We have through a series of complaints earlier brought to the attention of the Election Commission of India the serious violation

of the Model Code of Conduct by a number of leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Their resort to blatant lies and fabrication, fear mongering and overtly communal appeals were highlighted in these complaints. Sadly, in none of these complaints has the ECI punished the culprits," Yechury said.

"We had urged that the Commission act against offenders immediately to nip the disease in its bud. Unfortunately, the ECI sought not to act," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Pok belongs to us, will take it back: Shah

PRAYAGRAJ (UP), May 19: Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday asserted that Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) belongs to India, and "we will take it back".

Shah was addressing an election rally in Prayagraj to seek votes for BJP candidate Neeraj Tripathi.

"Faroq Abdullah and Mani Shankar Aiyar say give respect to Pakistan because it has atom bomb...Rahul baba, today from the sacred land of Prayagraj I will say this PoK is ours, will remain ours, and we will take it back," he said while referring to Aiyar's atom bomb remark that has sparked a political row.

In a purported video clip that has gone viral on social media, Aiyar was heard saying that India should

give respect to Pakistan as it is a sovereign nation and engage with it as it also possesses the atom bomb.

While Aiyar has said the video was old and dredged up now as the BJP's election campaign is faltering, the Congress had said it totally disagreed with the remarks made by Aiyar some months ago.

Shah also said that the opposition alliance has been wiped out in the four phases of Lok Sabha polls.

"Four phases of polling have been completed. In these four phases, the 'INDI alliance' has been wiped out and Modi ji is rapidly moving towards crossing 400 (Lok Sabha seats)," he said.

The main contest in Allahabad is between BJP's Neeraj Tripathi, son of former (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

THE MAJESTY

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A JOINT VENTURE BY:

China allocates billions of dollars to bailout its crisis-hit property sector

Household wealth in China is also highly concentrated in property

BELJING, May 19: After prolonged dithering, China has finally announced steps to address the near collapse of its mammoth property sector by allocating billions of dollars to buy back unsold homes and repurchase idle lands to resurrect its bankrupt real estate sector, which once constituted the mainstay of its economic growth.

The People's Bank of China has announced that it would establish a 300-billion-yuan (about USD 42.25 billion) relending facility for the government-subsidized housing project.

Local state-owned enterprises are encouraged to use the funds to buy reasonably-priced commercial homes that have completed construction, Tao Ling, deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, told the media last week. Tao added that these homes will then be used to provide affordable housing.

Also, as part of the government's increased financial efforts to support the property sector, commercial banks across the country issued a total of 963.6 billion yuan (about USD 137 billion) in real estate development loans followed by billions of yuan loans for individual housing loans in the first quarter of the year, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The newly set up fund will help



developers to have access to financing and to encourage the repurchase of "idle" land and the "relending" funds will enable local state-owned enterprises to buy unsold homes they can then offer as affordable housing, according to Chinese media reports.

Besides being unusually large, China's property sector accounted for about a quarter of annual output of its economy and was highly connected to other parts of the Chinese economy.

The household wealth in China is also highly concentrated in property. Just as systemically important financial institutions had to be rescued to prevent a financial meltdown 16 years ago, major property

developers in China may also be too interconnected to fail, according to a report in the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

The Chinese property sector crisis, regarded as the most serious setback for the country's massive economy, sparked the default of the biggest property market developer Evergrande Group in 2021.

Evergrande has reported over USD 300 billion in liabilities. Earlier this year, a Hong Kong court ordered the liquidation of the company, sending ripples across China and the world.

Soon the crisis spread like wildfire with other real estate developers like Kaisa Group, Country Garden, Fantasia Holdings and a

host of others declaring bankruptcy following millions of unsold and partly developed residential high-rises all over the country.

Analysts say it is unlikely that the decision of the Hong Kong court in January to liquidate Evergrande marks the end of China's property debt crisis.

As the property crisis became a major drag on the world's second largest economy, pinning its GDP to around five per cent with persisting slowdown, China last week finally moved to stem the crisis.

Besides the USD 42.25 billion fund, the government also announced measures to boost the property market, cutting minimum down payment ratios, setting up a relending facility for affordable housing and pledging to deliver unfinished homes.

The measures included minimum down payment ratios for individuals' commercial housing mortgages will be lowered to 15 per cent for first-home purchases and 25 per cent for second-home purchases.

"This is the lowest down payment requirement in history, which will be very helpful in boosting the property market," Yan Yuejin, research director at E-house China R&D Institute, told Xinhua. (PTI)

INDIA bloc govt will herald stable, predictable policymaking: Cong



NEW DELHI, May 19: Amid stock market volatility, the Congress on Sunday accused Home Minister Amit Shah of inciting "fear-mongering" and said an INDIA coalition government shall herald a new age of stable, predictable policymaking and overall prosperity.

The opposition party's assertion came after Home Minister Shah in an interview with a TV channel said the stock market shouldn't be linked with elections, but a stable government does help it perform better. He also suggested that the market will shoot up after June 4 as a result of the BJP and its allies sweeping the Lok Sabha elections.

In a statement, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said there is no basis to the "fear-mongering, incited by the outgoing Home Minister, about the INDIA government in financial markets". The record of the Congress party in providing strong and inclusive economic growth speaks for itself, he said.

"It is a matter of record that economic growth and investment were much higher under Dr Manmohan Singh than under the Modi government. Private investment and the share of manufacturing as a percentage were much greater under Dr Singh than in the past decade," he said. Ramesh said that "self-inflicted policy blunders" such as demonetisation, GST and an ill-planned lockdown played an important role in growth being lower in the last decade. But equally important is the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty created by the Modi government that has led to the biggest exodus of wealth creators from India to locations such as Dubai, London and Singapore, he claimed.

In this context, the most important contribution of the INDIA government will be to "remove the current environment of distrust and fear, and create a healthy ecosys-

tem where private enterprises, regulatory authorities, tax authorities and government will work in a spirit of mutual cooperation and respect, as we wrote in our Nyay Patra manifesto", he said.

"We also stated that 'regulatory oversight will be based on clearly enunciated laws and rules that will be applied fairly and without discrimination'," the Congress general secretary in-charge communications said.

This is a complete contrast with the Modi government's "vindictive and arbitrary approach whose main goal has been to extort funds, suppress competition against a favoured few and eliminate all freedom in decision-making", Ramesh said. These anti-competitive policies have contributed to underinvestment, concentration of economic power and unsustainable K-shaped growth, he claimed. "Our manifesto also promises to implement a clear, transparent and predictable tax regime. We will replace the current GST with a GST 2.0 that will be a single, moderate rate (with a few exceptions). We will enact a Direct Taxes Code and maintain stable personal income tax rates throughout the next five years," Ramesh said.

"We will eliminate 'Angel tax' and all other exploitative tax schemes that inhibit investment in new micro, small companies and innovative start-ups," he said.

Ramesh further said that the Congress has made important announcements in its manifesto to deal with the Modi government's poor record on price rise, jobs and stagnant wages and its "utter failure" on the demand side of the economy.

"We will implement all of these within established principles of fiscal responsibility. We remind market participants that Dr Singh's government ended its tenure with a fiscal deficit of 4.5% of GDP (2013-14), much below the 5.8% fiscal deficit in the Modi government's final year (2023-24)," he said. Sharing a screenshot of his statement, Ramesh said on X that there is no need for the "fear-mongering" that the Home Minister is inciting. "The INDIA coalition is coming to power, and it shall herald a new age of stable, predictable policymaking and overall prosperity," he said. Tagging Ramesh's statement and post on X, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said, "Hear hear. As a member of the @inIndia Manifesto Committee I am proud to confirm our party's commitment to economic growth with social justice, an end to tax terrorism that is driving wealth creators away from India, and a commitment to predictable and transparent economic and fiscal policies." (PTI)

Veteran banker Narayanan Vaghul cremated in Chennai

'He (Vaghul) was always available for advice and was so punctual'

CHENNAI, May 19: Veteran banker and Padma Bhushan recipient Narayanan Vaghul, who died in the city on May 18, was cremated here on Sunday, family sources said.

Vaghul was cremated at a city crematorium, after industry titans including Ajay Piramal and R Seshasayee paid their respects to the departed veteran here.

Admitted to a corporate hospital in the city due to health-related ailments, Vaghul (88) breathed his last on Saturday. He is survived by his wife Padma, son Mohan, and daughter Sudha.

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das, Mahindra and Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra had condoled his demise.

On Sunday, former Union minister and senior Congress leader P Chidambaram mourned Vaghul's demise and credited him with creating many legendary women bankers.

"He was a legendary banker who turned ICICI into a financial powerhouse, but he was more than that. He was the one who spotted talent among men and



women, mentored them, promoted them and entrusted them with high responsibilities," Chidambaram said.

"Dozens of them, especially women, became legendary bankers themselves. May his example guide the banking industry and may his soul rest in peace!", he wrote in a social media post.

Industry leaders—Piramal Group Chairman Ajay Piramal, Asian Paints Ltd Chairman R Seshasayee, ICICI Bank MD and CEO Sandeep Bakshi among others paid their last respects to

Vaghul at his house here.

Former MD and CEO of Axis Bank, Shikha Sharma, Cognizant Co-founder Lakshmi Narayanan, Tractors and Farm Equipment Ltd (TAFE) Chairperson Mallika Srinivasan, Larsen and Toubro CMD S N Subrahmanyam also paid their respects to the late veteran.

Anand Ramakrishnan, a chartered accountant with a 45-year association with Vaghul said the banker was part of a closely knit family of seven brothers and sisters and "they were available for

each other."

In a brief interaction with PTI, Ramakrishnan said, "He (Vaghul) was always available for advice and was so punctual and was never late even for a small function in the house."

"Vaghul used to share his insights on most topics and even last week he was active in all family social media groups. His humor and wit were amazing and his knowledge was vast in areas like sports, history, economics, politics," Ramakrishnan said.

Vaghul used to tell stories of the 1933 heroics of legendary Australian cricketer Sir Don Bradman and Indian ace Sachin Tendulkar's innings in 2003.

He used to watch Tamil and Hindi classics of the 1950s. Later, his favourites movies were those made by late director and Dadasaheb Phalke recipient K Balachander and director Mani Ratnam, he said.

Vaghul's favourite pastime also includes visiting the Music Academy in Chennai to attend concerts of Carnatic musicians, he said.

"We all will miss him dearly and will cherish the good moments we had", he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Fifth phase: Voting on 49

polling will be held in 13 Lok Sabha constituencies, including six in Mumbai, Piyush Goyal, Bharati Pawar (Dindori) and Kapil Patil (Bhiwandi) are among the key nominees of the BJP, which has also fielded prominent lawyer Ujjwal Nikam (Mumbai North Central).

Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde (Kalyan) and city Congress chief Varsha Gaikwad (Mumbai North Central) are also among the candidates in this phase, which is the last for the state in this election.

In Uttar Pradesh, Rajnath Singh (Lucknow), Irani (Amethi), Jyoti, Kaushal Kishor (Mohanlalganj) and Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma (Jalau) are the five Union ministers in the fray. Voting will also take place for the assembly bypolls to the Lucknow East assembly constituency.

Rahul Gandhi, who has contested from Wayanad in Kerala, is also in the fight for Rae Bareilly, a Nehru-Gandhi family pocket borough represented by his mother Sonia Gandhi since 2004. The BJP has fielded UP minister Dinesh Pratap Singh.

In Amethi, Irani, who had defeated Rahul Gandhi in 2019, is seeking a second term, while KL Sharma, an aide of the Gandhi family, has been fielded by the Congress.

Senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh is eyeing a fourth term from Lucknow. He is up against SP MLA from Lucknow Central Ravidas Mehrotra.

In the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat, which covers the temple town of Ayodhya, the electoral contest is mainly between sitting BJP MP Lallu Singh, who is seeking a hat-trick, and Awadhesh Prasad, the SP MLA from Milkipur (SC) assembly constituency in Ayodhya.

In Baramulla, besides Omar Abdullah, former separatist Sajad Lone, ex-MLA Sheikh Abdul Rashid alias 'Engineer Rashid', currently lodged in the Tihar jail, and the PDP's former Rajya Sabha member Fayaz Ahmad Mir are among the 21 others contesting.

More than 500 centenarians are among the 17.37 lakh voters eligible to exercise their franchise in the constituency, with political observers expecting a high turnout on the back of the huge crowds that thronged election rallies and roadshows in the first major political battle post the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

In Ladakh, Congress candidate Tsering Namgyal, BJP's Tashi Gyalson, and Independent candidate and NC rebel Haji Hanifa Jan are locked in a keen contest.

Security has been stepped up in West Bengal's seven constituencies which have a history of election-related violence, with over 57 per cent of the polling stations identified as sensitive in this phase, the highest till now in this Lok Sabha election.

Over 60,000 personnel of central forces and around 30,000 personnel of the state police, have been deployed, which is more than in the four previous phases in the state, an official said.

BJP's Arjun Singh, who has been in and out of the saffron party and the Trinamool Congress on four occasions in the last five years, is taking on West Bengal minister Partha Bhowmick in Barrackpore in a bid to retain the seat he won in 2019.

Actor Rachana Banerjee has been fielded by the TMC to stop actor and BJP candidate Locket Chatterjee from winning a straight second term from Hooghly.

In Serampore, the TMC's sitting MP Kalyan Banerjee is fighting against the BJP's Kabir Shankar Bose.

Voting will take place in Saran, Madhubani and Sitamarhi, Sitamarhi and Madhubani Lok Sabha seats of Bihar, which are all with the NDA.

In Hajipur, the primary contest is between Chirag Paswan, whose late father Ram Vilas Paswan had won the seat eight times, and RJD's Shiv Chandra Ram, a former MLA and ex-minister in the state.

Former Union minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy's bid to score a hat-trick in Saran has been challenged by RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya, who had donated her kidney to her father.

Voting in three Jharkhand Lok Sabha constituencies — Chatra, Koderma and Hazaribag — and by-election in Gandey assembly seat, where Kalpana Soren, the wife of jailed former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, is contesting, will take place on Monday.

An interesting fight is expected in the Koderma Lok Sabha seat where Union Minister and BJP candidate Annapurna Devi is up against Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation nominee Vinod Singh, an MLA from Bagodar assembly constituency.

In Odisha, CM Patnaik is contesting from two assembly segments -- Hinjili under the Aska Lok Sabha seat in Ganjam district and Kantabanji under the Bolangir parliamentary constituency.

Apart from Patnaik, major contestants include around half a dozen Odisha ministers, BJP's sitting MPs Jial Oram and Sangeeta Singh Deo, BJD MP Achyut Samant and former Indian Hockey captain Dilip Tirkey.

Around 45.1 crore electors have exercised their franchise in the last four phases. Polling for 23 states and Union territories and 379 seats has been completed so far. The sixth and seventh phases are on May 25 and June 1 respectively. The counting of votes is on June 4. (PTI)

Rahul's 'Maoist' language hinders

had said. In the Jamshedpur rally where he campaigned for BJP's Bidyut Baran Mahto, Modi asserted that he has broken the backbone of the Naxals, but the Congress and JMM have taken the responsibility of "extorting funds". "I dare the CMs of Congress and INDIA bloc-ruled states to answer as to whether they agree with the anti-industry and anti-industrialist language of their 'shehzada'", he said.

Taking a dig at Gandhi over his decision to contest from the Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seat, he said the Congress 'shehzada' rushed to the constituency, contending that "it is my mummy's seat, which not even an eight-year-old school boy will say".

"His mother (Sonia Gandhi) said that she is handing over her son to Rae Bareilly... She could not find even a single party worker devoted to them... The voters of Rae Bareilly in turn ask her as to where they were when people were in trouble during the Covid pandemic," Modi said.

"The Congress is writing a 'vasiyatnama' (will); they consider Parliament seats as 'khandani jaydad' (ancestral property)," he alleged.

Earlier this month, the Congress had announced Rahul Gandhi's candidature from the Rae Bareilly seat, held by his mother Sonia Gandhi for the last two decades. She recently moved to the Rajya Sabha.

Attacking the opposition INDIA bloc, the PM said the Congress and JMM have nothing to do with the development of the country, as they are "neck-deep in corruption".

"The Congress is the mother of corruption, it has been involved in numerous scams, including the coal and 2G scams... The JMM and Congress are not concerned about industries... Jharkhand, despite its rich resources, is known for heaps of black money with corrupt leaders. They did not even spare the Army and usurped its land... Former Jharkhand CM (Hemant Soren) is rotting in jail for corruption," Modi said.

The prime minister also assured people that he would recover the "looted public money" from corrupt leaders in the state, and return it to the poor to whom the funds belong.

He accused the Congress of denying basic amenities to people, and alleged that the condition of 18,000 villages was similar to that of the 18th century during the party's previous regimes.

"Modi gave Jan Dhan accounts to 52 crore people, pucca houses to four crore people, electricity to 18,000 villages along with pure tap water, modernised railways and augmented infrastructure," he said.

The PM also alleged that the Jharkhand government was creating hurdles in the way of the proposed Dhalbhumgarh airport in East Singhbhum.

The Jamshedpur seat, with a total electorate of 18.41 lakh, will go to polls on May 25. (PTI)

'More and more BJP leaders using anti

Yechury said on the complaint against Modi, in a departure from precedents, instead of sending notice to him, the EC sent a notice to BJP president J P Nadda.

"In the complaint against the Prime Minister, the Commission, in a departure from precedents, instead of sending notice to him, sent it to the President of the BJP after a lapse of many days and after the issue being raised in various forums. But this notice to the BJP has had no impact as is revealed by repeated violations both by the Prime Minister as well as other leaders of the BJP," he said.

"More and more leaders of the BJP are now taking resort to inciting hatred against the Muslim community using anti-Muslim tropes," he said.

Referring to PM Modi's speech in Barabanki of Uttar Pradesh on Friday, Yechury wrote in the letter that the PM said 'If SP and Congress come to power, Ram Lalla will be in a tent again and they will run a bulldozer on Ram temple'. He also mentioned UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath's remarks made at a rally in Bihar's Saran on May 17, and remarks made by Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma at an election meeting in Raghunathpur in Siwan (Bihar) on May 18.

CPI(M) quoted Adityanath's speech where he said "the Congress and RJD are trying to rob SCs, STs and OBCs of quotas and divert those to Muslims".

Sarma, at the Siwan poll meeting, had said that if the NDA returns to power, it would bring the UCC and put an end to "this business of marrying four times" and also said "we will shut down shops that produce mullas", said the CPI(M) complaint.

"While reiterating our demand for action on the complaints we had lodged with the ECI earlier, we also urge the Commission to immediately act against Narendra Modi, Yogi Adityanath and Himanta Biswa Sarma for the above complaints," Yechury said.

"We had through our earlier complaints warned the Commission that if it fails to take decisive action in cases where the offenders are those in high positions of power, the impartiality of the ECI will be in question and its credibility compromised," he added.

The CPI(M) has filed a number of complaints against Modi and other BJP leaders for violation of the Model Code of Conduct, including those related to the PM's speech in Banswara in Rajasthan.

While addressing a rally in Banswara on April 21, Modi had suggested that if the Congress comes to power, it would "redistribute" wealth to Muslims. The Election Commission had issued a notice to BJP president J P Nadda following complaints by opposition parties. (PTI)

Pok belongs to us, will take it

Governor of West Bengal and Speaker of UP Legislative Assembly Keshari Nath Tripathi, and Ujjwal Ram Singh, son of former Samajwadi Party leader and Rajya Sabha MP Reoti Raman Singh.

Polling in Allahabad Lok Sabha constituency will take place in the sixth phase of the ongoing elections on May 25. (PTI)

Tea major B&A Ltd ventures into

gradually expand across India based on a demand-driven growth strategy," he said. B&A Ltd deputy managing director Dhruba Jyoti Dowerah said the company's parent group had four verticals previously, and the retail branding being the fifth one. The existing verticals are tea manufacturing and processing, packaging, tea tourism and broking. B&A Ltd is the listed flagship company of the ₹ 300-crore Barooahs & Associates Group and has descended from Barasali Tea Company Ltd, which was founded in 1915.

The company currently has 11 tea estates in upper Assam locations and produced 5.5 million kgs of black tea last year. Chatterjee said the Group has rolled out a ₹ 50-crore capex plan for a pan-India growth strategy, under which it recently acquired Moheema tea estate in Golaghat district.

This is the first acquisition by the company in over six decades, he said.

"For the first time in sixty years, the B&A Group has prepared a roadmap for a pan-India growth strategy with new acquisitions and diversification into the branded retail tea market. The company will invest around ₹ 50 crore in the next seven years as part of its growth and expansion strategy," he added. (PTI)

NGO involvement key for govt school upliftment: Guv Kataria

Governor inaugurates 'Happy School' renovated by Rotary Metro

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 19: "The involvement of non-government organisations is essential for the upliftment of government schools," as highlighted by Governor Gulab Chand Kataria during a program organised by Rotary Club of Guwahati Metro. Governor Kataria emphasised the importance of timely completion of necessary improvements in schools, which might otherwise be delayed due to lengthy government processes.

Speaking on the occasion of the renovation of Arya Pathshala located in Rehabari, Governor Kataria commended the efforts of Rotary Club of Guwahati Metro in renovating the school. He stressed that while the club has undertaken the renovation, it is now the responsibility of teachers to ensure its maintenance. Additionally, he urged club members to inspect the school periodically and provide necessary support as needed.

Established before independence in 1935, Arya Pathshala is a government provincial Assamese primary school located in the heart of Guwahati. Rotary Club of Guwahati Metro has transformed it into a 'Happy School'.

On Sunday, Governor Gulab Chand Kataria, graced the inauguration ceremony as the chief guest. His presence at the event, despite his busy schedule, underscores his profound commitment to education.



Governor Kataria expressed his appreciation for the Rotary Club of Guwahati Metro for their outstanding social work in transforming the school into a 'Happy School'. This initiative, aimed at creating an environment where students feel happy and proud to attend, is a testament to the club's commitment to enhancing education and promoting community development.

Following the renovation, the 'Happy School' has witnessed a significant reduction in student dropout rates and absenteeism. The project focused on reviving key areas of school infrastructure, including clean drinking water facilities, repairs and painting of desks and benches, renovation of classrooms, modern toilet facilities with separate facilities for boys and girls, developing areas for playing

and gardening, and overall painting of the school.

With a total cost exceeding Rs 10 lakh, this school has now become the model primary school of the state, serving as an example of excellence in education infrastructure.

It's notable that there's a significant migration of people from villages to Guwahati city in search of employment opportunities. Many of them work for low wages and find it challenging to afford education for their children in private schools. Despite the government's considerable spending on schools, there remains a pressing need for local communities and international social clubs like Rotary and Lions to step forward and improve the infrastructure of government schools.

The Governor also commended other projects undertaken by the club, including providing artificial legs, offering three months of sewing machine training to economically backward women in groups of ten, subsequently providing them with free sewing machines, organising cancer detection and health check-up camps, and planting fruit-bearing grafted plants along roadsides, along with various other social initiatives.

The renovation work at Arya Pathshala was made possible with the generous contributions of club president Rtn RP Sureka and vice president Vijay Jasrasaria, whose support enabled the club to successfully complete this project and make a positive impact on the local community.

The dedicated efforts of Rtn Bijay Saraf, chairman of community service, Rtn Ashok Kumar Goyal, and Rtn Ravi Dutta played pivotal roles in bringing the dream of the Happy School to fruition. Their commitment and hard work contributed significantly to the success of the project.

During the inauguration ceremony, Rtn RP Sureka, president of Rotary Club of Guwahati Metro, announced a mega project undertaken by the club as an implementing agency under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of IOC Ltd. This project involves providing smart vision glass, a device powered by Artificial Intelligence, which will be

transformative for blind students. With the ability to read books in 73 regional languages and English in an Indian accent, among other features, this project promises to be life-changing. Rtn Sureka also lauded the efforts of Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, director of Social Justice & Empowerment, government of Assam, for his dedication in compiling and providing the list of beneficiaries for this project.

Additionally, the club has initiated registration for another project aimed at providing functional artificial hand limbs (LN4) manufactured in the USA. This initiative will enable beneficiaries to perform day-to-day tasks smoothly. Rtn Sureka encouraged individuals with hand sizes below the elbow exceeding 4 inches to register for this project at Jaipur Foot, GMC Road, Kachari Basti, Ganeshguri, Guwahati.

The success of the inauguration ceremony was made possible by the diligent efforts of the inaugural committee members, including Rtn Arun Sharma, Rtn Dinesh Mangalunia, Rtn Satish Kasera, Rtn Rajeev Chandak, and other members of the club. The meeting was attended by dignitaries, rotarians, students, and members of society.

Rtn SL Agarwal delivered the vote of thanks, acknowledging the commitment of all Rotary members to social responsibility, which exemplifies the Rotary motto of 'Service Above Self'.

Public meeting commends Muda Dol mouja's achievement

Top revenue contributor honoured in Sonitpur

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 19: The state government's recent initiative for land revenue collection saw Sonitpur district achieving significant success, with Muda Dol mouja emerging as the top contributor to revenue collection in the district. This accomplishment was celebrated with a public meeting held at the office of the moujadar of Muda Dol mouja located in Tapiya on Sunday. Sotea MLA Padma Hazarika graced the occasion as the chief guest and extended felicitations to Heremba Bhagawati, the moujadar of Muda Dol mouja.

MLA Hazarika commended moujadar Bhagawati for his remarkable achievement in collecting the highest revenue within the stipulated time, despite facing physical challenges. The event was attended by Sujata Goswami, the circle officer of Naduar revenue circle, moujadars from neighbouring areas, and village headmen

under Naduar revenue circle. During the session, moujadar Bhagawati highlighted the plight of downtrodden individuals who struggle to pay their land revenue. He revealed that he personally made payments on behalf of such people up to the year 2024. He urged village headmen to identify impoverished individuals and extend assistance to them in their respective areas. Additionally, Bhagawati drew attention to land-related issues faced by certain educational institutions under his jurisdiction, appealing to the state government and concerned departments to address these matters.

The meeting was efficiently conducted by Shailesh Borkataky, the moujadar of Shilabandha mouja, and served as a platform to acknowledge the significant contribution of Muda Dol mouja to land revenue collection and discuss ways to support vulnerable individuals and resolve land-related issues in the region.

Wild elephant attack

HT Correspondent
KHERONI, May 19: Tragedy struck in West Karbi Anglong on Saturday evening as a man fell victim to a wild elephant attack. The deceased, identified as Ramjit Chauhan, a resident of Hawaipur Bhetapara, was walking home from the market when he was suddenly attacked by a wild elephant. Another individual narrowly escaped a similar fate after being chased by the pachyderm. Forest officials from the Southern Range in Kheroni are currently assessing the situation.

Drug bust in Karbi Anglong



HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, May 19: In a significant development, police in Karbi Anglong seized a large quantity of marijuana on Saturday evening. Acting on information, authorities conducted a search of a container truck bearing registration number WB 76 B 2883, traveling from Dimapur on NH 39 under Khatkhathi Police Station.

During the search, police discovered 75 tightly packed packets filled with marijuana, weighing a total of 790 kg, with an estimated market value of Rs 4 crore.

The driver of the vehicle, identified as Radheshyam Sahni, a resident of Motihari, Bihar, was arrested in connection with the incident. Further investigation into the matter is ongoing.

Gold's Gym celebrates 15 years of fitness excellence

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 19: Gold's Gym, Ganeshguri proudly commemorates its 15th anniversary, marking a significant milestone in its journey of promoting fitness excellence. Since its establishment on May 17, 2009, Gold's Gym Ganeshguri has remained unwavering in its commitment to delivering exceptional fitness facilities and unwavering support to its members.

Directors Rajiv Jain, Sanjiv Jain, and Swastika Jain reflect on this transformative journey, expressing their pride in witnessing the brand's evolution and growth firsthand over the past 15 years. They attribute their success to a dedicated partnership with the community, learning, and growing alongside the brand.

Gold's Gym, Ganeshguri has earned its reputation as the preferred fitness destination for a diverse range of individuals, including celebrities, athletes, bodybuilders, military personnel, businessmen, bureaucrats, and fitness enthusiasts. The gym's dedication to excellence and personalised support has enabled individuals from various backgrounds and ex-



perience levels to achieve their fitness goals effectively.

To celebrate its 15th anniversary, Gold's Gym Ganeshguri hosted a special event at its premises, attended by esteemed guests, including renowned Assamese actress Nishita Goswami, who inaugurated Gold's Gym Ganeshguri back in 2009, and prominent businessman Sanjiv Narain.

"We are thrilled to celebrate this significant milestone with our members, partners, and the community," says the team at Gold's Gym,

Ganeshguri. Looking ahead, they reaffirm their commitment to their mission of transforming lives through fitness, empowering individuals to unleash their full potential. Swastika Jain emphasises that Gold's Gym Ganeshguri is dedicated to helping individuals achieve their fitness goals and lead healthier lives. With state-of-the-art equipment, expert trainers, and a supportive community, Gold's Gym Ganeshguri continues to be the ultimate destination for fitness enthusiasts in Ganeshguri and beyond.

Inter-district teachers' debate held in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 19: The Sivasagar District Samagra Siksha has taken a commendable initiative to enhance teachers' awareness of teaching-learning strategies by organising an annual inter-district debating competition for teachers from primary to senior secondary schools. This year's debate focused on the topic - Teachers' failure to gauge learners' psychology is an impediment to effective teaching, held at TRG Town HS School, Sivasagar.

The competition was inaugurated by Debajyoti Gogoi, inspector of schools, Sivasagar Circle, in the presence of former deputy director of Secondary Education, Abdul Zelil, senior journalist Manoj Kumar Borthakur, Bhairav Munda, Anamuddin Ahmed, and principals Jitu Barua, Pranob Baruah, and Manju Chetia, along with other guests. Dr Saumerjyoti Mahanta, principal of Sivasagar Commerce College and a renowned writer, presided over the session. Prof Ajoy Gogoi from Moran Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Prof Sivaprasad Mili from Sivasagar Girls' College, and NDTV Upper Assam bureau chief Kaustov Moni Kakoty served as judges.

In the debate competition, Jahnabi Konwar Borah of Kakajan Bagan MV School, Jorhat, clinched the first prize, which included ₹ 10,000 in cash and trophies. The second prize was awarded to Pralheka Saikia of Banmukh HS School, Sivasagar, while the third prize went to Junmoni Baruah of Rastriya HS School, Tinsukia. The second and third prizes carried ₹ 7,000 and ₹ 5,000 each, along with mementos.

Participating schools from Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Charaidoo, and Sivasagar made the competition a success, with over 45 schools joining in.

Illegal timber seized

HT Correspondent
KHERONI, May 19: Forest officials from the Kheroni Southern Range in West Karbi Anglong seized a tractor, bearing registration number AS02 BC 9361, laden with illegal timber on Saturday evening. The trailer of the tractor was found to be loaded with sawn illegal timber during an operation conducted at Diklem village in the evening hours. Following the operation, the tractor along with the illicit timber was being transported to the office of the Southern Range of the Forest Department for further action. Authorities suspect that the timber was intended for smuggling into the neighbouring district of Dima Hasao.

Three arrested for attempted cattle theft

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, May 19: Three persons were sent to judicial custody on Sunday for allegedly trying to steal cattle at Malowpathar Kathonbari on Saturday. The trio was apprehended by villagers and handed over to the police.

According to sources, the accused persons are Kulai Hazarika (33) of nearby Borbheti, Babujan Das (42) of nearby Baliati, and Pranob Das (35) of Kuruhabari, Bokakhat Civil Sub-division of Golaghat district. They were arrested under Sections 379 and 34 of the IPC in Pulibor Police Station case number 71/2024. The sources said the three, along with another individual, were reportedly spotted by local people while they were chasing cattle, which were grazing in a ground near a paddy field, after which the villagers nabbed three of them, with one managing to flee from the site. A mini-truck and a motorcycle reportedly used by the accused persons to commit the act of cattle theft were also found at the spot. It may be mentioned here that people of several villages near the incident site have been alleging that a number of domestic cows and buffaloes were found missing in recent times.

Summer special train periodicity extended

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 19: To accommodate extra rush, the periodicity of summer special trains has been extended, maintaining their existing days of run, timings, stoppages, and composition. Here are the details: Train no 06570 (Guwahati - SMVT Bengaluru) special, departing from Guwahati every Wednesday at 06:00 hours and reaching SMVT Bengaluru on Friday at 10:00 hours, will be further extended to run from May 29 to June 12, 2024. In the return direction, Train no 06569 (SMVT Bengaluru - Guwahati) special, departing from SMVT Bengaluru every Sunday at 00:30 hours and reaching Guwahati on Tuesday at 5:30 hours, will be extended to run from May 26 to June 9, 2024. The extension of these train services aims to benefit waitlisted passengers of other trains running in these directions. Details of stoppages and timings of these trains are available on the IRCTC website and are also being notified in various newspapers and social media platforms of NF Railway. Passengers are advised to verify the details before undertaking their journey.

DMC takes action to address congestion

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, May 19: The Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation (DMC) conducted an eviction drive on Saturday to clear illegal vendors who had set up their stalls in Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH).

With the assistance of police personnel and CRPF, the DMC demolished several shops that had been illegally occupying land belonging to AMCH for many years. This move comes after Dibrugarh district commissioner Bikram Kairi held an emergency meeting to address issues plaguing AMCH and instructed relevant departments to take action.

Illegal vendors had been occupying AMCH land and setting up shops for years, leading to congestion and hindering the free move-

ment of ambulances and vehicles carrying emergency patients.

"We conducted the eviction drive to clear the illegal vendors occupying government land. Despite warnings to vacate the area, they did not comply, necessitating the eviction drive. Most of the stalls and shops were demolished," stated an official of DMC.

Recently, there has been a proliferation of food stalls and shops in Dibrugarh, with many of them encroaching upon roadside areas.

Residents of Dibrugarh have raised concerns about the uncontrolled growth of food stalls and the resulting parking issues. They advocate for designated areas for vendors to set up their stalls and emphasise the importance of addressing parking problems exacerbated by illegal vendors.

Pub Nagaon Rongali Bihu Utsav Ujjapan Somitee felicitates students

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, May 19: The Pub Nagaon Rongali Bihu Utsav Ujjapan Somitee honoured over 60 meritorious students from Amulapatty Ward no 8 for their outstanding performance in the HS final and HSLC examinations of 2024. The felicitation ceremony took place at the Nagaon Rongali Kanta Borkakoti High School.

Simanta Bora, president of the Pub Nagaon Rongali Bihu Utsav Ujjapan Somitee and vice president of the Nagaon Municipality Board, presided over the event.

Local MLA Rupak Sarma and retired academician Nava Kr Mahanta graced the occasion as chief guests and guests of honour, respectively.

School hosts discussion on parental role in education

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 19: The Management & Development Committee of Fuleswari Girls' HS School organised a meeting on Saturday, bringing together parents and guardians of nearly one thousand students to discuss their increasing responsibilities in light of the New Education Policy 2020.

Addressing the gathering, Manoj Kumar Borthakur, president of the SMDC, emphasised the importance of providing greater attention, love, and inspiration to adolescent girls at home to help them cope with the increasing workload and stress. He highlighted the limited time teachers have to interact with students and urged parents to communicate with their children about their inner feelings, fears, and anxieties.

Pranob Baruah, principal of Fuleswari Girls' HS School, addressed the challenges faced by the school and called upon the guardians to extend their support. He mentioned the burden imposed by the new prepaid electricity billing system, which requires the school to spend approximately Rs 10,000 per month



on electricity.

Prasanta Sarmah, a noted cultural worker and distinguished teacher, urged parents to ensure their wards attend school regularly. He emphasised that absenteeism hinders students' ability to keep up with classroom activities and can lead to the development of an inferiority complex.

Several guardians, including Rajibuddin Ahmed, Firoj Ahmed, Firoj Ali, and Rasmirekha Chutia, commended the initiative taken by the SMDC. They pledged their continued support to the school authorities in all activities.

Margherita College alumni demand provincialisation of science stream

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, May 19: The Margherita College Alumni Association convened a meeting during a campus recruitment drive at Margherita College, demanding the provincialisation of the science stream, which has remained non-provincialised for 24 years. Manash Pratim Gogoi, the general secretary of the association, highlighted this long standing issue, emphasising the need for immediate action from the state education minister, Dr Ranaj Pegu. The recruitment drive, organised by the Margherita College Placement Cell in collaboration with the Alumni Association, aimed to address the issue of educated unemployment, particularly in banking institutions. Over fifty educated youths participated in this event.

During the meeting, Dr Atonu Kakoty, the principal of Margherita College, alongside the president, secretary, and members of the Alumni Association, deliberated on various infrastructure-related challenges facing the college. Specifically, they discussed the persistent absence of provincialisation for the science section, despite its establishment over two decades ago.

Key figures present at the meeting included Mullen Baruah, president of the Margherita College Alumni Association; Chintu Gogoi, assistant secretary; Anjan

Bordoloi, Margherita College teacher coordinator; and Nilav Jyoti Konwar, executive member. Following the discussions, association officials visited the science departments to assess the specific challenges faced by the science stream.

The science stream at Margherita College, serving as the sole science education hub in the Margherita region of Tinsukia district, has significantly contributed to the educational landscape, benefiting students from Margherita and neighbouring areas like Arunachal Pradesh. Despite consistently yielding satisfactory results, the non-provincialisation of the science stream has been a persistent concern.

Expressing discontent over the delay in provincialisation, the alumni body urged the state government to take prompt action. They emphasised that over a dozen teachers had also voiced their demand for the immediate provincialisation of the science wing, which has been delivering quality education for years.

The alumni association has consistently advocated for the provincialisation of the science stream, urging the state education minister to ensure its perpetuation through official provincialisation. They have communicated their demands to the media through a press note, seeking resolution to this long standing issue.

Satya Ranjan Pradhani receives lifetime membership award from IJRDET

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, May 19: Dr Satya Ranjan Pradhani, an assistant professor in the department of Mathematics at Gossaigaon College under Bodoland University, has been honoured with the prestigious Editorial Board Membership and Life Membership Award by the International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology (IJRDET).

The award, conferred by the renowned open-access, peer-reviewed journal published by Blue Eyes Intelligence Engineering and Sciences Publication (BEIESP), recognises Dr Pradhani's significant contributions to the field of pure mathematics.

IJRDET aims to publish original, high-quality research articles in various areas of engineering and



technology, including computer science & engineering, information technology, electrical and electronics engineering, electronics and telecommunication, me-

chanical engineering, civil engineering, and interdisciplinary streams.

Dr Satya Ranjan Pradhani, currently serving at Gossaigaon College, has been recognised for his outstanding academic endeavors and research work in mathematics.

The achievement highlights the continuous support and guidance provided by esteemed individuals such as Dr Magnesh Kumar, KK DST Government of India scientist; Professor Dr Abhishek Adhikary, HOD Presidency University Kolkata; Dr Ashis Sen Gupta from ISI, Kolkata; Dr Umesh Kumar Srivastab Das; Dr Chandrashekar Prasad, HOD at BRABU University; Dr Amit Sintel, editor in chief of IJRDE; and Dr Kumud Ranjan Basumatary, principal of Gossaigaon College.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You can lead a man to Congress, but you can't make him think.
-Milton Berle

The Controversial 'Seeshmahal'

The official residence of a minister should symbolize integrity and governance, not scandal and controversy. Yet, Delhi's Chief Minister's residence, colloquially dubbed the "Seeshmahal," has been mired in controversy since its inception. Built with an extravagant budget of ₹ 45 crore, the residence has been under scrutiny for various reasons, and its opulence has earned it the moniker of a palace, stirring public and political discourse alike. The initial controversy, known as the "Seeshmahal scandal," was a significant blow. The exorbitant expenditure on what was perceived as a lavish personal residence for the Chief Minister drew widespread criticism. The controversy intensified when a journalist who broke the story found themselves imprisoned, raising serious concerns about press freedom and the state's response to criticism. Recently, the residence was back in the spotlight following allegations of an assault on a female Member of Parliament in its drawing room, under a large portrait of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. This incident has only added to the house's notorious reputation. The narrative surrounding the "Seeshmahal" has taken a darker turn, with some speculating on everything from the land's dubious history to potential violations of Vaastu Shastra principles, and even astrological misfortune.

However, there's more to this story than superstition. Political machinations are undeniably at play. Atishi Marlena, a prominent AAP leader, has publicly accused Swati Maliwal of being part of a BJP conspiracy against Kejriwal. Marlena's claims are backed by video evidence, suggesting that Maliwal's visit to the CM's residence was unannounced and part of a larger political strategy. Such allegations are indicative of the fraught political landscape in Delhi, where every move is scrutinized and potentially weaponized. The recent arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, who went from the opulent confines of the "Seeshmahal" to the austere surroundings of Tihar Jail, further complicates the narrative. Kejriwal's presence at the INDI-Alliance rally in Mumbai, seated alongside veteran politician Sharad Pawar, was a moment of political theatre. The alliance with regional parties and the Congress is seen as a strategic bulwark for both Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) against the BJP's dominance. Sharad Pawar's call for regional parties to unite with the Congress resonates in the current political climate. For AAP, this alliance is not merely a matter of political expediency but a necessity for survival.

Atishi Marlena's accusations against Swati Maliwal and the BJP may resonate with AAP's core supporters, but they do little to address the broader electoral challenges the party faces. The upcoming Lok Sabha elections will be a litmus test for AAP's political strategies and alliances. The CM House, with all its controversies, symbolizes the broader struggles of the party and its leadership. In the end, the "Seeshmahal" is more than just a residence; it is a reflection of the tumultuous and often chaotic nature of Delhi's politics. The controversies that have engulfed it are emblematic of the broader political battles being fought in the capital. Whether these battles are won or lost will significantly impact not just the AAP and its leaders but also the political future of Delhi and perhaps, by extension, the nation. The task ahead for Arvind Kejriwal and AAP is formidable. They must navigate the treacherous waters of political alliances, public perception, and electoral challenges. The "Seeshmahal" will undoubtedly continue to be at the heart of these battles, a symbol of both ambition and controversy.

Labour party's first six steps for new govt fall below the real demands

By: Ben Chacko

Labour's "six first steps," the priority actions it will take when in government, are testimony to the shrivelled state of the party's ambitions as well as of its long post-Corbryn march to the right. Voters looking for determined action to improve their circumstances and address the ills scaring society will look in vain.

On the economy, Keir Starmer's "first step" could well be mistaken for immobility. He pledges to be tough on spending and aiming for low taxes, without spelling out how or where the hoped-for "growth" is going to come from. Of his discarded green investment plan, Labour's last remaining proactive growth policy; there is not barely a whisper.

The last surviving element of that plan, the establishment of a publicly owned GB Energy to deliver clean power and cut bills, is welcome. But it is a very poor substitute for his original pledge, in his now discarded Labour leadership promises, to take the energy and water utilities into public ownership.

As it is, these fat cats will continue to rip off consumers and pollute our rivers under Labour much as now. Hiring more teachers and cutting NHS waiting times are both ambitions which will be widely shared. And it is of course true that the damage wrought by 14 years of Tory austerity on these and other vital public services cannot be undone in an instant.

But these limited first steps will exhaust the potential of Labour's highly modest revenue-raising proposals, leaving further and more decisive improvements entirely dependent on the economic growth for which it has no plausible plan. The two remaining "first steps" - cracking down on anti-social behaviour and establishing a portentous border security command are pure dog-whistle politics. These are not dividing lines with the right but a straightforward echoing of its politics.

Even Tony Blair famously acknowledged that crimes had caused which required tough action. Undesirable behaviour in communities cannot be separated from poverty, insecure work and eviscerated public services.

Nor is trying to outbid Sunak's Tories in cracking down on cross-Channel illegal migration - only a small fraction of total immigration - anything more than pandering to prejudice. It is not as if the policy proposed - "smashing the criminal boat gangs" - is original or a course of action that has not occurred to anyone before.

Then there are the "steps" that Labour does not commit to taking. There is nothing to address climate change in the list, for example, a startling omission. Nor is there any mention of the New Deal for Working People, the vital package of workers' rights which Starmer reaffirmed in talks with trade union leaders only this week.

Given that legislation to give effect to the package was supposed to be introduced within Labour's first 100 days in office that it is not now a "first step" must be serious cause for concern. The package overall appears to be informed by Starmer's assumption that the voters are simply looking for managerial competence in government and that being an alternative to the Tories is a sufficient pitch.

Briefing journalists on the "six steps" campaign a Labour spokesman revealed that the party's two core commitments were, above all, to prove they were to be trusted with public finances and strong on national security.

These are euphemisms for loyalty to finance capital and imperialism, to austerity and war. Those overriding priorities condition the modesty of Labour's approach to everything else. Polling suggests he will get the chance to take his six steps and more, but it will not be long before it becomes clear that they are on a road to continuing misery for working people. (IPA Service)

Acute joblessness has been a major issue in 2024 Lok Sabha elections

Freebees, promised and actually delivered, have been by and large welcomed by the electorate over 40 years of age across the country throughout the first five phases of election campaigns. However, sharp fall in employment has made the unemployed youth little more concerned, though PM Narendra Modi tried his best to entice them with his guarantee of a developed India by 2047, a "world of opportunities awaits India's youth".

The youth between the age of 18 and 40 seemed to be divided. Majority of the youth, who were in their 25-30 when Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister on the promise of creating 2 crore jobs every year, have lost their illusion on account of their being unable to find suitable jobs under 10 years of Modi rule.

They have now become overage or nearing overage and hence they have already lost their opportunities to get quality jobs. They have reconciled to either informal jobs sans social security, or self-employment having very low earnings. This development has also made majority of youth really concerned, and only a fraction of them were found dreaming as PM Modi has prompted them to during the election campaigns.

Though, youth of the country are also divided on religious lines, since

many have found their engagement with "Jai Shri Ram" sloganeering party, they seemed generally on meditative mood, though not vocal in expressing their preference of voting. Elections were announced on March 16 when unemployment rate was still elevated at 7.4 per cent, which became even worse by the beginning of May when it rose to 8.1 per cent, as the CMIE data shows.

Since the Government of India does not provide real time data on employment and unemployment, we have no option but to look into the private CMIE data. Worse, higher the education level, higher the unemployment rate.

The CMIE's latest Consumer Pyramids Household Survey has found that unemployment rate increased both in the rural and urban areas. Rural unemployment rate climbed to 7.8 per cent in April from 7.1 per cent in March, while in urban areas it rose from 8.1 per cent to 8.7 per cent. Suffering the impact of the rise in unemployment during the election has offset much of the enticing power of Modi's guarantee of employment to the workforce in general and youth employment in particular.

Then there was even a worse thing happened. Employment rate and opportunities thereby fell in April, as the labour participation rate (LPR) data of the CMIE shows. LPR came down to 40.9 per



cent in April, from 41.1 per cent in the March. Employment rate, which is the proportion of employed persons in the working age population aged 15 years and above, fell from 38.1 per cent to 37.6 per cent in April 2024.

Workforce has shrunk, as CMIE data recorded. In March the total employed persons in the country were 433.8 million which came down to 429.1 million in April. It means about 4.7 million workers lost their jobs in April. The loss of jobs have not been received favourably for during PM Modi's campaigns, and people generally doubted his commitments towards providing employment opportunities to the people.

It should be noted that employment rises between August to April every year chiefly due to rise in agricultural activities in the rural areas. It begins falling in April and the trend continues until July,

because of lack of agricultural activities. In the light of this one thing is clear that there is a disturbing lack of job opportunities in non-agricultural activities.

In April 2023, total employed persons were 414.8 million as per the CMIE data which fell to 405.4 million in July 2023. It sharply rose with monsoon and agricultural activities in August to 424.7 million. When Kharif reaping season came it rose even to 433 million which picked to 433.8 million in March 2024 in Rabi reaping season. Then it has started falling in April, and this trend will continue until election.

Since about 20 million workers were found gainful engagement during the election, the real job opportunities seem to be at the level of one year before. Indeed, it is a dismal performance of the Modi government despite his promises of giving jobs, and so-called distribution of appointment letters. Job

market in the country seems to be stagnant; while about 2 crore youth enter into job market every year.

It was just during the election campaign in the beginning of April, International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute for Human Development (IHD) had published their India Employment Report 2024, which said that youth constituted about 83 per cent of the jobless in India, and growth was not employment-intensive.

The report, based on government data, said that about 90 per cent of those who found jobs in 2022 were informally employed, 82 per cent in the informal sector, 55.8 per cent self-employed, 22.7 per cent casually employed and only 21.5 per cent were in regular employment.

The report admitted that youth employment is, by and large, of poorer quality than employment for adults. Youth unemployment increased nearly threefold, from 5.7 per cent in 2000 to 17.5 per cent in 2019 but declined to 12.1 per cent in 2022. The youth unemployment rate has increased with the level of education, with the highest rates among those with a graduate degree or higher and higher among women than men.

In 2022, the unemployment rate among youths was six times greater than among persons with a secondary or higher level of education (at 18.4 per cent)

and nine times greater among graduates (at 29.1 per cent) than for persons who cannot read and write (at 3.4 per cent).

Women not in employment, education or training amounted to a proportion nearly five times larger than among their male counterparts (48.4 per cent versus 9.8 per cent) and accounted for around 95 per cent of the total youth population not in employment, education or training in 2022.

After the publication of the report, the Chief Economic Advisor of the Government of India V A Nageswaran had said that Government can't really address unemployment problem. Before that, PM Narendra Modi had said on March 20, that India's "youth have opted to become job creators more than job seekers."

Opposition parties have made the unemployment a major issue during their election campaigns and included it in their manifestoes. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has said, "Our Youth is bearing the brunt of Modi Government's pathetic apathy, as ever-increasing Unemployment had destroyed their future. ILO & IHD report conclusively says that the unemployment problem is grim in India. They are Conservative; we are sitting on a ticking bomb of joblessness!" He alleged that youth unemployment has tripled under the Modi government compared to 2012. (IPA Service)

Joe Biden has continued Donald Trump's policy of crippling Cuban economy



By: Antoni Kapcia

In early 2021, Cubans faced a triple crisis. Since 2017, Donald Trump had decreed 243 presidential measures to make the long-standing US embargo tighter than at any time since the mid 1960s. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the problem by closing Cuba's borders to tourism, a major source of hard currency. Meanwhile, in January 2021, the long-awaited fusion of Cuba's challenging dual currency system generated worrying uncertainties and rising prices for many.

Three years on, the crisis seems to have gotten worse rather than better. Despite early hopes, Joe Biden never repealed Trump's measures. Instead, he has increased pressure on Cuba's economy. Most damagingly, Washington has upheld Trump's farewell gift to Cubans before leaving office: his move to place Cuba on the list of "state sponsors of terrorism." This is a status that most governments reject but one that is increasingly recognized de facto by European banks and insurance companies wary of US sanctions.

Other factors worsening the crisis include rising oil prices, seriously affecting transport and energy production, and the recent US decision to deny the ESTA visa waiver for any Europeans who have visited Cuba in the preceding six months, immediately affecting bookings for package tours and cruises.

Meanwhile, Raúl Castro's 2021 retirement from his remaining post as the Communist Party's first secretary left Cuba in the hands of a new generation and a president (Miguel Díaz-Canel) who lacked the historical legitimacy, experience, and popular authority of the Castros. It was therefore no coincidence that in July 2021, unrest erupted within weeks of Raúl leaving the political scene, with a partially orchestrated campaign of open (and often violent) dissent, capi-

talizing on the government's perceived weakness.

Raúl was the (perhaps unwitting) cause of Cuba's most worrying new phenomenon: the dramatic rise in the numbers (over five hundred thousand) of young Cubans emigrating. In 2012, he had lifted restrictions on Cubans leaving, hoping to end a running score of youth frustration.

However, Cuba's historic educational successes increasingly led young Cubans to use their qualifications for more lucrative employment abroad. This tendency was aided substantially by the 1966 US Cuban Adjustment Act, which, to encourage a "brain drain," uniquely gave Cuban migrants the right to seek US residence and then US citizenship. The latest exodus worries many Cubans, threatening to create an ageing population and an insufficient workforce.

Beyond simply the desire to move to a far more developed country, the push factors behind this emigration remain unclear. However, some evidence suggests that it arises less from outright rejection of "the Revolution" as such than simple apathy about a system that no longer inspires people as it once did. This reflects a worrying ideological drift away from past patterns of commitment or acceptance among a generation that often lacks the political imperatives or awareness of those that came before them.

That brings us to the embargo itself. It is worth remembering that, over the course of six and a half decades, US policy toward Cuba has changed its character and justification, adapting to different agendas. However, its impact should never be underestimated. The embargo undermined the new government's long-term strategy of postcolonial development via some form of socialism, after just eighteen months of the revolution, and its continuation has always determined, distorted, and limited Cuba's autonomous

plans and capacities.

Moreover, the embargo remains in clear breach of international law. This is a point that successive, overwhelming UN votes have determined since the early 1990s, usually with only the United States and Israel dissenting.

Initially, the limited sanctions on exports to the US market were a punitive response to Cuba's "insufficient" compensation for US-owned properties that had been expropriated in response to the US cut in Cuba's annual sugar quota. By early 1962, when the Organization of American States (OAS) expelled Cuba as a member, the justification became a perceived threat from communism, enlisting all of Latin America (with the exception of Mexico) in a hemispheric embargo.

Although the aftermath of the 1962 Missile Crisis demonstrated that the "threat" was minimal and that Cuba's communism was quite different from Soviet models or strictures, the rationale for the embargo now shifted to the perceived threat to the security of the Americas from Cuba's active support for armed revolution. In the early 1970s, Richard Nixon's administration eased the stranglehold by allowing Latin American countries to recognize and trade with Cuba, while Moscow finally allowed Cuba to join the socialist bloc's trading network, Comecon.

In 1977, Jimmy Carter decided to partially recognize Cuba, establishing "interest sections" in third-party embassies in preparation for eventual full recognition. This was followed by unprecedented permission for US-based Cubans (but still no other US citizens) to visit their families back home.

The 1980s saw both Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, whose administrations were focused on the Soviet Union and the bloc it led; leave both the embargo and Carter's partial recognition more or less intact. Although Reagan showed greater hostility to what he defined as the source of Central America's new rebelliousness, he shifted responsibility for Cuba to the newly powerful Cuban American lobby, especially the Cuban American National Foundation, and funded the new propaganda war via Radio and TV Martí.

As the Soviet-led bloc collapsed in 1989-91, Cuba moved back to center stage. With the is-

land descending into a seemingly terminal existential crisis, immediately losing 80 per cent of its trade along with Soviet protection, the new lobby engineered the 1992 Torricelli Act, seeking to extend the embargo's reach to the relations of other countries with Cuba. Clearly, they now envisaged the end of "Castro's Cuba" - there was always an obsessive focus on the Cuban leader as the only factor explaining the revolution's survival - as the last communist domino to fall.

By 1992, with the Cold War over, the embargo's old justifications had lost their force; instead, its continuation was now linked to Cuba's human rights record. Yet the real explanation for its persistence was clear: Florida's growing significance in every national election gave the Cuban American lobby in the state real power.

The embargo reflected Florida's political importance rather than any real US desire to end the Cuban system. That power would be seen in 2000, when the state's electoral machinery determined George W. Bush's victory.

That power seemed to fade under Barack Obama, who knew that Florida's black and (non-Cuban) Hispanic voters would back him, bypassing the entrenched Cuban American vote. However, that impression was misleading. Since the 1996 legislation had locked the embargo into long-term permanence, Obama could easily raise the level of Carter's limited 1977 recognition, converting the Interest Sections into fully-fledged embassies, but could not affect the embargo itself.

While easing some restrictions, such as those on travel to Cuba or remittance levels, and changing the mood, Obama left the embargo intact. Indeed, the US Treasury continued to fine major European banks heavily for embargo breaches. It now seems likely that Obama took those limitations fully into consideration in a new approach to "regime change."

The year 2017 brought Trump and his many measures, this time lacking any clear justification but encouraging the Cuban American lobby to flex their muscles. Trump's move also gave renewed licence for US intelligence agencies to sow and fund discord, diffuse false news, orchestrate culture wars, and seek to sabotage the economy and Cuba's financial arrangements.

More than ever, Cuba was in the eye of a perfect storm, designed to end the system.

Of those measures, the most significant was Trump's decision in 2019 to end the Title III waiver, immediately dissuading would-be investors, frightening non-Cuban trading entities into withdrawal, and worrying European banks and financial institutions. The fall in Cuban imports was soon palpable, with increasing shortages of grain, food, and medicines.

Why Biden refused to repeal Trump's changes remains a subject of debate. It may reflect the assumption that, as Cuba was simply not an important issue, it could be left in the hands of entrenched elements in the State Department and Congress's foreign relations committees.

If that is true, many Cubans are hoping for a repeat of the earlier pattern with Obama. In this scenario, just as Obama judged that Cuba could be left until his last year and then easily "solved" by a politically cheap form of détente, a second Biden presidential term, with no worries about reelection, might also lead to an easing of relations.

However, it would be advisable for Cubans not to hold their breath in anticipation of this outcome. Cuban government officials now publicly recognize that, with the end of the embargo nowhere in sight, they must construct policies for economic survival on the basis that it will remain a permanent fact of life. That pessimistic acceptance now adds to the growing sense of apathy and gloom.

We repeatedly hear the cliché that Cuba is "at a crossroads," but in truth the revolution has always been at a crossroads, its direction always shaped, determined, or limited by having to react to external pressures. That was true in 1959 and remains true today, as the leadership in Havana struggles to square the circle of urgent economic reform while keeping the faith in a constantly redefined socialism.

While we should not read too much into recent expressions of public protest, which are often not as widespread and spontaneous as they seem, frustration is real, and the underlying sense that Cubans face the prospect of "yet more of the same" risks being corrosive. Loyal Cubans urgently need some good news, to tap into the reservoir of support that still seems to survive, despite everything. (IPA Service)

Why are lung cancer screening rates so poor?

By: Nina Thomas

Many medical organisations have been recommending lung cancer screening for decades for those at high risk of developing the disease.

But in 2022, less than 6% of people in the US eligible for screening actually got screened. Compared with other common cancer screenings, lung cancer screening rates fall terribly behind. For comparison, the screening rate in 2021 for colon cancer was 72%, and the rate for breast cancer was 76%. Why are lung cancer screening rates so poor?

I am a pulmonologist who specialises in screening and diagnosing lung cancer. In my research to improve early detection of lung cancer, I've found that numerous complex barriers hinder the widespread adoption of lung cancer screening.

Lung cancer screening basics

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related death in the world. But early detection can significantly improve outcomes.

Survival rates for early stage lung cancer are nearly seven times higher than lung cancer that has spread in the body. Between 2015 and 2019, survival rates for lung cancer have improved by 22%, in part because of an increase in earlier diagnosis.

Most patients with early-stage lung cancer, however, have no symptoms and aren't diagnosed until they reach more advanced stages that are harder to treat, underlining the need for effective lung cancer screening.

The US Preventive Services Task Force recommends lung cancer screening for people 50-80 years old, people who cur-

rently smoke or previously smoked but quit within the past 15 years, and people who smoked at least 20 pack-years. Pack-years is an estimate of cigarette exposure in a person's lifetime, calculated by multiplying the total number of years someone has smoked by the average number of packs smoked per day. For example, if someone smoked half a pack per day for 40 years, they would have smoked for 20 pack-years.

Low-dose CT scan

One of the primary barriers to lung cancer screening is lack of public awareness and understanding. Many people are unaware they qualify for lung cancer screening or have misconceptions around what to expect from the screening process.

Lung cancer screening involves a yearly low-dose computed tomography, or CT, scan, a diagnostic imaging tool that uses X-rays to create detailed cross sections of the inside of the body. Screening 250 patients can prevent one lung cancer death. In comparison, 645 people screened with a mammogram can prevent one breast cancer death.

Some people have reservations surrounding the scan itself because of radiation exposure. The radiation from a low-dose CT scan, however, is about 1.4 millisieverts – the scientific unit used to measure ionizing radiation – which is less than the 3 to 5 millisieverts of background radiation a person may be exposed to in a given year on average while living on Earth.

The whole process takes only a few minutes and does not require any needles, medications or infusions. During the scan, the patient lies on the scanner's sliding table and raises their arms above their head.

The technologist may ask them to hold their breath for 5



to 10 seconds as the table passes through the scanner.

A radiologist summarizes the results of the test for their doctor in a report. If the result is negative for findings in the lungs, the patient would return in one year for another scan. If the result is positive, it usually means the radiologist saw a lung nodule, or a spot on the lung. Not all lung nodules are cancer, and patients may require additional imaging or a biopsy to confirm.

Disparities in screening

Public health campaigns and education initiatives work to engage the public and increase awareness of the availability and benefit of lung cancer screening. However, these efforts have been less effective in some of the communities most at risk for developing lung cancer.

African American men have the highest rates of developing and dying from lung cancer compared with other groups, even at younger ages and among those with less smoking history. The tobacco industry has explicitly targeted the Black community with pervasive marketing tactics in predominantly Black neighborhoods and stores.

Since the 1970s, the tobacco industry has aggressively marketed menthol cigarettes to African Americans using tailored messaging and imagery.

This compounds and exacerbates the socioeconomic disparities in health care and cancer care already seen in these underserved and underrepresented communities.

Rural communities face geographic barriers to lung cancer screening. About 80.5 million Americans live in counties with high rates of lung cancer and poor access to a quality screening centre.

Many of these counties are clustered in the Appalachian and southeastern regions of the US where smoking rates are highest. Over 60% of people living in rural areas who are eligible for lung cancer screening have to travel over 20 miles to a screening facility.

Lung cancer screening may also be costly. While most private insurances and Medicare cover the cost of lung cancer screening, Medicaid policies vary state by state and may not cover the cost of lung cancer screening.

In addition, while some plans may cover the initial low-dose CT scan, they might not cover follow-up testing, procedures and treatment. Supplementary costs such as transportation, time off from work, child care and other logistical issues can also add up to create additional socioeconomic barriers to screening.

Communities that are under- or uninsured are at the highest

risk of developing lung cancer. They often lack access to primary care providers, let alone specialists who can facilitate screening.

Erasing smoking stigma

Because lung cancer is linked to smoking, stigma plays a significant role in preventing many people eligible for screening from pursuing it.

Many people eligible for lung cancer screening fear being blamed for their previous or current tobacco use.

Stigma also discourages patients from discussing lung cancer screening with their health care providers or community. Clinicians can partner with patients and communities to destigmatise lung cancer and tobacco dependence, extricating the disease from blame.

Framing screening as a proactive measure to help those at risk of developing lung cancer and as collaboration with those who need help quitting smoking can empower people to actively engage in screening rather than dreading or avoiding it.

Fear is another barrier. Many people believe that a lung cancer diagnosis is a death sentence. When diagnosed early, however, doctors treat lung cancer with an intention to cure.

Additionally, advances in lung cancer treatment over the past 10-15 years have led to remarkable improvements in survival for all stages of the disease. Reassurance and education around next steps and paths to treatment at the time of screening help diffuse some of the distress surrounding lung cancer.

Public health researchers are exploring how to minimise the significant and complex barriers to lung cancer screening for those who need it most. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Regularly adding table salt to food linked to 41% higher risk of gastric cancer



By: Jessica Freeborn

Gastric cancer - also known as stomach cancer - is the fifth most common cancer in the world. While not as common in the United States, it still makes up about 1.5% of new cancer cases diagnosed annually.

Doctors and experts are interested in identifying risk factors for gastric cancer so that people can seek high-quality care early.

A recent study published in *Gastric Cancer* examined data from over 470,000 individuals to see how the frequency of adding salt to food related to cases of gastric cancer.

The authors found that participants who always added salt to food were at a higher risk for gastric cancer than participants who rarely or never added salt to food at the table.

This study adds to data about the risk salt poses for gastric cancer in non-Asian populations, as most research in this area has been in Asian populations.

As research moves forward, doctors may be able to ask people about their frequency of adding salt to foods as a simple indicator to monitor salt intake and related gastric cancer risk, aiding public health messaging.

Salting food linked to higher gastric cancer risk

This prospective study used data from the UK Biobank, including 471,144 participants in its analysis.

They excluded participants who were missing data on adding salt to food, body mass index (BMI), or urinary sodium or potassium levels. They also excluded participants who had cancer at baseline and participants who had kidney disease.

Participants filled out baseline questionnaires to indicate how often they added salt to food, excluding the salt they used while cooking. Participants could respond with never/rarely, sometimes, usually, or always.

Researchers further measured participants' urinary sodium, creatinine, and potassium levels. They were also able to estimate 24-hour urinary sodium excretion.

They accounted for several covariates, including physical activity levels, age, education level, ethnicity, sex, and alcohol use. They were also able to take into account red meat consumption and fruit and vegetable intake. The median follow-up period with participants was 10.9 years.

During the follow-up time, 640 cases of gastric cancer among participants were documented. In general, participants who reported always adding salt to food at the table were more likely to be past or current smokers, have a high level of alcohol intake, and have a lower education level.

Researchers found that participants who always added salt at the table were at 41% higher risk for gastric cancer compared to participants who never or rarely added salt to food at the table.

While they found that adding salt to food more often was associated with increased 24-hour urinary sodium levels, they did not find a significant association between 24-hour urinary sodium levels and gastric cancer.

They also found that in a subset of 198,900 participants, responses to the frequency of adding salt at the table positively correlated with daily sodium intake levels.

The results suggest that examining the frequency of added salt use at the table may be a simple way to assist in identifying individuals with high salt intake who may, in turn, be at risk for gastric cancer.

Anton Bilchik, MD, PhD, surgical oncologist, chief of medicine, and Director of the Gastrointestinal and Hepatobiliary Program at Providence Saint John's Cancer Institute in Santa Monica, CA, not involved in this study, told *Medical News Today* "[t]he study provides further evidence of the association between diet, particularly one rich in salt and gastric cancer." He added: "It has been suggested that one of the major causes of gastric cancer in Asian countries is from fish high in salt content. Much less is known about the associa-

tion of salt intake and gastric cancer in Western countries. It is well known that excessive use of salt is associated with a higher risk of hypertension and cardiovascular disease. This study provides additional evidence that salt routinely taken with meals increases the risk of developing gastric cancer. It is therefore imperative that people be aware of the deleterious effects of excessive salt intake."

Who is most at risk for gastric cancer?

Many factors contribute to someone's risk for gastric cancer, including smoking, increased age, obesity, and family history.

Researchers of the current study note that higher salt intake has been associated with a higher risk for gastric cancer in Asian studies.

However, there have not been many studies in this area among Western population groups.

Bilchik offered the following insight to MNT:

"Gastric cancer is very serious especially if it presents at an advanced stage. It is one of the most common cancers in Asian countries and there is therefore greater emphasis on screening measures than in Western countries. Also, the pattern of presentation is different with patients from Western countries presenting more often with cancer in the upper part of the stomach, a more challenging location to manage than Asian countries where cancers are more often found in the lower part of the stomach. This may be related to a higher incidence of obesity and gastroesophageal reflux disease in Western countries - risk factors for upper gastric cancer."

More studies on salt intake and gastric cancer needed

This study has several limitations. First, it cannot prove that increased salt consumption causes gastric cancer. It also relies on participant reporting, which does not always produce the most accurate data, and they did not have complete data on salt intake in foods.

The UK Biobank is also not necessarily reflective of the general population, so research with other groups with greater diversity may be warranted, and the results cannot be generalized. The link between salt intake and gastric cancer risk may be stronger than observed in this study.

Researchers also used an estimation method to measure 24-hour urinary sodium levels, which does not always accurately represent this level.

They further note that the case numbers were inadequate to examine the effect of possible modifiers like sex, age, ethnicity, smoking status, or *Helicobacter pylori* infection.

There is the possibility for residual confounding, and future research can also focus more on gastric cancer subtypes.

How to reduce salt consumption

This data continues to support the idea that excess salt intake is associated with an increase in gastric cancer risk.

However, there are many other reasons to limit salt intake. For example, consuming too much sodium can also increase the risk of high blood pressure and kidney problems.

People can work towards making wiser choices regarding salt consumption to reduce their overall salt intake.

This can include working with a registered dietitian who can help with individualized strategies.

Registered dietitian Karen Z. Berg, not involved in this research, offered the following insights on salt reduction ideas to MNT:

"People get so caught up in their habits that they add salt to an already salty food. Taste your food first, and hopefully more often than not, you won't have to add salt. Also, I tell people not to cook with salt. Use spices instead to enhance flavors. Salt can be added later if you absolutely feel like it's necessary. Your taste buds get used to salt, and the more you add salt to your food, the more you're going to want it. So I tell people to really be conscious of that and try to wean themselves off of salt as much as possible." (Courtesy: *Medical News Today*)

How much weight loss can reverse type 2 diabetes? 44 million women, 26 million men in India were obese in 2022: The Lancet

By: Srishti Aggerwal

To treat type 2 diabetes, your doctor undoubtedly advises appropriate eating habits and exercise. These two strategies not only help to regulate your blood sugar levels but can also aid in weight loss. Additionally, a study that was reported in the September 2017 issue of the journal *BMJ* suggests that losing weight may be the key to reversing type 2 diabetes.

The authors noted that a 33-pound weight loss frequently assists in putting diabetes into remission. Yes, that sounds very detailed, but it makes more sense when you realize that the data is based on dropping 15 kilograms, or 33 lbs. Given that many individuals believe type 2 diabetes to be a chronic, lifelong ailment, this assertion is audacious.

The precise number is based on earlier studies: A study published in the journal *Diabetes Care* in May 2016 showed that 40 percent of persons with diabetes could put their condition into remission by losing around 33 pounds and keeping it off for six months.

According to the study's authors, type 2 diabetes "is a potentially reversible condition." Despite this, it does not imply that you should set a precise goal of losing 33 pounds. "Further work on this is ongoing, regarding the actual weight loss needed," says Louise McCombie, RD, research associate at the University of Glasgow in Scotland and a study co-author.

The International Diabetes Federation will present these findings as a part of a bigger body of work in December 2017. And while 40% of people putting their diabetes into remission is remarkable, it also implies that this is only viable for some people.

Why is it important to lose weight?

According to our research, type 2 diabetes is thought to develop differently in people who store too much fat in their pancreas and liver, and decreasing this fat can help your diabetes go into remission.

Also according to the *Review Journal*, A1C is a blood test to identify Type 2 diabetes and measures

how well we manage the blood sugar levels. A higher A1C level signifies poor management of blood sugar. Therefore, knowing how to lower hemoglobin A1C is essential as it indicates better management of your diabetes.

How can diabetes be reversed?

Our greatest data point to weight loss as the primary factor in putting type 2 diabetes into remission. If you lose weight as soon as feasible after receiving a diabetes diagnosis, remission is more likely. However, we know individuals who, 25 years after being diagnosed, have managed to put their diabetes in remission.

If you lose a significant amount of weight—15 kg (or 2 stone 5 pounds)—quickly and safely after being diagnosed with diabetes, your diabetes is more likely to enter remission.

It is crucial to understand that not everyone who loses a significant amount of weight will be able to achieve remission of their diabetes. Even if it doesn't result in remission, decreasing 15 kg has numerous health advantages. According to research, obtaining assistance to drop even 5% of your body weight can significantly impact your health.

Losing excess weight may result in the following:

- Fewer prescriptions
- Improved blood sugar levels
- Decreased risk of heart problems.

How to lose weight?

Through dietary and lifestyle changes, weight loss surgery (also known as bariatric surgery), or a combination of these, some patients have significantly reduced their weight and put their diabetes into remission.

A particular diet for those who have diabetes or are trying to reverse their diabetes does not exist. There are many various approaches to weight loss, but there isn't a single diet that works for everyone. We do know that some patients have been able to put their diabetes into remission by losing weight while adhering to a low-carb or Mediterranean diet. To assist you in determining which strategy is ideal for you, we provide a wealth

of information, meal plans, and recipes.

Learn about our research on reversing type 2 diabetes for individuals with lower body weight (BMI) who are not considered obese or overweight.

How to Reverse Diabetes by Losing Weight: 8 Tips

Take into account the following to raise your chances of losing weight successfully:

- Stay motivated
- Change habits gradually

- Think about your diet
- Know that your diabetes medication may affect body weight
- Talk to your doctor about weight loss surgery options

- Monitor yourself
- Ask for help
- Think of the health benefits of losing weight in the long run.
- Here are some food recommendations to lose a few extra pounds and reverse diabetes

- Opt for healthy fats
- Include a variety of fruits and vegetables
- Go for whole grains like lapse, ragi, jowar, barley, bajra, etc.
- Must include lean proteins, such as poultry, fish, low-fat dairy, soy, daal, peas, beans, etc
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Avoid sugars in the form of sweets and drinks.

Conclusion

Increased blood sugar levels are one of the many health issues that can result from being overweight or obese. Maintain a healthy body weight if you want to control your blood sugar or prevent diabetes. Losing weight also aids in maintaining your body's BMI, which reduces insulin resistance and treats diabetes.

In the end, he added, it's also crucial to keep in mind that even little losses can lead to significant benefits while trying to reverse diabetes. "With a weight decrease of between 15% and 20%, the majority of patients can enter remission."

It's simpler if you have just been diagnosed, but if you're motivated, even long-term diabetic patients can achieve results. You never reach a moment when you've completely lost the chance, he added. "However, the sooner you make lifestyle changes, the better." (Courtesy: *Youth Ki Awaaz*)

By: Seema Prasad

There were 70 million adults living with obesity in India in 2022, with almost twice the number of women than men, at 44 million and 26 million, respectively. In children aged 19 and under, 5.2 million girls and 7.3 million boys were obese, a global study published on February 29 in *the Lancet* noted. The study also found dramatic increases in obesity rates compared to figures from 1990.

"Hormonal and biological changes that occur during menopause and pregnancy led to more obese women than men," Dr. Guha Pradeepa, study co-author from the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, told *Down to Earth* (DTE), warning that obesity could increase cardiovascular risk factors and diabetes.

Across the world, obesity rates crossed the one billion mark, with 159 million children and adolescents and 879 million adults living with obesity in 2022.

From 1990 to 2022, obesity rates among children and adolescents worldwide quadrupled and obesity rates among adults have more than doubled. In India, the obesity rates increased from 1.2 per cent in 1990 to 9.8 per cent in 2022 for women and 0.5 per cent to 5.4 per cent in 2022 for men.

The prevalence of obesity in India ranked 182nd highest in the world for women and 180th highest in the world for men in 2022, according to the study conducted by network of health scientists NCD Risk Factor Collaboration along with the World Health Organization.

The researchers used population-based data from 197 countries. More than 1,500 researchers contributed to the study, which looked at body mass index (BMI) to understand how obesity and underweight have changed worldwide from 1990 to 2022. Adults were considered obese if they had a BMI greater than or equal to 30 kilograms per square metre (kg/m²) and underweight if their BMI was below 18.5kg/m².

Over the period between 1990 and 2022, rates of underweight fell among children, adolescents and adults, leading to obesity becoming the most common form of malnutrition in many countries, the paper said. In 1990, underweight was more prevalent than obesity in adults in several countries, but the trend has reversed.

The same was true for India and reflected in the estimates. The underweight rate decreased from 41.7 per cent in 1990 to 13.7 per cent in 2022 for women and 39.8 per cent to 12.5 per cent in 2022 for men. The country had 61 million underweight women and 58 million underweight men in 1990. For adolescents and children,

the underweight rate in India decreased from 27.3 per cent in 1990 to 20.3 per cent in 2022 for girls and 45.1 per cent to 21.7 per cent in 2022 for boys.

Despite this fall, the prevalence of underweight in India ranked highest in the world for girls with 35 million underweight girls and second highest in the world for boys with 42 million boys in 2022.

The researchers underlined the urgency of economic and agricultural policies that tackle poverty and improve food security. "There is an urgent need for programmes that enhance healthy nutrition, such as targeted cash transfers, food assistance as subsidies or vouchers for healthy foods, free healthy school meals and primary care-based nutritional interventions," they said.

The shifting of the double disease burden from underweight-dominated to obesity-dominated, particularly with the age of obesity striking adults decreasing, was attributed to two reasons: Eating away from home and access to processed foods increased in school-aged children, adolescents and adults over three decades as well as the reduced burning of calories due to the mechanisation of work and transport.

The researchers highlighted the "need for obesity prevention, supporting weight loss and reducing disease risk (via the treatment of the mediators of its hazards, such as hypertension and hypercholesterolemia) in those with obesity. Prevention and management are especially important because the age of onset of obesity has decreased, which increases the duration of exposure."

Pradeepa, told DTE, "Obesity is a public health concern that needs to be addressed through policies that prohibit the advertising of sugar-sweetened beverages; restrict and regulate the sale and marketing of unhealthy foods to children; and insist on more clear nutrition labelling."

"Limited accessibility to healthy foods and few opportunities for play and sports leads to inequalities in obesity treatment. While individuals can pursue a healthy lifestyle on their own, the government has to provide community space to exercise and walk. Without which, there could be a limit to the impact of policies that target unhealthy foods," Pradeepa added.

Importantly, the paper also highlighted there are no generalised clinical guidelines to treat obesity as it varies between organisations and countries. Without established guidelines, new pharmacological treatments of obesity being evaluated are likely to have a low impact globally in the short term. (Courtesy: *Down To Earth*)

White House had acknowledged Sullivan's trip and that he would later head on to Israel, where he's scheduled to meet Netanyahu

US national security adviser, Saudi Arabia's crown prince meet to discuss 'semi-final' security deal

DUBAI, May 19: President Joe Biden's national security adviser met early Sunday with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss what the kingdom described as the "semi-final" version of a wide-ranging security agreement between the countries.

The announcement by the state-run Saudi Press Agency comes as the strategic deal had been upended after Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 250 others taken hostage back to the Gaza Strip.

In the time since, a punishing Israeli airstrike campaign and ground offensive there has killed over 35,000 Palestinians, endangering the security deal that had included Saudi Arabia diplomatically recognising Israel for the first time since its founding in 1948.

Saudi state media released no images of Jake Sullivan and Prince Mohammed meeting in Dhahran, a city in the kingdom's far east that's home to its state-run oil giant, the Saudi Arabian Oil Co. known as Saudi Aramco.

"The semi-final version of the draft strategic agreements between the kingdom and the United States of America, which are almost being finalised — and what is being worked on between the two sides in the Palestinian issue to find a credible path — were discussed," the statement released after the talks said.



That included "a two-state solution that meets the aspirations and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" and "the situation in Gaza and the need to stop the war there and facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid," the statement added.

Saudi Arabia has long called for an independent Palestinian state to be created along Israel's 1967 borders, with east Jerusalem as its capital. However, that likely may be untenable for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose government hinges on support from hard-liners who oppose a two-

state solution and support Israeli settlements on lands Palestinians want for that state.

The White House had acknowledged Sullivan's trip and that he would later head on to Israel, where he's scheduled to meet Netanyahu on Sunday. However, there was no immediate statement from the US on the discussions, other than to say they would be "including the war in Gaza and ongoing efforts to achieve a lasting peace and security in the region."

Saudi Arabia has long relied — like other Gulf Arab nations — on the US to

be the security guarantor for the wider Middle East as tensions over Iran's nuclear program in recent years have spilled over into a series of attacks. The proposal now being discussed likely would deepen that, and also reportedly includes access to advanced weapons and possibly trade deals as well.

Saudi Arabia has also pushed for nuclear cooperation in the deal that includes America allowing it to enrich uranium in the kingdom — something that worries nonproliferation experts, as spinning centrifuges opens the door to a possible weapons program. Prince Mohammed has said the kingdom would pursue a nuclear weapon if Iran had one. Iran in recent weeks has increasingly threatened it could do so.

Iran's mission to the United Nations in New York meanwhile confirmed that Tehran held indirect talks with US officials in Oman last week. Iran's state-run IRNA news agency quoted the mission as describing the talks as "an ongoing process."

"The negotiations have not been the first and will not be the last of their kind," the mission said, according to IRNA.

Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, has been the site of US-Iran talks in the past, including under Biden despite the tensions between the two nations. (AP)

Slovak prime minister's condition remains serious but prognosis positive after assassination bid

BANSKA BYSTRICA (SLOVAKIA), May 19: Slovakia's populist prime minister, Robert Fico, remained in serious condition on Sunday but has been given a positive prognosis four days after he was shot multiple times in an assassination attempt that has sent shockwaves across the deeply polarised European Union nation, the defence minister said.

"The worst of what we feared has passed, at least for the moment. But his condition remains serious," Robert Kalinak told reporters outside the hospital where Fico is being treated. "His condition is stable with a positive prognosis."

Kalinak added that the hospital treating the Slovak leader in Banská Bystrica, a former coal mining town of 16,000 situated 29 km (17 miles) from where Fico was attacked, will continue to issue updates on his health status. Milan Urbani, deputy director of the hospital, told reporters that "based on the doctors' morning consultation, we can conclude that the patient is currently out of a life-threatening condition. His condition remains very serious, and he needs a long time to rest to recover. We firmly believe that everything will go in a good direction."

Fico, 59, was shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters on Wednesday outside a cultural centre in the town of Handlova, nearly 140 km (85 miles) northeast of the capital, Bratislava. Video showed the Slovak premier approach people gathered at barricades and reach out to shake hands as a man stepped forward, extended his arm and fired five rounds before being tackled and arrested. On Friday, Fico underwent two hours

of surgery to remove dead tissue from his gunshot wounds, but he was not healthy enough to be transferred to the capital, officials said Saturday.

The country's Specialised Criminal Court in the town of Pezinok on Saturday ordered the suspected assassin, who is charged with attempted murder, to remain behind bars. Prosecutors said they feared he could flee or commit other crimes if freed, a court spokesperson said. The suspect can appeal the order.

Little information about the would-be assassin has been disclosed after prosecutors told police not to publicly identify him or release details about the case. Unconfirmed media reports have named him and said he was a 71-year-old retiree known as an amateur poet who may have once worked as a mall security guard.

Government authorities have given details that matched that description. They said the suspect didn't belong to any political groups, though the attack itself was politically motivated.

Fico said last month on Facebook that he believed rising tensions in the country could lead to the killing of politicians, and he blamed the media for fuelling tensions in the country of 5.4 million.

In his address on Sunday, Kalinak also stressed that lessons must be learned from the violent attack on Fico, who has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond. "This must be a memento. If we don't learn, we're heading for hell," he said. "We need to bring this situation back to what we can consider standard." (AP)

An ultimatum raises pressure on Netanyahu to make postwar plans for Gaza, even as fighting rages

JERUSALEM, May 19: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is under mounting pressure from his own War Cabinet and his country's closest ally over postwar plans for Gaza, even as the war with Hamas shows no sign of ending.

On Saturday, Benny Gantz, a member of the War Cabinet and Netanyahu's main political rival, said he would leave the government on June 8 if it did not formulate a new war plan including an international, Arab and Palestinian administration to handle civilian affairs in Gaza.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, the third member of the Cabinet, has also called for a plan for Palestinian administration, and said in a speech this week that he wouldn't agree to Israel governing Gaza itself. The United States has meanwhile called for a revitalized Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza with assistance from Saudi Arabia and other Arab states ahead of eventual statehood. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan is expected to push those plans when he visits Israel on Sunday.

So far, Netanyahu has brushed them all off. But Gantz' ultimatum could reduce his margin for maneuver. Netanyahu has ruled out any role for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, saying he plans to hand civil responsibilities over to local Palestinians unaffiliated with it or Hamas. But he has also said that it's impossible to make any such plans until Hamas is defeated because it has threatened anyone who cooperates with Israel.

Netanyahu's government is also deeply opposed to Palestinian statehood. In a statement issued after the ultimatum, Netanyahu said Gantz' conditions would amount to "defeat for Israel, abandoning most of the hostages, leaving Hamas intact and establishing a Palestinian state."

Netanyahu added, however, that he still thought the emergency government was important for prosecuting the war, and that he "expects Gantz to clarify his positions to the public."

Gantz' departure would leave

Netanyahu even more beholden to his far-right coalition allies, including National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who could more easily bring down the government if he doesn't meet their demands. They have called for Israel to reoccupy Gaza, encourage the "voluntary emigration" of Palestinians from the territory and reestablish Jewish settlements that were removed in 2005. Critics of Netanyahu, including thousands who have joined weekly protests in recent months, accuse him of prolonging the war for his own political survival. Gantz, who brought his centrist party into the government days after the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war, warned Netanyahu not to "choose the path of fanatics and lead the entire nation to the abyss."

Netanyahu denies such accusations, saying he is focused on defeating Hamas and that elections would distract from the war effort.

Polls indicate Netanyahu would be driven from office if new elections were held, with Gantz most likely to replace him. That would probably mark the end of Netanyahu's long political career and expose him to prosecution over longstanding corruption charges.

Israeli media have reported growing discontent within the country's security establishment over the course of the war, with officials warning that the lack of any such planning was turning tactical victories into strategic defeat.

With no one else to govern Gaza, Hamas has repeatedly regrouped, even in the hardest-hit areas that Israel previously said it had cleared. Heavy fighting has erupted in recent days in the built-up Jabalya refugee camp in the north and the Zeitoun neighbourhood on the outskirts of Gaza City.

Israeli troops are meanwhile pushing into parts of the southern city of Rafah in what they say is a limited operation. The fighting there has displaced some 800,000 people, many who had already fled from other areas, and severely hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid. (AP)

2 dead, 5 missing after boat collision on Danube

BUDAPEST (HUNGARY), May 19: Police say two people have died and five are missing following a boat collision on the Danube River in Hungary. Hungarian police received a report late Saturday night that a man had been found bleeding from his head on the shore of the Danube near the town of Verce, around 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of the capital, Budapest. The bodies of a man and a woman were later discovered nearby. Hours after police began their search, they discovered a damaged boat in the water, which they towed to shore. They are still searching for five adults — three men and two women — who they believe were on the boat. Police said they determined that a river cruise boat had been in the area at the time of the accident. They stopped a cruise boat with a damaged hull near the town of Komarom, more than 50 miles (80 kilometers) further upriver. The Danube at Verce is roughly 1,500 feet (460 metres) wide and is in the centre of an area called the Danube Bend where the river makes a sweeping, nearly 90-degree turn to the south. The area is a popular recreational and boating destination and is on a route often used by cruise boats between Budapest and the Austrian capital, Vienna, some 140 miles (230 kilometers) upriver. (AP)

Fresh corruption allegations levelled against ex-Pak PM Imran Khan

ISLAMABAD, May 19: Pakistan's accountability watchdog has levelled fresh corruption allegations against jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, accusing him of "illegally" possessing and selling seven high-value watches and 10 other precious gifts linked to the state gift repository when he was in power, media reports said on Sunday.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) launched an inquiry against the 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi over the alleged misuse of the Toshakhana — the state gift repository, The Express Tribune newspaper reported. The beleaguered former first couple has been convicted in earlier Toshakhana corruption cases as well.

In January, Khan and Bushra were sentenced to 14 years in jail each by an accountability court for alleged corruption in state gifts they got from the state repository. The sentence was later suspended by the Islamabad High Court (IHC). The previous Toshakhana graft case was filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in the charges of hiring the sale of state gifts.

The NAB investigation centres

on the illegal possession and sale of seven high-value watches and 10 other precious gifts, including diamond and gold jewellery, the report said.

According to the inquiry, items such as Graff and Rolex watches and diamond jewellery were allegedly sold without being legally owned or deposited in the Toshakhana, as required by law.

The Toshakhana is a department under the Cabinet Division that stores gifts given to rulers and government officials by heads of other governments and foreign dignitaries.

Under the rules governing Toshakhana — a Persian word meaning "treasure house" — government officials can keep gifts by paying a price, but first, the gift should be deposited.

The gifts were purchased/retained at "considerably lower rates" and were "routinely sold" without properly declaring them. The expensive Graff watch set was also allegedly sold without "retention", according to the report.

The NAB's findings suggest collusion between the buyers of the Graff watches and a private appraiser, who allegedly undervalued the watches by Rs 30 million.

The undervaluation, confirmed

via an email from Toshakhana, meant that only Rs 20.1 million, or 20 per cent of the watches' actual value of Rs 100.9 million, was deposited into the government treasury, the report said.

"During the course of the inquiry, it was revealed that the value of luxury gift items was assessed in an unscrupulous and slipshod manner by a private appraiser [...] was not even an industry expert and did not possess the required experience or expertise to make these assessments," Geo News said, citing the report.

After the report findings, the accountability watchdog was authorised to conduct further probes against Khan and Bushra. Separate call-up notices had also been served to them, which they have challenged in the IHC.

The court will hear Bushra's appeal on June 4 and Khan's appeal on June 24, the report said.

The former-cricketer-turned-politician has been lodged at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi since August last year. Since his removal from power in a no-confidence motion in April 2022, Khan has been convicted in at least four cases, including the cipher (secret diplomatic communication) case. (PTI)

Congolese army says shootout in the capital is failed coup, perpetrators arrested

KINSHASA, May 19: Congo's army says it has "foiled a coup" early Sunday morning and arrested the perpetrators, including several foreigners, following a shootout between armed men in military uniform and a top politician's guards that left three people dead in the capital, Kinshasa.

The attempted coup d'état was "nipped in the bud by Congolese defence and security forces (and) the situation is under control," Congolese army spokesperson Brigadier General Sylvain Ekege said at a media briefing. He did not give further details.

Clashes were reported between men in military uniform and guards of a local politician at the politician's house that is on Tshatshi Boulevard which is 2 kilometres from the presi-



idential palace and where some embassies are also located.

This came amid a crisis gripping President Felix Tshisekedi's ruling party over an election for the parliament's leadership which was supposed to be held Saturday but was postponed.

The armed men attacked the Kinshasa residence of Vital Kamerhe, a federal legislator and a candidate for

speaker of the National Assembly of Congo, but were stopped by his guards, Michel Moto Muhima, his spokesperson said on the X social media platform.

"The Honourable Vital Kamerhe and his family are safe and sound. Their security has been reinforced," he wrote.

Local media identified the men as Congolese soldiers. It wasn't clear if the men in military uniform were trying to arrest the politician.

Two police officers and one of the attackers were killed in the shootout that started around 4:30 a.m. at the house on Tshatshi Boulevard, according to Muhima.

Footage, seemingly from the area, showed military trucks and heavily armed men parading deserted streets in the neighbourhood.

On Friday, President Felix Tshisekedi met with parliamentarians and leaders of the Sacred Union of the Nation ruling coalition in an attempt to resolve the crisis amid his party which dominates the national assembly.

He said he would not "hesitate to dissolve the National Assembly and send everyone to new elections if these bad practices persist."

Tshisekedi was reelected as president in December in a chaotic vote amid calls for a revote from the opposition over what they said was a lack of transparency, following past trends of disputed elections in the central African country.

The United States Embassy in Congo issued a security alert, urging caution after "reports of gunfire." (AP)

Prachanda set to seek Vote of Confidence for fourth time

KATHMANDU, May 19: Nepal Prime Minister Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" is set to seek vote of confidence from the House of Representatives on Monday amidst obstruction of the Parliament proceedings by the opposition Nepali Congress.

The prime minister is taking the vote of confidence as per the Article 100 clause 2 of the Constitution of Nepal, informed Dasharath Dhamala, assistance spokesperson of the House of Representatives.

The office of the prime minister and the Council of Ministers has already sent a letter informing the Parliament Secretariat regarding the matter, he said.

The prime minister is required to take a vote of confidence within 30 days if the party he is representing splits or if a member of the coalition government withdraws support, as per the Article 100 clause 2 of the Constitution. The Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP) withdrew its support last week while quitting the coalition government.

This will be the fourth vote of confidence for Prime Minister Prachanda within one and a half year after he assumed the top executive position on December 25, 2022.

It requires 138 votes out of a total of 175 members of the HoR, to pass the vote of confidence.

"There is no doubt that my government will survive the floor test," Prime Minister Prachanda said speaking at a ruling party's programme in Kathmandu on Saturday. "The differences between the ruling alliance and the opposition parties will be sorted out through dialogue," he pointed out.

Meanwhile, the major political parties have agreed to form a panel to look into the misappropriation of fund by cooperatives. Nepali Congress party has been obstructing the House of Representatives for a week demanding a probe into the cooperative scam in which Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Ravi Lamichhane is allegedly involved. (PTI)

Elon Musk launches Starlink satellite internet service in Indonesia, world's largest archipelago

DENPASAR (INDONESIA), May 19: Elon Musk travelled to Indonesia's resort island of Bali on Sunday to launch Starlink satellite internet service in the world's largest archipelago nation.

Wearing a green Batik shirt, Musk was greeted with a garland of flower petals at a community health clinic in Denpasar, the provincial capital of Bali, where he launched the Starlink service alongside Indonesian ministers.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago of 17,000 islands sprawled across three time zones with a population of more than 270 million, has been trying for years to secure deals with Musk's Tesla on battery investment and for Musk's SpaceX to provide fast internet for the country's remote regions.

During the ceremony, Musk took a speed test of the Starlink internet service with several health workers in Indonesia's remote regions, including in Aru, one of Indonesia's unserved and outermost islands in Maluku province.

"This can make it really a lifesaver for remote medical clinics, and I think it could be a possibility for education as well," Musk told reporters.

"If you can access the internet and then you can learn anything and you can also sell your business services worldwide. So, I think it's going to be incredibly beneficial," he said.



He also signed an agreement on enhancing connectivity in the country's health and education sectors. Details about the agreement between the Indonesian government and Musk's

SpaceX, the aerospace company that operates Starlink services, were not provided.

Launching the service at a health clinic aligns with Starlink's broader mission of providing affordable access to high-speed internet services, particularly in underserved and remote regions, said Coordinating Minister of Maritime and Investment Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan.

"Our remote regions need Starlink to expand high-speed internet services, especially to help with problems in the health, education and maritime sectors," Pandjaitan, a close ally of Indonesia's President Joko Widodo, told reporters. He held separate talks with Musk on Sunday. Communication and Informatics Minister Budi Arie Setiadi said earlier that local internet providers, which rely on base transceiver stations to transmit signals, are unable to reach outer islands because they have limited coverage. Starlink's satellites, which remain in low orbit, will help them deliver faster internet with nationwide coverage.

Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said of the more than 10,000 clinics across the country, there are still around 2,700 without internet access.

"The internet can open up better access to health services as communication between re-

gions is said to be easier, so that reporting from health service facilities can be done in real time or up to date," he said.

During his first in-person visit to Bali, Musk is also scheduled to participate in the 10th World Water Forum, which seeks to address global water and sanitation challenges.

Musk spoke in 2022 at the B-20 business forum ahead of a summit of the Group of 20 leading economies that took place in Bali. He joined the conference by video link weeks after completing his heavily scrutinised takeover of Twitter.

Musk's visit comes just weeks after Apple CEO Tim Cook met Widodo on April 17 and said the company would "look at" manufacturing in Indonesia. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella visited on April 30 and said the company would invest \$1.7 billion over the next four years in new cloud and artificial intelligence infrastructure in Indonesia.

Indonesia under Widodo has promoted development of the digital technology and information sectors, aiming to achieve the government's Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision. The country hopes to become one of the world's top five economies with a GDP of up to \$9 trillion, exactly a century after it won independence from Dutch colonisers. (AP)

BSF seizes gold worth ₹ 36 lakh, arrests one in Tripura

AGARTALA, May 19: BSF foiled a gold smuggling attempt in West Tripura's Nischintapur area and arrested one person, an official said on Sunday.

Based on specific inputs, BSF jawans laid a trap in different locations under the Nischintapur border outpost on Saturday and observed the movement of two suspects near the border.

"They were moving from Bangladesh side to the Indian part, negotiated the border fence and entered the nearby forest area, but alert BSF jawans successfully apprehended one suspected smuggler while another fled

away taking advantage of dense vegetation," said a senior BSF official.

During the search, four gold bars amounting to ₹ 36.6 lakh were seized from the arrested Prashant Rai, a resident of Kishmatkuri under Amtali Police Station, he said.

The official said the arrested person admitted his involvement in trans-border smuggling of gold and revealed the consignment was handed over to him by one Bangladeshi man identified as Iqbal, a resident of Brahmanbaria in Bangladesh. (PTI)

Locals stage protest, condemning attack on workers in Imphal West

IMPHAL, May 19: Locals of Naoremthong area of Imphal West district on Sunday staged a protest on Sunday to condemn the shooting of people in the locality that killed a worker and injured two others on Saturday night. On Saturday night, around 8 pm, armed miscreants shot and injured three workers of Keystone Private Limited, who had been engaged in the construction of Imphal Sewerage Project at Naoremthong under Lamphel Police station in Imphal West district.

One of the workers later identified as Shree Ram Hangsada from Jharkhand state, succumbed to bullet injuries, while the other two workers hailing from the same state were undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Imphal.

Local sources said that some miscreants, who had come in a car, shot them after whisking away the three workers from the makeshift camp of the workers on the bank of Nambul River at Naoremthong Khulem Leikai on Saturday night.

The miscreants whisked them away around 7.30 pm and aban-

doned them after shooting them at a place around 100 meters away from the makeshift camp of the workers.

Shortly after the shooting incident, top officials of the state police including an IG rushed to the spot and took ground zero stock of the situation. With additional forces from the Imphal West district police headquarters, the police also conducted a massive search operation in the nearby localities to nab the culprits.

Further, the police commandos also conducted a search operation at several places in Paona Bazar and Thangal Bazar of Imphal.

However, there were no reports of arrest of any suspect during the operations.

While strongly condemning the shooting of innocent workers, the locals demanded clarification if any armed rebel group was involved in the shooting.

Alleging that the shootout has created fear and panic to the residents, they also appealed to all those concerned not to repeat such an incident. (NNN)

Man shot dead in Imphal West

IMPHAL, May 19: One person was killed and two others were injured after unidentified assailants shot them at Naoremthong area in Manipur's Imphal West district, police said.

The incident took place around 8 pm on Saturday outside their rented accommodation, a police officer said.

The deceased has been identified as Shree Ram Hangsada (41) from Jharkhand, he said.

The injured are undergoing treatment at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences Hospital in Imphal.

Police have registered a case and started an investigation to ascertain the reason behind the shooting and the identity of the assailants. (PTI)

Over 1,000 Mizoram policemen unable to vote in Lok Sabha polls

No arrangement made for policemen to cast their vote at various facilitation centres



AZWAL, May 19: More than 1,000 policemen in Mizoram were unable to cast their votes in the Lok Sabha polls held on April 19, officials of the state election department said.

These personnel were deployed in other states for poll duty several days before April 19, the day when the northeastern state voted, they added.

Although arrangements were supposed to be made for the police personnel to vote at facili-

tation centres, no such provision was made as they had to leave the state before candidates could be finalised, officials said.

Despite requests made to the Election Commission on two occasions to allow the police personnel to cast their votes, the appeals were allegedly rejected by the central poll panel, officials added.

In response to this, the People's Conference (PC) party wrote to Election Commission

principal secretary SB Joshi urging the poll panel to permit 1,047 policemen from Mizoram to exercise their franchise before the counting of votes.

The party criticised the authorities for failing to arrange the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) for the police personnel and emphasised that these 1,047 votes could have played a meaningful impact on the poll results in a small state like Mizoram. (PTI)

Arunachal: Army conducts forward area tour for defence experts

ITANAGAR, May 19: The Indian Army has conducted a week-long forward area tour in Arunachal Pradesh for defence experts to provide them a first-hand experience of operational challenges faced by troops and to encourage them to formulate technological solutions to the problems, a communique said here on Sunday.

The tour was conducted from May 12 to 19 for a seven-member team of experts from defence industries, startups and academia.

After their arrival at Dinjan Military Station in Assam's Dibrugarh district on May 12, the team visited forward areas in Anjaw district of Arunachal Pradesh along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and gained insights about operational and logistical challenges of the armed forces. The experts also visited army establishments in Namsai and Dibrugarh and interacted with senior officers.

The interaction focused on the need for holistic efforts in developing indigenous technology tailor-made for mountainous terrain, the defence communique added (PTI)

ENPO asked to reconsider decision to abstain from local bodies elections

KOHIMA, May 19: The Nagaland State Election Commission has appealed to the Eastern Nagaland People's Organization (ENPO) to reconsider its decision of abstaining from the urban local bodies (ULB) elections in Nagaland.

The commission said that it was drawn to a news item concerning ENPO's decision to abstain from participating in the Nagaland ULB elections.

While the commission said it is cognizant of the stated context of the issue surrounding the ENPO's stand, "it is of the view that the method adopted to express their stand on collective abstention from participating in the ULB elections needs a reasoned reconsideration", the commission said.

It said that voting was a constitutional right for every eligible citizen. The option of not to vote was an understood extension of the right, the commission also said. This right however, needed to be understood in the light of individual freedom and choice. Voting per se was singular, based on the principle of one person one vote; it was not a collective instrument.

The matter of ULB elections in Nagaland has been under the supervision of the Supreme Court with notice of contempt issued to several entities in the state and that any attempt to disturb or disrupt the electoral process by any individual or organisation in violation



of the court orders would have serious legal ramifications, the commission also said.

The commission further pointed out that the constitution of Urban Local Bodies like the Municipal and Town Councils in the state through the participation of the local community in the electoral process was an essential requirement for incorporating the common aspirations and grievances of the local populace as was reflected in the development and progress of the municipalities.

The commission also said that it was committed to holding free and fair elections to all the Municipal and

Town Councils in the state as had been notified on April 29. It is hoped that through these elections, the people in the municipality areas would be able to freely and willingly participate in exercising the constitutional right to vote and/or to contest as was deemed necessary to discharge the vital functions of local self-governance.

The Election Commission has appealed to the ENPO to reconsider its stance of asking citizens to abstain from participating in the ongoing ULB elections. Meanwhile, it would ensure that all polling processes would continue as per the election schedule. (NNN)

Health worker commits suicide

HT Correspondent
MORIGAOON, May 19: An employee of the National Health Mission (NHM) at Naokata Sub-Health Center in Morigaon district tragically committed suicide by hanging himself in his office.

The deceased, identified as Rupam Sarma (40), was a resident of Rajagaon in Morigaon town.

According to reports, Rupam left his home early in the morning on his motorcycle, stating that he had special work to attend to in the afternoon.

He then dismissed other employees from the sub-health center.

However, he did not return home until around 9:00 pm, and his mobile phone was switched off. Concerned family and friends began searching for him

and eventually found him hanging in a room at the Naokata Sub-Health Center where he worked.

The body of Rupam was recovered from the scene and sent to the Morigaon Civil Hospital for post-mortem examination.

A suicide note was found in Rupam's pants pocket, which is currently in police custody.

The exact cause of the suicide has not been revealed yet, but the post-mortem report and police investigation are expected to shed light on the circumstances.

Rupam Sarma was actively involved in various organisations and institutions in Morigaon.

He is survived by his wife, an eight-month-old daughter, and a 12-year-old son.

Sonitpur gears up for 10th International Yoga Day

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, May 19: Tezpur is set to host this year's state-level central program to commemorate the 10th International Yoga Day on June 21, 2024. A preparatory meeting regarding the organisation of the event was held on Saturday under the chairmanship of Sonitpur district commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra at the Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office in Sonitpur, Tezpur.

The district commissioner, in his opening remarks, instructed everyone present to carefully plan and make necessary arrangements to celebrate the day in a befitting manner, ensuring the success of the program. He informed the gathering about various aspects to be considered in preparing for the

central event. Primary among them was the identification of a venue and its preparation, training of trainers for the event, involvement and participation of students, athletes, yoga practitioners, leading citizens, and the general public, along with other related issues.

District development commissioner Gaya Prasad Agarwal, CEO Zilla Parishad Karabi Saikia Karan, all additional district commissioners, circle officer of Tezpur Revenue Circle, all assistant commissioners, joint director of health services, inspector of schools, district sports officer, representatives from Tezpur District Sports Association, and other officials from concerned departments of the district administration attended the meeting.

Chatia College alumni holds general meeting

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARALI, May 19: The general meeting of the Chatia College Alumni Association convened in the conference hall of the college on Saturday, under the leadership of Dilip Upadhyaya, the vice president of the alumni association.

The event commenced with the ceremonial lighting of a lamp, followed by a warm welcome address by Dr Swapna Kalita, the college principal.

Dr Dipen Bharali, the convenor cum assistant professor of the college, elucidated the objectives of the association and presented the annual report.

During the meeting, Biraj Hatibaruah shared valuable insights, enriching the discussions. Additionally, eight esteemed alumni were honoured with life membership certificates, acknowledging their longstanding connection and contributions to the alma mater.

The newly constituted body of the alumni association, with Narayan Hazarika as president, Chandan Bora as secretary cum convenor, and 34 executive members, was announced at the conclusion of the meeting.

Tridip Bhuyan extended the gracious vote of thanks.

AITUC Manipur branch launches campaign seeking solution to current crisis



IMPHAL, May 19: The Manipur branch of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) has launched its mass campaign seeking an early settlement of the prevailing crisis in Manipur.

The mass campaign was launched during a formal function held in Imphal on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, general secretary of AITUC Manipur, L. Sotinkumar stressed the need for early settlement of the ongoing crisis arising out of ethnic conflict in the state while asserting that the protracted crisis has given a big blow to the society with the working class affected the most.

He alleged that it was due to lack of political will that the crisis has been allowed to escalate. Due to failure on the part of the state as well as the central government, the living conditions of not only the internally displaced persons, but all sections of the society were severely affected.

"The people have crossed their limits to tolerate. There is an urgent need for initiating political dialogue to resolve the conflict. On May Day representatives of as many as 64 different bodies of workers adopted a 13-point demand to be placed before the government," Sotinkumar said.

It further resolved to launch various forms of movement while pressing the government to translate the 13-point demand.

The key points of the demand included setting up a highway protection force, hike in the minimum wages of the workers per month to Rs 26,000 and initiation of political dialogue to resolve the crisis unfolding in the state, Sotinkumar said.

Asserting that setting up of a dedicated force to be deployed along the national highways in the state, Sotinkumar said that more than 1,000 people, mostly drivers, have been killed by the armed miscreants on these highways.

On the hike of the wages, he added that employees in the private sectors including drivers, people working in shops and other business establishments and journalists are paid very little.

The AITUC Manipur also strongly opposed "privatisation of public sectors taking place in the country under the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre.

If the demands were not addressed at the earliest, the AITUC Manipur will take a decision to launch many more forms of agitations including mass court arrest stir, Sotinkumar said. (NNN)

M'laya minister hopeful of leaders of other parties joining BJP



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 19: BJP leader and Meghalaya cabinet minister AL Hek state that several leaders from different political parties are set to join the BJP in the coming days.

"There are many who will join the BJP," Hek told reporters. "I will not name anyone right now; it is too early to disclose."

Hek expressed readiness to welcome former Meghalaya chief minister Mukul Sangma if he decides to join the BJP.

"I have not met nor discussed this with him, but if he wants to join, we welcome him," Hek stated.

Addressing allegations that BJP's support has no significant impact on the National People's Party (NPP), Hek asserted, "BJP's support for NPP will translate into votes as we have worked very hard."

AMBA to observe 'World Bee Day' today

'World Bee Day' focuses on sensitising about importance of bees, other pollinators for biodiversity, food security and sustainable development

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 19: The All Manipur Beekeepers' Association (AMBA) will celebrate the 'World Bee Day, 2024' on Monday.

AMBA will commemorate the day with day-long activities at its office at Khundrakpam Awang Leikai Mamang Ching in Imphal East in Manipur.

The 'World Bee Day' serves as an international platform to raise awareness about the importance of bees and other pollinators for biodiversity, food security and sustainable development. As we confront global challenges such as climate change, habitat loss and biodiversity decline, recognising the critical role of bees in maintaining ecological bal-



ance has never been more urgent.

The event will share their expertise and insights on the significance of bees in agriculture, ecology, and rural livelihoods. Attendees can expect a

series of enlightening presentations, discussions, and networking opportunities, aimed at fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among beekeeping enthusiasts, farmers, researchers and policy-

makers.

"We are thrilled to invite farmers and beekeeping enthusiasts to join us in celebrating the World Bee Day, 2024," said Atom Sunil Singh, secretary of AMBA.

AMBA has been at the forefront of promoting beekeeping as a sustainable livelihood option for rural communities in Manipur.

Founded with the aim of advancing beekeeping practices, supporting beekeepers and advocating for policies that protect pollinators and their habitats, the association has made significant strides in promoting bee-friendly farming practices and raising awareness about the importance of bees among local communities.

Modi pans Mamata for her remarks against RKM, Bharat Sevashram Sangha

'Voting will begin at 7 AM on Monday in 7,303 polling stations across the four Lok Sabha seats and their assembly segments and will continue till 6 pm'

PURULIA/BISHNUPUR, May 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday condemned West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's remarks against the Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha, alleging that she is "under pressure from Muslim fundamentalists" and "threatened" these socio-religious organisations to "appease" TMC's vote bank.

Addressing back-to-back rallies in Purulia and Bishnupur, Modi stated that the TMC has crossed the limits of decency by spreading falsehood against ISKCON, Ramakrishna Mission, and Bharat Sevashram Sangha.

"The TMC, which has intimidated and threatened the people of Bengal during elections, has crossed all limits this time. Today, in the country and the world, ISKCON, Ramakrishna Mission, and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are known for service and morality, but the chief minister of Bengal is openly threatening them, warning them from an open platform," he said. Modi claimed that threats were issued to appease the vote bank.

"West Bengal Chief Minister (Mamata Banerjee) is threatening them. They are threatening them just to appease their vote bank," he reiterated.

Modi emphasised that these or-



ganisations have millions of followers worldwide and their sole aim is to serve the people.

"The TMC has pointed fingers at them. So much courage! Just to please their vote bank?" he questioned. Addressing another rally at Bishnupur, the prime minister accused Banerjee of being under pressure from Muslim fundamentalists to attack the saints and monks of the country.

"The TMC is jittery because the party sees its time is over. In their desperation, TMC leaders have started hurling abuses at prestigious organisations like ISKCON, Ramakrishna Mission, and Bharat Sevashram Sangha. These organisations have brought glory to Bengal, but the CM of this state claims

that they are ruining Bengal. Under pressure from Muslim fundamentalists, she has publicly insulted our faith," he stated.

Addressing an election rally in Goghat under the Arambagh Lok Sabha constituency on Saturday, Banerjee had claimed, "Some monks of Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are working under the influence of BJP leaders in Delhi. Those who are looking after temples are doing great spiritual jobs, but everyone is not doing so. This is not done. We respect the monks."

The prime minister criticised the "corrupt INDIA bloc, including the TMC," saying, "Modi guarantees that none of the corrupt people will

"After the new government is formed on June 4, corrupt people will spend their lives in jail. Action against them will intensify after the Lok Sabha poll results," he added. Modi alleged that the TMC and Congress are two sides of the same coin when it comes to corruption.

He asserted that the TMC, Congress, and the Left might be three different parties, but their sins are the same and "that is why they formed the INDIA bloc."

"These parties have only given empty promises to the poor, women, and SC and ST communities. Wherever they formed governments, they destroyed the states. Bengal is a prime example of that," he said.

Modi accused the INDIA bloc parties of operating on a "model of misrule, corruption, appeasement, and dynastic politics".

"The INDIA bloc has used every tool in their arsenal, but all their attempts have failed. I have exposed their deeds to you. They want to undermine the Constitution, promote infiltration, and oppose the implementation of the CAA to appease their vote bank," he claimed.

The prime minister criticised the TMC's vote-bank politics, saying the party "refrained from taking action against culprits in Sandeshkhali and is now pointing fingers at women who suffered

atrocities".

"The incident of Sandeshkhali has shaken the women of Bengal. The TMC has dehumanised women of SC and ST communities to protect Shahjahan Sheikh. The leaders of TMC are pointing fingers at the women who suffered atrocities," he said.

Sheikh, a key accused in sexual assault and land grab in Sandeshkhali, was arrested and suspended from the TMC for six years.

Modi's remarks come amid multiple purported videos of Sandeshkhali women circulating in the public domain, claiming that a local saffron party leader made those women sign blank papers which were later filled up as complaints of sexual assault.

PTI could not independently verify the authenticity of those videos, which have kept the state's political situation volatile in recent days. Hitting out at the corruption of the TMC, Modi said, "Everything of the corrupt TMC leaders will be sold."

"The TMC has not even spared your children in its hunger for money. The 'teacher recruitment scam' has put the future of not only the youth but also the coming generations at stake. Poor parents sold their houses and land parcels, took loans and bribed their (TMC) ministers," he said at the rally. (PTI)

LADAKH POLLS

Ladakh at receiving end of worst of Modi govt's 'anyay kaal': Jairam Ramesh



NEW DELHI, May 19: A day before polling for the Ladakh Lok Sabha constituency, the Congress on Sunday alleged that over the last 10 years, the union territory has been at the receiving end of the Modi government's "malicious and step-motherly treatment".

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said Ladakh has been protesting in freezing temperatures over the lack of control over their land and water.

"The protests have been ongoing for months, including all 8 tribes and over 30,000 people, coming together for hunger strikes and huge marches," he said.

The Modi government's only response has been continued silence and apathy, Ramesh claimed.

In a post on X, the Congress general secretary noted that on May 20, Ladakh will go to the polls, and "over the last 10 years, Ladakh has been at the receiving end of the worst of the Modi government's Anyay Kaal - from complete apathy to malicious and step-motherly treatment".

"In August 2019, the Modi government stripped all representation from the people of Ladakh by downgrading them to a Union Territory without a legislature," he said.

"The greed of the Modi Sarkar and its crony corporate friends is threatening Ladakh's fragile ecosystems. Corporates in sectors like mining have their eyes set on Ladakh's natural resources, and if the Modi Sarkar is allowed back into power, there is nothing stopping them from extracting wealth from the land and the people."

Ramesh claimed.

The entire region is being "remote-controlled" from Delhi through a lieutenant governor, he alleged.

A huge influx of tourists and urbanisation is putting pressure on Ladakh's resources, creating water shortages, the former environment minister said.

"Further, the Modi government's weakness has caused great harm to Ladakh's security and economy: The Modi government's cowardice has allowed China to seize 2,000 sq. km of land in Ladakh, taking away 26 out of 65 patrolling points," he alleged.

"The Chinese occupation has directly affected thousands of Ladakhis, particularly indigenous shepherds who graze their sheep and goats in the highlands near the border," he claimed.

Ramesh said the Congress "Nyay Patra" has clearly promised Sixth Schedule status to the tribal areas of Ladakh, granting critical autonomy to the local people to protect indigenous culture and the region's fragile ecosystem.

"We have also outlined a detailed plan to address environmental issues, climate change, and natural disasters. On June 4, Ladakh will begin the process of healing, and return to the path of prosperity and stability!" Ramesh asserted.

Ladakh, a sprawling cold desert region, holds the distinction of being India's largest constituency in terms of area. It has around 1.84 lakh voters -- around 96,000 in Kargil district and over 88,000 in Leh district. (PTI)

Modi is 'messiah' of poor: Rajnath

SAMBALPUR (ODISHA), May 19: Describing Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a "messiah" of the poor in India, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday claimed that as many as 25 crore people have been lifted from below the poverty line under the PM's leadership.

Singh said this while addressing an election rally at Rairakhol under the Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is the BJP candidate in the Sambalpur constituency.

"Beginning from Jawahar Lal Nehru to Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Manmohan Singh, all have failed to eradicate poverty from the country. However, Modi is the first prime minister who could reduce the miseries of the poor people in this country," Singh said.

The Defence minister said PM Modi has provided pucca ghar, piped water to households, free of cost cooking gas, free foodgrains, toilets and many other things to the poor people of India during the last 10 years.

He said the BJP has promised has ensured the building of the Sri Ram Temple in Ayodhya which silenced the critics. "As Ram Lala has come to his temple, now Ram Rajya will be established in India," he said.

Singh came down heavily on Odisha's BJD government for not implementing the Ayushman Bharat scheme which provides free health service to the people. "If voted to power, the BJP government will issue Ayushman Bharat cards to the people of Odisha," Singh said.

While calling upon the gathering to vote for the Lotus symbol to further the welfare schemes for the poor by the Modi government, Singh asked whether Modi's welfare schemes are reaching the people in Odisha.

The senior BJP leader said the people will get pucca ghar, piped water, Ayushman Bharat card and other facilities as soon as the BJP government is formed in Odisha. Singh blamed both the Congress and BJD for the sorry state of affairs of Odisha. The Congress has ruled the state for 50 years and BJD for 25 years.

He claimed that India is the only country which provided free two doses of COVID-19 vaccines to all the citizens of the country.

He said Modi also provided an additional 5 kg of foodgrains to the poor people during the pandemic period. "This is Modi's sensitivity towards the requirement of the poor people," Singh said.

Claiming that Modi has enhanced the image of India globally, Singh said: "Our PM talked to authorities of both Russia and Ukraine and stopped the war between the two countries for four and half an hour during which over 22,000 Indian students were rescued from the war zone."

He further said that Modi also highlighted Odisha's pride and culture during the G20 summit. "There is no international leader who has not taken a picture during the G20 summit with Konark wheel in the background," he said and attacked the state's BJD for spoiling Odisha's literature, art, culture and tradition. (PTI)

Nadda asks people to teach AAP a 'lesson', says its deeds are 'dirty'

CHANDIGARH, May 19: BJP chief J P Nadda on Sunday attacked the Aam Aadmi Party, saying their deeds are "dirty" and asked people to teach the party a "lesson" in the elections.

Nadda's attack came shortly after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday claimed the BJP has launched a campaign "Operation Jhaadu" to crush AAP as the BJP sees it as a challenge.

Addressing a poll rally in Kaithal under the Kurukshetra Lok Sabha constituency, Nadda said, "The Congress has become a 'parivarvadi party'. The Congress and 'ghamandiya gathbandhan' (INDIA bloc) have become a congregation of the corrupt."

"Some are in jail, while some are on bail," said Nadda while campaigning for BJP's Naveen Jindal.

In an apparent dig at Kejriwal, Nadda said that years ago, they first said they would not form any party, not fight elections, but later on they formed a

party and contested elections.

"He (Kejriwal) said he will never shake hands with the Congress but that too happened. Then, they said they will not indulge in corruption. Now, three of them (AAP leaders) are in jail," Nadda said.

Nadda then referred to Chief Minister Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar's arrest in connection with the alleged assault on AAP MP Swati Maliwal.

Targeting Kejriwal in the matter, Nadda said, "Those who used to talk about respect to women, inside their homes, women are misbehaved with and the leader (Kejriwal) maintains silence."

"Tell me, will you allow such kind of people to come forward (will you vote for them)? Will you teach them a lesson or not? Will you make them sit at home or not? (defeat them in polls)."

"They may speak sweet things but their deeds are dirty," he added.

Referring to AAP's proposed protest march to the BJP headquarters in Delhi announced by Kejriwal, Nadda said he has come to know that the Delhi chief minister is saying "arrest me, arrest me..."

"First you file pleas before the Supreme Court to say 'save me, save me'. And if you have come out (on bail) that is (valid) till June 1. Now, he (Kejriwal) is saying 'arrest me, arrest me'. I am saying cancel your bail and go back (to jail). Your home is there," he said.

Kejriwal had accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "playing the game" of sending AAP leaders such as Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain, and Sanjay Singh to jail.

"I along with my MLAs and MPs would go to the BJP office at noon tomorrow so that the prime minister can send anyone he wants to jail," Kejriwal had said on Saturday. (PTI)

Arrest warrant against JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna



Revanna, son of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, is on bail after spending seven days in jail after four-day police custody for allegedly kidnapping a woman.

There are three cases of sexual assault registered by three women against Prajwal, the NDA's Hassan Lok Sabha candidate who is at large.

A blue corner notice has been issued against him by the Interpol.

Trouble started for Prajwal after large number of explicit videos showing women being sexually assaulted allegedly by him became public.

Subsequently, the Karnataka government constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) on the recommendations of Karnataka State Commission for Women chairperson Nagalakshmi Chowdhary to probe Prajwal's alleged atrocities on women. (PTI)

BENGALURU, May 19: A special court for MPs and MLAs here has issued an arrest warrant against JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna in the sexual assault case.

The court issued the warrant in connection with the sexual assault case registered against Prajwal on Saturday in which his father and Holarasipura MLA H D Revanna is also an accused.

Delhi's outdoor workers, low-income households bear brunt of deadly heat

NEW DELHI, May 19: Sitting under a tree, Suman Mandal strenuously fans her two-year-old son on a hot summer afternoon near a construction site in southeast Delhi's Sewa Nagar.

The mercury has soared to 46 degrees Celsius and Mandal, 37, and her two children -- the other aged four -- are visibly sluggish.

"It is very difficult to work in this heat. But I cannot skip work or I will lose income," she said, adding the heat also takes a toll on her children.

Wearing a checkered scarf to shield himself from the searing sun, Sanjay Verma, 49, zigzags across south Delhi for eight hours, delivering food.

He says the crippling heat is slowing him down. "I take a break and drink water every 30 minutes, otherwise I will faint or drop dead."

As parts of India grapple with extreme heat, outdoor workers, the elderly and children are particularly affected. People are less productive during hot weather and children struggle to learn.

While experts say spells of extreme heat have become more frequent and severe due to climate change, a new analysis shows Delhi logged a high of 40 degrees Celsius or above on more than 150 days in eight of the last 10 years.

Only one year (2007) saw the mercury exceeding 40 degrees Celsius for more than 150 days in the previous two



decades. The International Institute for Environment and Development's (IIED) analysis of temperatures in the world's 20 biggest capital cities also shows Delhi reached or surpassed 40 degrees Celsius on 1,557 days (around 43 per cent) in the last 10 years.

The IIED analysed only airport site data for consistency across cities. The data from the Indira Gandhi International Airport has been used for Delhi.

The densely packed city recorded temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius on

Kejriwal should stop theatrics, break silence on Maliwal assault case: BJP

NEW DELHI, May 19: The BJP on Sunday said Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal should not indulge in theatrics and instead break his "silence" on the alleged assault on AAP MP Swati Maliwal by his aide Bibhav Kumar.

The reaction came after Kejriwal and his party workers and leaders held a massive protest near the BJP headquarters against Kumar's arrest in connection with the case.

"Kejriwal should break his silence instead of his 'dramebazi (theatrics)' and answer specific questions," Shehzad Poonawalla, the BJP's national spokesperson, said in a post on X.

The BJP leader asked Kejriwal if he had ordered the "attack" on Maliwal at the chief minister's residence and gave patronage to Kumar because he knows his "dark secrets".

"Why is the CCTV (camera) footage missing? Did Kejriwal help Bibhav to destroy/tamper evidence, including CCTV (camera) footage from Shoshan Mahal (Kejriwal's residence)? Why release small clips

and not full CCTV (camera) footage?" he said in the post.

"Why U turn from what Sanjay Singh said 96 hours ago and why victim-shaming now by AAP?" the BJP leader asked.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters, party MP Manoj Tiwari, who is seeking reelection from North East Delhi, alleged that Kejriwal held the protest to save Kumar.

"Why is Arvind Kejriwal not saying anything in the Swati Maliwal case and speaking in favour of Bibhav Kumar, who is accused of beating her up? Why is he trying to save Bibhav Kumar? What is his compulsion?" Tiwari asked.

"Protesting in favour of the person who beat up a woman. What disgusting thinking. Everyone in Delhi is surprised and shocked," he charged.

Tiwari said the people of Delhi want answers to questions on the alleged assault and wondered if he had come out on interim bail to do such things.

"The Supreme Court did not grant him

complete (regular) bail. It (Supreme Court) wrote on your (Kejriwal) head that you are outright corrupt. There is a lot of proof against you. Yet, he got 20 days time that is becoming a subject of controversy a bit. There are many people who are asking why such treatment (was meted out to him)," he added.

The apex court has granted Kejriwal interim bail till June 1, the last day of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections, and directed him to surrender and go back to jail on June 2.

Tiwari also said Maliwal suffered serious injuries, according to her medical report, and sought to counter AAP's allegation that the BJP has come out in her support for political reasons.

The BJP is speaking for Maliwal because she is a woman and the party cannot be a mute spectator to atrocities against women, he said and accused AAP of levelling baseless allegations against the saffron party's involvement in the matter. (PTI)

of poor access to water and electricity. In addition, the design and construction of informal houses often means there is poor ventilation and little shelter from extreme heat," she said.

Need for robust heat action plan:

Chandni Singh, senior researcher at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements and IPCC lead author, said state and city-level heat action plans are proving "insufficient to deal with the heat we are now experiencing".

In urban areas, Singh said, the experience of heat depends on factors such as residential location, occupation and access to cooling.

"Understanding this unequal heat risk is a critical first step to developing nuanced heat action plans. Delhi's current heat action plan needs to map heat hotspots and overlay this with existing vulnerability maps to inform heat action," she said.

Prepared last year, the city's heat action plan talks about altering school timings, suspending non-essential water use and providing uninterrupted power supply to health facilities to mitigate the impact of extreme heat. But it has not been implemented yet.

There are around 3.4 million unorganised workers in Delhi, according to the central government's e-Shram portal.

Dharmendra Kumar of NGO Janpahal said most of these workers labour out-

doors. "They often live in cramped one-room apartments without proper ventilation or cooling systems, exacerbating the effects of heat."

According to Bibyani Minj of Delhi-based Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangam, a trade union of construction workers, there are around 10 lakh construction workers (including unregistered ones) in the city and a majority of them are migrants.

"Many workers were left without work during the pandemic. They have debts to repay and families to feed. So, they are travelling long distances and working longer hours in intense heat with little safety and support from contractors," she said.

Extreme heat broiled large parts of north India on Friday and Saturday, with temperatures soaring to a scorching 47.4 degrees Celsius on the outskirts of Delhi, the country's highest so far this season.

Temperatures breached 49 degrees Celsius in parts of the capital last year.

The Met office has issued a 'red' alert for Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and west Rajasthan, stressing the need for "extreme care for vulnerable people".

In view of general elections in India, experts have warned of an increased likelihood of heat-related illnesses in people due to prolonged sun exposure or engaging in heavy work.

Delhi goes to polls on May 25. (PTI)

Bifurcation blues: 10 years later, several issues remain unresolved between AP, Telangana

HYDERABAD, May 19: It has been ten long years since bifurcation, but several issues such as division of assets, power bill dues, are still unresolved between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana even as Hyderabad would cease to be the common capital of the two states from June 2.

Hyderabad would belong solely to Telangana, according to Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act 2014.

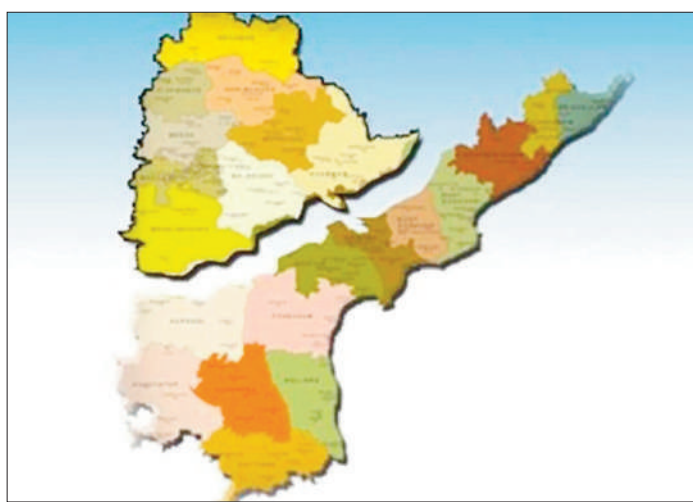
According to official sources, the division of various institutions and corporations, listed in Schedule 9 and Schedule 10 of the Act, between the two states, has not been completed as there was no consensus over several issues.

According to the AP Reorganisation Act, as many as 89 government companies and corporations are listed in the Ninth Schedule.

They include state-run companies and corporations like Andhra Pradesh State Seeds Development Corporation, Andhra Pradesh State Agro Industrial Development Corporation and Andhra Pradesh State Warehousing Corporation.

The 10th Schedule of the Act includes 107 training institutions/centres like AP State Co-operative Union, Environment Protection Training and Research Institute, AP Forest Academy, Centre for Good Governance and Andhra Pradesh Police Academy.

Though an expert committee headed by retired bureaucrat Sheela Bhide gave recommendations on bifurcation of Schedule IX



and X institutions, the matter remained unresolved.

The two states have also been caught in a row over payment of dues for supply of power post bifurcation. Transfer of employees is one of the issues which is waiting for final resolution.

The Telangana Non-Gazetted Officers' Union Central - Hyderabad president M Jagadeeshwar told PTI on Sunday that they submitted a memorandum to Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bharti Vikramark on May 18 urging the government to bring back the leftover (144) Telangana employees allotted to AP during state bifurcation.

These employees have been working in AP since 2014.

Another example is the disagreement between the two states

over assets of the state-run Road Transport Corporation.

A senior official of the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) told PTI that AP sought a share in assets of the corporation located in Hyderabad and that the TSRTC has denied and disagreed on it.

The TSRTC feels that these assets belong to it as per the definition of 'headquarters' given by the Sheela Bhide panel.

CM A Revanth Reddy had instructed the officials to settle amicably the pending transfer and repatriation of employees to Andhra Pradesh.

He had told the officials to resolve the issues where there is reconciliation between the two states and to act in such a way to protect

the interests of Telangana over other pending matters.

The Telangana government had proposed to conduct a meeting of the state cabinet on May 18 to discuss, among others, the pending issues between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and other related matters.

However, the cabinet meeting could not be held as the requisite nod from Election Commission, in view of the model code of conduct for Lok Sabha elections, was not received till May 18 night.

CM Revanth Reddy has now decided to hold the cabinet meeting after obtaining the EC's approval.

It was fulfilment of a decades-long demand when Telangana came into existence on June 2, 2014 following the passage of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation bill in Parliament in February, 2014, during the previous UPA regime. Hyderabad has been made the common capital of the two states for a period of 10 years beginning June 2, 2024.

As per the AP Reorganisation Act, the bustling metropolis of Hyderabad, would be the capital of Telangana alone from June 2, 2024.

Though Hyderabad is the common capital for the two states till June 2, 2024, the Andhra Pradesh Secretariat and almost the entire state administration shifted to Amaravati in AP in 2016 when TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu was the chief minister. (PTI)

3,300 CISF contingent to take full charge of Parl security from today; CRPF exits

NEW DELHI, May 19: More than 3,300 CISF personnel will take over the complete counterterrorism and anti-sabotage security duties at the Parliament complex from Monday following the withdrawal of over 1,400 CRPF staff from the country's most important symbol of democracy, official sources said.

The parliament duty group (PDG) of the CRPF wound up its entire administrative and operational parhamalia -- vehicles, weapons and commands -- from of the complex on Friday and its commander, a deputy inspector general (DIG)-rank officer, handed over all the security points in the complex to the incoming CISF group, the sources said.

A total of 3,317 Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel are being inducted for securing both the old and new Parliament buildings and the associated structures in this complex located in central Delhi after the government directed it to take over the task from the CRPF following the December 13 security breach incident of last year, a senior officer told PTI.

In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack, two persons jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour on December 13, 2023, released yellow smoke from canisters and shouted slogans before being overpowered by MPs.

Outside the Parliament premises around the same time that day, two other persons sprayed coloured smoke from canisters while shouting slogans.

Following this incident, a committee under the chairmanship of CRPF DG was setup to look into the overall security issues of the Parliament complex and make suitable recommendations.

The CISF counterterrorism security unit will take over the full charge of the Parliament complex from 6 am on Monday, May 20, the officer said, requesting anonymity.

It has deployed its staff to guard all the flap entry gates of the complex, posted canine squads, fire fighting personnel along with fire tenders, manpower at CCTV monitoring control room and communication centre apart from the pass section, watch towers apart from specialists to undertake anti-sabotage checks and other operations at the Parliament complex, he said.

With this, the CRPF PDG, Delhi Police (about 150 personnel) and the parliament security staff (PSS) who jointly secured the Parliament till now, stand withdrawn, a senior CISF officer said.

He said the CISF personnel have been undertaking familiarisation exercise of the complex for the last 10 days and the men and women personnel of the force who will man reception areas have been given light blue full sleeved shirts and brown pants apart from safari suits as their new uniform.

The first officer quoted above added that the PDG unit is expected to be merged with the six battalion strong VIP security wing of the CRPF, while the PSS staff could be tasked afresh for rendering security and protocol duties at other central

government installations.

Some PSS staff could be retained for manning the lobbies of the house for marshal duties but a final decision is yet to be taken, he said.

The CISF contingent, according to sources, has been deployed on a temporary manner called the 'inter-national security duty pattern' and it is expected that it will be granted a full-fledged sanction as new government assumes office after the ongoing general elections, sources said.

The CISF personnel have been imparted refresher training in baggage screening, personal frisking, bomb detection and disposal, quick reaction terrorist counter, sniper task and public interaction and courtesy before being sent for the Parliament duty.

They have also trained recently with the 'black cat' commands of the National Security Guard (NSG) who were air-dropped from an IAF helicopter on the new Parliament complex to simulate a terrorist attack, the sources said.

A CRPF officer said PDG troops who left the Parliament complex on May 17 clicked selfies and took photographs as a token of remembrance of "efficiently" guarding the country's highest temple of democracy.

"During the 2001 terrorist attack, CRPF personnel showed extreme bravery alongwith personnel from other agencies to defeat the dastardly assault with one personnel laying down her life in the line of duty while some others receiving gallantry medals and in 2023 they were not responsible for the breach that took place." (PTI)

Audio books can stimulate a child's interest in reading: Ruskin Bond

NEW DELHI, May 19: Audio books can inculcate story listening habits in children and gradually attract them to reading books, says legendary author Ruskin Bond who turned 90 Sunday.

To commemorate the day, audiobook platform Audible has brought out a keepsake edition with 25 of his popular stories. Titled "All Time Favourites for Children", the stories have been curated and selected by the author himself. The narration is by Anuj Datta.

Bond said audiobooks can be like oral storytelling and stimulate a child's interest in reading.

"Sometimes a child is reluctant to make the effort to start reading

a book. If it's being read to them, either the book is on audio or somebody is reading from one, it helps to create interest. Once that interest develops, the young reader very often will go on to reading books on his or her own," Bond told PTI.

"I would call it a stimulus, a catalyst for the whole art of reading," he added.

Talking about his childhood, Bond said he began to read at a pretty young age.

"My father used to tell me stories mostly about history. I was an early reader but some kids are not. They come a bit late to books. So, audiobooks fit in very well there in their early years," he said. (PTI)

Goa police arrest man from Bengaluru for cyber bullying woman and extortion

PANAJI, May 19: The Goa cyber crime police have arrested a man from Bengaluru on charges of cyber bullying a woman and extortion after posting a fake job advertisement online, an official said on Sunday.

Following a complaint by the Goa-based woman, the cyber crime team arrested the accused, Mohan Raj V (29), on Saturday after laying a trap, a police spokesperson said.

The victim in her complaint claimed the accused published a fake job advertisement for a vacancy at a foreign bank and contacted her through a chatting app, he said.

"The accused lured her into attending an online interview via video call, during which some per-

sons, posing as representatives of the company, coerced her to undress, recorded the video and took screenshots," the spokesman said.

The accused then began to blackmail the woman, demanding sexual favours to delete the compromising material, he said.

The woman alleged that the accused harassed her for the past two months and demanded she meet him in Bengaluru or else he would make her videos and pictures public.

A team led by Superintendent of Police Rahul Gupta travelled to Bengaluru with the victim and laid a trap.

"After extensive efforts and a long chase, the accused was apprehended when he arrived to meet the



victim," the spokesperson said.

Police said the accused has confessed to his crime.

"The chats and videos of the victim recorded on the phone of the accused were recovered. The phone will be sent for a cyber forensic examination," he said.

The investigation suggested the accused created fake accounts using VPN phone numbers and posted

fraudulent job offers targeting female victims.

"They (the arrested person and others) randomly contacted women, induced them to participate in online interviews with promises of high salary packages, and then recorded their objectionable images and videos. These recordings were subsequently used to blackmail the victims for sexual gratification," he said.

After the woman's complaint, the police on April 30 registered a case against unidentified persons.

Following the arrest, the accused was booked under Indian Penal Code sections 354 A (sexual harassment), 384 (extortion) and provisions of the Information Technology Act, the police said. (PTI)

Former Jel spokesperson surrenders in 2019 attempted jailbreak case

SRINAGAR, May 19: A former spokesperson of the banned Jamaat-e-Islami who faced multiple cases has surrendered before police in connection with an attempted jailbreak in 2019, police said on Sunday. They said Ali Mohammad Lone alias Zahid Ali surrendered before the police in Srinagar. A police spokesman said, "The accused person namely Ali Mohd Lone @ Advocate Zahid Ali son of Habibullah Lone resident of Nihama Pulwama, who was involved in Case FIR No. 19/2019 under section 13 of UAP Act" surrendered before the police station concerned and was arrested on May 16 in the jailbreak case. He was also booked at Rainawari Police Station under various sections of the Ranbir Penal Code (RPC). The spokesman said the accused was allegedly involved in conspiracy and commission of crimes involving arson, rioting, an attempt to jailbreak, raising anti-national slogans and stone pelting in Srinagar Central Jail in 2019. A former chief of the Jel had recently said the outfit would contest future elections if the Centre lifts the ban on the outfit imposed in 2019. Lone was released from custody in April after five years of detention under Public Safety Act. The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, while ordering his release a month ago, had directed the union territory administration to pay

a compensation of Rs five lakh to the former spokesman of banned Jamaat-e-Islami outfit for his illegal detention under the Public Safety Act. Lone, who was spokesperson of Jamaat-e-Islami for a long time, was first arrested in March 2019 but his preventive detention was quashed by the court in July that year. However, he was detained again under preventive laws within six days but the order was set aside by the court in 2020. Within three months, he was again booked under preventive laws but the detention was again set aside by the court in 2021.

He was booked for the fourth time in 2021 under the PSA which was quashed by the court last month. "Now if three judgments of this Court quashing preventive detention of the petitioner made three times hereto before have not been spared a passing glance, lest an application of mind, by and on the part of the SSP Pulwama, the respondent No.2- District Magistrate Pulwama and last by the respondent No.1- Govt. of UT of J&K as well, then how can it be claimed by the said three authorities at their respective end that the fourth time preventive detention of the petitioner is an outcome of an open and fair mindset acting upon changed factual scenario," the court had observed in its 13-page order. (PTI)

Key Antarctica meetings begin in Kochi on May 20 under shadow of Ukraine conflict

NEW DELHI, May 19: The 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting begins in Kochi on Monday under the shadow of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, an issue that has been affecting the discussions for the past two years.

The 10-day deliberations among signatory nations to the Antarctic Treaty are expected to focus on collaboration between parties on research and exchanging information on plans for sustainable management of resources in the icy continent. Also on the agenda for the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) is the development of a framework for regulating tourism in Antarctica, given the pristine and delicate nature of the

continent, and applications by Belarus and Canada for consultative status at the deliberations.

"We expect the Ukraine conflict to figure in the talks and we have to ensure that it doesn't affect the meeting in a big way," a senior official closely involved in the ATCM's organisation said. Russia and Ukraine have consultative status or full decision-making roles at the ATCM, which takes all decisions by a consensus.

Russia's increase in surveys of the Antarctic region for oil and gas reserves has also caused some anxiety among the partner nations, some of which believe that Moscow may stake claim to large swathes of the continent. Union Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju is scheduled to formally inaugurate the ATCM at the Lulu Bolgatty International Convention Centre in Kochi on Tuesday.

The ATCM and the 26th Meeting of the Committee for Environmental Protection is hosted by the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences through the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research.

The meeting is also expected to deliberate on the development of a framework for tourism in Antarctica -- the only continent without any indigenous population.

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

Book provides alternative view of F N Souza's Art

NEW DELHI, May 19: A new illustrated book brings forth concepts from psychoanalysis, feminism and other sources to deconstruct the thought behind artist Francis Newton Souza's work and also discusses the inspirations, themes and significance of his oeuvre.

In "FN, Souza: The Archetypal Artist", a collection of 21 articles or essays combining research in art history, Eastern-Western philosophy, classical literature, Jungian analysis, psychology, anthropology, religion and theatre, author Janeita Singh seeks answers to cultural constructs of life, body and sexuality.

Souza is considered one of the significant modern Indian painters. One of the founding members of the Progressive Artist's Group in Mumbai in the 1940s, he led a colourful life, eventually leaving India to live in the UK and then the US. He has gained further renown in recent times as his paintings have been valued very highly at art auctions.

While not all can own a Souza painting, this book featuring many of his paintings gives read-

ers an opportunity to gaze upon and appreciate them.

"Be prepared to be shocked, bewildered, and amazed. Beware - since most of Souza's art images overlap with your personal unconscious, you will be triggered," says Singh.

While Souza's paintings continue to visually impact the reader, most notably due to the exaggerated features of many of his female nude images, the author brings forth concepts from psychoanalysis, feminism and other sources to deconstruct the thought behind his work. Souza's paintings of nudes and heads are analysed, as the author deals with aspects such as the male gaze, the perception of the nude, and alternative ways of seeing.

As Singh describes her first viewing of a retrospective exhibition of Souza's paintings, "... Not one seemed shy, skinny, shamefaced, self-conscious, self-effacing, shrinking or sheepish..."

"They seemed to portray women more naturally than any other female portraits I had seen through Western art history. They were definitely more inclined towards sculptures of In-

dian temple art, but with a distinctive modernist twist."

The author writes that Souza was "deeply connected to nature and revelled in being one with the sea, the breeze, the waves, the flowers and the trees. In complete rhythm with forces of nature, animate and inanimate matter, he expressed his innate vocabulary on his canvas with vitality and vigour."

Her analysis is that Souza mined images from the "collective unconscious".

Drawing on the concept of the 'anima' and Jungian psychology, Singh celebrates Souza's depiction of the female body, stating that "Souza's art imbues the female form with self-assurance and authority".

Connecting Souza's depiction of the female nude with female iconography in different parts of the world, the author points out that social codes and religious authority suppressed the expression of individuality.

She claims the iconography of the fertility goddess, viewed in modern times as a woman confident in her body and aware of her sexuality is what Souza depicts in his paintings. (PTI)

Philosophy could help bridge gap between science and policy: Researchers

NEW DELHI, May 19: Good evidence-based policy needs to also engage with philosophical questions, a new research work has suggested, adding philosophers might be able to bridge the gap between science and policy.

According to the study published in the journal Nature Human Behaviour, philosophical expertise can benefit public policy development, especially when dealing with complex problems such as those faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Philosophers can help tackle the complexity of problems where there are many interconnected components and a lack of any single optimal solution, said Anne Schwenkenbecher from the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Murdoch University, Australia. The team showed that good evidence-based policy needs to engage with philosophical questions.

"We have shown that some of the problems in translating scientific evidence into public policy are philosophical in nature: how much evidence do we need? What evidence do we need and what does that evidence really show? What obligations do policy-makers have to seek and obtain evidence?" said lead author Schwenkenbecher. The researchers said that the



philosophical theory of knowledge, or epistemology, could help with "transparency of reasoning", which involved laying open the process, evidence base and reasons that lead to the adoption of a particular piece of public policy.

"Philosophical expertise can help clarify decision-making and integrate philosophical -- in particular ethical and epistemological -- considerations into policy-making

when there are challenges with experts coming together from different disciplines, with varying methodologies and unique points of view, like we saw happening in our own country (Australia) during COVID, as experts sought to find the best policies and solutions as new problems arose," said Schwenkenbecher.

However, despite the benefits, challenges exist in adopting philo-

sophical engagement as a 'standard' in interdisciplinary scientific research, the researchers said.

"First is a challenge of numbers: there are far fewer academic philosophers than scientific researchers. So, not many scientists have had the opportunity to experiment on the best ways to cocreate and/or innovate with philosophical expertise," the authors wrote.

Such circumstances can lead to frictions in collaborations where philosophers are newly invited, they said.

"There is also a challenge of pacing: philosophical argument and the continued back-and-forth that philosophers often use to gain conceptual clarity can feel jarring to scientists. It can be difficult at times to mesh such different methodologies in day-to-day collaboration," the authors wrote.

The challenge was relevant and applicable to any interdisciplinary endeavour, though, they said.

"In an increasingly interdependent world, there is no question that broad interdisciplinarity among the sciences is needed to tackle ambitious problems at the science-policy interface. Expanding that collaboration to include philosophers will reap untold benefits as well," the authors concluded. (PTI)

Want to do quality work, says actor Shilpa Shinde

MUMBAI, May 19: Doing quality work is of utmost importance to actor Shilpa Shinde, who believes that's the only way to garner recognition and respect from the audience.

In her over two decade career, Shinde has acted in over 20 projects including TV shows, films, and an OTT series. After more than a decade in showbiz, she shot to fame as Angoori Bhabhi in the 2015 comedy television serial "Bhabhi Ghar Par Hain!".

Emerging as the winner of reality TV show "Bigg Boss 11", hosted by Salman

Khan, only added to her popularity.

"For me quality matters, like 'Bhabhi Ghar Par Hain!', 'Bigg Boss' were quality shows, and you get the benefit of that forever. There are people who do 10 shows but they don't get that recognition or respect.

"I believe I should do less but best work. Rather than doing more work or being seen everywhere, one should maintain quality work," Shinde told PTI in an interview here.

Long working hours and lesser remuneration has kept her away from doing daily

soaps, she added.

"These days it's difficult to do daily soaps because they don't have budgets, but they want artists to be available 24x7. It is not possible to work beyond 12 hours due to multiple reasons.

"So, how can you work on that budget? They have good money to spend on creating the sets and everything else that they want to do, they just don't have money to give to artists," the 46-year-old actor said.

Up next for Shinde is the 14th season of stunt reality series "Khatron Ke Khiladi". This is her third reality series after "Bigg Boss 11" and dance competition show "Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa 10".

The actor said it's a "coincidence" that she is doing back-to-back non-fiction shows.

"I was not ready for 'Bigg Boss' initially, but I won the show. Five years later, I did 'Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa', there was

excitement to do that show. I'm not a good dancer and I was told, 'The show is about the journey of becoming a dancer from a non-dancer'. So, I thought, 'Let's do this'.

"I was not well while doing the show. It was hectic. Dance is difficult and there were good dancers like Gashmeer. Amruta on the show and dancing in front of them was a big task. 'Khatron Ke Khiladi' is a different show, it's a big show. These three are big shows and I've always said, 'I want to do quality work'," she added.

According to Shinde, the makers of "Khatron Ke Khiladi" had approached her in the past. "Everything has a right time. I was not mentally prepared for it. You should do what you like. Even when I would say no, they would still ask me" she said.

The actor described the long-running Colors reality show, currently hosted by director



Rohit Shetty, as a "paid holiday" to do adventure stunts. "I wanted to do the stunts the way it's done on the show. You don't get to do these kinds of tasks in real life despite paying money. So, this is something different. Doing all those stunts will be fun."

The celebrities participating in the upcoming season of "Khatron Ke Khiladi" also include Sumona Chakravarti, Asim Riaz, Krishna Shroff, Shalin Bhanot, Abhishek Kumar, Nimrit Kaur Ahluwalia, Karan Veer Mehra, and Aditi Sharma. (PTI)

Kiara Advani attends Women In Cinema Gala in Cannes, shares pictures



CANNES, May 19: It was 'a night to remember', said actor Kiara Advani, who was honoured at the Women In Cinema Gala, which was held alongside the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival. Advani was one of the six women to be felicitated at the dinner, hosted by the Red Sea International Film Festival and Vanity Fair Europe on Saturday on the sidelines of the ongoing extravaganza in France. For the event, she opted for an off-shoulder pink and black gown with a bow on the back and black lace gloves. She tied her hair in a high bun, and completed her look with an ornate necklace and a ring. The Satyaprem Ki Katha actor shared a series of photos on her Instagram page on Sunday.

"A night to remember," Advani captioned her post. According to Red Sea International Film Festival's X page, the Women In Cinema Gala honoured six women who are 'fiercely redefining what is possible for future generations of female storytellers'.

Besides Advani, the honourees were Saudi Arabian singer-actor Aseel Omran, Saudi Arabian actor Adhwa Fahad, Senegalese director-screenwriter Ramata-Toulaye Sy, Thai actor-model Sarocha Chankimha aka Freen, and Egyptian actor-model Salma Abu Deif.

The Cannes Film Festival will conclude on May 25. (PTI)

'GULLAK' SEASON FOUR TO PREMIERE ON JUNE 7



NEW DELHI, May 19: Season four of the popular family drama series "Gullak" will premiere on June 7 on SonyLIV, the streamer announced on Sunday.

The show, created by TVF, is directed by Shreyansh Pandey. The upcoming season of "Gullak" will see series stars Jameel Khan, Geetanjali Kulkarni, Vaibhav Raj Gupta, Harsh Mayar, and Sunita Rajwar reprise their respective roles. According to the makers, this season each member of the Mishra family is ready take on a new journey in their life. "The trailer shows a sweet and enduring face-off between parenting and adulthood

in the Mishra household.

"As Santosh, Shanti, Anu, and Aman face new challenges in their new phase of life, be a part of their story with 'Naye Hisse...Naye Kisse' of season four," read the official synopsis.

Khan, who plays the patriarch Santosh Mishra in the series, said being a part of "Gullak" feels like going back to his roots and family. "Every season brings me closer to Santosh Mishra, a character who was once unfamiliar but has now become a cherished part of my career. It gives me a chance to step into my father's shoes and helps me understand him better.

"I am excited for the audience to embark on this unforgettable journey that will leave a lasting impact, as they see a reflection of themselves or their family through us," Khan said in a statement.

Actor Helly Shah is the new addition to the cast this season.

The first season of "Gullak" premiered in 2019, followed by its second season in 2021 and third season in 2022. (PTI)

ROHIT SHETTY BEGINS SHOOTING FOR FINAL LEG OF 'SINGHAM AGAIN' IN J&K

SRINAGAR, May 19: Filmmaker Rohit Shetty has started shooting for his upcoming action movie "Singham Again" in the interior areas of the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, the officials said here on Saturday.

"Singham Again" is the third film in the Ajay Devgn-led "Singham" series, which started with 2011's "Singham" and was followed by "Singham Returns" in 2014.

Shetty and his team recently arrived in the valley to shoot for the final leg of the movie, the officials said.

The film's shooting took place in 'Shehre Khas' or Downtown area – the interior areas of the city amidst tight security, the officials added. Devgn and his co-star Jackie Shroff were seen shooting for the movie. The crew has done a recce of various locations in the valley for the movie. Shetty had called on Jammu and Kashmir lieutenant governor Manoj Sinha at Raj Bhavan here on Friday. "Singham Again" is the fifth part of Shetty's cinematic cop universe, which also includes Ranveer Singh's "Simmba" (2018) and "Sooryavanshi" (2021), starring Akshay Kumar.

The cast also includes Singh, Kumar, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Tiger Shroff, Deepika Padukone and Shweta Tiwari as well as Arjun Kapoor, who essays the role of the antagonist. "Singham Again" is slated for a theatrical release on August 15 this year, coinciding with Independence Day. (PTI)



Don't have an answer to it: Sumona on absence from 'The Great Indian Kapil Sharma Show'



MUMBAI, May 19: Actor Sumona Chakravarti says she has been on her own journey and doesn't have an answer about her absence from the celebrity comedy talk show "The Great Indian Kapil Sharma Show", hosted by her frequent collaborator Kapil Sharma.

The actor, who has been part of Sharma's shows since 2013, said she is touched by the love of fans who have missed her on the ongoing ensemble Netflix series.

Chakravarti featured on Colors' "Comedy Nights with Kapil" and "The Kapil Sharma Show" on Sony TV. Asked why she isn't a part of "The Great Indian Kapil Sharma Show", she told PTI: "I don't have an answer to this. The show that I was part of, which was on another channel, ended last year in July. Since then, I've been on my own

journey, doing my own things, networking, and meeting people."

Sharma partnered with streaming service Netflix for a new venture "The Great Indian Kapil Sharma Show", which features Sunil Grover, Krushna Abhishek, Kiku Sharda, Rajiv Thakur, and Archana Puran Singh.

Chakravarti, also known for TV serial "Bade Achhe Lagte Hain", said people often keep coming up to her and say they miss her.

"I know fans have missed, I've seen their messages. I meet people everywhere, the moment you step out of the house, your neighbours tell you. That is exactly what motivates you to do something different.

"When I was in London last year, I had so many Indians telling me that they liked me in 'Bade Achhe Lagte Hain'. It's really nice to see

the love coming whether it's for 'Bade Achhe...' or 'Comedy Nights...'. It's great and you know you are doing something right. Nobody expected me to do well in comedy" she added.

The 35-year-old actor, who is gearing up to participate in stunt reality show "Khatron Ke Khiladi 14", said going forward she wants to try something different in her career.

"This year some exciting stuff will happen with fiction. I was busy with theatre. Now, this is happening. So, it's about doing something different now," she said.

The actor said she is blessed to have garnered acclaim for her role of Natasha Kapoor in "Bade Achhe Lagte Hain", headlined by Ram Kapoor and Sakshi Tanwar, and for director Anurag Basu's 2012 film "Barfi!", in which she played the

role of Ileana D'Cruz's friend.

"Bade Achhe Lagte Hain" gave me a name, it was my claim to fame. I had worked a lot before but 'Bade Achhe Lagte Hain' made me famous, and I owe a lot of my career to that show.

"For 'Barfi!', we didn't even have the script but the idea was to work with Anurag da. I took up the film thinking, 'This will be an amazing crash course as an actor'. I knew I'll get to work with Ranbir, with Priyanka. Unfortunately, I didn't have a scene but it was amazing to be a brick on the wall. You learn so much by just having a film like 'Barfi' on your resume," she said.

Chakravarti is thrilled about her participation in "Khatron Ke Khiladi 14", which features celebrity contestants facing their worst fears to win the coveted title. (PTI)

SWIATEK DOMINATES TO EARN HER 3RD ITALIAN OPEN TITLE

ROME, May 19: If Iga Swiatek can keep up her form, it's hard to imagine anyone preventing her from winning a fourth French Open title.

The top-ranked Swiatek dominated in her latest meeting with No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka, winning the Italian Open final 6-2, 6-3 on Saturday to earn her third trophy on Rome's red clay.

Swiatek didn't drop a set at the Foro Italico and extended her tour winning streak to 12 matches. In the semifinals, she was almost as dominant in a 6-4, 6-3 win over No. 3 Coco Gauff. Roland Garros starts next weekend and Swiatek will be aiming for a third straight title in Paris and fourth overall.

"Obviously I am confident. I feel like I'm playing great tennis," Swiatek said. "But it doesn't change the fact that I really want to stay humble and really focused on getting everything step by step. Grand Slams are different. There is different pressure on the court and off the court. "These are hard seven matches that you need to win, so I don't take anything for granted. I'll just work hard as I did in Madrid and Rome and we'll see." After congratulating Swiatek during the trophy ceremony, Sabalenka told her rival: "I hope we're going to make it to the final in Roland Garros, and I'm going to get you there."

Then Sabalenka added, "Just kidding. I'm just going to try to



do better than today."

During her speech, Swiatek replied, "We'll see about that Roland Garros final."

Swiatek became the first

woman to complete the "dirt double" of winning Madrid and Rome back to back since Serena Williams in 2013.

The final was quite a contrast

from when Swiatek had to save three match points before beating Sabalenka in a third-set tiebreaker in the Madrid Open final two weeks ago.

"Madrid, I didn't feel like I could do everything. Here I kind of did," Swiatek said. "I felt like I can really use this surface and this feeling to play even better."

Swiatek applied so much pressure early on that Sabalenka slammed her racket onto the clay in the fourth game and then had to grab a new stick from her bag. Even on points when the hard-hitting Sabalenka seemed in control, Swiatek used her superb footspeed and accurate groundstrokes to turn the dynamics around and force Sabalenka into errors.

"Her movement is incredible. You always know that you have to build the point and you have to finish the point," Sabalenka said. "That's why sometimes I try to overhit balls, knowing she's going to get to it. ... She's really good in every facet of the game." Sabalenka stepped up her game at the start of the second set but Swiatek saved seven break points in her opening two service games. Swiatek produced only 11 winners to Sabalenka's 18 but also had just eight unforced errors to Sabalenka's whopping 28. Swiatek crushed a backhand return up the line on her second match point and when Sabalenka's weak reply landed in the net, Swiatek dropped her white racket to the clay and then began jumping around in celebration after shaking hands with Sabalenka. (AP)

Aravindh Chithmabaram beats Salem to claim sole lead in Sharjah

SHARJAH, May 19: Indian Grandmaster Aravindh Chithmabaram defeated local star A R Saleh Salem to emerge as the sole leader on 4.5 points after the end of the fifth round of Sharjah Masters chess tournament here.

Chithmabaram is now followed by four players, the Iranian duo of Amin Tabatabaei and Bardiya Daneshvar and Americans Hans Moke Niemann and Sam Shankland who all have four points apiece.

Top seed Arjun Erigaisi is in the next pack of eight players having 3.5 points each and giving him company here is another Indian in Sankalp Gupta.

With four rounds still to be played in the USD 52000 prize money tournament, as many as 16 players have an identical three points each. The list includes Indians Abhimanyu Puranik, Leon Luke Mendonca, P Iniyan and V Pranav.

It turned out to be a tough day at the office for many but Chithmabaram was in his element as he simply crushed Salem in all departments of the game.

It was a King's Indian defense by Salem who played black and the middle game saw Chithmabaram exerting pressure on the queen side. It was on the 17th move that the Chennai-based GM unleashed a brilliant tactical sequence, giving up two minor pieces for a rook.

As things turned out, white's position remained better for the rest of the game and Salem was outdone eventually in the endgame wherein white's rook proved superior. The game lasted 48 moves.

Erigaisi was in a spot of bother at some point against Volodar Murzin, the upcoming talent from Russia who has to play under FIDE flag here. After attaining an optically better position in the middle game out of a Queen pawn game, Erigaisi was on the defensive as Murzin made some steady recovery.

He had to liquidate to a rook



and pawns endgame where the draw was a just result.

Sankalp continued with his impressive run, holding highly regarded Teimour Radjabov of Azerbaijan to a draw while Abhimanyu Puranik could not keep up with his form and lost to Amin Tabatabaei of Iran.

Important and Indian results Round 5 (Indians unless specified): Aravindh Chithmabaram (4.5) beat A.R. Saleh Salem (Uae, 3.5); Hans Moke Niemann (Usa, 4) drew with Alexey Sarana (Srb, 3.5); Erigaisi Arjun (3.5) drew with Volodar Murzin (Fid, 3.5); Abhimanyu Puranik (3) lost to Amin Tabatabaei (Iri, 4); Sankalp Gupta (3.5) drew with Samuel Sevian (Usa, 3); Shreyas Royal (Eng, 3) drew with Nihal Sarin (3); Leon Luke Mendonca (3) drew with Nikolas Theodorou (Gre, 3); P Iniyan (3) drew with Teimour Radjabov (Aze, 3); V Pranav (3) beat Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 2); Abhimanyu Mishra (2.5) drew with Bharath Subramaniam (2.5); Benjamin Gledura (Hun, 2.5) drew with Pranav Anand (2.5); Aditya Mittal (2.5) drew with Siddharth Jagadeesh (Sgp, 2.5); B Adhiban (3) beat Pouya Idani (Iri, 2); Abhijeet Gupta (2.5) drew with Mahdi Gholami Orimi (Iri, 2.5); D Harika (1.5) lost to Emre Can (Tur, 2.5); Yilmaz Mustafa (Tur, 1.5) drew with Raja Rithvik (1.5); S P Sethuraman (1) lost to Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus (Tur, 2). (PTI)

Tvesa rises to T-21 with a superb 67 in German Masters

BRANDENBURG (GERMANY), May 19: Indian golfer Tvesa Malik carded her best round on the Ladies European Tour in almost four years with a 5-under 67 that carried her from the cut line to T-21 at the end of the third round of the Amundi German Masters at Golf & Country Club Seddiner See.

Tvesa, seeking to regain her card on the LET, had an eagle and five birdies against two bogeys. While this was her best show on LET since late 2021, Tvesa had recorded a 65 on the Sunshine Ladies Tour

in South Africa, while winning the Super Sport Ladies Challenge in February this year. India's other two players to make the weekend, Pranavi Urs (71) and Diksha Dagar (73) were T-31 and T-43. The remaining four Vani Kapoor, Amandeep Drall, Sneha Singh and amateur Avani Prashanth did not make the cut.

Austrian Emma Spitz (66) and Alexandra Försterling (69) shared the lead on seven-under-par going into the final round.

Tvesa, former Order of Merit winner on Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour in India,

began from the tenth began in an electric manner with four birdies in first six holes and turned in 4-under.

On her second nine, the front side of the course, she eagled the first but dropped a shot on second. A birdie on the fifth was erased by a bogey on seventh but her 67 saw her rise up the leader board from T-55 to T-21. Pranavi had seven birdies against four bogeys and a double, while Diksha had three birdies against four bogeys in her 73. The 24-year-old Spitz began her round with a birdie on the first before

adding another on the third and a further birdie on the sixth. Spitz dropped a shot on the 12th but bounced back immediately with back-to-back birdies on 13 and 14 before rolling in two more on 16 and 18 to seal her round of six-under.

Three-time LET winner Försterling, who led at the midway mark of the competition, had one birdie on her front nine before dropping her only shot of the day on 11 and as usual, she finished strongly with birdies on 13, 16 and 18 to join Spitz at the top of the leader board. (PTI)

It's scary bowling to Abhishek: Pat Cummins

HYDERABAD, May 19: Batting at a strike rate of 209.41 this IPL season, Abhishek Sharma on Sunday received the biggest compliment of his life when premier pacer Pat Cummins said he wouldn't like to bowl at the explosive left-hander as "it's scary".

In the ongoing edition of the league, Abhishek has put fear in the minds of bowlers, including Cummins, his skipper at Sunrisers Hyderabad.

He blazed away to a 28-ball 66 in SRH's four-wicket win over Punjab Kings here.

The young left-hander hit six sixes and five fours as SRH shot down Punjab Kings' target of 215 with five balls to spare.

"He (Abhishek) is amazing. I wouldn't want to bowl to him. It's scary as he plays with freedom,

not only against pacers but also against spinners," the Australian fast bowler said at the post-match presentation.

The 23-year-old, who represents Punjab at domestic level, has been in phenomenal form this season, aggregating 467 runs from 13 matches at a strike rate of nearly 210 while hitting 39 sixes and 35 fours.

Cummins also hailed Nitish Reddy who made a crucial 25-ball 37 while batting at No 4.

"Nitish is a class player, matured beyond his age, seems to sum up the game really well, he is perfect for our top-order," he said.

"It has been great and amazing. I didn't know many guys

coming into this season, but we have played great cricket and had some fun. Great bunch of guys," Cummins added.

The win kept SRH on course for a top-two finish that will give them an extra opportunity to make the final.

"We have won five out of seven matches here, it has been great and amazing. It's really satisfying and exciting. I haven't played in finals before, we are playing some really good cricket, excited for what's ahead," Cummins said.

Abhishek said he has benefited a lot after working with batting great Brian Lara, who was involved with the franchise in the past.

"I have done some work with him, he's in touch. That's helping me now," Abhishek said.

His fifty came off 21 balls, the slowest of the three half-centuries he has made this season, summing up his belatedness.

Abhishek's previous two fifties came off 16 balls versus Mumbai Indians and 19 balls against Lucknow Super Giants.

"My days are going good so I should utilise it for my team. I wanted to contribute as the target was big today.

"I think I have told this before, during Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy I was clear how I was going to play and dominate in the IPL.

"I'm just waiting for the loose balls, I am going hard against them and trying to put them (bowlers) under pressure," Abhishek added. (PTI)

Satwik-Chirag win Thailand Open title



BANGKOK, May 19: In a confidence-boosting performance ahead of Paris Olympics, star Indian shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty on Sunday won the Thailand Open Super 500 badminton tournament with a straight-game win over Chen Bo Yang and Liu Yi of China, here. Satwik and Chirag, the world number three pair, prevailed 21-15 21-15 over Liu and Chen, ranked 29th, for their ninth BWF world tour title in men's doubles. It was also the second title of the season for the Asian Games champions following their triumph at the French Open Super 750 in March. They had also finished runners-up at Malaysia Super 1000 and India Super 750.

"It has been a lucky tournament for us. The journey started from here. We lifted this title in 2019 and again we

are lifting it here now. After 2019, we went on to win many tournaments and, hopefully, it will give more boost to us in the upcoming important tournaments," Satwik said after the win.

"They keep on playing fast and we knew we couldn't relax. Overall, I think it's the best match we played throughout the tournament. We kept everything calm and under control. So really happy that we played well."

Asked about Paris Games, Chirag said: "Not just us but all athletes want to go out there in the Olympics and win that medal and we too want that and hopefully we will play well there." For Satwik and Chirag, the title comes at a crucial juncture of their careers as they had some low returns in the last couple of tournaments. The Indian pair lost in the second round at All England Cham-

pionships and then missed the Asia Championships due to an injury to Satwik. The Thomas Cup campaign was also not too fruitful as they lost a couple of narrow matches to top pairs. Satwik and Chirag had come into the Thailand Open final without dropping a game and were favourites to claim the title, while Liu and Chen also produced some stunning wins in the run-up to the summit clash and had the reputation of never losing a final. However, it was always going to be a tough task to tame the top-seeded Indians, who didn't allow the Chinese to get into long rallies or sustain any pressure. Satwik and Chirag made a superb start by quickly opening up a 5-1 lead. Chen and Liu clawed back with a four-point burst. At 7-7, the Chinese pair won a 39-shot rally and surged ahead to 10-7 before spraying one long. (PTI)

To Hell & Back: 'How are you now feeling Maa?' Dayal calls up after momentous final over

KOLKATA, May 19: Only a mother can feel the helplessness of his child and when Yash Dayal was on his haunches exactly 405 evenings back at the Motera, Radha Dayal had fallen ill watching his son pick up pieces of fledgling career. It lay in tatters after longtime UP teammate Rinku Singh clobbered him for five successive sixes walking into collective consciousness of a nation.

It could have well been an end of the road for Dayal but those who pay little heed to the ruthlessly fickle social media stood by their man and boy he has delivered. He was earlier handed a BCCI pacer's contract and on Saturday, the manner in which he defended 17 runs against two of IPL's greatest finishers Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Ravindra Jadeja, the life's cycle was complete. "God's plan baby" Rinku wrote on his Instagram page and who better than him to aptly sum it up.

But after that eventful 20th over, the first thing that Dayal did was to check on his mother Radha.

"Kaisa feel kar rahi ho (how are you feeling mom?)," was Yash's first words to his mother on a video call, whose joy knew no bounds as celebrations continued in Dayal family since midnight.

A beaming father Chandrapal, said that the son told his mom that he was confident of stopping the legendary MSD on his tracks.

"I was confident of pulling it off after the first-ball six and was calm and composed, Yash said about the last over."

Since the 27-run win, the phones haven't stopped ringing at the Dayal household.

Chandrapal himself played a lot of club cricket and was a former medium pacer, who retired from the Accountant General's office in Allahabad in 2019.

Throughout the difficult phase following Rinku's six-

hitting spree on that eventful night of April 9 in Ahmedabad, it was Yash's 64-year-old father who stood by him as his only source of support.

"Woh darawana sapna fire aa raha tha jab Dhoni ne pehli ball pe sixer mara (That terrifying dream of last season started to haunt me when Dhoni hit that 110-m six off the first ball)," he recollected the dramatic final over.

"But deep inside, I knew something good will happen this time. It's all the result of his hardwork, full credit to him. The God has been kind."

The morning has been a buzzing one for Chandrapal, who is trying to attend to each and every phone call from relatives, friends and well-wishers.

"Khana Khane ko time hi nahin mila hai tne sare phone calls aa rahe hain subah se (I haven't had time to eat with the inundation of calls since morning)," Chandrapal told PTI from Allahabad.

"I haven't even had a chance to talk to Yash myself -- I've only heard my wife and daughter speak to him from the sidelines."

With noise and celebrations engulfing the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, he could not talk properly and returned the call from his hotel after waking up around noon on Sunday.

A lot has changed for Yash since last season, not only he lost a spot in the playing XI, Gujarat Titans lost faith in him and released him.

He also fell ill after returning from last year's IPL and the father had turned into a motivator.

"I kept giving him examples of Stuart Broad and how great a bowler he had become since being hit for six sixes by Yuvraj Singh in the 2007 T20 World Cup," Chandrapal said.

"I never had to tell him anything on cricket, like if his hand movement or foot landing is going wrong. He's a God's gifted talent, a complete

fast bowler."

"I ensured that he remained mentally strong by shutting all the noise around him, and never let him go into depression or give up after that setback."

The duo would together visit the Madan Mohan Malviya Stadium in Civil Lines daily in the morning as he would watch him train for hours in dual shifts (morning and evening) while his elder sister Shuchi, who is a dietician took care of his diet.

From curbing his sweet cravings to giving up ice cream and his favourite mutton keema and biryani dishes, Dayal had worked hard on his fitness and mental strength in his journey to redemption.

"It meant giving up his sweet cravings and ice creams, as well as abstaining from his beloved mutton keema and biryani. Yash has not missed a single domestic match which has worked in favour of him. (PTI)

Arshdeep gave SRH an early blow, cleaning up the dangerous Travis Head for a golden duck

Abhishek explosive fifty powers SRH to easy win against PBKS

HYDERABAD, May 19: Abhishek Sharma bossed Punjab Kings bowlers with yet another explosive half-century as Sunrisers Hyderabad cruised to a four-wicket win in the IPL here on Sunday.

Opting to bat on a flat track, Punjab Kings posted an imposing 214/5 riding on Prabhsimran Singh's 45-ball 71 and skipper Jitesh Sharma's final over heroics.

But SRH looked in complete control of the tall chase after losing Travis Head off the first ball and chased down the target with five balls to spare.

The win took them second place in the table with 17 points from 14 matches as they would need to wait for the result for the match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals.

Rajasthan, who have 16 points, can topple SRH for the prized No 2 spot with a win over KKR in Guwahati.

Finishing inside top-two gives the teams an extra chance of making the final.



Abhishek went about his business with utmost nonchalance for a 21-ball fifty, his third half-century of the season.

He smoked six sixes and five

boundaries in his knock of 66 from 28 balls to completely tilt the equation in their favour.

Henrich Klaasen (42; 26 balls) Rahul Tripathi (33; 18b) and Nitish

Reddy (37; 25b) made handy contribution in their complete domination act.

Shashank Singh dismissed Abhishek against the run of play with

the batter getting beaten by a slower ball and ended up gifting a catch to Shivam Singh at covers.

But with SRH in top gear at 129/2 at the midway stage, the chase was just a formality and Klaasen continued their strong momentum, slamming three fours and two sixes.

Looking to seal the chase, the South African wicketkeeper-batter was bowled by Harpreet Brar in the final over.

But by then, SRH just needed seven runs from 10 balls and Sanvir Singh sealed the issue with a four in the first ball of the final over.

Earlier Arshdeep gave SRH an early blow, cleaning up the dangerous Travis Head for a golden duck.

After losing a wicket of the first ball, SRH showed little sign of panic with Rahul Tripathi seizing the momentum in a 18-ball 33.

Playing only his second match of the season, Tripathi took Rishi Dhawan to clearers with two fours and one six in a row that set

the tone for their tall chase.

Abhishek then came on his own, smashing Arshdeep for two fours and one six as the duo continued their assault dealing only in boundaries to cruise to 50 in four overs.

Harshal Patel leaked 22 runs in his first over but returned with a wicket, dismissing Tripathi with a slower ball.

But with 72/2 in five overs, there was no looking back for SRH when Klaasen came to the party to record their third highest power-play score of 84/2.

The new look opening pair of Prabhsimran and Vidartha's Atharva Taide put on 97 runs from 55 balls as PBKS did well to see through the power play without losing a wicket.

Prabhsimran smashed seven fours and four sixes for his 45-ball 71, while Taide will regret missing out on a fifty after being dismissed for a well-made 46 off just 27 balls.

Taide hit five fours and two sixes and after his departure, Prabhsimran in the company of

Rilee Rossouw as the duo put together 54 off 32 balls to keep the momentum going in the middle overs.

It looked a one-way traffic at 151/1 in 14 overs when leg-spinner Vijaykhanth Vijaykhanth (1/37) dismissed the set batter Prabhsimran off a quicker delivery that took a faint edge and Klaasen did well to take a one-handed catch behind the stumps.

Cummins (1/36) ended his spell taking the wicket Rossouw in the 18th over that left two new batters at the crease -- Jitesh Sharma and Ashutosh Sharma.

T Natarajan (2/33) then did well to remove the inform Ashutosh in the penultimate over.

PBKS went on to lose four wickets for 44 runs in five overs before the stand-in skipper Jitesh's last over assault took them to a fighting total.

Jitesh (32 not out from 15 balls; 2x4, 2x6) finished with two sixes against Nitish Kumar Reddy in a 20-run final over. (PTI)

Chennaiyin FC extend midfielder Jiteshwor Singh's contract



CHENNAI, May 19: Former champions Chennaiyin FC on Sunday announced they have extended midfielder Yumkhaibam Jiteshwor Singh's contract till 2025, following his impressive show in the recently concluded Indian Super League season.

The 22-year-old midfielder from Manipur, who has made his ISL debut with Chennaiyin FC in 2022, has been a crucial cog in the club's remarkable show in the recent season of the league.

He not only made 25 successful tackles, the most for Chennaiyin in the season, but also registered 14 interceptions, showcasing his quality on the field.

"Jitu was never going anywhere. His unrelenting nature combined with his elegance on the ball are unique qualities for a midfielder in India and he's a big part of our plans for next season," head coach Owen Coyle said.

Jiteshwor has played a total of 44 matches for Chennaiyin in all competitions including 23 in the last season.

"It's exciting to stay at Chennaiyin FC. This club is the perfect environment for me to grow and learn from some of the best coaches and players." Jiteshwor said.

Since joining Chennaiyin FC in 2022, Jiteshwor has been a key contributor for the club. He was also part of the Indian team that participated in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qualification last year. (PTI)

RCB's turnaround will inspire other teams, says Dinesh Karthik

BENGALURU, May 19: Royal Challengers Bengaluru's remarkable turnaround to win six games on the trot and barge into the Indian Premier League playoffs this year will inspire other teams in future, believes wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik.

RCB, who lost seven of their first eight games including six defeats in a row, came back roaring from the brink of elimination in the 17th edition of IPL to make the final four.

The Faf du Plessis-led side on Friday got the better of defending champions Chennai Super Kings by 27 runs to seal the fourth spot in the points table.

"People will always remember certain journeys. The way we have come back after eight games, we needed to win six, people will remember this team," Karthik was quoted as saying in a RCB release.

"Every year in this tournament, when you hit the seven-game mark, there will be one or two teams which would have probably won one or two and they will look to us and say, 'RCB did it. That was special. We are going to try and repeat what RCB did'."



"That is what we all play cricket for, sport for, where people follow us and believe us that they can do something special. It is hard. It is not going to be easy, I can tell any team that. What we have achieved today is very, very special," Karthik said.

RCB will now face the team which finishes third, one among Sunrisers Hyderabad and Rajasthan Royals, in the Eliminator to be played at Ahmedabad on Wednesday.

"We have it within our grasp to do something that people will re-

member us for many decades. It will be a journey where people will say, 'wow, that RCB team was special'. We are on that journey," Karthik said.

Karthik said RCB's confidence between them and CSK, a team which has a better bilateral record.

"Coming into this game, there was a sense of quiet confidence about us, playing the defending champions, and the way we played we should be really proud," Karthik said.

The senior wicketkeeper pointed out RCB's fielding and aggressive batting, despite rain intervention, as the factors which worked for them.

"We can proudly say we are the best fielding team in this tournament without a doubt," he said.

"Even though it turned, we had a rain break, we had to go, start again, just the way Virat (Kohli) and Faf played the next three overs made it feel like 140-150 could be a decent total.

"Most teams would have thought about that and we would have thought about that for a second as well," he said. (PTI)

Paul McCartney song starts Paralympics on 100-day countdown to opening ceremony in Paris

GENEVA, May 19: With an assist from Paul McCartney the Paralympic Games starts its 100-day race on Monday to the opening ceremony in Paris in August. The former Beatle has let "We All Stand Together"—the signature tune from an award-winning animated film he wrote and produced 40 years ago—be used in a promotional film for the International Paralympic Committee.

"Sir Paul really understands what we stand for as a movement and he was so generous to us," IPC president Andrew Parsons told The Associated Press. "He was not difficult to convince, it was something that came very naturally."

In 100 days from Monday, the Summer Paralympics opening ceremony on Aug. 28 will play out

along a section of the Champs-Élysées and Place de la Concorde. The 4,400 athletes taking part will compete over the following 11 days watched by up to 2.7 million spectators in venues including ones beneath the Eiffel Tower and at Versailles Palace. "We have probably the most famous avenue in the world," Parsons said in a recent interview. "That is really exciting. The city is really embracing Paralympic athletes, athletes with disabilities."

"With our games we talk a lot about inclusion and it's a good symbol of that. That very welcoming attitude is I think a very good start to our games." A turning point for the Paralympic movement came in London in 2012 when the host country rose to the occasion with huge ticket sales and a radically

fresh approach to broadcasting it by Britain's Channel 4.

"Still the benchmark games of our movement," said Parsons, whose home nation Brazil hosted in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro.

To promote those Rio Paralympics, Channel 4 produced the "We're the Superhumans" musical film that was a landmark of high-production values and inspirational images.

"Many broadcasters come to us in their preparations in different parts of the world and they normally ask, 'What is Channel 4 doing?'" Parsons said. The IPC's trailer inspired by McCartney's "Rupert and the Frog Song" film is in that tradition. (AP)

'God's plan': Year after Rinku's rapidfire, Yash Dayal redeems himself

BENGALURU, May 19: Yash Dayal couldn't shake the haunting memory of Rinku Singh's five consecutive sixes last year as MS Dhoni lofted his full-toss over the Chinnaswamy roof, before regaining his composure to complete the 20th over and clinch RCB's berth in the 2024 IPL playoffs.

Dayal, who cut a forlorn figure after being hammered for five sixes in a row by his Uttar Pradesh mate Rinku last season, redeemed himself on Saturday night by defending 17 in the final over against the likes of Dhoni and Ravindra Jadeja.

"God's plan baby," that was how Rinku summed the reversal of fortunes for Dayal.

The 26-year-old from Prayagraj was released by Gujarat Titans after the 2023 season but he found a new IPL home in RCB, who showed faith in him by paying a handsome Rs 5 crore at the auction.

Dayal not only repaid the faith but also erased the scars of last season.

"When I got hit the first ball (by Dhoni), subconsciously you reach that place (Rinku's five sixes off him). But I did well this whole season and I kept telling myself that I just had to bowl a good ball.

"I didn't have to look at the scoreboard. I just had to bowl well. I used that confidence in execution," said Dayal who kept RCB's remarkable comeback story alive in this IPL.

The last over also indicated the coming of age for Dayal, who learned from the mistakes he made against Rinku's onslaught. After the full toss that Dhoni duly dispatched out of the ground, Dayal returned to bowling



slower balls into the pitch that resulted in the former India captain's wicket and just one run off the following four balls.

"The last time what happened with me, it made me a little nervous. But since I have come in the RCB setup, I have worked very hard on practice and I have delivered in matches. I just wanted to focus on bowling two balls well.

"Even if when plans were not executed well, the seniors were standing, they did not

scold me or anything. That was a positive thing and it helped me a lot on the ground."

In what arguably has been the toughest season for bowlers, Dayal has managed 15 wickets in 13 games at a decent economy rate of 8.94.

Dayal was supposed to bowl the penultimate over but a last-minute change of plan saw him bowling one of the most important overs of his life.

"Actually, I was going to bowl the second

last over. But suddenly DK bhैया and Faf spoke. I don't know what they talked about. They said that Lockie will bowl and then I'll bowl the main over. I was fine with both."

Dayal feels the constant support that he has received from RCB has led to desirable results.

"I have got proper backing from RCB. When I came at the start, the management told me that I am an important player. I will be backed from the starting to the end, which is a very good thing.

"All the youngsters who were picked, they were told the same thing. That is visible in the results also."

The home crowd was RCB's 12th man as usual and with a play-off berth on the line, the atmosphere fired up the team even more. It is difficult to keep emotions in check at such a juncture but Dayal tried to calm himself down.

"There are so many people around you, there is a whole crowd. So, somewhere or the other, the mind gets diverted. But as a player, we are built for this."

He also gave due credit to the army of RCB loyalists.

"I had never felt like this since childhood. Whenever I used to watch a RCB match on TV, I never thought that I would be part of this team. Today I am here and I was feeling unreal on the ground. It is an unbelievable crowd and very supportive," added Dayal.

What was the turning point of the game? "I think Dhoni bhैया's wicket was the turning point, as the first ball went for six." (PTI)

Rohit lashes out at IPL broadcasters for breaching privacy



NEW DELHI, May 19: India skipper Rohit Sharma on Sunday lashed out at the IPL broadcasters for "breaching" cricketers' privacy by recording their conversations with friends and colleagues at training and on match days and then telecasting the contents.

Rohit expressed his disappointment after a video involving him and Kolkata Knight Riders assistant coach Abhishek Nayyar, in which the former is seen contemplating his future at the Mumbai Indians, went viral.

"The lives of cricketers have become so intrusive that cameras are now recording every step and conversation we are having in privacy with our friends and colleagues, at training or on match days," Rohit posted on X.

He added, "Despite asking Star Sports to not record my conversation, it was and was also then played on air, which is a breach of privacy."

"The need to get exclusive content and focused only on views and engagement will one day break the trust between the fans, cricketers and cricket. Let better sense prevail."

(PTI)

Rohit was seen making a request to the broadcasters to shut down the audio while recording him after his chat with Nayyar. The conversation between the two took place after MI's IPL fixture against KKR on May 11.

The audio of the chat was posted by KKR on their social media handle and fans assumed that the cricketer is speaking about leaving MI after the ongoing season.

Following the controversy, the video was taken down by the Knight Riders' social media team.

Few days after that, on May 17, Rohit was once again seen having a chat with Dhawal Kulkarni ahead of MI's fixture against Lucknow Super Giants. Seeing himself being recorded, the opener, with folded hands, requested the broadcaster to turn off the audio as one audio has already got him into trouble.

"Bhai audio band karo haan, already ek audio ne mera waat laga diya (Brother please close the audio, one audio has already made things difficult for me)," said Sharma in the video that also went viral. (PTI)

Rayudu doesn't feel Dhoni has played his last match, puts ball in BCCI's court

NEW DELHI, May 19: Former India batter Ambati Rayudu doesn't feel MS Dhoni has played his last match in the IPL and wants the BCCI to continue with the contentious impact player rule as it could help the long-serving legend to keep going in top-flight cricket.

Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings bowed out of this edition of the Indian Premier League following a 27-run defeat to Royal Challengers Bengaluru in a much-anticipated southern derby in Bengaluru on Saturday.

The five-time defending champions needed 17 in the final over to qualify for the playoffs on better net run rate, but bowler Yash Dayal, after being hit for monstrous six by Dhoni, held his nerves to help RCB prevail. Later, speaking on Star Sports Cricket Live, Rayudu said, "I don't think this is his last game. I just don't see him wanting to end on this note."

Even as the RCB players broke into wild celebrations, Dhoni shook hands with the opposition's reserves and support staff before quietly disappearing into the dressing room.

Rayudu said, "He looked a little frustrated, even when he got out. That's very unlike MS Dhoni, he just wanted to qualify and finish on a high. But you never know with MS Dhoni, he might come back next year." Rayudu, who played under Dhoni at CSK, brought the BCCI into the picture.

"... With the impact player role as well, it gives him the opportunity to be able to come in those last few overs and truly make that impact."

"BCCI better not remove the impact player role because we still want to see MS Dhoni play. So, it's up to BCCI now. Do we want to see MS Dhoni play or not."

While the match ended in agony for Dhoni and Co, RCB continued their revival with a sixth straight win in a row, a remarkable feat that saw them rise from the bottom of the table to make the playoffs.

Speaking of Dhoni, former Australian opener Matthew Hayden said, "Yeah, I suppose the thing is when you come to the end of your career, whether it is the last part of his career or not, what you don't want to see is diminishing returns as an athlete."

"Firstly, as a leader, he is The Thala of the Chennai Super Kings. This is telling me that nothing here is about becoming anything else other than first place. He's desperately using his brains, all of that cricket knowledge."

"And of course, the power is there and that's always been MS Dhoni. He's always hit balls at this stage of an innings. At the front, you can understand how players can hit it. But at the back, it's really hard to hit balls." (PTI)