

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- The bodies of 3 more hostages are recovered from Gaza by the Israeli army
- More than 100 people believed killed by a landslide in Papua
- Himachal's 'talabaaz sarkar' shut recruitment commission: Modi
- INDIA bloc getting 'clear' mandate in LS polls

Manipur violence: Can't go by sentiments, says SC

NEW DELHI, May 24: The Supreme Court said on Friday it cannot go by sentiments and has to act in accordance with law, as it refused to entertain a petition seeking contempt action for alleged non-compliance with the apex court's order on protection of properties of people displaced during the Manipur violence.

A vacation bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal said it was not satisfied with the contention that a case of contempt was made out against the respondents, including the chief secretary of Manipur, and the petitioners can take recourse to remedy which may be available under the law.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhatti, appearing for Manipur, told the bench that no case of contempt was made out, and the state government and the Centre were on the ground doing everything they can to assuage



public concerns.

"The effort is to keep the pot boiling which is very unfortunate," Bhatti said, adding that the state was duty bound to protect all and can file an updated status report on the issue.

The top court was hearing a petition claiming the respondents had committed contempt of its September 25 last year order on protecting

Focus shifts to Jangal mahal region of Bengal and Delhi

6th phase: Voting in 58 seats to take place today

NEW DELHI, May 24: Voting for the sixth and penultimate phase of Lok Sabha polls will be held on Saturday in 58 constituencies in six states and two Union territories, including all the seven seats in Delhi and the Jangal Mahal region in Bengal.

Besides the national capital, polling will be held Saturday in 14 seats in Uttar Pradesh, all 10 seats of Haryana, eight seats each in Bihar and West Bengal, six seats in Odisha, four seats in Jharkhand and one seat in Jammu and Kashmir. Simultaneously, polling will be held for 42 assembly constituencies in Odisha.

Over 11.13 crore voters - 5.84 crore male, 5.29 crore female and



5120 third gender - are eligible to exercise their franchise. The Election Commission (EC) has deployed around 11.4 lakh polling officials at 1.14 lakh polling stations. With large parts of India swelter-

ing under a heat wave, the EC has directed election officials and state machineries to take adequate measures to manage the adverse impact of hot weather.

Among the prominent candidates are Union Ministers Dharma Pradhan Rao Inderjit Singh and Krishan Pal Gurjar, BJP's Maneka Gandhi, Sambit Patra, Manohar Lal Khattar and Manoj Tiwari, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti and Deependra Singh Hooda, Raj Babbar and Kanhaiya Kumar of Congress.

The poll panel also urged voters to come out in greater numbers and vote with responsibility and pride. It particularly reminded voters in urban (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Lalu worked neither for welfare of backward classes nor Yadavs'

ARRAH (BIHAR), May 24: Union home minister Amit Shah on Friday launched a blistering attack on Lalu Prasad, alleging that the RJD chief worked neither for the welfare of backward classes nor the people belonging to his caste 'Yadav'.

Addressing an election rally in favour of senior BJP leader and Union minister R K Singh in Arrah, Shah said if Prasad, as part of the "arrogant" INDIA bloc, comes to power, "jungle raj, abduction, and gang war will return to Bihar".

"People don't want the return of 'jungle raj', gang war and abduction industry in Bihar. Lalu worked for neither the welfare of backward classes nor the people belonging to his own caste 'Yadav'. They are under the wrong impression that Lalu works for them. He (Lalu) works for the promotion of his family only," Shah said.

The BJP leader also said, "Lalu Ji allowed his two sons to become ministers, sent one daughter to Rajya Sabha, and another is contesting the Lok Sabha polls. He made his wife Rabri Devi the chief minister of Bihar. He made brothers of Rabri Devi ministers...He promotes only his sons and daughters. He can't think for the welfare of people belonging to his own caste."

He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for respecting people from backward classes and predicted a landslide victory for the NDA in Bihar. "The NDA under the leadership of Modi ji will win 400-plus seats. He has done a lot for Bihar".

The BJP leader accused the Congress and the RJD of "trying to rob reservation from the quotas of SCs, STs and OBCs and give such benefits to Muslims". "The NDA under the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM Modi campaigned for Revanna, owes explanation to women of India: Shashi Tharoor

PATNA, May 24: Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Friday asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi "owed an explanation to the country's women" for having campaigned in favour of sex scandal accused Prajwal Revanna.

Speaking to PTI-Video during his visit to Patna, Tharoor alleged that accusations against Revanna had been known to the BJP which chose to ignore these because of "political cynicism".

"It is now well known that videotapes of Revanna were made available to a BJP leader in Karnataka where the party displayed political cynicism by keeping mum and having a truck with the Janata Dal (Secular)," he said.

Referring to a rally of Modi of the Hassan constituency for Revanna who has been on the run since the matter came to light, Tharoor said, "The prime minister of the country clearly owes an answer



to the country's women for canvassing in favour of such a candidate".

The former Union minister also said he was "confused" by the PM's speeches smacking of "Muslim bashing" after which he said in an interview that he would be unworthy of his office if he pitted one community against another.

"And the very next day he did

SC refuses to direct EC to upload voter turnout numbers amid LS polls

NEW DELHI, May 24: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to issue directions to the Election Commission on an NGO's plea for uploading polling booth-wise voter turnout data on its website during the Lok Sabha elections and favoured a "hands-off attitude" amidst an ongoing electoral process.

A vacation bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma adjourned the hearing on the application filed by 'Association for Democratic Reforms' and said it will be heard with the NGO's writ petition filed in 2019 after the Lok Sabha elections are over.

It said everyone wants free and fair elections but "we are also concerned that there could be mischievous people looking to take advantage".

"The arguments on the interim application were heard. Prima

facie we are not inclined to grant any relief on the interim application at this stage in view of the similarities of prayer 'A' of interim application with prayer 'B' of writ petition out of which the interim application arises. Grant of such interim relief would amount to granting the final relief in the writ petition," the court said.

It said the 2024 elections are spread over seven phases out of which five are already over and the sixth is on May 25.

"This particular compliance which you (NGO) are insisting upon would require not only manpower but also require mandamus (a judicial writ). It is not possible during this period. We have to be conscious of the ground reality and cannot change the process midway," the top court said.

"Let us tell you, we keep it pending and (will) hear along with Article 32 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India likely to send tigers to Cambodia later this year

NEW DELHI, May 24: India is likely to send four tigers to Cambodia by November-December to help reintroduce the big cats into its forests, sources said on Friday.

New Delhi signed a pact with Phnom Penh for the world's first transnational tiger reintroduction in November 2022.

Officials from Cambodia, the National Tiger Conservation Authority, and the ambassador of India to Cambodia, Devyani Khobragade, participated in an online meeting a few days ago. They discussed the proposal to send four tigers to Cambodia by November-December. However, a final decision is pending, a source said.

"There is a continuous dialogue with the officials of Cambodia regarding the proposal. The NTCA has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India underlines importance of making African voices stronger in multilateral organisations

UNITED NATIONS, May 24: India has underlined the need for making African voices stronger in multilateral organisations to ensure they can argue their case and call out external interferences.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj told the UN Security Council on Thursday that it is "high time" that the comity of nations gives due credence to the African member states.

"Sustainable peace and security is possible only if external forces do not intervene for vested interests. This calls for making African voices stronger in multilateral organisations so that they can argue their own case and call out external interferences," she said.

Kamboj noted that it was this conviction, which drove India to

successfully campaign for the admission of the African Union into the G20 during its presidency in 2023.

She said the high-level Summit of the Future, to be held during the UN General Assembly this year, presents a precious window of opportunity to display "our collective commitment to reform the existing multilateral system and strengthen both the capacities and the role that our friends from Africa might play".

Kamboj underlined that India believes that Africa's rise is essential for true multipolarity in the global order and New Delhi is committed to that end.

She said India has always worked with Africa for the continent's priorities in both bilateral and multilateral channels even as

it meets its own development targets.

"This tradition of South-South solidarity continues to strengthen. For India, therefore, our partnership with Africa is and will remain a top priority," the envoy said, adding that there cannot be any peace without development.

Kamboj emphasised that no society or nation has so far managed to achieve peace and stability without eradicating poverty and providing basic human development and economic opportunities to its people.

"Sustainable economic growth calls for investment in education, in health, in infrastructure, in agriculture, energy security, amongst other areas. Thus, Financing for Development holds the key. This can be (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Strong regional force required to safeguard Assam's interest: Akhil Gogoi

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 24: Rajjor Dal chief and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi stated on Friday that two regional parties, Rajjor Dal and Assam Jatiya Parishad, are going to form a new political party, citing the need for a strong regional force to protect Assam's "indigenous" interests.

While interacting with reports, Gogoi opined that there is a requirement of a strong regional party given the state's current political climate.

"We have discussed the possibility of combining the two parties into one with the leaders of the Assam Jatiya Parishad. The conversations were fruitful, and Rajjor Dal has granted its approval in this case," Gogoi said to reporters.

He also claimed that the ball is currently in the Assam Jatiya Parishad's court and they have to take a final call in the matter.

"A new political party with a new constitution would be founded if they (the Assam Jatiya Parishad) approve. Together, the two parties can, in my opinion, become a powerful force that can defeat the BJP. More small regional parties will



join us in the upcoming days," Gogoi stated. He further claimed that regional parties are essential to offering the people of Assam a good political alternative.

The Sivasagar legislator also mentioned that a united front combining the state's regional parties would be formed if Assam Jatiya Parishad rejects the idea of merging for "technical" reasons.

Meanwhile, Assam Jatiya Parishad top leader Lurinjyoti Gogoi, though, has not made an official statement regarding the merging of his party with Rajjor Dal.

For the unversed, both Rajjor Dal and Assam Jatiya Parishad were constituents of a united opposition forum led by the Congress party in the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls.

Four held with narcotics worth Rs 8.5 crore

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 24: Narcotics worth ₹ 8.5 crore have been seized and four persons have been arrested in two separate operations in Assam's Cachar district on Friday, said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday.

"In two successful anti-narcotic drives conducted by @cachar police, it seized a huge swath of narcotic substances", the chief minister posted on micro-blogging site 'X'. The operation was conducted jointly with the Assam Rifles and the seized substances include 20,000 Yaba tablets and 418 grams of brown sugar.

"The price of the seized items are ₹ 8.5 crore and four accused have been arrested", the chief minister added.

Earlier on May 19, Assam police had recovered heroin worth ₹ 105 crore in Assam's Cachar district.

Taking to the micro-blogging site X, the Assam chief minister 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 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

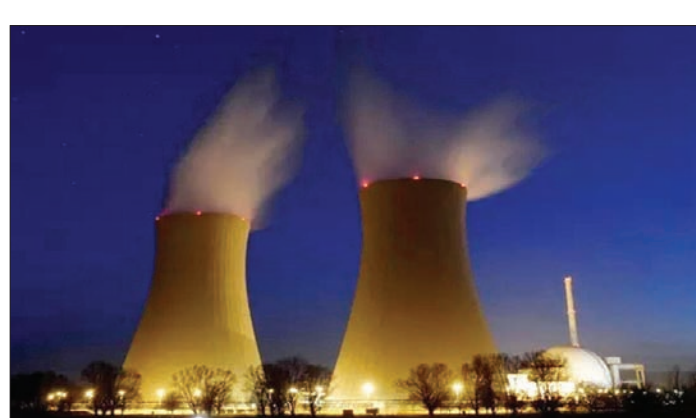
Both the countries are collaborating on building six 1,000 MW nuclear reactors Ready to build high-capacity nuclear power units at a new site in India: Russia

MUMBAI, May 24: Russia has said it is ready for serious expansion of cooperation with India in the area of atomic energy, including building high-capacity nuclear power units at a new site in India.

Department of Atomic Energy secretary Ajit Kumar Mohanty on Thursday met with Alexey Likhachev, the director general of Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation of Russia and discussed ways to further bolster nuclear energy cooperation between two countries.

A statement by Rosatom said officials of the two sides visited the site of the Pilot Demonstration Energy Complex (PDEC) being built in Seversk, Tomsk region in Russia.

During the joint visit, a full-scale



discussion took place on the prospective areas of Russian-Indian cooperation in the nuclear field, the statement added.

"We are ready for serious expansion of the cooperation with India

in the field of using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. This includes, first of all, serial construction of the Russian-designed high-capacity nuclear power units at a new site in India, implementa-

tion of land-based and floating low-power generation projects, cooperation in the nuclear fuel cycle area, as well as in the field of non-power applications of nuclear technologies," Likhachev said.

Rosatom did not elaborate the type of nuclear power reactors it intends to make on the new site in India.

Last week, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said India is looking for additional sites for Russian nuclear reactors.

Russia and India are collaborating on building six 1,000 MW nuclear reactors each in Kudankulam (in Tamil Nadu), of which two have been commissioned.

"Alexey Likhachev and Ajit Kumar Mohanty also discussed the progress (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'India's growing weight will ensure overall global balance remains in favour of freedom, openness'

NEW DELHI, May 24: India's growing weight will ensure that the overall balance in the world order remains in favour of freedom, openness, transparency and a rules-based order, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said on Friday.

In a virtual address at the Nikkei Asia Future of Asia Forum, he said the challenge of supply chain and the use of economic coercion by states have put a premium on resilience, in comments that came amid China's attempt to become an economic hegemon.

Jaishankar said the world is undergoing a flux, driven by geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-technological developments and that the global order today is visibly under stress, with Asia and the Indo-Pacific very much part of this transformation.

"But it is not just change we are seeing; there is also much greater risk-taking. It is visible in the conflict in Ukraine, in violence in the Middle East and the disre-

gard for international law and agreements in Asia and the Indo-Pacific," he said.

This has economic facets, perhaps even more concerning. The supply chain challenge, over-concentrations stemming from globalization and the use of economic coercion by states have put a premium on resilience and redundancy," he said.

The minister said equally important is the technology challenge that has created a new level of interpenetration and interdependence. "As a result, the era of AI, EVs (electric vehicles), green and clean technologies have brought both hope and anxiety in equal measure.

"As both market shares and data harnessing are leveraged, national security has become crucial to many economic transactions," he said. Jaishankar said the transformation of India is critical to strengthening multipolarity (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Markets end lower after scaling record peaks intra-day; Nifty breaches 23,000-level

MUMBAI, May 24: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty scaled new peaks on Friday in intraday deals before closing marginally lower due to profit booking in FMCG, IT and health-care stocks.

A weak trend in global equities weighed on the sentiments, but renewed foreign capital inflows and stable crude oil prices in international markets supported the markets, traders said.

Markets were on a record-breaking rally for the second straight day ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls on June 4.

In a highly volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 7.65 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 75,410.39. During the day, it rallied 218.46 points or 0.28 per cent to hit its all-time intra-day high of 75,636.50.

The NSE Nifty breached the 23,000 mark for the first time in early trade.

During the day, the benchmark climbed 58.75 points or 0.25 per cent to hit its lifetime peak of 23,026.40. However, it pared all the gains and ended with a marginal decline of 10.55 points or 0.05 per cent at 22,957.10.

"Markets ended flat in a sluggish trading session as investors preferred to stay on the sidelines due to weak global cues. As it was the last trading day of the week, investors didn't want to increase exposure to equities and rather followed global cues," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

On the weekly front, the BSE



benchmark zoomed 1,404.45 points or 1.89 per cent. The NSE Nifty climbed 455.1 points or 2 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies stood at Rs 4,19,99,274.85 crore (USD 5.05 trillion).

The market capitalisation of listed companies on the NSE stood at Rs 416 lakh crore (USD 5.01 trillion).

"Nifty climbed to the 23,000 level on May 24, 2024, with the latest 1,000-point move taking more than 4 months amidst global and local uncertainties. Late election outcome-related positioning helped Nifty reach this level ahead of the June 4 date.

"The surge in Nifty was primarily driven by favourable macro-economic indicators, reformist policies, stability in politics, a forecast of favourable monsoons, and expectations of the start of rate cuts across the globe," Dhiraj Relli, MD & CEO at HDFC Securities, said.

The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on June 4.

From the Sensex firms, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints, Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, JSW Steel and ITC were among the major losers.

On the other hand, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, Larsen & Toubro, NTPC, Axis Bank and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers.

Gautam Adani Group firm Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone will replace IT major Wipro in BSE's benchmark index Sensex from June 24, according to an official announcement on Friday.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.20 per cent while the midcap index climbed 0.23 per cent.

Among the indices, services declined 1.52 per cent, FMCG (0.71 per cent), IT (0.55 per cent), metal (0.41 per cent), commodities (0.35 per cent) and consumer discre-

tionary (0.29 per cent).

Energy, financial services, industrials, telecommunication, bank and capital goods were among the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday after days of offloading equities. They bought equities worth Rs 4,670.95 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

"After making fresh highs above 23,000 in early trade, Nifty settled flat. Shares mostly fell in Europe and Asia on Friday after unexpectedly strong reports on the US economy raised the possibility of interest rates staying high," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were trading with cuts. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Thursday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.73 per cent to USD 80.77 a barrel.

With nearly a fortnight left for the results of Lok Sabha polls, benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty zoomed more than 1.6 per cent to close at lifetime high levels on Thursday.

"With India projected to remain the fastest-growing major economy, inflation at manageable levels, and expectations of continued reform momentum, the outlook for the Indian stock market remains positive over the medium term, though some hiccups may be expected in the interim," Relli said. (PTI)

Rupee jumps 18 paise to close at 83.11 against US dollar



MUMBAI, May 24: The rupee rallied for the fourth consecutive trading session on Friday and appreciated by 18 paise to settle at 83.11 (provisional) against the US dollar on fresh foreign fund inflows and suspected intervention by the RBI.

Forex traders attributed the rally to ₹ 2.11 lakh crore record dividend by the RBI to the government for the fiscal ended March 31. It was more than double the budgeted expectation, helping shore up revenue ahead of a new government taking office.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 83.26 and moved in the range of 83.03 and 83.26 against the greenback during the session.

The local unit finally settled at 83.11 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a rise of 18 paise from its previous close. In the last four trading sessions the local unit has added 39 paise against the American currency.

The forex market was closed on Thursday on account of 'Buddha Purnima'.

On Wednesday, the rupee appreciated by 2 paise to settle at 83.29 against the US dollar.

"The Indian rupee gained on suspected intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The RBI's ₹ 2.11 lakh crore dividend to the government also boosted market sentiments.

"Fresh FII inflows and a decline in crude oil prices also supported the rupee. The US dollar strengthened as markets trimmed rate cut bets amid hawkish US data and hawkish Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting minutes," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, declined 0.22 per cent to 104.88. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, slipped 0.70 per cent to USD 80.79 per barrel.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias on positive domestic equities and overall weakness in crude oil prices. However, weak global markets and strong dollar on hawkish US data may cap sharp gains," Choudhary said.

Traders may take cues from durable goods orders and revised consumer sentiment data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 82.80 to ₹ 83.30, Choudhary added.

On the domestic equity market front, benchmark equity indices scaled new peaks in intra-day trade before ending flat.

The 30-share Sensex declined 7.65 points, or 0.01 per cent, to settle at 75,410.39 points, and Nifty fell 10.55 points, or 0.05 per cent, to close at 22,957.10 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Thursday, as they purchased shares worth Rs 4,670.95 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Adani Ports to enter Sensex from June 24; Wipro to move out

NEW DELHI, May 24: Gautam Adani-owned Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) will replace IT major Wipro in the 30-share BSE Sensex from June 24, according to an official announcement on Friday.

This marks the first inclusion of any Adani Group firm in Sensex. The group has 10 listed firms with a combined market valuation surpassing Rs 17 lakh crore. Notably, both APSEZ and Wipro are constituents of NSE's Nifty index. Moreover, the group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises is also a part of the 50-share Nifty.

The changes will be effective from June 24, 2024. Asia Index, a joint venture between S&P Dow Jones Indices and BSE, said in a statement adding that the replacement is a part of periodic review.

In addition, Tata Group company Trent Ltd will enter S&P BSE Sensex 50, while Divi's Laboratories will be dropped from the index.

Apart from these, changes have been announced in S&P BSE 100, S&P BSE Bankex and S&P BSE Sensex Next 50.

In S&P BSE 100 index, REC, HDFC Asset Management Company, Canara Bank, Cummins India and Punjab National Bank (PNB) will be included, while Page Industries, SBI Cards and Payment Services, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company, Jubilant FoodWorks and Zee Entertainment Enterprises (ZEEL) will move out.

Further, Yes Bank and Canara Bank will find a place in the Bankex index replacing AU Small Finance Bank and IDFC First Bank.

In Sensex Next 50 index, REC, PNB, Divi's Laboratories, HDFC AMC, Canara Bank and Cummins India will be added.

On the other hand, Trent, Page Industries, SBI Card, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, Jubilant FoodWorks and ZEEL will be dropped from Sensex Next 50. (PTI)

Government sues Ticketmaster owner

Court asked to break up company's monopoly on live events

WASHINGTON, May 24: The justice department sued Ticketmaster and its parent company Thursday, accusing them of running an illegal monopoly over live events in America and asking a court to break up the system that squelches competition and drives up prices for fans.

Filed in federal court in Manhattan, the sweeping antitrust lawsuit was brought with 30 state and district attorneys general and seeks to dismantle the monopoly they say is squeezing out smaller promoters, hurting artists and drowning ticket buyers in fees. Ticketmaster and its owner, Live Nation Entertainment, have a long history of clashes with major artists and their fans, including Taylor Swift and Bruce Springsteen.

"It's time for fans and artists to stop paying the price for Live Nation's monopoly," Attorney General Merrick Garland said. "It is time to restore competition and innovation in the entertainment industry. It is time to break up Live Nation-Ticketmaster."

The government accused Live Nation of tactics — including threats and retaliation — that Garland said have allowed the entertainment giant to "suffocate the competition" by controlling virtually every aspect of the industry, from concert promotion to ticketing. The impact is seen in an "end-

less list of fees on fans," the attorney general said.

"Live music should not be available only to those who can afford to pay the 'Ticketmaster tax,'" said Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter of the Justice Department's Antitrust Division.

Ricky Palitti and Jacob DeLong of Detroit said they recently spent about \$1,200 for three tickets to a Shania Twain concert using Ticketmaster and about \$370 to see RuPaul's Drag Race Live.

"I think tickets have definitely gone up in price, but I also think that all the different fees that Ticketmaster places on an order definitely hikes the price up, for sure," Palitti said.

DeLong said that while he respects an artist's work, the added fees make the costs to see a show "ridiculous."

"Where can we get a break?" he said.

Live Nation, which has for years denied that it is violating antitrust laws, said the lawsuit "won't solve the issues fans care about relating to ticket prices, service fees and access to in-demand shows."

"Calling Ticketmaster a monopoly may be a PR win for the DOJ in the short term, but it will lose in court because it ignores the basic economics of live entertainment," Live Nation added. It said most service fees go to venues and that



outside competition has "steadily eroded" Ticketmaster's market share. The company said it would defend itself against the "baseless allegations."

The Justice Department said Live Nation's anti-competitive practices include using long-term contracts to keep venues from choosing rivals, blocking venues from using multiple ticket sellers and threatening venues that they could lose money if they don't choose Ticketmaster.

In 2021, the concert giant threatened to financially retaliate against a firm if one of its portfolio companies didn't stop competing with Live Nation for artist promotion contracts, the Justice Department alleged. Live Nation has also scooped up smaller promoters it

viewed as a threats, officials said.

Michael Carrier, a professor at Rutgers Law School who specializes in antitrust litigation, said the Justice Department has a strong case. He expects Live Nation to "try to cast blame elsewhere," such as arguing that prices are set by artists or venues, but he said those explanations are weak.

"The DOJ showed how Live Nation really has its tentacles in each element of the supply chain, which means that it has a lot more control than it is letting on," he said. "And, in terms of justifications, there is really very little that (Live Nation) can offer in terms of how they're helping the consumer."

The complaint said a breakup between Live Nation and Ticketmaster is on the table. That, combined with other remedies such as preventing some exclusive deals that shackle competition, could potentially help fans see lower ticket prices, give artists more agency in choosing venues and boost smaller promoters' success in the long run, Carrier said.

Ticketmaster, which merged with Live Nation in 2010, is the world's largest ticket seller across live music, sports, theater and more. During its annual report last month, the company said Ticketmaster distributed more than 620 million tickets through its systems in 2023. (AP)

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Manipur violence: Can't go by

and are not in a position to go anywhere near Imphal, the bench said. "That does not mean that notice be issued against chief secretary". Bhati referred to the September 25 last year order which said the state of Manipur and the Centre are given one week to respond to the directions, including on ensuring protection of properties of displaced persons and preventing their encroachment. "We had filed a status report. We can file an updated status report," she said, adding the state was duty bound to protect its citizens and their properties.

"Manipur is still in a situation of uneasy calm as we speak. There are conflicting views and the state and central government are trying to assuage everyone," Bhati said.

When the counsel for the petitioners claimed that their properties have been looted in the presence of police and they can place those videos before the court, the law officer objected to it and said wild allegations were being made. "They (authorities) are duty bound to protect the properties. They are duty bound to carry out the orders of this court and the government. No doubt about it," the bench said.

Observing that no contempt was made out against the chief secretary and the other respondents, the bench observed, "Don't pressure the officers like this". It said the petitioners may file appropriate proceedings as permissible under the law. "All sympathies for you. Your properties need to be protected but that does not mean that we have to issue contempt notice to the respondents," the bench said. When the petitioners' lawyer said, "Your lordships may kindly see the message that goes out today...," the bench observed, "We have to go as per the law. We cannot go by sentiments." The bench said it was not satisfied with the claim that contempt proceedings were maintainable against the respondents in connection with the September 25, 2023 order. (PTI)

6th phase: Voting in 58 seats

centres like Delhi, Gurugram and Faridabad about their "right and duty to vote and break the trend of urban apathy". The fifth phase saw a voter turnout of 62.2 per cent in the 49 seats that went to polls on May 20.

In West Bengal, voting will be held in the tribal belt Jangal Mahal region, spanning five districts. A hotspot for identity politics, the region sends eight representatives to Lok Sabha from Tamuk, Kanthi, Ghatal, Jhargram, Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura, and Bishnupur seats. Out of the eight seats, the BJP won five and TMC bagged three in the 2019 polls.

Soumendu Adhikari, the brother of Suwendu Adhikari, has been fielded from Kanthi, considered the backyard of the senior BJP leader. In Tamuk, former judge of Calcutta High Court Abhijit Gangopadhyay is fighting on a BJP ticket against TMC's young turk Debangshu Bhattacharya, known for composing the "Khela Hobe" song for the party in the 2021 assembly polls. An interesting fight is on the cards in Delhi with the BJP and the INDIA bloc partners pitted in a direct, one-on-one contest in all the seven seats.

This is the first time the AAP and the Congress have fielded joint candidates against the BJP. While the AAP is contesting on four seats, the Congress has fielded candidates on the remaining three seats.

The AAP has fielded Kuldeep Kumar from East Delhi seat, Mahabul Mishra from West Delhi, Somnath Bhatti from New Delhi and Sahi Ram Pahalwan from South Delhi. The Congress has fielded J P Agarwal from Chandni Chowk, Kanhaiya Kumar from North East Delhi and Udit Raj from North West Delhi constituency.

The BJP candidates are Manoj Tiwari from North East Delhi, the only sitting MP from Delhi fielded by the party again; Ramvir Singh Bidhuri from South Delhi, Bansuri Swaraj from New Delhi, Harsh Deep Malhotra from East Delhi, Yogendra Chandolia from North West Delhi, Praveen Khandelwal from Chandni Chowk and Kamaljeet Sehrawat from West Delhi. (PTI)

'Lalu worked neither for welfare of

leadership of Modi ji will not allow this to happen. Congress, Lalu Prasad and Mamata Banerjee are against reservations to backward classes," he alleged. "They have been exposed", he said, referring to a Calcutta High Court order that cancelled OBC certificates issued in West Bengal since 2010.

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010, sparking a political debate in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections.

The court observed that the inclusion of 77 classes of Muslims in the list of backward categories was to treat them as a vote bank. The home minister said, "After completion of the five phases of Lok Sabha elections, I can tell you the results. The sixth round of voting will take place tomorrow. Modi ji (who heads the NDA) has already bagged more than 310 seats." He also claimed, "Lalu ji's party (RJD) will not be able to open its accounts. The INDIA alliance will face a humiliating defeat in this election". Shah alleged that Congress and RJD were against the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya from the very beginning.

"Congress leaders tried to scare us by saying that we cannot take back Pakistan-occupied Kashmir because Pakistan has atom bombs. PoK belongs to India. We will claim it back," the BJP leader said. The NDA government under the leadership of PM Modi has "ended terrorism and naxalism" in the country, he said. (PTI)

PM Modi campaigned for Revanna

said such things... It also betrays desperation, a sense of the elections slipping out of his hands." The Congress leader also mocked the claim of the BJP-led NDA's return to power with 400-plus seats made by Union home minister Amit Shah. "If there is one profession that Amit Shah must never try his hands at, it is psychology. Just recall the tall claims he had made during the assembly polls in West Bengal where the BJP was trounced by the ruling Trinamool Congress," remarked Tharoor.

He also mocked at Shah's claim of "taking back" Pakistan-occupied Kashmir with the remark, "What were they doing for the last 10 years? It is an election stunt... So many of our border outposts have been occupied by China and the government has been unable to do anything about that."

The Congress leader was also asked about the claim of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal that had he resigned before being arrested by ED, the ruling BJP at the Centre would have been emboldened to frame his counterparts in states like West Bengal and Kerala to topple the governments there. (PTI)

SC refuses to direct EC to upload

writ petition after elections are over. In between the elections, hands-off attitude has to be there," the bench told senior advocate Dushyant Dave, appearing for the NGO. Senior advocate Maninder Singh, appearing for the Election Commission, questioned the maintainability of the interim application and claimed it has been filed on the basis of mere suspicion and apprehension coupled with false allegations.

The bench, which posed to Dave several questions about the maintainability of the plea, asked why the interim application filed by the NGO contained an identical prayer made in the writ petition of 2019.

"Prayer 'A' in your (interim) application is Prayer 'B' in your writ petition. That's the final relief you have prayed for in the writ petition. Now, how can you claim it as an interim relief?" the bench told Dave.

The prayer 'A' in the interim application says "Direct the Election Commission of India to immediately upload on its website scanned legible copies of Form 17C Part-I (Account of Votes Recorded) of all polling stations after close of polling of each phase in the on-going 2024 Lok Sabha elections."

The top court said the NGO's interim application is based on various press notes issued by the ECI relating to the 2024 polls and asked can a court, by an interim order, grant a relief which is in the nature of a final relief while keeping the writ petition pending.

Dave submitted it is not an adversarial litigation and the NGO has approached the court for a genuine public cause as the EC, after the first two phases of polling, came out with a voter turnout figure which was substantially higher than what it had initially given. Dave said these are public interest litigation proceedings where strict rules of procedure, pleadings etc do not apply. (PTI)

India likely to send tigers to Cambodia

requested them to send a detailed action plan. The same will be examined and placed before the technical committee," NTCA member secretary Gobind Sagar Bharadwaj told PTI. Appropriate decision will be taken by competent authority on the basis of the technical committee's recommendations, he said.

Another source said the plan is to reintroduce four tigers - one male and three females - into the Cardamom hills in the southwestern region of Cambodia. According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), conservationists in Cambodia declared tigers "functionally extinct" in 2016.

Cambodia's last tiger was seen on a camera trap in the eastern province of Mondulkiri in 2007.

In September 2017, the Cambodian government announced plans to reintroduce tigers into the country with the help of WWF. Cambodia lost all its tigers due to poaching, habitat loss, and other factors. India is ensuring that all factors responsible are addressed and the conditions are conducive for the reintroduction of tigers, the first source said. (PTI)

India underlines importance of making

facilitated by genuine partnerships that empower the Africans and take into account Africa's priorities," she said. The envoy asserted that in India's continuous endeavour to provide impetus to the voice and aspirations of the Global South, "we have maintained that the continued denial of representation in the permanent category of membership is a blot on the collective credibility of this Council".

India has always supported the Ezulwini consensus and called for permanent African representation in an expanded Security Council, "those who are responsible for denial by delay and perpetuating a historical injustice must be called out". On matters related to peace and security, Kamboj said the Security Council should respect a regional approach adopted by countries who are involved and work in collaboration with regional organisations to address these shared challenges. Kamboj also voiced concern over the spread of terrorism in Africa, saying terrorist outfits deserve the priority attention of the Council in their response to addressing security threats confronting the continent today. "Capacity constraints and the lack of sustained financing have indeed become major impediments in the fight against terrorism," she said. (PTI)

Four held with narcotics worth

on the drugs network, @cacharpolice conducted a special operation and confiscated 10.333kg heroin transported from a neighbouring State," Sarma wrote on X.

'India's growing weight will ensure

in Asia itself, which is a prerequisite for a multipolar world. "India's growing weight will ensure that the overall balance in the world order remains in favour of freedom, openness, transparency and a rules-based order," he said. "Equally, its greater sense of responsibility and more contributions are also making a difference. Indian naval ships are currently operating in the Red Sea to protect maritime shipping," he noted.

"India has been a First Responder for natural disasters across the Indian Ocean, sometimes even beyond. Its initiatives ranging from solar energy to disaster resilience and bio-diversity have been recognised across the world," he said. (PTI)

Ready to build high-capacity nuclear

of the joint Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project being constructed as per the Russian design in the southern India, comprising six power units equipped with light-water reactors, each of 1,000 MW capacity," the statement added. (PTI)

Bhupen Borah writes to Akhil Gogoi over criticism of party leaders

HT Correspondent
GUWAHATI, May 24: Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah's letter to Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi for his critical remarks against Congress leaders has sparked a new controversy in the state.

Gogoi earlier stated that many Congress leaders remained inactive during the run-up to the Lok Sabha poll campaign in the state. He also asserted that grassroots workers and leaders from allied parties gave their best during the election.

The remarks made by the Sivasagar legislator drew criticism from various ranks of the Congress party in the state.

Borah told reporters on Friday, "I have received many calls from Congress party workers after Akhil Gogoi's statement. That is why I have written a letter to him, saying that Congress leaders put their best effort to take on the BJP despite our several limitations."

He also emphasised the importance of maintaining transparent relationships, whether friendly or adversarial.

"If I call somebody my friend, then the friendship with him must be pure. The same is true for en-

emies as well," Borah said. Meanwhile, the Opposition leader in the Assam assembly, Debabrata Saikia, also distanced himself from Akhil Gogoi's statement.

He said, "We had funding issues during the campaign as the BJP had frozen the party accounts demanding ₹ 4000 crores. Despite that, Congress leaders engaged in strong contests with the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. Therefore, I denounce Akhil Gogoi's claim that Congress leaders did not campaign vigorously. This is not true."

However, Saikia asserted that Akhil Gogoi is Congress' friend and BJP's enemy.

"He is BJP's foe. Akhil Gogoi campaigned for the Congress candidates in Dhubri, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, and Nagaon. He extensively campaigned for Rakibul Hussain in the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat, which has proved beneficial for us," Saikia said.

The Opposition leader also dismissed Akhil Gogoi's remark that Saikia may quit Congress in the coming days.

"I am not going anywhere. I am a devoted party worker of Congress," he added.

Police nab drug trafficker with 24.23 gm of heroin

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, May 24: In Dibrugarh, a suspected drug trafficker was apprehended by the police on Thursday evening, reportedly in possession of 24.23 grams of heroin. The individual, identified as Arfan Ali (26), residing at Chowalkhwa Gharbandi Chuk, Dibrugarh, and son of Habib Ali, was taken into custody following a tip-off.



Acting on the information received, law enforcement conducted an operation leading to the discovery of two plastic soap cases containing the alleged heroin. A case (No 200/2024) was filed under the NDPS Act at Dibrugarh Police Station.

This incident comes on the heels of another drug seizure in the Barbaruah area, where Dibrugarh Police confiscated 2.806 kg of cannabis (ganja) and arrested two individuals: Basanta Kurmi (22) and Azaad alias Teru Kurmi (55).

Authorities suggest that organised drug activities are prevalent in Assam, with Dibrugarh serving as a central hub. Allegedly, a well-established supply chain operates from Dibrugarh, orchestrated by notorious drug smugglers. While many involved in this illicit trade have faced legal consequences under the NDPS Act, some continue to operate discreetly, aided by intermediaries, despite being out on bail.

Freedom fighters' pension holders urged to submit details

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, May 24: As per directives of the government, Niranjan Sarma, general secretary of Nagaon district unit of Assam Freedom Fighters' Association, urged all freedom fighters, widowed wives, as well as unmarried women who have been drawing family pension and other facilities to submit all details along with PPO numbers and working phone numbers at the office of Nagaon District Freedom Fighters' Association on or before May 31, 2024, for budget allotment of freedom fighters' pension for the year 2024-25.

Sarma, in a press note, asserted here that Dilip Kumar Bora, joint secretary to Home and Political Department, government of Assam, issued an official letter on April 4 last through which he directed all district commissioners to make a list of freedom fighters, widowed wives, and unmarried women who are availing freedom fighters' pension for long in the said district each for budget allotment of freedom fighters' pension for the year 2024-25.

It is pertinent to mention that two freedom fighters, 33 widowed wives, and 64 unmarried women from freedom fighters' families are getting freedom fighters' pension in Nagaon district, stated in the press note, asserting that the benefits of freedom fighters' pension will be cut off if they fail to submit their details at its office on or before May 31 as the list has to be submitted to the Department of Budget as well as Home and Political Department, government of Assam beforehand.

Union minister pays tribute and emphasises legacy of unity & progress

Sarba inaugurates statue of Matak King Sarbananda Singha



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, May 24: Union minister and senior BJP leader Sarbananda Sonowal paid his deep respects to the great Matak King Sarbananda Singha on the eve of the 222nd Punya Tithi on Friday.

On this occasion, organised by the Matak Rajvansh Unnayan Samiti and All Assam Matak Sanmilan, Sonowal also inaugurated a statue of the revered king.

Covering the legacy and life cycle of Matak King Sarbananda Singha, Sonowal said, "The renowned Matak Swargadeo Sarbananda Singha has paved the way for building an ideal society through work consciousness, brotherhood, and good governance. He united different ethnic groups, implemented various pro-tribal measures, and promoted harmony. In Bengmara, now Tinsukia, the capital, Sarbananda Singha has etched his name in golden letters in the pages of history. His bravery, indomitable courage, leadership, and dedication to the country and the nation continue to inspire the Matak people and the Assamese nation."

I hope that Swargadeva's blessings will always remain with us as we continue to render dedicated service to our nation."

Sarbananda Sonowal further said, "The Matak are a strong community in Assam, playing a crucial role in every significant aspect of the state's national life. I urge the Matak community to actively contribute to realising the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to build a developed and self-reliant India during this transformative period, guided by the noble ideals and unparalleled work of Sarbananda Singha. The strength of diverse ethnic groups ensures Assam's strength, and a strong Assam translates to a strong India. We must never forget our past. We must commit to protect, preserve, and promote our rich heritage, traditions, and culture. The BJP government remains dedicated to fostering the holistic progress of Assam's indigenous communities and safeguarding their legacy. Moving forward, we pledge to continue our efforts with renewed vigor to uphold the foundation of our nation."

Kirat Rai Mahasabha

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, May 24: The Kirat Rai Mahasabha was convened for a one-day event on Thursday at Kara Rongpi village in Bokajan sub-division, Karbi Anglong. This gathering serves as a platform for the Nepali Rai community, aiming to preserve their cultural heritage, traditions, and language, while fostering connectivity among the youth. In the morning, Jai Kumar Rai, the president of Karbi Anglong Rai Sabha, hoisted the organisation's flag. An open session took place in the afternoon, graced by the presence of Chandra Sing Kro, president of Karbi Cultural Society, Laichan Engeng, president of Hills People Cultural Forum, along with other dignitaries, also participated in the event.

Guru Nanak Senior Secondary School hosts annual function

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 24: Guru Nanak Senior Secondary School, Guwahati, hosted its annual function with immense zeal and enthusiasm at the prestigious Srimanta Sankaradeva International Auditorium, Kalakshetra, Guwahati.

The event, a vibrant celebration of talent and tradition, commenced with the auspicious lighting of the lamp by the esteemed trustee members of the institution, followed by the melodious rendition of the state anthem, setting a reverent tone for the proceedings. The students of Guru Nanak Senior Secondary School showcased extraordinary talent in the performing arts, presenting a diverse array of performances including singing, dancing, and drama. These performances highlighted the rich cultural heritage of India, featuring traditional art forms from various regions such as Bodo, Mising, and Assamese. The audience was enthralled by the students' dedication and skill, which brought to life the vibrant tapestry of Indian culture. Teachers also graced the stage with their participation, presenting a poignant dance drama that underscored the importance of motherhood and child relationship.

The annual function aimed to emphasise the merits of good men-

Domestic dispute turns violent

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, May 24: A distressing incident unfolded in Gajali, near Demow on Friday, as a husband assaulted his wife with a dao, resulting in severe injuries. Sources report that Jaki Garh engaged in a dispute with his wife, Hemanti Garh, leading to the violent altercation on Friday morning. Hemanti Garh sustained injuries to her forehead, right cheek, and right hand as a result of the attack. She was swiftly taken by family members to Demow Model Hospital, where she received initial medical care before being referred to Dibrugarh for further treatment.

importance of the overall growth of a child's mind and the vital role that such annual functions play in this development. The event concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks delivered by the coordinator of the institution, S Chakraborty. He expressed gratitude to the management, parents, children, and acknowledged the entire team for the grand success of the program. Sardar Bhupinder Pal Singh, the secretary of the institution extended his thanks to the gathering, lauding the children extensively for their beautiful performances, which brought the event to a joyous and memorable close. He also thanked the parents and guardians for cooperating wholeheartedly for the successful presentation of the program.



Working president, Sardar Davinder Singh Kohli, addressed the gathering, commending the students for their remarkable performances and praising the management team for their exceptional efforts in organising such a magnificent event. He emphasised the

importance of the overall growth of a child's mind and the vital role that such annual functions play in this development. The event concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks delivered by the coordinator of the institution, S Chakraborty. He expressed gratitude to the management, parents, children, and acknowledged the entire team for the grand success of the program. Sardar Bhupinder Pal Singh, the secretary of the institution extended his thanks to the gathering, lauding the children extensively for their beautiful performances, which brought the event to a joyous and memorable close. He also thanked the parents and guardians for cooperating wholeheartedly for the successful presentation of the program.

Tenant alleges illegal eviction by landlords

HT Correspondent
GUWAHATI, May 24: Two years ago, Bhusita Kalita from Chhaygaon started her business for Ibhaan Motors at a cost of ₹ 30 lakh after signing a lease agreement with Naren Saloi and Girish Saloi for 10 years at 1 no Balasiddhi under Chhaygaon LAC in Kamrup district.

In the meantime, some parts of the company had to be abandoned for highway development.

Recently, when Bhusita Kalita was away for three months, the landlord pressured the employees to leave the business.

Instead of leaving the business, Kalita went to court and obtained a stay order. She alleged that the landlords not only pressured her to give up the land but also threatened her.

The landlord defied the court's order and demolished Ibhaan Motors with an excavator at midnight on Sunday. Later, Bhusita Kalita filed an FIR regarding this incident at the Chhaygaon Police Station on Monday.

Bhusita Kalita later learned that the land where Ibhaan Motors is located had been sold by the owners to a company called Nahar Group of Companies. Therefore, Ibhaan Motors was evicted from there. However, Kalita was shocked to be asked to vacate the premises within two years despite having a 10-



year lease agreement.

Kalita further stated that Ibhaan Motors had equipment and machinery worth about Rs 50 lakh. However, the company authorities and the landowners demolished Ibhaan Motors with an excavator at night.

"Another allegation is that the landowner signed a contract with me under a different survey number. Therefore, Ibhaan Motors did not receive the value of the property demolished in the name of highway construction," Kalita further added.

It may be mentioned here that Bhusita Kalita filed a case under Section 420 against the landowners and Nahar Group of Companies.

Students turn entrepreneurs for Biodiversity Day

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 24: In an innovative initiative to mark International Biodiversity Day, students of Bongaon High School set up a vibrant marketplace within their school premises on Wednesday. Guided by their teachers and parents, the young entrepreneurs showcased and sold an array of locally grown vegetables, fruits, and homemade pickles.

The unconventional program aimed to provide students with a hands-on learning experience, imparting practical knowledge about marketing strategies, arithmetic skills, financial literacy, and the application of weights and measures. The students enthusiastically embraced their roles as vendors, delighted by the opportunity to sell homegrown produce while simultaneously gaining valuable insights.

The makeshift market bustled with a diverse range of offerings, including spinach, coconuts, peas, carrots, eggplants, brinjal, chilies, potatoes, and ferns. Some enterprising students even brought various types of pickles, adding a tantalising twist to the event.

The teachers wholeheartedly supported the initiative, purchasing bags of vegetables and other items from their young entrepreneurs, fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment among the students.

Ledo Central Namghar marks 57th anniversary



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, May 24: Ledo Central Namghar, one of the oldest Namghars located at 83 number Margherita constituency of Tinsukia district, celebrated its 57th anniversary with a grand program from Thursday to Friday. Diha Samrat Kamla Gogoi was invited as the chief guest to recite Bhagawat paath.

Ranajyoti Neog, general secretary of Ledo Central Namghar Managing Committee, stated that on Thursday, the program commenced with the hoisting of the religious flag, which was unfurled by Tarun Gogoi, president of Ledo Central Namghar. This was followed by the illumination of earthen lamps by Damrudhar Neog and Loknath Konwar.

Following this, a procession carrying the holy Bhagawat Gita was taken from Ledo Central Namghar to Ledo town.

Rana Jyoti Neog mentioned that on Friday, an open session was held on the topic - Srimanta Sankardev's democratic thinking towards Assam and our society. In the evening, 57 earthen lamps were illuminated at Ledo Central Namghar, where Diha Samrat Kamla Gogoi and his team performed Diha Naam.

Special screening of 'Jiya' for 130 people

Enthusiastic response from female audience in Sonapur area

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 24: Amidst the increasing popularity of the Assamese feature film 'Jiya' for its realistic portrayal of women's issues and struggles, Star Cement organised a special screening for 130 people at PVR Cinemas. The screening, held on Friday, was particularly significant as 95 percent of the attendees were women and girls from the Sonapur area. This initiative, conducted by the CSR wing of Star Cement, aimed at supporting and inspiring women through impactful storytelling. The screening of 'Jiya' received an enthusiastic response from the audience.

The film, directed by Kenny Basumatary and produced by Sarmistha Chakravorty, tells the story of a resilient young woman named Jiya. The audience, comprising many single mothers, found the film deeply relatable and inspiring. One viewer commented, "Jiya is a life-changing experience. It feels like the story of someone we all know—a neighbour, a friend, maybe even ourselves."

Critics and film lovers have praised 'Jiya'



for its realistic portrayal of real-life struggles and compelling storytelling. Film critic Ambar Chatterjee described 'Jiya' as "a deeply personal and poignant tale of struggle and triumph, underlined by fantastic performances and able direction." Popular ac-

trix Ila Arun commended the film for its beautiful depiction of the life and struggles of a single mother, urging everyone to support the film by watching it in theatres.

The special screening by Star Cement was more than just a movie outing; it was an

event that fostered a sense of community and support among the attendees. The film has also been recognised with multiple awards at the Prag Cine Awards, including best film, best screenplay and dialogue (Kenny Basumatary & Sarmistha Chakravorty), best male singer (Angarap Papon Mahanta), and best background score (Ambar Das). These accolades have further boosted the film's popularity among cinema lovers. The soundtrack of 'Jiya', featuring hit songs like 'Xopun Xopun Loga', 'Nuphuta Jonak', 'Kothabur Jodi Hool Hoi', and 'Ei Xaadhu', has also resonated deeply with listeners, contributing to the film's success. The latest release from Jiya, 'Udong Bukut' sung by Sarmistha Chakravorty, has also been widely praised for its flawless lyrics and powerful rendition.

Star Cement's special screening initiative is a reflection of the positive reception 'Jiya' has garnered and the strong connection audiences feel with its story. This initiative not only provided an enjoyable experience but also offered a source of inspiration and empowerment to the attendees.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts. —Winston Churchill

Delhi's changing political scenario

As the Lok Sabha election nears its end, the political landscape in Delhi is undergoing a significant shift. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's recent missteps and the faltering AAP-Congress alliance have seemingly cleared the path for a BJP sweep in all seven of Delhi's Lok Sabha seats. The alliance between AAP and Congress, once seen as a potential game-changer, has failed to capitalize on its initial promise. The mishandling of campaign time by Kejriwal, exacerbated by his personal controversies, has dampened the coalition's prospects. The Supreme Court's temporary relief allowing Kejriwal to campaign did little to alter the public's perception, and his personal assistant, Bibhav Kumar's legal troubles, have only added to the woes. Kejriwal's defense of Kumar, reminiscent of a child guarding his prized marbles, has not sat well with voters, particularly women, who have shown a growing disenchantment with the AAP leader. The BJP, on the other hand, appears to be in a comfortable position. Despite initial jitters that led to a reshuffling of candidates in six out of seven seats, the party now exudes confidence. The key seat of Chandni Chowk, historically a bellwether for Delhi's political mood, seems to be leaning towards the BJP once again. This seat's significance is underscored by the adage that the party winning Chandni Chowk often rules from New Delhi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign strategy has been instrumental in shaping voter sentiment. His series of over 40 interviews, starting with a Tamil TV channel, have laid the groundwork for a narrative of inevitable victory. This media blitz, coupled with the BJP's effective slogan "voting for Modi," has resonated with voters across the Hindi heartland and beyond. Neither Kejriwal nor Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has managed to mount a compelling challenge to Modi's dominance, which has only solidified the BJP's position. The anticipation of a BJP super-majority is not unfounded. The satta bazaar, an informal betting market, predicted 310 seats for the BJP as of May 23, down slightly from 335 the previous day, with Congress expected to secure 63 seats. Such predictions, whether they stem from psychological warfare or concrete strategy, indicate a well-orchestrated campaign by the BJP-RSS nexus, which has meticulously planned for this electoral outcome over months, if not years. The broader implication of a BJP victory extends beyond mere numbers. Modi's administration, alongside Union Home Minister Amit Shah and RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat, envisions a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) by 2047. This vision includes long-term policies and ideological shifts that the BJP/RSS aims to solidify over the next term. A defeat for the BJP could potentially undo much of their work, returning power to the Congress and erasing the advances made under Modi's leadership.

As Delhi prepares to vote on May 25, the election's outcome seems increasingly clear. Kejriwal's imminent return to Tihar Jail, set for June 2, and the fallout from the Swati Maliwal assault case have only expedited the AAP-Congress decline. Meanwhile, Modi's schedule, which includes foreign tours like attending Putin's inauguration in Russia, signals a leader confident in his victory and ready to continue his international engagements unabated. The BJP's strategic prowess and Modi's charismatic leadership have positioned the party for a decisive victory in Delhi. The failure of the AAP-Congress alliance to present a united and effective front has only reinforced the narrative of a BJP clean sweep.

Supreme Court should act to protect democracy and right to vote

Visible zeal of the Indian voters to overthrow the autocratic Narendra Modi government that's determined to dismantle Ambedkar's Constitution, may prove to be a mirage, thanks to Rajiv Kumar-led election commission's single-minded focus to subvert the election process in favour of Modi by hook or crook.

The fifth phase of the election culminated two days back, on May 20. But as had happened earlier, Rajiv Kumar once again did not put in public domain the figure of the actual votes polled. Rajiv had amended the data of the votes polled during the first two phases after eleven and four days of the polling. In both the cases, the amended percentage of vote polled showed an increase of around 5.67 per cent. The total number of votes polled shot up by 1.07 crores. Certainly, by no means this is a small figure.

It is worth recalling that in 2019 Lok Sabha elections, at least 14 BJP candidates had won by a margin of 5000 to 15,000. If the increase in votes is spread proportionately to the constituencies which went to polls, it would be perceived that each constituency has registered an average increase of 28,000 votes. This number is sufficient to jockey the results in favour of BJP. These votes are sufficient to help BJP to get a clean majority and ensure Modi's coming back to power for third term.

There is no doubt that Rajiv Kumar, at the instructions of his political masters, has chalked a conspiracy to trample election machinery and ensure victory for Modi and BJP.

It was the foreboding of losing the election that Modi had dared to remove the CJI of Supreme Court from the committee of the selectors for the Election Commission, while appointing two compliant officers as election commissioners to assist Rajiv Kumar. Modi was ready for any kind of eventualities.

By the second phase of the polling Modi could sense that there's indeed a strong but subterranean anti-incumbency against his government. The people have turned hostile and a silent revenge wave was sweep-



ing across the country, especially in Hindi heartland.

What made the situation worse for him was the decision of the RSS leaders and cadres not to support him and abstain from polling. Realising that water was flowing above his head, he was left with no alternative but to signal Rajiv Kumar to swing into action. But Kumar committed a major faux-pas. He increased the percentage of votes polled disproportionately. Even his clarification on non-availability of total number of votes was untenable and did not stand scrutiny.

Former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Qureshi, who is credited with introducing the EVM to 'speed up' the election process and make data around it public faster than before, asserted that it is for the Election Commission to explain why so much time is being taken to finalise the votes polled data. Qureshi was clear: "There should be no reasons for delay in the voter turnout data as it is available in real time. Within five minutes of the polling ending, all information is available. Now, in this situation, the Election Commission is accountable for why so much time is being taken to finalise the data."

Qureshi added: "The Election Commission must give full information about why this gap or lack of coordination is there. The commission must explain why this is happening. For transparency in the electoral process, all questions arising in the minds of people have to be answered."

The expert seeking clarification is enough to expose the conspiracy hatched out by the

election commission in connivance with the political masters.

Rajiv Kumar's election commission might not have dared to contrive, if the Supreme Court had not reaffirmed its faith in the working of EVMs and rejected prayers for 100 per cent verification of the votes polled in them with slips printed by the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines or, alternatively, a return to the system of ballot papers.

The court even went further and in separate but concurring judgments, had said: "To us, it is apparent that a number of safeguards and protocols with stringent checks have been put in place, adding that "data and figures" placed before it "do not indicate artifice and deceit".

An unnecessary observation of the court, saying - "It is of immediate relevance to note that in recent years, a trend has been fast developing of certain vested interest groups endeavouring to undermine the achievements and accomplishments of the nation, earned through the hard work and dedication of its sincere workforce. There seems to be a concerted effort to discredit, diminish, and weaken the progress of this great nation on every possible frontier.

Any such effort, or rather attempt, has to be nipped in the bud. No Constitutional court, far less this Court, would allow such (an) attempt to succeed as long as it has a say in the matter" - simply emboldened the Election Commission to act according to its sweet will.

In the past, the supporters of the candidates used to loom some booths, but now the Election

Commission is virtually committing grave constitutional sin by managing the EVM before the very eyes of the voters.

In fact Modi's assertion: "My expectation to get more than 400 seats must not be seen as over-confidence. I do not live in over-confidence. I am a person who has his ear to the ground. I may think big... I may dream far... but I remain grounded", has simply reinforced the suspicion that Election Commission has been out to bend the votes polled grossly in Modi's favour.

Just ahead of the fifth phase, Modi had asserted that the BJP will emerge as the single largest party in the south and was strongly confident that NDA will cross 400 seats in Lok Sabha when election results come out on June 4. "Our strategy for the entire nation is the same. Phir ek baar modi sarkar. Aur chaar June 400 paar", he asserted.

Rajiv Kumar's Election Commission showing a rise of 5.67 per cent in votes polled during the first two phases has drawn the attention of the Supreme Court and this time the CJI D Y Chandrachud will hear Rajiv Kumar-led EC's response and clarification on May 24, a day before the sixth, or second last phase of polling. CJI had on May 17 asked the EC why it was not supplying the total numbers of votes, as it has always done. The court also ought to know from EC: "On what basis do you disclose the tentative voting percentage."

Is it based on Form 17C? What is the difficulty of putting this on website?" It is mandatory that all polling officers in election booths should fill Form 17C and submit to the returning officer. The apex body, the central office of the CEC, receives the figures within hours from the state electoral officers.

It is indeed a matter of shame that CEC has been negating the functioning of his organisation by saying that returning officer collects data from the entire constituency, which takes time. There are some constituencies at far flung places and there are others where re-polling has been ordered.

At a time when the figures are available at a "click button" dis-

tribute, he was hiding behind gross falsifications.

This is reminiscent of the tricks played by the State Bank of India in the matter of providing information on electoral bonds. It had played the same dirty game. It demanded time till June end. But once Supreme Court issued a stern warning and ordered it to release the information asap, it revealed the information within three days.

Former additional secretary home affairs, Sanjeev Gupta, says, "Can the [Election Commission] not embarrass themselves any further? I reiterate that Form 17C data of voters is entered boothwise in ECI's EN-CORE web based software. Data is available with them at the press of a button. How can they then say that they don't have actual numbers of votes cast?"

It remains to be seen if the Supreme Court at the May 24 hearing will adopt a stern approach and ensure that Rajiv Kumar's CEC does not succeed in its mission to defeat the people's mandate by rigging the elections in Modi's favour. Rajiv Kumar is under legal obligation to explain what the basis for increasing the percentage of votes cast during first two phases was. SC must seek an honest reply from the pliant CEC.

He must also furnish an undertaking to the court that no tampering of the electoral process takes place during the next two phases. It is not simply the electoral process that is at stake; instead the future of the democracy and the fundamental right to vote and choose the representative is also endangered.

At a time when Modi has been facing acute voter fatigue and serious resistance from a resurgent opposition with the foot soldiers of RSS, party's Hindu nationalist parent turning hostile, he can go to any extent to swing the election in his favour and come to power for the third time. With lower voter turnout, Modi and his BJP have turned nervous. In this backdrop, the Supreme Court should have to be extra cautious and if necessary order re-polling at the booths where some kind of suspected tampering might have taken place. (IPA Service)

Chabahar deal: Geopolitical challenges for India's strategic initiatives

By: Dipak Kurmi

Chabahar, the sole Iranian port outside the Straits of Hormuz, has recently made headlines again. On May 13, India and Iran inked a 10-year, \$370 million agreement to further develop this Indian Ocean-facing port. The idea of jointly developing the Chabahar port was first proposed during Iranian President Muhammad Khatami's 2003 visit to India.

At that time, India and Iran shared a strong strategic alignment. Both nations viewed Pakistan's political interference in Afghanistan as harmful to their interests and supported the Northern Alliance, led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, which opposed Pakistan-backed Pashtun factions. Therefore, the collaborative development of Chabahar, strategically situated on Iran's Indian Ocean coast, emerged as a logical extension of the Indo-Iranian alliance.

India's focus shifted to its nuclear deal with the United States, causing the Chabahar project to lose prominence, especially as Iran faced sanctions after its covert nuclear activities were exposed in 2003. Iran was frustrated that India, despite not signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, received favorable treatment while Iran was penalized for its secretive nuclear program.

Iran overlooked the difference between a treaty signatory violating its terms and a conscientious objector like India rejecting the treaty as unfair. By 2015, a bilateral agreement to develop Chabahar was signed. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Iran in 2016, a trilateral agreement was made between Afghanistan, Iran, and India to create an International Transport and Transit Corridor. Chabahar was envisioned as a secure route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, avoiding Pakistan's ports.

In 2018, India Ports Global Limited established a subsidiary to manage the Shahid Beheshti Port, one of Chabahar's two terminals. The recent agreement aligns with Iran's four-phase development plan, aiming to boost the port's annual cargo capacity from 2.5 million tonnes to 82 million tonnes. Currently, Bandar Abbas, Iran's primary Gulf port, handles 85 per cent of the nation's maritime trade, resulting

in significant congestion and delays.

On paper, the plan appears logical and feasible. However, dealings with Iran are rarely simple. Iran stands opposed to Israel and the United States and is often accused of fueling the Gaza conflict. For the first time, Iran launched a significant missile and drone attack on Israel in response to the Israeli bombing of Iranian diplomatic sites in Damascus. In a symbolic counteraction, Israel targeted Iranian anti-missile sites near its nuclear facilities. With Israel's Rafah operation in progress, despite ongoing American objections, it's clear that the US is unlikely to welcome any collaboration between India and Iran.

Vedant Patel, the US State Department's deputy spokesman, cautioned India about the potential risk of sanctions. The US has already sanctioned 600 Iranian entities and individuals. India has so far secured a US exemption for its activities in Chabahar, emphasizing the port's importance for delivering humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, particularly after the Taliban took control following the US withdrawal in August 2021.

However, the port is now being promoted as part of a transit route through the Caspian Sea to St. Petersburg. This highlights the growing cooperation between Iran and Russia, both of which are aligning with China's efforts to reshape the global order.

The North-South Corridor via the Caspian is not a new concept. It was actively considered when I served as the Indian ambassador to Iran from 2003 to 2005. However, several challenges impeded its progress. High Iranian fees for transshipping containers from the Gulf to the Caspian Sea posed a significant obstacle. This included costs for unloading at Bandar Abbas port, overland transportation, and reloading onto ships at the Caspian.

Additionally, the Russian mafia demanded hefty sums upon the cargo's arrival at Russia's Caspian ports. Lastly, trade imbalances caused containers to accumulate in Russia, as there were insufficient goods to ship back to Asia.

The China factor plays a crucial role in any agreement with Iran. The India-Iran deal is being positioned as a strategic counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China

has made significant investments in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which ends at Gwadar, located just 200 km from Chabahar. As a result, China is eager to maintain a presence at Chabahar to monitor its development and any potential competition with Chinese interests in Pakistan. Previously, China signed a 25-year, \$400 billion cooperation agreement with Iran, though it remains uncertain how much, if any, will be invested in Chabahar.

China's primary concern is protecting its investment in Gwadar as the gateway to Central Asia. Since Chabahar aims to serve a similar role and support the North-South Corridor to Russia, it creates a conflict of interest for China. Interest in the North-South Corridor has been renewed due to the regional repercussions of the Gaza conflict. The US-proposed India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), intended to link India to Europe via the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, is now unfeasible in the near term because of the Gaza hostilities. Additionally, the Suez Canal route faces disruptions from Houthi threats. Consequently, an alternative route through the Caspian Sea and Russia appears viable. However, this overlooks the ongoing war in Ukraine and Western sanctions against Russia. Given the persistent hostilities in Ukraine, using St. Petersburg as a European endpoint for the corridor seems impractical.

Iran will always be a challenging partner in creating a new security and trade framework in West Asia. Like India, it cherishes its strategic independence. As a Shia-majority nation, Iran competes with Saudi Arabia for leadership in the Islamic world, wielding significant influence over the Shia crescent extending from Iran to the Mediterranean.

Additionally, Iran is regarded as a key member of the Russia-China-led coalition that opposes US dominance. As long as the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine persist, India's Chabahar initiatives are likely to experience gradual progress rather than significant advancements. Navigating competing interests in a world rife with conflict will continue to pose a formidable challenge for Indian diplomacy. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)

After 5 phases, Congress has to over-perform in the remaining seats

By: Nitva Chakraborty

The first five phases of polling for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are over by now, with only 115 seats out of the total of 543 remaining for voting in the next two phases. The results will be out on June 4. In the last few days, all top leaders of the BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have announced in public meetings and a series of interviews in TV channels and newspapers that the BJP has already crossed the magic figure of 272 - the majority mark - and in the next two phases, it will cross 300 plus. Home Minister Amit Shah has even mentioned the figure of 310-plus for BJP in the first five phases.

As regards the INDIA bloc, their own feedback from the first five phases has given them big hope that the polling trends are going against the NDA, and they are nursing the feeling that the NDA will lose majority. Rahul Gandhi is prominently declaring in poll meetings that the INDIA bloc is forming the new government at the centre after June 4. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has talked of convening a meeting of the INDIA bloc parties after June 4 to decide on the next course of action.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has invited on June 3 all INDIA bloc leaders to be in Delhi in the DMK office to attend the birth anniversary programme of his father M K Karunanidhi and also discuss the situation. Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said in her campaign that BJP's Lok Sabha tally will not cross 200 seats in 2024 elections.

So what is the real scenario emerging on June 4? On Wednesday, the well-known U.S. political scientist and risk consultant Ian Bremmer told NDTV in an interview that BJP will get between 295 and 315 seats, meaning BJP will get majority on its own. Lot of global companies and investment banks operating in India have carried out surveys in the last few weeks.

Whatever I have been able to gather from my sources in the financial sector, the initial reports were highly favourable to the BJP; however, after the fifth phase, the updated reports talked of uncertainty. My sources say that a top US investment company has indicated to its headquarter the possibility of a hung Lok Sabha, but eventually leading to a weak government led by Narendra Modi.

Among the top investment analysts who know India, I have faith in Ruchir Sharma, who has extensively travelled in Indian districts during the current poll

campaigning. I agree with few of his observations which I also noted during my travels in the southern states as also in Uttar Pradesh in the last few months. First, there is no wave: neither in favour of Narendra Modi, nor in favour of the opposition. This is a major positive factor for INDIA bloc, because both the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls witnessed a big Modi wave.

Secondly, local and regional issues dominated more in the states, mainly in the southern and eastern states. In the northern states, the emotive issues including Ram Mandir are present among the voters, but other live issues like unemployment, poor health facilities, high prices of essential commodities are also being taken into consideration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent speeches aimed at demonising the Muslims, and terming the Congress as anti-Hindu party, may not succeed in full consolidation of Hindu votes in the remaining 115 seats as desired by the PM and the BJP.

The third point is my own. Regional parties opposing BJP as part of the INDIA bloc have done much better in the first five phases of Lok Sabha elections. It is the Congress which failed to take full advantage of the anti-BJP mood in the constituencies where the Party is fighting the BJP on behalf of the INDIA bloc. Lack of adequate financial resources affected the organisational preparation of the Congress against the BJP's financial and organisational muscle power.

Let us look back at the post Lok Sabha election scenario after 1996 and 2004 polls. In 1996, the BJP got 161 seats and the Congress got 140. BJP led by Atal Behari Vajpayee formed the Government at the Centre which fell after 13 days. The opposition led by the Janata Dal formed the government then but it also fell in 1998. In 2004 polls, the Congress got 145 and the BJP 138. The UPA was formed by the Congress and the UPA lasted two terms under the prime ministership of Dr. Manmohan Singh.

As regards 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the scenario is a bit different; it cannot be a repeat of either the 2004 or the 1996 post poll scenario. The moot issue is how many seats the BJP will lose out of 303 the party got in 2019 polls. The BJP got maximum in 2019 under Modi wave; its tally has certainly to go down and its down number will decide the course of formation of the next government.

The BJP has to lose at least 80 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls for facilitating the formation of an alternative govern-

ment at the centre. Any BJP tally over 240 will facilitate the formation of a government by the NDA led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Let me explain. After 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had 282 seats and the NDA had a total of 336; meaning the other NDA parties together got 54 seats altogether. In the 2019 elections, the BJP got 303 seats and the NDA seats totalled 353 meaning the non-BJP NDA parties got 50 seats altogether. In 2024 elections, the number of NDA partners will go down but it can be between 25 to 30. So this figure will have to be added to the BJP tally to arrive at the total NDA figure.

If BJP gets 220 or less and the NDA figure of 25 to 30 is added that comes to 245 to 250 - 22 below the majority figure of 272. BJP-led NDA may be the largest alliance and invited by the President to form the government and face confidence vote. The support from the other parties like YSRCP and BJD will be crucial then. Both these parties may get a total of 20 seats, if not more. These parties support may help the NDA government to continue, if Narendra Modi wants such a government to run.

But for INDIA bloc, the continuing fighting between the PM and the Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in the present election campaign gives a ray of hope that Naveen may consider snapping ties with the BJP and extend support to the INDIA bloc, if there is a hung Lok Sabha. A bit of lobbying with Naveen by the INDIA bloc leaders, especially M K Stalin and Mamata Banerjee, will be needed. As regards Jagan Mohan Reddy, he will decide his strategy after assessing the final results. He will see which party is the real threat to his YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh.

Certainly BJP-TDP combination will emerge as a bigger threat to his political domination. In national politics, Jagan can never be in the same camp with Chandrababu Naidu, who is now in NDA. Jagan has every reason not to support NDA after Lok Sabha elections.

So taking a total view, INDIA bloc has still some chances of coming to power after 2024 Lok Sabha elections. For ensuring that, the BJP's tally has to be brought down to the level of 220; the Congress should do its utmost to annex seats from the BJP in the constituencies the party is fighting; and lastly, the regional leaders of INDIA bloc should be in touch with Jagan and Naveen. Only then, the INDIA bloc can wait for June 4 with some bout of optimism. (IPA Service)

How to join National Defence Academy

By: **Ranjan K Baruah**

One of the best careers in life is none other than joining the defence forces as an officer and the best option is to appear in the National Defence Academy (NDA) Examination and get selected and become an officer at an early age and serve the nation. The best thing is that like boys nowadays, girls can also choose to get admission in the prestigious NDA and serve the nation as an officer.

One must remember that to be an officer one must be physically fit, mentally alert, socially active and also emotionally stable.

An Examination will be con-

ducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on 01st September, 2024 for admission to the Army, Navy and Air Force wings of the NDA for the 154th Course and for the 116th Indian Naval Academy Course (INAC) commencing from 2nd July, 2025.

The total vacancy this time including all services and for boys and girls is 404 and only unmarried male/female candidates born not earlier than 2nd January, 2006 and not later than 1st January, 2009 are eligible.

Educational Qualifications:

1. For Army Wing of NDA: 12th Class pass of the 10+2 pattern of School Education or equivalent examination conducted by a State Education

Board or a University.

2. For Air Force and Naval Wings of NDA and for the 10+2 Cadet Entry Scheme at the Indian Naval Academy: 12th Class pass with Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics of the 10+2 pattern of School Education or equivalent conducted by a State Education Board or a University.

Candidates must be physically fit according to physical standards for admission to NDA and Naval Academy Examination (II), 2024 as per guidelines.

Candidates (excepting SC/ST candidates/female candidates / Wards of JCOs/NCOs/ORs specified in Note 2 below who are exempted from payment of fee) are required to pay a fee of

₹ 100 (Rupees one hundred only) either by remitting the money in any Branch of State Bank of India by cash, or by using Visa/Master/RuPay Credit/Debit Card/UPI Payment or by using internet banking of any Bank.

Candidates are required to apply online by using the website upsconline.nic.in. It is essential for the applicant to register himself/herself first at One Time Registration (OTR) platform, available on the Commission's website, and then proceeds for filling up the online application for the examination.

Candidates should also have details of one photo ID viz. Aadhar Card/ Voter Card/ PAN Card/ Passport/ Driving Li-

cence/ School Photo ID/Any other photo ID Card issued by the State/Central Government.

The Online Applications can be filled upto 04.06.2024 till 6:00 PM. The eligible candidates shall be issued an e-Admit Card on the last working day of the preceding week of the date of examination.

The e-Admit Card will be made available on the UPSC website (upsconline.nic.in) for being downloaded by candidates.

Candidates should note that there will be a penalty (Negative Marking) for wrong answers marked by a candidate in the Objective Type Question Papers. This is one of the best opportunities and our aspirants



must apply for the same. There are many senior ranked officials from different parts of North East India. The region has produced Lieutenant General, Air Marshal, etc. Aspirants must visit the official website of UPSC for further details and for

filling in the details. (*The write is the Advisor, Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department of Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734*)

APSC Recruitment 2024 – 5 Research Assistant Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 29/05/2024

Assam Public Service Commission has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 5 Research Assistant Posts under Finance (Economics Affairs) Department. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Research Assistant

No of posts: 5 posts

Category-wise vacancy:

UR: 2
OBC/MOBC: 1
SC: 1
STP: 1
STH: 0

Name of organisation: Finance (Economics Affairs) Department, Govt. of Assam

Scale of Pay: Rs. 22,000 to 97,000 GP: Rs.9,400

Age Limit: The candidates should not be less than 21 years of age and not more than 38 years of age as on 01/01/2024.

Educational Qualification: Candidates must have a Degree in Science, Commerce or Arts with Statistics, Mathematics or Economics as one of the subject of study in Degree course from a recognized University. The Minimum six months Diploma in Computer Application is desirable.

Other Criteria of APSC Recruitment

Citizenship: Candidates must be Indian Citizens as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.

Residency:

(i) The candidate must be a permanent resident of Assam.
(ii) The candidate must produce PRC issued in Assam for educational purpose/ Employment Exchange Registration certificate as proof of residency along with the application form.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

SC: 5 years
ST: 5 years
OBC/MOBC: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years
For more details pl read the official notification/s.

Employment Exchange Registration: Candidates must be registered themselves in any of the employment exchanges of Assam.

Small Family Norms: The candidates have to submit a declaration regarding "The Small Family Norms" in Form-A at the time of applying for the post.

Application Fee: Category-wise application fee is as under.

Category	Fee (in Rs.)
General	Rs.297.20
SC/ST/OBC/MOBC	Rs.197.20
BPL/ PwBD	Rs.47.20

Important Dates of APSC Recruitment 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 29th April 2024
Last date of submission of online application: 29th May 2024

Hojai Judiciary Recruitment 2024 – 5 Jarikarak & Peon Posts

Last Date: 31/05/2024

Office of the District and Sessions Judge, Hojai has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 5 Jarikarak & Peon Posts in the establishment of District and Sessions Judge, Hojai. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

1. Jarikarak

No of posts: 02 [UR: 1, OBC: 1]

Age Limit: 18-40 years as on 01.01.2024.

Educational Qualification:

(i) Must be a Graduate in any discipline
(ii) Must have knowledge in official language of Assam.

Scale of pay: ₹ 14000-49000/- + GP ₹ 5200/- per month

4. Peon

No of posts: 03 [UR: 2, OBC: 1]

Age Limit: 18-40 years as on 01.01.2024.

Educational Qualification: Minimum VIII Standard Pass. A candidate who has passed HSSLC or above shall be ineligible to apply for the post. Candidates have to submit a self-declaration certificate along with the application form stating that "he/she has not passed HSSLC or equivalent examination or above."

Scale of pay: ₹ 12000-37500/- + GP ₹ 3900/- per month

Other Criteria of Hojai Judiciary Recruitment

Age Relaxation: The Upper Age limit is relaxable for the reserved categories as per rule.

Nationality: Candidate must be an Indian citizen as defined in article 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.

Employment Exchange Registration: Candidates must have registered their names in the Employment Exchange.

How to Apply for Hojai Judiciary Recruitment ?

The eligible candidates must submit their applications in the Standard Form of Application published in Assam Gazette Part-IX (annexed with this advertisement).

The application must be accompanied with the following:

a) 4 (four) copies of recent passport size coloured photographs with signature on the reverse side,
b) Self-attested copies of testimonials in support of his/her AGE, CASTE, EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION etc.
c) Self-declaration certificate.

d) Valid Employment Exchange Registration Certificate.

Interested and eligible candidates may submit their applications to "The District & Sessions Judge, Hojai, District Judicial Court Complex, Sankardev Nagar, Hojai, Assam, Pin-782442".

Jorhat Judiciary Recruitment – 2 Office Assistant & Peon Posts

Last Date: 02 & 30/06/2024.

District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Jorhat has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 2 Office Assistant and Peon posts on contractual basis in the office of the Legal Aid Defence Counsel System at District Legal services Authority, Jorhat as per the LADCS Modified Scheme, 2022 of NALSA. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

1. Office Assistant

No of posts: 1

Monthly Salary: Rs.18,000

Educational Qualification:

Graduation.
Knowledge in Basic Computer Applications like MS Office, Word, Excel, Power Point, DTP (English & Assamese) and Internet etc.

2. Peon

No of posts: 1

Monthly Salary: Rs.12,000

Educational Qualification: Minimum Class VIII Passed but not Graduate.

Age Limit:

Minimum: 21 years

Maximum: 40 years as on date of advertisement.

Age Relaxation as per Govt. Rule

How to Apply for Jorhat Judiciary Recruitment?

Interested and eligible candidates will have to appear in the walk-in-interview as per the schedule mentioned below:

Walk-in Schedule:

Date:
Office Assistant: 02/06/2024
Peon: 30/06/2024
Time: 10 AM

The registration process for Walk-in-Interview in both selections will start at 8.30 am till 10.30 am. No candidate will be allowed to register for the walk in interview after 10.30 am in any circumstances.

After completion of Walk-in-Interview for the engagement of post No - 01, short listed candidates from the Walk-in-Interview process will be called for Computer Skill Test. The result of Walk-in-Interview for both engagements along with date, time and place of the Computer Skill Test will be informed in due course of time only via the official website of Jorhat District Judiciary (<https://jorhat.dcourts.gov.in/>).

Required Documents:

To appear in the Walk in Interview in both engagements, the candidates will have to bring self certified/attested copies of the following documents:

a. Standard Form as published in Assam Gazette in part IX to the issuing authority.
b. H.S.L.C admit card for age proof (Post No - 01).
c. H.S.L.C admit card / School Certificate for age proof (post No - 02).
d. Educational qualification certificate.
e. Computer education certificate. (Post No - 01)
f. Certificate of higher education, if any (Post No - 01).
g. 02 (Two) nos of passport size photographs,
h. Employment Exchange certificate.
i. Experience certificate, if any.

Dr. Radhakrishnan School Dibrugarh Recruitment – 4 Posts

Last Date: 03/06/2024

Dr. Radhakrishnan School of Arts, Commerce and Science, Dibrugarh has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 4 Non-teaching posts. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

1. Arts Coordinator

No of posts: 01

Pay: 12,000 to 35,000 (Salary will be commensurate with merit and experience)

Educational Qualification: B.A. / M.A.

Experience: Preference will be given to 1-2 years of experience.

2. Accounts Officer

No of posts: 01

Pay: 12,000 to 35,000 (Salary will be commensurate with merit and experience.)

Educational Qualification: B.Com / M.Com / MBA in Finance

Experience: Preference will be given to 1-2 years of experience.

3. Public Relation Officer

No of posts: 01

Pay: 12,000 to 30,000 (Salary will be commensurate with merit and experience.)

Educational Qualification: B.Sc. / M.Sc.

Experience: Preference will be given to 1-2 years of experience.

4. Security

No of posts: 01

Pay: 08,000 to 15,000 (Salary will be commensurate with merit and experience)

Educational Qualification: Class X Passed.

Age Limit: 18 to 35 years.

Experience: Preference will be given to 1-2 years of experience.

Application Fee: Nil.

How to Apply for Dr. Radhakrishnan School Dibrugarh Recruitment ?

Potential candidates having the requisite qualification & experience can send their (CVs) at hrrkschool@gmail.com or submit the same at the front office of Dr. Radhakrishnan School of Arts, Commerce & Science, Amolapatty, Dibrugarh, Assam – 786001 on or before 3rd June 2024.

For any query, please contact H.R. Department @ 8822400362/ 7099069263 from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm .

PWD Assam Recruitment 2024 – 80 JE (Mechanical) Posts

Last Date: 05/06/2024

Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 80 Junior Engineer (Mechanical) posts under joint cadre of Public Works Roads (PWRD) and Public Works (Building & National Highway) Department [PW(B&NH)D]. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Junior Engineer (Mechanical)

No of posts: 80 posts

Category-wise vacancy:

UR: 44
OBC/MOBC: 25
OBC/MOBC (Tea Tribe & Adivasi Community): 1
SC: 1
STP: 5
STH: 4

Name of department: Public Works Roads (PWRD) and Public Works (Building & National Highway) Department [PW(B&NH)D]

Scale of Pay: PB-4 Rs. 14, 000 to 60,500 GP: Rs. 8,700

Eligibility Criteria of PWD Assam Recruitment

Age Limit: The candidates should not be less than 21 years of age and not more than 38 years of age as on 01/01/2024.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

SC: 5 years
ST: 5 years
OBC/MOBC: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years
For more details pl read the official notification.

Educational Qualification:

The candidate must have a Three year Diploma in Mechanical Engineering from any technical institute recognized by the Government.
The Diploma must be a Regular course. Diploma courses obtained through Distance Mode of Education, by whatever name called, will not be accepted.

Local Language Proficiency: Apart from English, the candidate should have adequate knowledge of at least 1 (one) official language of the State of Assam (i.e. Assamese/Bengali/Bodo) except candidates belonging to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and Dima Hasao Autonomous Council.

Citizenship: Candidates must be Indian Citizens as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.

Residency:

(i) The candidate must be a permanent resident of Assam.
(ii) The candidate must produce PRC issued in Assam for educational purpose/ Employment Exchange Registration certificate as proof of residency along with the application form.

Application Fee:

General/EWS: 297.20
SC/ST/OBC/MOBC: 197.20
BPL: 47.20
PwBD: 47.20
Payment Mode: Online

Important Dates of PWRD Assam Vacancy 2024

Starting date of submission of online application: 6th May 2024
Last date of submission of online application: 5th June 2024



Hamis terrorists still have 125 hostages in Gaza, 39 of whom are considered dead, according to the Israel Defense Forces

The bodies of 3 more hostages are recovered from Gaza by the Israeli army

TEL AVIV, May 24: The bodies of three more hostages killed on October 7 were recovered overnight from Gaza, Israel's army said on Friday, as the top United Nations court prepares to rule on whether Israel must halt its military operations and withdraw from the enclave.

The bodies of Hanan Yablonka, Michel Nisenbaum, and Orion Hernandez Radoux were found and their families have been notified. The army said they were killed on the day of the attack at the Mefal-sim intersection and their bodies were taken to Gaza.

The announcement comes less than a week after the army said it found the bodies of three other Israeli hostages killed on October 7.

Hamis-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and abducted around 250 others in the October 7 attack. Around half of those hostages have since been freed, most in swaps for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

Israel says around 100



hostages are still captive in Gaza, along with the bodies of around 30 more.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to both eliminate Hamas and bring all the hostages back, but he's made little progress. He faces pressure to resign, and the US has threatened to scale back its support over the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

On Friday Netanyahu said the country had a duty to do everything to return those abducted, both those killed and those who are alive.

The country is also expecting a ruling Friday afternoon by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to decide on an urgent plea by South Africa to order Israel to cease opera-

tions. Israel is unlikely to comply with any such order. Even so, a cease-fire order by judges of the International Court of Justice would heap more pressure on an increasingly isolated Israel.

On the hostages, Israelis are divided into two main camps: those who want the government to put the war on hold and free the hostages, and others who think the hostages are an unfortunate price to pay for eradicating Hamas.

On-and-off negotiations mediated by Qatar, the United States and Egypt have yielded little.

Anger is growing at home at the government's handling of the hostage crisis.

Earlier this week, a group representing the families of

hostages released new video footage showing Hamas' capture of five female Israeli soldiers near the Gaza border on October 7.

The video shows several of the young soldiers bloody and wounded. In one scene, a militant tells one of the terrified women she is beautiful.

The video sparked more protests across the country calling for the hostages' release. The army said on Friday the hostages were found during an operation in Jabaliya. Military spokesman Rear Adm Daniel Hagari said in a news conference that the army was able to retrieve the bodies based on "critical intelligence" uncovered last week by Israeli forces operating in Gaza.

The group representing the families of the hostages said the bodies had been returned to their families for burial.

Nisenbaum, 59, was a Brazilian-Israeli from the southern city of Sderot. He was taken hostage when he went to rescue his 4-year-old granddaughter.

Oryon Hernandez Radoux,

30, was a French-Mexican citizen taken from the Nova music festival, which he attended with his partner Shani Louk. Louk's body was one of those found by the army nearly a week ago.

Yablonka, 42, a father of two, was also taken from the music festival. His family in December told the AP that he loved music. Yablonka's family had no news of him for nearly two months after he'd been taken, not knowing if he was alive or dead.

Israel's offensive since the war began has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, and has caused a humanitarian crisis and a near-famine.

While it has weakened Hamas' capabilities, after nearly eight months of war, militants are regrouping in some of the hardest-hit areas in northern Gaza and resuming rocket attacks into nearby Israeli communities.

Israel says its troops are operating in Rafah in the south, in central Gaza and in Jabaliya in the north. (AP)

More than 100 people believed killed by a landslide in Papua New Guinea, Australian media report



MELBOURNE, May 24: More than 100 people are believed to have been killed on Friday in a landslide that buried a village in a remote, mountainous part of Papua New Guinea, and an emergency response is underway, the South Pacific island nation's leader and news media said.

The landslide reportedly hit Kaokalam village in Enga province, about 600 kilometers (370 miles) northwest of the capital, Port Moresby, at roughly 3 am, Australian Broadcasting Corp (ABC) reported.

Residents said estimates of the death toll were above 100, although authorities have not confirmed that figure. Villagers said the number of people killed could be much higher.

Prime Minister James Marape said authorities were responding and he would release information about the destruction and loss of life when it was available.

"I am yet to be fully briefed on the situation. However, I extend my heartfelt condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the landslide disaster in the early hours of this morning," Marape said in a statement.

"We are sending in disaster officials, PNG Defense Force, and the Department of Works and Highways ... to start relief work, recovery of bodies, and reconstruction of infrastructure," he added.

Videos on social media showed residents pulling out bodies buried under rocks and trees. Elizabeth Laruma, who runs a women's business association in Porgera, a town in the same province near the Porgera Gold Mine, said houses were flattened when the side of a mountain gave way.

"It has occurred when people were still asleep in the early hours, and the entire village has gone down," Laruma told the ABC. "From what I can presume, it's about 100-plus people who are buried beneath the ground."

The landslide blocked the road between Porgera and the village, she said, raising concerns about the town's supply of fuel and goods.

Village resident Ninga Role, who was away when the landslide struck, expects that at least four of his relatives died.

"There are some huge stones and plants, trees. The buildings collapsed," Role said. "These things are making it hard to find the bodies."

Belinda Kora, a Port Moresby-based ABC reporter, said helicopters were the only way of accessing the village, which is in the mountainous interior region known as the Highlands, with the main road closed.

Papua New Guinea is a diverse, developing nation of mostly subsistence farmers with 800 languages. There are few roads outside the larger cities.

With 10 million people, it is also the most populous South Pacific nation after Australia, which is home to some 27 million.

Telecommunications are poor, particularly outside Port Moresby where government data show 56 per cent of the nation's social media users reside. Only 1.66 million people across the country use the internet and 85 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. (AP)

Chinese military practice control, occupation as part of 'strong punishment' drill around Taiwan

BEIJING/TAIPEI, May 24: China's military on Friday tested its ability to "seize power" as the People's Liberation Army said its forces kicked off a second day of large-scale exercises around Taiwan in retaliation to its new President Lai Ching-te's remarks rejecting Beijing's sovereignty claims over the self-ruled island.

Li Xi, the spokesperson for the Eastern Theatre Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), said the combined forces of the army, navy, air force, and rocket forces continued joint drills surrounding Taiwan Island focussing on practicing control and occupation of the area on the concluding day of the two-day drill.

"Integrated operations inside and outside the island chain are being conducted to test the command's capabilities to jointly take control of the battlefield and launch joint strikes, and to seize control of crucial areas," he said in a press release here.

Separately, the Chinese Coast Guard said it focussed its drills in the Taiwan Strait, the narrow waters that separate the Chinese mainland and Taiwan on verification and identification as well as warning and expulsion of any foreign vessels in times of conflict.

Military analysts say the PLA, which has been carrying out aggressive military exercises since the visit of the then US House Speaker

Nancy Pelosi in August 2022, practiced a possible takeover of the estranged island through military action at lightning speed.

China, which views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland even by force, may launch its offensive in 2027, according to top Taiwan politicians.

The PLA Eastern Theatre Command, which launched the two-day exercise on Thursday, said, "The drills also serve as a strong punishment for the separatist acts of 'Taiwan independence' forces and a stern warning against the interference and provocation by external forces."

A 3D video of simulated strikes was released by the command, showing targets in the Taiwanese cities of Taipei, Hualien, and Kaohsiung

hit by the PLA's air, naval, and rocket forces, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

According to Taiwan's defence ministry, 49 PLA aircraft, 19 PLA naval vessels, and seven coastguard vessels were detected operating around Taiwan till Friday morning.

It said 35 aircraft crossed the median line — a notional midpoint in the Taiwan Strait — and entered the southwestern air defence identification zone. The island's armed forces monitored the situation and responded accordingly, it said.

The number of aircraft detected near the island on Friday was lower than the PLA's first day of drills

compared to the previous drills last April, the Post report said.

Reports from Taiwan said the PLA drills have not disturbed the normal life of its 23 million people who went about with their routine.

The PLA's drill poses the first real test for the veteran Taiwanese politician Lai in managing tensions with Beijing, which has refused his offer to talk and to resume cross-strait tourism and student exchanges, a CNN report from Taipei said.

Domestically, he is facing chaos in the legislature, where opposition parties who favour closer ties to China hold a majority, and have pushed to subject his administration to tighter scrutiny, the report said.

Lai, 64, also known as William Lai, succeeded his independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) colleague Tsai Ing-wen after winning the popular vote in the January Presidential election this year. He was sworn in as the president at a ceremony held in Taipei on Monday.

In his no-holds-barred inaugural speech, Lai, regarded as a radical, called on China to stop threatening the island and promised to uphold the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. He said his government would adhere to the four commitments (of national sovereignty, democracy, and freedom) and maintain the status quo without being overbearing or servile.

His pro-independence speech riled China. While the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin defended the joint military drill as legitimate and necessary, the Chinese Defence Ministry on Friday launched a blistering attack on Lai saying that he is driving Taiwan towards war. (PTI)

A fire in an apartment building in Hanoi, Vietnam, kills 14 people and injures 6

HANOI, May 24, An overnight fire in an apartment building on a narrow alley in Vietnam's capital killed 14 people and injured six others, state media said on Friday.

The apartment building in central Hanoi could only be accessed through an alley just 2 metres (6.5 feet) wide, preventing firetrucks from reaching it, and firefighters eventually contained the fire by using hoses, state media said.

The fire started around 12:30 a.m. and was accompanied by several explosions, the Vietnam News Agency said. It took an hour to extinguish.

Neighbor Nguyen Thanh Trung said he was asleep when he heard the explosions and rushed out to see what was happening. "I could feel the shock at my house," he said, adding that he along with others got a ladder to break the window to help people escape.

State media reported the building had 24 residents at the time, seven in the owner's family and 17 tenants. The injured are stable and being treated at Hanoi Transport Hospital.

The fire started in the small courtyard in front of the building that was used as a garage for the sale and repair of electric bikes, state media reported.

Trung said the family would often charge the bikes' batteries at night. The alley was later cordoned off by police. The charred remains of burnt motorcycles and plants and scattered belongings remained at the apartment.

Authorities said that they would give USD 1,962 to the families of those who died and USD 1,177 to those injured as compensation.

This fire was reminiscent of a September blaze in Hanoi last year where more than 50 people died in similar circumstances. Rescue operations then were also hindered by the city's narrow lanes. (AP)

US pushes for Ukraine aid, united front against China's trade practices at G7 finance meeting

FRANKFURT, May 24: The US sought to build support for squeezing more money for Ukraine out of frozen Russian assets and for uniting against China's aggressive trade practices as finance ministers from the Group of Seven rich democracies opened a two-day meeting on Friday on the shores of northern Italy's scenic Lago Maggiore.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is pushing at the meeting in Stresa for "more ambitious options" to unlock money from some USD 260 billion in Russian central bank reserves frozen in Europe and the US after the February 24, 2022, invasion.

Aid for Ukraine has become more urgent as Kyiv's finances look shakier against the prospect of an even longer conflict, and as Russia steps up its destruction of civilian infrastructure such as power stations. European officials have balked at outright confiscating the funds and handing them to Ukraine as compensation for the destruction caused by Russia.

Instead they plan the interest accumulating on the assets, but that's only around USD 3 billion a year - about one month's financing needs for the Ukrainian government.



Proposals include borrowing against the future interest income from the frozen assets, so that Ukraine could be given as much as USD 50 billion immediately.

Ukraine spends almost all its tax revenue on the military and needs another USD 40 billion a year to continue paying pensions and the salaries of doctors, nurses and teachers. Support from allies and a USD 15.4 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund was initially thought to have secured the budget for four years, but the prospects of an extended conflict have darkened the outlook.

Yellen has also called for a clear united front against China's state subsidies for manufacturing of solar panels, semiconductors and electric cars, saying that China's production capacity exceeds the needs not only of China but of the global economy as a

whole and threatens the existence of competing companies in both Group of Seven and developing countries.

Ahead of the meeting she said that countries needed to take a common stance so that China's leaders understand that "they face a wall of opposition to this strategy that they are pursuing".

The finance ministers are working to set up final decisions at the summit of G7 leaders that will take place June 13-15 in Fasano, in southern Italy's Puglia region. The G7 is an informal forum that holds an annual summit to discuss economic policy and security issues.

The member countries are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Representatives of the European Union also take part, but the EU does not serve as one of the rotating chairs. (AP)

Extreme weather, a lack of lifesaving vaccines: Africa's cholera crisis is worse than ever

LILANDA, May 24: Extreme weather events have hit parts of Africa relentlessly in the last three years, with tropical storms, floods and drought causing crises of hunger and displacement. They leave another deadly threat behind them: some of the continent's worst outbreaks of cholera.

In southern and East Africa, more than 6,000 people have died and nearly 350,000 cases have been reported since a series of cholera outbreaks began in late 2021.

Malawi and Zambia have had their worst outbreaks on record. Zimbabwe has had multiple waves. Mozambique, Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia also have been badly affected.

All have experienced floods or drought — in some cases, both — and health authorities, scientists and aid agencies say the unprecedented surge of the water-borne bacterial infection in Africa is the newest example of how extreme weather is playing a role in driving disease outbreaks.

"The outbreaks are getting much larger because the extreme climate events are getting much more common," said Tulo de Oliveira, a South Africa-based scientist who studies diseases in the developing world.

De Oliveira, who led a team that identified new coronavirus variants during the COVID-19 pandemic, said southern Africa's latest outbreaks can be traced to the cyclones and floods that hit Malawi in late 2021 and early 2022, carrying the cholera bacteria to areas it doesn't normally reach.

Zimbabwe and Zambia have seen

cases rise as they wrestle with severe droughts and people rely on less safe sources of water in their desperation like boreholes, shallow wells and rivers, which can all be contaminated. Days after the deadly flooding in Kenya and other parts of East Africa this month, cholera cases appeared.

The World Health Organisation calls cholera a disease of poverty, as it thrives where there is poor sanitation and a lack of clean water. Africa has had eight times as many deaths this year as the Middle East, the second-most affected region.

Historically vulnerable, Africa is even more at risk as it faces the worst impacts of climate change as well as the effect of the El Niño weather phenomenon, health experts say. In what's become a perfect storm, there's also a global shortage of cholera vaccines, which are needed only in poorer countries.

"It doesn't affect countries with resources," said Dr Daniela Garone, the international medical coordinator for Doctors Without Borders, also known by its French acronym MSF. "So, it doesn't bring the resources."

Billions of dollars have been invested into other diseases that predominantly affect the world's most vulnerable, like polio and tuberculosis, largely because those diseases are highly contagious and could cause outbreaks even in rich countries. But that's not the case with cholera, where epidemics remain contained.

WHO said this month there is a "critical shortage" of oral cholera vaccines in the global stockpile. Since the



start of 2023, 15 countries — the desperate few — have requested a total of 82 million doses to deal with deadly outbreaks while only 46 million doses were available.

There are just 3.2 million doses left, below the target of having at least 5 million in reserve. While there are currently cholera epidemics in the Middle East, the Americas and South-east Asia, Africa is by far the worst-affected region.

Vaccines alliance GAVI and UNICEF said last month that the approval of a new cholera vaccine would boost stocks. But the result of the shortage has already been measured in deaths.

Lilanda, a township on the edge of the Zambian capital of Lusaka, is a typical cholera hot spot. Stagnant pools of water dot the dirt roads. Clean water is like gold dust.

Here, over two awful days in January, Mildred Banda saw her 1-year-

old son die from cholera and rushed to save the life of her teenage daughter.

Cholera shouldn't be killing anyone. The disease is easily treated and easily prevented — and the vaccines are relatively simple to produce.

That didn't help Banda's son, Ndanji.

When he fell sick with diarrhea, he was treated with an oral rehydration solution at a clinic and released. He slipped back into dehydration that night at home. Banda feels terrible guilt.

"I should have noticed earlier that my son was not feeling well," she said, sitting in her tiny concrete house. "I should have acted faster and taken him back to the clinic. I should have taken him back to save his life."

Because of the vaccine shortage, Zambia couldn't undertake a preventative vaccination campaign after neighbouring Malawi's outbreak.

North Korea appears to be preparing to launch its 2nd spy satellite, South Korean military says

SEOUL, May 24: North Korea appears to be preparing to launch its second military spy satellite into space, South Korea's military said on Friday, as animosities remain high over the North's continued weapons tests.

Last November, North Korea placed its first military reconnaissance satellite into orbit as part of its efforts to build a space-based surveillance network to deal with what it calls US-led military threats.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un later told a key governing party meeting that his country would launch three additional military spy satellites in 2024.

On Friday, South Korea's military told local reporters at a background briefing that it detected signs that North Korea is engaging in activities believed to be preparations to launch a spy satellite at its main Tongchangri launch facility in the northwest. The military said South Korean and US intelligence authorities are closely monitoring the North Korean moves.

The contents of the briefing were shared with foreign media outlets including The Associated Press. The South Korean military didn't immediately explain exactly what North Korean activities were spotted in the Tongchangri area.

After launching its Mallyong-1 spy satellite on November 21, North Korea said it had transmitted imagery of key sites in the US and South Korea, including the White House and the Pentagon. But it hasn't released any photos, prompting widespread doubts about the capacity of its satellite.

In recent months, North Korea has extended its run of missile tests to expand its weapons arsenal. Analysts say North Korea likely thinks a larger arsenal would increase its leverage in future diplomacy with the United States.

Last week, South Korea said North Korea fired suspected multiple short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast. North Korea later said it tested a tactical ballistic missile with a new autonomous navigation system. (AP)

Nagaland Governor visits Ram Temple in Ayodhya



KOHIMA, May 24: Nagaland Governor La Ganesan on Friday visited Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The governor visited the temple to have a darshan of Lord Ram.

"I came to Ayodhya many years back... but after construction of the new temple I did try to come immediately but was unable to visit," Ganesan told reporters on his arrival at Ayodhya.

Raj Bhavan Nagaland posted on X that the Governor of Nagaland La Ganesan paid a courtesy visit on the Governor of Uttar Pradesh on Thursday.

Raj Bhavan sources said La Ganesan will be back in Nagaland on Sunday. (PTI)

Tripura class 10, 12 board examination results announced



AGARTALA, May 24: The Tripura Board of Secondary Education (TBSE) on Friday declared the class 10 and 12 examination results, which recorded a pass percentage of 87.54 and 79.27 respectively.

Of the total 33,739 candidates, altogether 29,534 students have cleared the class 10 (Madhyamik) examination with a pass percentage of 87.54 which is one per cent more than the previous year (86.32 per cent).

As many as 20,095 students have passed the higher secondary examination with an average pass

percentage of 79.27 which is less than the previous year's a 83.32 per cent.

"... The pass percentage in Madhyamik is 87.54 per cent while that in higher secondary was 79.27 per cent," said TBSE president Dhananjay Gonchowdhury.

He said the board decided not to declare the merit list this year.

"This year we have not declared the top-ten merit list, which had been a tradition for the board for several years because it may change after rechecking of papers but it will be published later on," he said. (PTI)

SSLC, HSSLC results declared in Meghalaya

While the state's pass percentage in SSLC examination is of 55.80 %, pass percentage in HSSLC examination is 79.76 %

SHILLONG, May 24: The Sherwood School in Tura in West Garo Hills district in Meghalaya topped in the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) examination, while for the first time St Anthony's Higher Secondary School and St Edmund's Higher Secondary School shared the top position in the Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (Arts).

The results for both the examinations were announced by the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) on Friday.

Anuj Chetry of Sherwood School topped this year's SSLC examination by scoring 575 marks.

The second position went to Aleytheia Syiemlieh of St Margaret's Higher Secondary School in Shillong (574 marks) while Congenial Kharsahoh of Christian Academy in Shillong secured the third position (571 marks).

24 other students from different schools across the state also featured in this year's SSLC top-twenty merit list.

Menangkankhraw Kharkongor of St Anthony's Higher Secondary School and Gaurav Bharali of St Edmund's Higher Secondary School shared the top position in the HSSLC examination when they both scored 468 marks while Tanisha Das and Salseng Marak, both of Don Bosco College (Hr Sec Section), Tura were placed in the second and third position by scoring 451 and 450 marks respectively.

Meanwhile, the state recorded a pass percentage of 55.80 per cent in the SSLC examination when compared to last year at 51.93 per cent.

On the other hand, the overall pass percentage in the HSSLC examination was registered at 79.76 per cent. Last year, the pass percentage was 80.30 per cent.

A total of 30,207 of 54,134 students from 679 schools cleared the SSLC examination held in 157



centres, while 21,833 of 27,374 students from 251 schools who gave the HSSLC exams held in 105 centres were declared successful by the Board.

West Jaintia District scored the highest pass percentage at 78.34 percent while North Garo Hills registered the lowest at 23.88 percent in the SSLC examination. In the HSSLC examination, Eastern West Khasi Hills District recorded the highest pass percentage at 92.32 percent while South Garo Hills is the lowest with only 56.30 per cent. (NNN)

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Nagaland's healthcare management system to be at par with IPHS norms

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 24: The healthcare management in Nagaland will from now be at par with the Indian Public Health Standard (IPHS) norms.

Informing this at a review meeting of the programmes and activities under the National Health Mission (NHM) in Kohima, commissioner and secretary of the state health and family welfare department, V Kezo said, "As a fraternity the department needs to come together, discuss issues, make efforts and have a clear vision and goal."

The review meeting was held at the conference hall of state directorate of health and family welfare in Kohima on Friday.

He reminded everyone in the department to stay focused



while reiterating the role of the department in placing issues of importance before the authorities concerned so that they can

actively get involved in taking forward such activities.

Addressing the meeting, state health and family welfare min-

ister, P Paiwang Konyak said the financial allocations should be made as per the needs and priorities of the various programmes.

He sought timely sharing of updates on activities from the different programme officers so that everyone could put their heads together for the successful implementation of the health programmes in the state.

Principal director of the health department, E Moutsuthung Paton said, "Unless we achieve our targets and improve our indicators, the state will not receive the complete funds from the central government, which will hamper the implementation of different programmes."

Mission director of National Health Mission, Nagaland, Akuo Sorhie gave an overview of the mission at the meeting.

Trains with ICF rakes converted to LHB



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 24: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has converted the ICF rakes in 10 pair of long-distance trains operating through important routes to Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) rakes in 2023-24.

In its constant endeavour in making train journeys more safe and secured, NFR adopted technically advanced measures to prevent unforeseen incidents on trains.

As an initiative, NFR came up with conversion of its ICF coaches to LHB coaches in trains to provide better travelling and comfortable journey experiences without compromising safety.

These coaches consist of technical advancements like Fire and Smoke Detection System (FSDS), Fire Detec-

tion and Suppression System (FDSS) along with Aspiration type Smoke Detectors and Aerosol based Fire Detection System.

As of now a total of 60 trains with 95 rakes operating under NFR have been converted to modern LHB rakes.

LHB rakes are equipped with modern hydraulic shock absorber and improved suspension system which ensures greater riding comfort for the passengers compared to conventional rakes.

LHB coaches are manufactured with anti-collision technology that causes fewer fatalities during accident. Each coach also has an Advanced Pneumatic Disc Brake System for efficient braking at higher speeds.

At present, NFR has been operating 912 AC coaches and 822 sleeper class coaches along with 129 luggage vans and 67 pantry cars having LHB model.

In addition, two pairs of new train services the Dibrugarh-Deoghar-Dibrugarh Weekly Express and the Siliguri Town-Jogbani-Siliguri Town Intercity Express came up with LHB model.

Improvement in rail safety and upgradation in passenger amenities is a continuous process and constant efforts are made to improve the same.

Safety audits and inspections are undertaken at regular intervals on railway infrastructures with a view to identify areas to ascertain maintenance with implementation of safety procedure and systemic defects identifications are adopted to prevent accidents.

Conversion of old ICF coaches into LHB coaches is one such safety drive that Indian Railways aims towards providing enhanced safety and utmost comfort to its commuters.

Tea vendor killed in Tripura

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 24: A tea vendor has died in Agartala in Tripura after his customer reportedly attacked him with a piece of brick.

The incident occurred when the victim, Sukhen Das refused to serve tea and cigarettes to the accused, Dipankar sarkar as the latter had not cleared his past dues.

A heated argument ensued and Sarkar in a fit of rage, attacked Das with a piece of brick. Sarkar reportedly hit Das several times on his head, leading to multiples injuries. Locals intervened and rushed the victim to the GBP Hospital for treatment. However, he succumbed to his injuries.

Das had also asked Sarkar to clear the previous dues if he wanted to buy more edibles and tea from his shop, sources said. However, the latter did not pay any heed to it.

Meanwhile, Bithi Das, the widow of the victim lodged a complaint with the East Agartala Police Station after his death.

The police arrested Sarkar and produced him before the court.

Bhupen Borah calls for reviving Madhavdev award

HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, May 24: Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah has alleged that the BJP government has forgotten about Madhavdev because of its "busy schedule" and called on the government to make arrangements for resuming the Madhavdev Award.

He said, "The Sri Madhavdev Award was introduced in 2005 by former chief minister Tarun Gogoi. However, the BJP government has not maintained the continuity of the award. Perhaps due to some special preoccupation, the present BJP government has forgotten about Madhavdev."

The senior Congress leader visited Bihpuria on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Madhavdev on Friday.

He urged the government to regularly present the award on the birth anniversary of Mahapurush Madhavdev. Borah asserted that the role of Madhavdev, who made the greatest contribution to unity and harmony in the intellectual, cultural, spiritual, religious, and linguistic spheres of Assam, is as glorious and proud as that of Srimanta Sankardev.

"We are trying to make the place a tourist attraction by taking appropriate measures to preserve the archaeological resources of the holy birthplace of Madhavdev and to promote the Ghosha, literature, songs, dances, and life of him in a national perspective," the state Congress president said.

Phone explosion kills one

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, May 24: A com-mando lost his life when his cell phone exploded while being charged.

Amar Jyoti Taid, son of Nater Taid from Liabil Gaon near Demow in Sivasagar district, who was employed as a commando in Hailakandi, passed away on Thursday night.

Reports suggest that the tragic incident occurred while Taid was charging his phone and talking on it, resulting in the explosion that claimed his life.

Taid, who secured a job a year and a half ago, was a bright student. His untimely demise has been met with widespread condolences in the area.

He is survived by his parents, elder brother, and numerous relatives.

Man shot, grenade planted in school in Manipur

IMPHAL, May 24: A 61-year-old man was shot at on the leg at Akasoi village in Bishnupur district in Manipur on Friday.

The victim has been identified as Mutum Ibungo Meitei (61) of Terakhong Maning Leika. According to police sources, he was shot on his left leg by armed miscreants suspected to be cadres of a rebel groups at Akasoi village under Kumbi Police Station around 3.15 pm on Friday.

The injured person has been admitted to JNIMS (hospital), Imphal, for treatment, the police said.

The police registered a case for investigation to know the



motive behind the incident.

In another second incident, unknown miscreants threw a hand grenade at the gate of UNACO College at Khongman under Iriblung Police Station in Imphal East district around 1.30 pm on Friday.

The police said that the bomb wrapped in a black polythene bag was found placed at the gate of the college by some unknown persons.

On being informed about the unattended polythene by locals, a team of police personnel from the Iriblung Police Station rushed to the spot and took the necessary precautionary measures before calling experts from the state police bomb detection and disposal squad.

Upon opening the bag, the experts found a hand grenade in a tiffin box. The hand grenade was safely removed and defused by the bomb squad team later, the police added. (NNN)

2 students from Sikkim bag silver, bronze in India Skills Competitions

Winners to compete at World Skills contest to be held in Lyon in France



GANGTOK, May 24: Two students from humble backgrounds in Sikkim have bagged a silver and a bronze medal at this year's India Skills Competitions conducted by the central government in New Delhi.

Radhika Chettri, a student of B.Sc emergency medical technology in Medhavi Skills University (MSU) secured a silver, while Krishna Kumari Mukhia, specialising in B.Sc radiology and imaging

technology in the same institution, earned a bronze at the India Skills competition, a statement said.

The India Skills competition was held in New Delhi on May 19.

The feat by the two students has enabled them to set up their candidature for the World Skills contest to be held in Lyon, France, it said.

MSU is the youngest university to secure medals at the competition and this was the first time Sikkim earned medals at the national com-

petition.

Coming from humble backgrounds in Ben, South Sikkim, and Adarsh Goan, East Sikkim, respectively, these fourth-semester students from Medhavi Skills University's School of Healthcare have journeyed to the forefront of national recognition, after going through regional competitions.

The journey of Radhika and Krishna finished on top when MSU hosted the inaugural rounds of the India Skills Competition (Eastern Region) in the health and social care category in March this year.

The two students' achievements at India Skills 2024 "mark a significant milestone not only for MSU but also for Sikkim which was represented for the first time at the competition," MSU founder and Chancellor Pravesh Dudani said in a statement.

"Medhavi Skills University would like to congratulate the achievers, their mentors and the entire Sikkimese community for this achievement which serves as a source of immense pride for Sikkim and the North East," he said. (PTI)

World Schizophrenia Day observed

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, May 24: In collaboration with the Regional Physical Handicap Development Association, Dhula, Mangaldai, the Mangaldai Civil Hospital and the District Health Committee observed World Schizophrenia Day on Friday in Mangaldai. An awareness meeting, attended by over 100 individuals, including teachers, village heads, Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and villagers, was also conducted in Dhula as part of the observation.

Speaking to the audience, Dr Trishna Das stated that raising public

awareness of schizophrenia as a serious psychiatric disorder with a curable form is the primary goal of Schizophrenia Day. "It's crucial to view schizophrenia patients not as 'mad', but to extend support towards their access to appropriate treatment," she added. To raise awareness of schizophrenia among the general public, Puspita Kalita, a psychologist, Pranjal Thakuria, a psychiatric special worker, and record keeper Shahid Ali also gave lectures during the meeting. Finally, the Dhula Regional Physical Handicap Development Association's program manager expressed gratitude.



Heroin worth ₹ 8.4 crore seized in Mizoram

AIZWAL, May 24: Assam Rifles and Mizoram police seized over 1 kg of heroin worth ₹ 8.4 crore from Champhai district, an officer of the paramilitary force said on Friday.

Acting on a tip-off the joint team of Assam Rifles and Mizoram police seized the heroin from a car at Ngur village in east Mizoram's Champhai district on Wednesday, the officer said.

The contraband was believed to be smuggled from Myanmar, she said.

No person has been arrested in connection with the seizure, the officer added. (PTI)

Advisory issued over prediction of heavy rains in East Khasi Hills

SHILLONG, May 24: The East Khasi Hills district administration on Friday issued an advisory protocol with regard to heavy rainfall, thunderstorm and lightning in the district.

The advisory protocol read that public must ensure safe keeping of all objects such as lumber piles, loose tin sheets, loose bricks, garbage cans, sign boards etc which might be blown away in the strong wind.

It also urged the people to switch off all electric appliances like electric iron, mobile charger, television set etc if the lightning persists. People are also required to take extra care during heavy

rainfall as there is a likelihood of flash flood, especially in areas near the rivers and streams.

The district administration has also asked the public to refrain from going near water bodies or walk through moving water and stay away from streams, drains, culverts, rivers and waterfalls, etc. As water currents can be deceptive and shallow, fast moving water can knock off a person.

The district administration has also asked people not to drive through flooded areas and stay away from electric poles or power lines to avoid electrocution and to not venture into streams, rivers and waterfalls. (NNN)

Arms, ammunition seized in Manipur

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 24: The Indian Army and Assam Rifles recovered arms and ammunition from Bonghal Khullen, in Imphal East district of Manipur on Friday.

Based on specific information, the Indian Army along with the Assam Rifles conducted a joint operation in Bonghal Khullen on Friday. During the operation, one AK-56 rifle, one mortar, one improvised mortar bomb, one Pompei gun, two improvised explosive devices, five hand grenades, ammunition and other war-like stores were recovered.

The seized articles have been handed over to the Manipur police for further investigation and disposal.

Himachal's 'talabaaz sarkar' shut recruitment commission: Modi

SHIMLA/NAHAN, May 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday called the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh a "talabaaz sarkar" for shutting down the staff selection commission and said the party also intends to put a "tala", or lock, on Ayodhya's Ram temple.

Addressing a 'Vijay Sankalp' rally in Nahana in Sirmour district, the prime minister claimed a conspiracy is being hatched to snatch the reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and give it to Muslims.

As Modi took to the stage, he chanted 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and evoked local deities. Coming to Sirmour felt like a homecoming, he said.

"Neither Nahana nor Sirmour is new for me but I have to say that today's atmosphere is new as I have never witnessed such a historic rally in Nahana," he said.

"I have come here to seek your blessings for a third term of the BJP, not for myself or my family but for a developed nation and developed Himachal," he told the gathering.

The prime minister said the people of Himachal Pradesh live along the border and know the value of a strong nation.

"I assure you that I won't let any harm come to you," he said.



Hitting out at the Congress over the dissolution of the Himachal Pradesh Staff Selection Commission (HPSSC), Modi said let alone giving one lakh jobs to the youth, the "talabaaz sarkar" of the Congress put a lock on the recruitment commission.

In February last year, the Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhdeo's state government disbanded the HPSSC whose functioning was suspended after a paper leak was detected in December 2022.

In October last year, the state government notified the Himachal Pradesh Rajya Chayan Aayog (HPRCA) to replace the Hamirpur-

based HPSSC.

Modi further said, "The Congress opposed the Ram temple and teased us with slogans like 'mandir wahin banaenge, tareekh nahin btaenge'. We not only declared the date but also performed the Pran Pratishtha (of the Ram temple) and the Congress boycotted it to appease its vote bank."

The prime minister claimed that an aide of a top Congress leader has said that a conspiracy is being hatched to put a lock on the Ram temple in Ayodhya and shift Ram Lalla to a tent again if the party wins the Lok Sabha polls.

Modi also alleged that a conspir-

acy is being hatched to snatch the reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs and give it to Muslims.

The Congress has already done it in Karnataka, he said. The Kolkata High Court has quashed OBC certificates conferred on 77 classes of Muslims to please the Muslim vote bank but West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is not honouring the court order, he said.

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010, observing that the inclusion of 77 classes of Muslims in the list of backward categories was to "treat them as vote bank".

There are poor people in upper castes as well, Modi said.

He said his government has provided 10 per cent quota for the upper caste poor but did not snatch it from any other caste.

Modi also targeted the Congress for not accepting the demand for One Rank One Pension (OROP).

He said the Congress did not accept the demand for OROP for 40 years but after he declared at a rally of ex-servicemen in Haryana, Haryana in the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha polls that the BJP would implement it, the Congress "insulted" the veterans by earmarking just ₹ 500 crore for the scheme. (PTI)

INDIA bloc getting 'clear' mandate in LS polls, will name PM in less than 3 days: Jairam Ramesh



CHANDIGARH, May 24: The Congress on Friday hit back at the BJP over its "five PMs in five years" remark against the INDIA bloc, saying the alliance which is set to get a "clear and decisive" mandate in the Lok Sabha polls will have one person as prime minister for five years.

The name of the prime minister will be announced by the INDIA bloc within three days after the result of the elections is declared on June 4, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh told a press conference here ahead of the sixth round of polling on Saturday. The elections are being held in seven phases and the last is on June 1.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has in his poll rallies repeatedly targeted the bloc, claiming that it has plans to have five prime ministers in five years if voted to power.

The INDIA bloc is going to get a "clear and decisive mandate" on June 4 and, like in 2004, history will repeat itself after 20 years, Ramesh said. The BJP was unseated from power in the 2004 general polls despite its 'India Shining' campaign and the Congress-led UPA came to power.

"Those who repeatedly raise the question who will be PM (if the INDIA bloc comes to power), I want to remind that in 2004, after the Congress and its allies got the mandate, within three days Dr Manmohan Singh's name was announced for (the post of) PM," the Congress leader said. (PTI)

"This time it will not even be three days," Ramesh asserted and added that "one person will be prime minister for five years to run the government".

He said that the prime ministerial candidate will be selected in a democratic way by members of the INDIA bloc.

"Elections in our country are not a beauty contest. In our country, an election is between parties, our democracy is party-centric and not person-centric," Ramesh said.

"This is why the question that is repeatedly raised who will be prime minister is a wrong question. The right question is which party and which alliance will get the mandate," the Congress leader said at the conference in the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana.

While all 10 seats in Haryana are going to polls on Saturday, Punjab's 13 seats and the lone seat in the Union Territory of Chandigarh will see polling on June 1.

"Going by the indications, it became clear after the first two phases (April 19 and 26) that the INDIA bloc is going to get a clear and decisive mandate," Ramesh said.

Polling for five phases covering 428 seats has been completed and after the first two phases of the elections, which were in April, it became clear that in southern India, the BJP had been wiped out, and reduced to half in the rest of the country, he claimed.

The Congress and the INDIA bloc's performance is very strong this time in comparison to the 2019 polls, he said.

There has been a change in the language the prime minister has been using in his speeches after April 19, Ramesh claimed.

He also claimed that Modi's entire campaign from April 19 has been based on "communalisation" with the Hindu-Muslim rhetoric throughout. "No talk of Viksit Bharat, Modi ki guarantee or issues of farmers, the youth, women, workers, SCs, STs and OBCs," he said.

Ramesh said the prime minister has made "bogus statements" like the Congress manifesto had the imprint of the Muslim League and the Congress will give reservations on the basis of religion. (PTI)

Sibal urges SC to direct EC to preserve EVM logs for 2-3 years

NEW DELHI, May 24: Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Friday urged the Supreme Court to direct the Election Commission to keep the logs of EVMs safe for at least two to three years and declare the records of every phase of voting before counting so that no member is elected "illegally".

Sibal also said if the Election Commission cannot upload Form 17C -- which gives the number of votes polled in a polling station -- the state electoral officer could upload the data. "Every machine has an operating system, so do the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). This log of EVMs should be kept safely. This will tell us what time the voting ended and how many votes were invalid. It will tell us what time the votes were cast. So, this is the evidence that should be kept safely," he told a press conference. Sibal said the Election Commission usually keeps this data for 30 days and asserted this is "crucial" data which must be preserved by the poll body.

"It is their responsibility because we are making an allegation as they do not upload Form 17C, they do not tell us how many votes were polled. When the counting will take place, results would be declared and nothing can be done then as the results will be declared and government will be formed. They should keep these logs safely for two to three years," he said.

Sibal, also a senior advocate, urged the Supreme Court to direct the Election Commission to keep these logs safe and the record of all phases be made public before counting so that no MP is elected in an "illegal manner". "We also need to know how the voting percentage rose and how it increased when revised figures were given," he said. The Election Commission should have no hesitation in sharing data and letting people know how the votes were cast before the counting ended, the independent Rajya Sabha MP said.

"We want the Supreme Court to give a directive to this effect," he added. Sibal's remarks came two days after the Election Commission told the apex court that "indiscriminate disclosure" of polling station-wise turnout data and posting it on its website would cause chaos in the election machinery, which is already in motion for the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. (PTI)

Will move higher court after summer vacation to challenge Cal HC order on OBC certificates: Mamata

KOLKATA, May 24: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday announced that her government will approach a higher court, challenging the Calcutta High Court order that cancelled all OBC certificates issued in the state since 2010.

Addressing an election rally in Sagar in South 24 Parganas district, she said the state government would appeal to the higher court against the order after summer vacation.

"We do not accept the order that scrapped OBC certificates. We will contest at a higher court after summer vacation," Banerjee said.

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in the state granted since 2010, sparking a political debate in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections.

The court observed that the inclusion of 77 classes of Muslims in the

INDIA bloc wants to rob reservation of SCs, STs, OBCs to appease Muslims: JP Nadda

KUSHINAGAR/BALLIA (UP), May 24: Hitting out at the INDIA bloc, BJP president J P Nadda on Friday alleged that the "ghamandia" (arrogant) alliance is against the Dalits, tribals and backward because it wants to rob the reservation of these sections and appease Muslims.

The BJP chief also alleged that the "arrogant alliance" is "anti-Sanatan" and "anti-national". Nadda was addressing an election rally organised in Kushinagar in support of the local BJP candidate and sitting MP Vijay Dubey.

Later, he also addressed a rally in Ballia. In Kushinagar, Nadda appealed to the people to vote in favour of the BJP and claimed that if Narendra Modi becomes the prime minister for the third time, India will become the third largest economy.

Taking a jibe at the INDIA bloc, Nadda alleged that the INDIA bloc is against the SCs, STs, OBCs and extremely backward classes because they want to appease Muslims by robbing the reservation of these sections of the society.

"This alliance wants to rob the reservation of Dalits, Advasis and backward communities for Muslim appeasement," he said.

Praising the work of Prime Minister Modi, Nadda said, "Today, despite being hit by COVID and the war in Ukraine, India has jumped from the 11th position to become the fifth largest economy in the world under the leadership of Narendra Modi. If Narendra Modi becomes the prime minister for the third time, India will become the third largest economy of the world." Reminding the Covid crisis, Nadda said, "No leader of the world was capable of

fighting Covid. America, Europe and Japan could not take a decision but Narendra Modi imposed a lockdown and made the country capable of fighting Covid within two months."

Making an appeal to the people to vote in favour of the BJP candidate, he said, "If the button is pressed at the right place, development takes place. But if the button is pressed at the wrong place, the honour of daughters-in-law is put in danger and businessmen are forced to flee."

He said, "Seeing the people's excitement, enthusiasm, happiness and energy, I am convinced that you have made up your mind to send Vijay Dubey to the Lok Sabha again. The question is not about Dubey but about making Narendra Modi the prime minister."

Nadda also praised Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He held Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav for scams including Gomti River Front. He talked about the fodder scam involving RJD supreme Lalu Yadav and said West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's people are involved in the alleged teacher recruitment scam.

He also accused the DMK leaders of being involved in alleged sand scam and Arvind Kejriwal in the alleged liquor scam.

The BJP chief said, "Once upon time, Uttar Pradesh was known for mafia rule where daughters-in-law were not safe, businessmen were migrating and the mafia used to kill anyone in broad daylight. Today in the same Uttar Pradesh, with the blessings of Narendra Modi and the hard work of Yogi Adityanath, the mafia have been buried in the ground and the people

who used to be with the mafia are in jail."

Nadda accused the opposition parties of indulging in nepotism. Naming several leaders of the INDIA bloc, he accused them of thinking only about their family members. He went on to assert that Modi on other hand is concerned about 140 crore people of the country.

UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also addressed the poll meeting.

In his election rally at Ballia, in support of BJP candidate Neeraj Shekhar, Nadda said, "It is our good fortune that under the leadership of the successful Prime Minister Modi, not only the fate of India has changed along with the fate of India, but also the culture of Indian politics has changed. The definition of politics has changed today." Discussing "changing India", Nadda said Modi laid optical fiber in two lakh panchayats and opened common service centres in two lakh villages.

Attacking the opposition parties, he said, "This Congress, this SP, this educated illiterate (padha likha apadha) Akhilesh (Yadav) used to say that India is a country of illiterate people, and what will you do by digitising it and what will Wi-Fi do in the villages."

Nadda said, "You will be surprised to know that today even the vegetable seller does digital transactions. The one whom you (Akhilesh) called illiterate turned out to be more educated than you."

Launching a sharp attack on Yadav, Nadda said, "It was Akhilesh who had proposed to release the terrorists of Banaras, Lucknow and Varanasi blasts. They are friends of traitors." (PTI)

MEA sends show-cause notice to Prajwal Revanna

NEW DELHI, May 24: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has served a show-cause notice to suspended JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna asking why his diplomatic passport should not be cancelled as sought by the Karnataka government in view of allegations of sexual abuse against him, people familiar with the matter said on Friday.

Official sources on Thursday had said the MEA is processing the Karnataka government's request to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport. Currently, he is believed to be in Germany.

The show-cause notice has been served on Prajwal as part of the process initiated to cancel his passport, the people cited above said.

It is learnt that the show-cause notice was served through email. Prajwal, the grandson of former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, is at the centre of a mass sexual abuse case and the Hassan MP left India on April 27, a day after voting for the Lok Sabha elections took place in his constituency.

It is learnt that the MEA is undertaking the process to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport under the provisions of the Passports Act of 1967 as well as related regulations.

If the passport is cancelled, then Prajwal's stay abroad will be illegal and he may face legal action by concerned authorities in the country he is staying, a person familiar with the matter said.

On Wednesday, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wrote a second letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to take "prompt and necessary" actions to cancel Prajwal's diplomatic passport. (PTI)

list of backward categories was to "treat them as a vote bank".

"I respect the courts, but a few judges are only following the dictates of the BJP and the CPI(M)."

Banerjee urged electors "not to cast a single vote to the BJP or any other party except the TMC so that the INDIA bloc can form a government at the Centre".

She also accused the BJP of planning to implement the Uniform Civil Code to "undermine" the rights of people belonging to the SC and ST community.

Banerjee appealed to the families of Haj pilgrims to vote judiciously, as the "implementation of the Uniform Civil Code and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) could disenfranchise citizens".

She alleged that the BJP has "made attempts to disrespect women in Sandeshkhali, incite riots, and re-

voke reservations and employment rights of backward classes" and its only aim is to "defame TMC and Bengal".

The TMC supreme accused the saffron camp of running advertisements to "mislead" people.

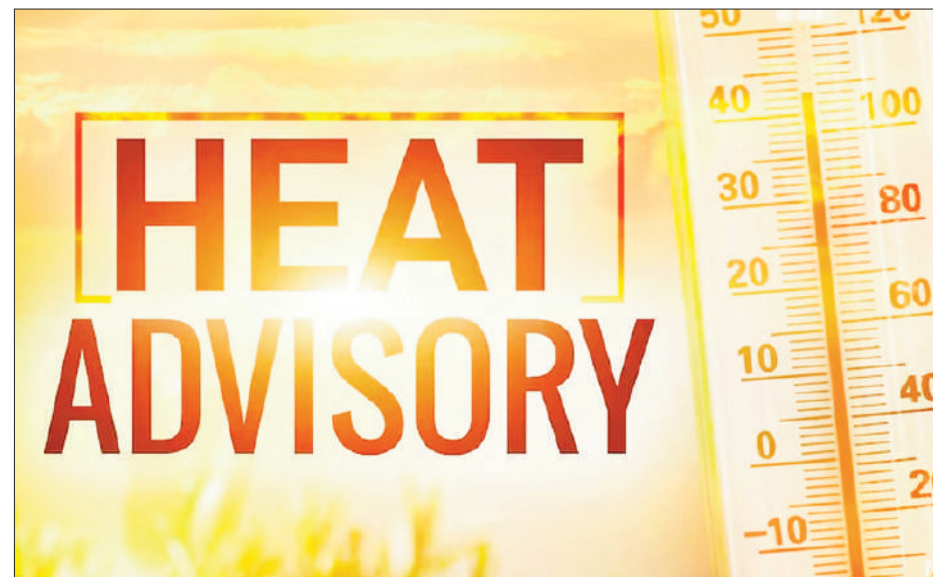
Banerjee said the 'Gangasagar Mela' must be recognised as a national fair, and claimed that her government is independently managing the annual affair while the "Centre has not been providing adequate support for it".

She also promised completion of a bridge over the Muriganga river in the next 2-3 years, even though the "Centre has not provided support in the Rs 1,500 crore project".

"You must come to vote even if there is rain," she said at the rally, emphasising the need to defeat the BJP in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. (PTI)

Duration of exposure to hot environments should be reduced, the advisory stated and added that periods of rest must be ensured between intense work sessions

Advisory issued in Kashmir as temperatures soar in Valley



SRINAGAR, May 24: Authorities in Kashmir issued an advisory on Friday amid soaring temperatures in the Valley, with Srinagar recording its hottest May day in 13 years.

The maximum temperature in Srinagar on Thursday was recorded at 32.2 degrees Celsius -- the same as on May 25, 2013. On May 20, 2011, Srinagar had recorded a maximum temperature of 32.3 degrees Celsius.

Thursday's maximum temperature was 7.4 notches above normal for this time of the season. The Met office has forecast an isolated heat wave across the Valley over the next five days. It said hot and dry weather will persist during this time, with no major rainfall activity till the end of the month.

The weather will be generally dry with the possibility of thundershowers at isolated places till May 28, the Met Office said.

During May 29-31, the weather is likely to remain partly to generally cloudy with the possibility of light rain/thunder at isolated places towards the afternoons, it added.

With the temperatures soaring, the Directorate of Health Services has issued an advisory, asking people to be vigilant about health risks associated with extreme heat, as the summer season has peaked in the Valley.

Suggesting that people stay hydrated, it said, "Drink plenty of water throughout the day, even if you don't feel thirsty. Avoid caffeinated beverages, as they can lead to dehydration. Persons working under the conditions of high temperature and humidity should assuredly drink cold water."

The duration of exposure to hot environments should be reduced, the advisory stated and added that periods of rest must be ensured

Over 26,000 displaced KPs to vote at 34 special polling stations set up in Jammu, Udhampur and Delhi

JAMMU, May 24: More than 26,000 displaced Kashmiri Pandit voters from across the country are eligible to vote at 34 polling stations in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag constituency on Saturday.

This marks the conclusion of voting in the Union Territory, with polling already completed in the other four constituencies.

The newly created Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat, covering the south Kashmir-Pir Panjal region, will cover the districts of Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian, Rajouri and Poonch.

The polling parties and security forces are being dispatched for special polling stations set up for the Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Udhampur districts. "Over 26,000 Kashmiri migrant voters will cast their ballots at special polling stations set up in Jammu, Udhampur and Delhi tomorrow. All arrangements have been made for free and fair polling tomorrow," Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner Dr Arvind Karwani told PTI.

Dr Karwani reviewed the arrangements along with election officers at 21 polling booths and 8 auxiliary ones in Jammu, one in Udhampur and four in Delhi. Assistant Electoral Returning Officer (AERO) Dr Riaz Ahmed urged the Kashmiri migrant voters to participate in the election.

"All necessary facilities, including water and shelter, have been arranged. The Election Commission has also provided a pick-and-drop facility for the voters, available from 6 am to 6 pm, focusing on areas with higher concentrations of migrants," the AERO said.

The authorities, amid tight security, handed over polling materials, including EVMs, to polling parties at Women's College in Jammu. The security forces and election parties are being deployed to their respective stations, the officials said. The Anantnag constituency is preparing for a competitive electoral showdown with nearly 18.36 lakh voters, including 9.02 lakh women, set to vote at 2,338 polling stations.

Twenty candidates are vying for the seat, with the main contest between PDP chief and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti and prominent Gujjar leader and former minister Mian Altaf Ahmad of the National Conference (NC). Apni Party's Zafar Iqbal Manhas, backed by the BJP in the Pir Panjal region, hopes to challenge both the PDP and the NC.

The Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP), led by former chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, has fielded Mohammad Saleem Parray for the seat. (PTI)

between intense work sessions.

It has also suggested taking cool showers or baths at home to lower the body temperature.

The advisory asked the people to wear light-weight, loose-fitting and light-coloured clothing.

"Use wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses, shields and umbrellas to protect your skin from sunburn," it said and advised people to avoid strenuous activities during the hottest parts of the day.

"If you must be outside, take frequent breaks in the shade of a cool environment or better to stay indoors. Apply sunscreen to protect your skin from sunburn," the advisory added.

The department also issued an advisory for children.

"Never leave children in parked cars, even with the windows down. Ensure they play in shaded areas and take breaks to cool down and hydrate. Dress children in appropriate clothing and apply sunscreen regularly," it said.

The department asked parents to encourage frequent water breaks and offer water-rich snacks such as fruits to their children. It has also urged schools to refrain from holding outdoor activities during the extremely hot and humid weather and ensure good hydration by providing multiple safe drinking water stations.

In an advisory to the elderly, the department said it must be ensured that they have access to cool environments.

"Watch for symptoms like dizziness, heavy sweating or lack of sweating, and in that case, seek medical attention immediately from nearby government health care facilities," the advisory stated.

By following these guidelines, individuals can significantly reduce the risk of heat-related illnesses during extreme heat events, the department added. (PTI)

Measures be taken to ensure well-being of Indian students in Kyrgyzstan: JK students' body to Jaishankar

'Situation in and around Bishkek is normal and stable today'

NEW DELHI, May 24: A students' association of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday wrote to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and requested that "proactive measures" be taken immediately to ensure well-being of the Indian students in Kyrgyzstan.

This comes days after mobs targeted the foreigners in capital city Bishkek triggering concerns about their safety.

Jammu and Kashmir Students Association in its letter also said that students from the Kashmir Valley studying there are "waiting to return to their homeland" after the incident.

Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy in Kyrgyz Republic on Friday said the situation in Bishkek "continues to remain calm".

"However, upon request of Indian medical students, the Embassy is working with Medical Universities in the Kyrgyz Republic to arrange for their transport to the nearest international airport to address their concerns," it posted on X.

Ambassador Arun K. Chatterjee had met the Indian medical students at International Higher School of Medicine (IHSM) in Bishkek on May 22 and as part of its outreach activity, some embassy officials had also met with various Indian medical students at Royal



Metropolitan University.

Jammu and Kashmir Students Association in its letter said that several Kashmiri students and their parents have "reached out to us, expressing their fear and anxiety following a series of troubling events".

The Indian students, particularly

those from Kashmir in Kyrgyzstan's capital city, Bishkek, were "caught unaware of the mob violence" and are "desperate to return home", it said.

"Given the gravity of the situation and the urgency of ensuring the safety and well-being of our fellow citizens, we earnestly request the Ministry of Ex-

ternal Affairs to take immediate steps to facilitate the evacuation of Indian students stranded in Kyrgyzstan. Their safe return home should be a priority to prevent any further distress or potential harm," the letter said.

"We trust in the prompt and decisive action of the Ministry in safeguarding the interests and security of Indian citizens in Kyrgyzstan. We request that proactive measures be taken immediately to ensure the well-being of these students," it added.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) should "collaborate closely" with the respective government and diplomatic mission to "facilitate the safe passage of Indian students out of harm's way", the association said.

"Your swift intervention in this matter will be greatly appreciated by the students, their families, and the students' body," it added.

The Indian Embassy had on Thursday also posted on X that the "situation in and around Bishkek is normal and stable today. Flights to India are operational".

"Embassy is in contact with Medical Universities in Kyrgyzstan to address concerns of Indian students. They can reach out to the Embassy for any assistance at 0555710041 and 0555005538," it said. (PTI)

India would have progressed much faster if borders had been more secure, defined: Ajit Doval



NEW DELHI, May 24: India would have progressed at a much faster pace if its borders had been more secure, defined and not in "adversarial disposition", National Security Advisor Ajit Doval said, underlining that the country's power has grown immensely in the last 10 years.

Delivering the Rustamji Memorial Lecture organised by the Border Security Force (BSF) on its 21st investiture ceremony, Doval said India's economic progress would have been much faster if "we had more secure borders".

"In the foreseeable future, I don't think our borders are going to be as secure as we will require for our fast economic growth. So, the responsibility on border guarding forces has become very, very heavy. They have got to remain on alert 24x7 in perpetuity. They have got to see that our national interests and country are protected," he said.

Borders are important because that is the limit which "defines our sovereignty", he said.

"Jameen par jo kabja hai wo apna hai, baki to sab adalat aur kachehri ka kaam hai, usse farak nahi padta (The land which is in our possession is ours, the rest is the matter of courts and that is immaterial)," Doval said.

The government has paid very, very high attention to border security during the last 10 years, a period in which "our comprehensive national power has grown immensely", Doval said on Friday.

The national security advisor said India is changing very fast and, in the next 10 years, "we will be a USD 10 trillion economy and the third largest economy" that he called a "major achievement".

He said India will have one of the largest workforces and be a hub of high-technology artificial intelligence, semiconductors, quantum computing and various other areas of defence and security manufacturing.

The country, which was an importer of arms, exported USD 2.5 billion worth of arms until March 31, emerging as a big exporter because of the government's policy of self-reliance and Atmanirbhar Bharat, Doval said.

In this changing India, prosperity guarantees security to some extent and increases vulnerability in much larger areas, he said.

"All these are ingredients of national power or what the Chinese call comprehensive national power. Your economy, your geographical expanse, your geo-strategic positioning, defence forces, technological achievements, and India's comprehensive national power will be very high," he said. (PTI)

Groundwater level down in 51 out of 76 talukas of Marathwada

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, May 24: Groundwater level has gone down, by more than three metres in some cases, in 51 out of 76 tehsils in Marathwada region of Maharashtra, an official report has said.

The situation is somewhat better in Nanded district which had received good rainfall last year compared to the other seven districts, it said.

Chief minister Eknath Shinde on Thursday reviewed the drought situation in this central Maharashtra region by holding a meeting here.

The official report submitted to the chief minister said that groundwater level has gone down by upto one metre in 18 talukas (tehsils), by between one to two metres in 15 talukas, between two to three metres in 14 talukas and more than three metres in four talukas.

The problem is more acute in Beed and Latur districts where decrease in groundwater level has been reported in ten talukas each. In Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, nine talukas have reported falling groundwater levels.

Eight talukas of Dharashiv district have also witnessed the same phenomenon.

In Nanded, only one taluka out of 16 has reported a fall in groundwater level.

Marathwada comprises the districts of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Jalna, Beed, Latur, Dharashiv, Nanded, Parbhani and Nanded. (PTI)

CBI closes corruption case against ex-IOA chief Narinder Batra

NEW DELHI, May 24: After nearly two years of investigation, the CBI has closed a corruption case against former Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Dhruv Batra and Hockey India Executive Director Cdr R K Srivastava as it could not find evidence of wrongdoing against them, officials said Friday.

The CBI had registered an FIR in the July 2022 case after its three-month-long preliminary enquiry report found prima facie material indicating "the commissions of cognizable offences" relating to criminal conspiracy, criminal breach of trust, and corruption against Batra.

Some officials of Hockey India including its Executive Director R K Srivastava, former president Rajinder Singh and former secretary general Mohd Mushtaq Ahmad

were also booked. When contacted, Batra refused to comment on the closure report, saying he has no information about the development. The CBI also did not offer comments on the closure of the case despite repeated attempts.

The CBI could not find enough evidence against Batra, Singh, Ahmad and Srivastava after over two years of investigation to file a charge sheet, the officials said.

The central probe agency has now filed a closure report in the case before a special court here. The court will decide whether to accept the report and close the matter or direct the agency to investigate further.

The officials said the case arose from a complaint alleging that Batra had got his office in the IOA Bhawan renovated in violation of norms. (PTI)

Teen was fully in his senses, attempts made to show he wasn't behind wheel: Pune police chief

PUNE, May 24: Pune police chief on Friday said there was an attempt to tamper with evidence to show that the Porsche that ran over two people on a motorcycle was being driven by a family driver and not the 17-year-old who is in custody over their deaths.

There were attempts to make it appear as if the adult driver was driving the car, but that bid was foiled, Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar told reporters.

"We have the CCTV footage of him (juvenile) drinking liquor in the pub. The point of saying this is that our case is not alone depending on the blood report as we have other evidence also," the officer said.

"He (juvenile) was fully in his senses, He had full knowledge that due to his conduct, such an accident, where section 304 is applicable, can happen," Kumar said.

On the allegations of preferential treatment given to the juvenile, Kumar said an ACP rank officer is investigating the claim.

On reports of the juvenile being served pizza after the incident, Kumar said, "We have clearly said that a pizza party didn't happen in the police station. But yes, something had happened on which we have initiated an internal investigation."

"We are trying to make this a water tight case. We have already filed a case against the father of accused and the bar owners. The technical analysis of the evidences is underway," he said.

He said an internal inquiry has pointed to lapses on the part of some cops while registering the case and action will be taken against them for destruction of evidence.

"During our investigation, it has clearly emerged that the juvenile was driving the car and we have already collected all the necessary chronological evidence. For example, when the juvenile left the house, the entry on the security register shows that he left with the car," he said. On the basis of technical and CCTV evidence, it is confirmed that the car was being driven by the juvenile, the police chief said. Eyewitnesses have also corroborated that the teenager, son of real estate developer Vishal Agarwal, was driving the Porsche at the time of the accident, he said.

Kumar said attempts were made to show that an adult, the family driver, was at the wheel and not the teen when the vehicle fatally knocked down two persons in Pune's Kalyani Nagar area around 3 am on Sunday. "We are investigating these things and will

take action against those who made such attempts, under section 201 (destruction of evidence) of the IPC," he said.

Asked about blood samples, Kumar said the juvenile was sent to Sassoon Hospital around 9 am on Sunday after an offence was registered. "There was a delay in taking blood samples as they were collected at 11 pm but the blood report is not the pillar of our case," he said. He said the case has been registered under IPC section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and that the juvenile was fully aware that driving in an inebriated state would lead to this kind of offence and people's lives would be lost.

As a pre-emptive measure, extra blood samples were collected for testing at another lab to ensure that both samples and DNA reports were of the same person.

"We have not received the blood reports but the process is being expedited," he said.

In the initial FIR, section 304 A (death by negligence) was applied but it was revised with section 304 the same day as the crime warranted that section, he said.

An ACP-level officer is being entrusted with the probe to ascertain if there was any attempt to tamper with or destroy evidence.

Kumar responded to complaints about lapses and allegations that some cops were "managed", saying the police have taken a stringent approach from the beginning.

"So it is not correct to say there was pressure on police or dereliction on the part of cops. But a probe is underway to find out why section 304 was not added in the first place," he said. There are complaints that some eyewitnesses were pressured, he said. "If such things come to the fore, strict action will be taken against the police officer concerned," he added.

On reports that Vadgaon Sheri NCP MLA Sunil Tingre had intervened to ensure that the juvenile gets favourable treatment from police, Kumar said, "He (Tingre) had come to the police station, but it won't be correct to say that the direction of the police investigation was impacted due to this." After the accident, the minor was produced before the Juvenile Justice Board which granted him bail while asking him to write a 300-word essay. Following an outcry over quick bail and the police's review plea, the Board on Wednesday remanded the teen, son of real estate developer Vishal Agarwal, to the observation home till June 5. (PTI)

Odisha: Results of class 10 state board exams to be declared tomorrow

CUTTACK, May 24: Results of the class 10 examinations conducted by the Board of Secondary Education, Odisha will be declared on Sunday, an official said.

The results of examinations for the High School Certificate (HSC), State Open School Certificate (SOSC) and Madhyama (Sanskrit), which were simultaneously in February and March, will be published at 10.30 am on that day, board president Srikant Tarai said.

The results will be published after approval of the Examination Committee, he said.

The results will be available on www.bseodisha.ac.in from 11.30 am. The results can also be accessed by sending an SMS to 5676750 with OR10<Roll Number>.

Tarai said the board would for the first time provide digitised pass certificates and mark sheets to the students on the day of the publication of results to help them to get admission for further studies without any delay. (PTI)

Heavy rainfall in Kerala, IMD issues Orange alert for three districts

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 24: Heavy rains continue to lash Kerala with parts of the state receiving over 200 mm of rain in the last 24 hours and places in major cities including Kochi and Thrissur remaining waterlogged on Friday.

As the southern state reels under the impact of heavy pre-monsoon rains, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) today issued an Orange alert for three districts.

An Orange alert has been issued for Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Idukki districts.

A red alert indicates heavy to extremely heavy rain of over 20 cm in 24 hours, while an orange alert denotes very heavy rainfall of 11 cm to 20 cm, and a yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 cm and 11 cm.

State Revenue Minister K Rajan, who met the media today said parts of the state received over 20 cm of rain in the last 24 hours.

Kunnamangalam in Kozhikode district received 226.2 mm of rain in the last 24 hours, he added.

He said while Cherthala in Alappuzha district received 215 mm rain, Kumarakom in Kottayam district and Thamarassery in Kozhikode district received 203 mm and 200.7 mm rain respectively in the last 24 hours.



"Such heavy rainfall in a short span of time will lead to various incidents and we need to arrange facilities accordingly," Rajan said.

He said the local authorities, Fire force, the police and Revenue department were ready to face any upward incidents. The minister also said two teams of the NDRF were currently in the state.



cence to appear in the Indian screening test after they return from studying abroad.

Annually, around 2,000 Indian students go to the Philippines for medical studies, which is expected to grow by 25-30 per cent, as the country offers high-quality education at competitive costs, with tuition fees significantly lower than those in the Western countries, Pillai told PTI.

After the legislative amendment, Indian students who complete their Doctor of Medicine degree from a Philippine College of Medicine recognised by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), with a 12-month internship, will be eligible to register and practice medicine in the Philippines.

In India, a record 2.4 million students appeared for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (UG) this year. Overall, around 20,000 Indian students go abroad for medical education.

The top five countries that Indian students go to study medicine, include Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and the Philippines, among others.

Earlier, Indian students also went to China and Ukraine for medical education, Pillai said.

"However, the numbers dropped significantly after the Covid-19 pandemic for China and Ukraine after the Ukraine-Russia war," he added. (PTI)

Severe cyclone forming in Bay of Bengal to make landfall tomorrow night

KOLKATA/BHUBANESWAR, May 24: A depression in the Bay of Bengal is likely to concentrate into a severe cyclonic storm and make landfall between Sagar island in West Bengal and Kheupara in Bangladesh around May 26 mid-night, bringing heavy rain in the coastal districts of the state, the Met department said on Friday.

The system, which lies over central Bay of Bengal, about 810 km south of West Bengal's Canning, is likely to concentrate into a cyclonic storm by May 25 morning, the Met said.

Moving in a northward direction, the system will further concentrate into a severe cyclonic storm by May 25 evening, the weather office said.

The severe cyclonic storm is very likely to cross West Bengal and Bangladesh coasts between Sagar island and Kheupara around midnight of May 26, it said.

The weather system will bring heavy to very heavy rain in the coastal districts of West Bengal on May 26 and 27, the Met said. (PTI)

MYSURU FILMMAKER BAGS CANNES LA CINEF FIRST PRIZE

CANNES, May 24: In a major triumph for India at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, Chandananda S. Naik's "Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know..." has won the first prize of La Cinef here.

The Mysuru doctor-turned filmmaker made the film at the end of his one-year course in the television wing of Pune's Film and Television Institute of India. "Sunflowers..." is based on Kannada folk tale about an old woman who steals a rooster. As a result of her action, the son stops rising in the village. The third prize of the La Cinef competition on Thursday went to India-born Mansi Maheshwari's animation film "Bunnyhood".

Maheshwari, born in from Meerut and an ex-student of NIFT Delhi, made the film as a student of UK's National Film and Television School.

The second prize was shared by "Out of the Widow Through



the Wall", directed by Columbia University's Asya Segalovich, and "The Chaos She Left Behind", made by Nikos Kolioukos of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Cannes Film Festival awards a 15000 Euro grant for the first prize winner, 11,250 euros for the second prize and 7,500 euros for the third prize.

The awarded films will be screened at the Cinema du Pan-

theon on June 3 and at the MK2 Quai de Seine on June 4.

The first prize for Naik is India's second in five years. In 2020, Ashmita Guha Neogi, also from FTII, won the award for her film "CatDog". (PTI)

Payal Kapadia and cast of 'All We Imagine As Light' shine at Cannes 2024 with historic screening



CANNES, May 24: Filmmaker Payal Kapadia and the cast of All We Imagine As Light shone bright at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival as they took to the red carpet ahead of the film's history-making screening here.

Kapadia's feature directorial debut, which screened on Thursday night and has received glowing reviews in the international press, is the first Indian film in 30 years and first ever by an Indian female director to be screened in the main competition of the prestigious film gala.

Kapadia and the film's cast members Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha, Chhaya Kadam and Hridhu Haroon, were beaming with energy and did a little dance as they posed for the shutterbugs at the Cannes red carpet.

They were accompanied by cinematographer Ranabir Das, and producers Julien Graff, Zico Maitra, Thomas Hakim.

At the film gala, All We Imagine as Light, also written by Kapadia, competes for Palme d'Or alongside 19 other highly anticipated titles, including films from master directors like Francis Ford Coppola (Megalopolis) and Yorgos Lanthimos (Kinds of Kindness), Paul Schrader (Oh, Canada), David Cronenberg (The Shrouds) and Andrea Arnold (Bird).

The last Indian movie to be selected for the main competition was Shaji N Karun's 1994 movie Swaham.

All We Imagine as Light, a Malayalam-Hindi feature, is about Prabha, a nurse, who receives an unexpected gift from her long estranged husband that throws her life into disarray. Her younger roommate, Anu, tries in vain to find a private spot in the big city to be alone with her boyfriend.

One day the two nurses go on a road trip to a beach town where the mystical forest becomes a space for their dreams to manifest, according to the plotline.

In his review, Peter Bradshaw of The Guardian called the film glorious, highlighting its "freshness and emotional clarity" as well as "enriching humanity and gentleness," while also comparing the movie to Satyajit Ray's The Big City (Mahanagar) and Days and Nights of the Forest (Aranyer Din Ratri).

International critics have given the film a thumbs up and praised Kapadia's storytelling prowess. (PTI)



Steven Spielberg's new movie to come out in May 2026

LOS ANGELES, May 24: Hollywood veteran Steven Spielberg is set to start his next feature directorial project, which will be released in theatres worldwide in May 2026.

Hollywood studio Universal and Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment announced the filmmaker's new film on Thursday.

The movie, which is currently untitled, is described as an "original event film", reported entertainment news outlet The Hollywood Reporter. Based on a story by Spielberg, the screenplay is written by longtime collaborator David Koepp, who previously collaborated with the director for "Jurassic Park" and "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull". Spielberg last directed the semi-autobiographical "The Fabelmans", which was released in 2022. Released by Universal, the Amblin film received seven Academy Awards nominations, including for best picture, directing, best original screenplay, best actress and best picture. (PTI)

CHRIS HEMSWORTH RECEIVES HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME

LOS ANGELES, May 24: Superstar Chris Hemsworth received a Hollywood Walk of Fame for his work in the entertainment industry with his family and Robert Downey Jr, his co-star on many Marvel movies, in attendance.

Hemsworth was accompanied by parents Leonie and Craig Hemsworth, wife Elsa Pataky and his children -- sons Sasha and Tristan and daughter India in a rare public outing for the family.

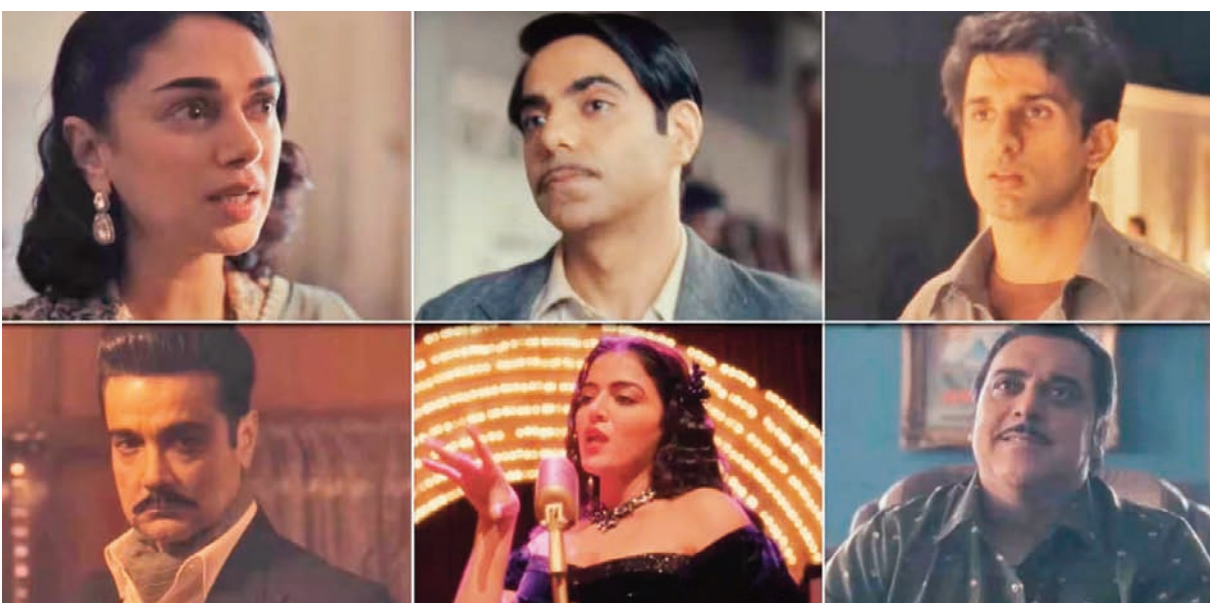
The "Extraction" star praised Pataky, also an actor, for being a constant support in his life.

Chris was surrounded by family and friends while receiving his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. In front of them, Robert said he reached out to his 'fellow Avengers' and asked them to describe Chris in just three words, which led to some funny responses. Robert first read out Jeremy Renner's (Clint Barton/ Hawkeye) three words for Chris: 'Absurdly, annoyingly amazing.'

The actor was joined by his wife, Elsa Pataky, and their three children - daughter India Rose and twin sons Sasha and Tristan - as the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce honoured him for his contributions to motion pictures. His Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga co-star Anya Taylor-Joy and director George Miller also attended the ceremony. The Hollywood Walk of Fame is an iconic sidewalk attraction in LA that features stars' names to honour their achievements in the entertainment industry. (AGENCIES)



Indian movies, shows clock over 1 billion views on Netflix in 2023, says streamer in new report



MUMBAI, May 24: Series and movies from India clocked over 1 billion views on Netflix in 2023, the streaming service said on Friday in its second engagement report.

The report, titled "What We Watched: A Netflix Engagement Report", presented the streaming service's viewership data for the period of July to December 2023.

Subscribers across the world watched about 90 billion hours of content on Netflix in the second half of 2023.

From India, Sujoy Ghosh's "Jaane Jaan" was the most watched movie on Netflix with 20.2 million views, followed by Shah Rukh Khan's "Jawan" with 16.2 million views and Vishal Bhardwaj's "Khufiya" with 12.1 million views.

The other popular titles include "OMG 2", "Lust Stories 2",

"Dream Girl 2" and true-crime documentary "Curry & Cyanide".

From the series that were launched on Netflix, "The Railway Men", starring Kay Kay Menon, Babil Khan and Divyenndu, turned out to be the top title.

The series, set against the backdrop of the 1984 Bhopal Gas Leak, attracted 10.6 million views, followed by Suvinder Vicky and Barun Sobti-starrer "Kohraa", Raj and DK's "Gun and Gulaabs" and "Kaala Paani".

Globally, non-English shows and movies are very popular with Netflix subscribers, making up nearly a third of all viewing, according to the report.

This includes Korean, Spanish and Japanese language stories captured the biggest share of viewing outside of English.

The report highlighted stand-outs titles like "Dear Child" from Germany, "Forgotten Love" from Poland, "Pact of Silence" from Mexico, "Mask Girl" from Korea, "Yu Yu Hakusho" from Japan and "Berlin" from Spain.

The most watched movie title on Netflix was "Leave the World Behind", starring Ethan Hawke and Julia Roberts, generating 121 million views, followed by Adam Sandler's animated film "Leo".

From the series side, anime-inspired live action series "One Piece" attracted 72 million views.

The report also highlighted that fan favourites original titles "Wednesday", "Red Notice" and "Squid Game" continued to bring in millions of views in 2023, long after they premiered on Netflix. (PTI)

Around 300 kids underwent a skill and fitness assessment process

Bopanna's academy launches tennis programme for underprivileged children from Assam

NEW DELHI, May 24: Aimed at empowering underprivileged children, India's top tennis player Rohan Bopanna has picked 25 such kids from the remote areas of Majuli Island and Bongaigaon in Assam, for support.

The collaborative initiative between Rohan Bopanna Tennis Academy (RBTA) and Kamal India Foundation UK will provide comprehensive tennis training to the selected kids who are aged between 9 and 11.

Around 300 kids underwent a skill and fitness assessment process and 25 were handpicked by reigning Australian Open champion Bopanna for inclusion in the programme.

The selected players will relocate to Bengaluru, where they will be provided with state-of-the-art infrastructure, a world-class tennis curriculum, experienced coaching faculty, boarding and lodging within the school campus, education, and guidance from Bopanna himself at RBTA.

Asked if there was any specific reason for picking the players from



Assam, Bopanna said it was a request from one of the sponsors.

"One of the reasons was that a donor wanted kids to be selected from the North East. We thought

why not? It does not matter which part of the country kids come from, it is an incredible opportunity," Bopanna told PTT.

"We are thrilled to partner with

Kamal India Foundation UK to bring this transformative opportunity to talented young individuals who may not otherwise have had access to such resources.

"Through this program, we aim to not only nurture their athletic talents but also empower them with education and life skills that will shape their future," said Bopanna, who recently became the oldest world number one on the ATP Tour.

The 44-year-old Bopanna, who is set to compete at the Paris Games, said they will keep enrolling players in the programme.

"Out of 300, we got 25. Now these will remain. The plan is to support them till the 10 or 12th standard. We keep adding more kids to the programme. Every year we will have players from different regions.

"I am also getting lot of coaches. Simon Vesely who specialises for junior grassroots programme will be in Bengaluru on May 22, he will be there for a full week. We are also getting trainers from Argentina," he said.

Bopanna is also involved with a programme named 'Doubles Dream of India' aimed at supporting Indian doubles ranked in the top 200 on the ATP ranking chart. (PTT)

Langer drops plan to coach India after KL cautions him of 'pressure and politics'



NEW DELHI, May 24: Former Australian cricketer Justin Langer was enticed by the prospect of becoming India's head coach but KL Rahul's word of caution regarding the "pressure and politics" that come with the job dissuaded him from pursuing the "amazing" opportunity.

Langer, who served as Lucknow Super Giants' head coach this IPL season, recalled a chat with franchise skipper and a senior member of the Indian team Rahul.

"You never say never. And the pressure of doing it in India...I was talking to KL Rahul and he said, 'You know, if you think there's pressure and politics in an IPL team, multiply that by a thousand, (that's) coaching India,'" Langer told the 'BBC Stumped' podcast.

"That was a good bit of advice, I guess. It would be an amazing job, (but) I have (put myself out of contention)," he added.

The BCCI has invited fresh applications for the head coach position, with a deadline set for May 27 as Rahul Dravid is set to exit after the T20 World Cup.

Before taking up the gig with LSG this year, Langer had coached Australia for four years from May 2018 to February 2022, helping the team navigate a difficult period in the aftermath of the infamous ball-tampering scandal.

Under Langer's guidance, Australia lifted their first-ever T20

World Cup title and also went on to win the Ashes.

"I also know that it's an all-encompassing role, and having done it for four years with the Australian team, honestly, it's exhausting. And that's the Australian job!," the 53-year-old said.

Speculation was rife that the BCCI had approached Langer's former teammate and current Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting for the job.

But the World Cup-winning captain has already ruled himself out, saying the coaching gig won't suit his lifestyle.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah on Friday clarified that the board has not approached any former Australian cricketer with offer to coach Indian team.

"We are focused on identifying individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Indian cricket structure and have risen through the ranks," Shah said.

"It's crucial that our coach has an in-depth knowledge of our domestic cricket framework to truly elevate Team India to the next level," Shah added.

Some other high-profile names such as Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Stephen Fleming and Andy Flower have also opted out.

Former India batter Gautam Gambhis is said to be a top contender for the position right now. (PTT)

Sindhu enters semifinals of Malaysia Masters, Ashmita loses



KUALA LUMPUR, May 24: Double Olympic medallist P V Sindhu took a giant stride towards securing a title at the Malaysia Masters after progressing to the semifinals with a hard-fought win over top seed Han Yue of China here on Friday.

World No. 15 Sindhu recovered from a mid-game slump to outwit Han, ranked sixth, 21-13 14-21 21-12 in a 55-minute quarterfinal battle to avenge her loss to the Chinese in their last meeting at the Asia Badminton Championships in Ningbo last month.

Sindhu, a former world champion, will now square off against either Indonesia's Putri Kusuma Wardani or Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan in the last four stage.

In other results, Ashmita Chahiba's fine run ended in the quarterfinals with a 10-21 15-21 loss to sixth seed Zhang Yi Man of China. Sindhu, who last won the Singapore Open in 2022, gave a good account of herself during the 55-minute match as she broke off from 3-3 in the opening game to take a 11-5 cushion at the break.

The Chinese slowly made her way to 13-16 but Sindhu reeled off the remaining five straight points to take the opening game.

Stung by the reversal, Han zoomed to a 5-0 lead after the change of sides. She continued to dominate the proceedings as Sindhu struggled. The result was she jumped to a massive 15-2 advantage and despite some fight-back from the Indian, Han comfortably took the match to the decider.

Sindhu gathered her wits in the third game to open up a massive 11-3 lead at the break, which proved decisive as Han just couldn't bridge the gap. (PTT)

Senthilkumar, Abhay enter quarters of QSF 3 squash in Doha

DOHA, May 24: India's Velavan Senthilkumar and Abhay Singh entered the quarterfinals of the prestigious USD 53,500 QSF 3 squash tournament with stunning second-round wins over seeded opponents here.

The tournament is a PSA World Tour Bronze event.

Reigning national champion Senthilkumar defeated Egyptian seventh seed Omar Mosaad, a former world No. 3, 13-11 11-3 9-3 after the latter retired in 30 minutes due to an injury.

Asian Games medallist Abhay then beat sixth-seeded Frenchman Auguste Dussourd 11-7 5-11 10-12 11-5 9-3, who also conceded his match in 59 minutes on Thursday.

World No. 55 Senthilkumar will meet Egyptian top seed and world No. 8 Tarek Momen next, while Abhay, ranked 67 in the world, will take on Malaysian third seed and world No. 15 Eain Yow Ng. (PTT)

Definitely wanted four spinners, can't plan squad around IPL: Rohit Sharma

MUMBAI, May 24: India captain Rohit Sharma on Thursday said the team management was crystal clear about picking as many as four spinners for the T20 World Cup in the Americas, asserting that IPL had very little role to play in deciding the final 15.

India have picked four spinners and three pacers in the squad, a move that has attracted diverse views. Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal are the two wrist spinners while Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel are the all-rounders who bowl left-arm spin.

"I don't want to go into details on this. I definitely wanted four spinners. We have played a lot of cricket there. The match starts at 10 am in the morning. There is technical aspect involved in this," Rohit said in a press conference to address queries on the squad selection here.

"The reason for picking four spinners is something I won't re-



veal now. I definitely wanted our spinners. With two of them being all-rounders and two attacking options, it gives you balance. Based on opposition, we can decide who to play," added the skipper.

The India squad was picked on Tuesday and Rohit said a lot of attention was given to the team's needs in the middle overs. Shivam Dube was picked ahead of Rinku Singh and that too divided opinions.

"We've got to understand what the pitches will be like and the opposition composition. One thing we really looked at is our middle overs hitting. Our top order hitting has been alright, it has not been bad.

"There are other options there as well. We picked a guy based on his performance in the IPL and few games he played for India. There is no guarantee what our playing eleven will look like," he said referring to Dube.

The captain added that the he had figured out 70 to 80 per cent of the squad before the IPL.

"You sort of make the playing eleven in your mind and work around it. A lot of preparations and talks and guys playing games happen during the IPL, lot of them are playing the format for a while now

"The talk of what are final 15 is going to be started much before IPL. It is just few spots we had to look in the IPL.

"In IPL performances changes everyday. Anyone will come and score a hundred or to take five wickets. We knew 70-80 per cent of our squad (before the IPL)," he said. (PTT)

Indian compound mixed team enters final of Archery World Cup Stage 2

YECHON (South Korea), May 24: Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Priyansh entered the compound mixed team final to confirm India's second medal at the Archery World Cup Stage 2 here on Friday.

Compound women's team of Jyothi, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami have assured India's first medal by making the final on Wednesday.

Young compound archer Prathamesh Fuge is also eyeing a medal by advancing to the semifinal in the individual category.

The Indian compound mixed team, who are No. 2 in world rankings, dropped just two points from 16 arrows to eliminate the host country's duo of Han Seungyeon and Yang Jaewon 158-157 in a tight semi-final.

Jyothi and Priyansh will face USA's Olivia Dean and Sawyer Sullivan in a clash of the top-two world ranked nations in the gold medal match on Saturday.

The fourth-seeded duo earlier ousted Vietnam 159-152 in the first round of 16, missing the target only once from 16 ar-

rows. India then thwarted some strong resistance from formidable Mexico, seeded fifth, to win 156-155 in an intense quarterfinal.

The recurve mixed team of Deepika Kumari and Tarundeep Rai, who have more than 34 years of combined international experience in between them, will return empty-handed after going down in the quarters.

Having qualified as second seed, the pair lost to 10th seeded Spain 2-6 (33-37, 36-38,

39-34, 34-36) following a miserable start.

They shot in the red-ring twice (7 and 8) to drop seven points in the first set and went on to lose the second set too.

From 0-4 down, they won the third but they continued their inconsistent run as the Spaniards sealed it in the fourth set.

The recurve archers are already out of medal contention in team events and will hope to salvage some pride in the individual rounds getting underway later in the afternoon. (PTT)

Taking up the job of coaching India also implies spending 10-11 months away from home

Need someone with understanding of Indian cricket: Shah denies approaching Aussies for coach job

MUMBAI, May 24: BCCI secretary Jay Shah on Friday rejected claims that the Board has approached any former Australian cricketer to be India's next head coach and hinted that Rahul Dravid's successor could be an Indian by saying that he should have a "deep understanding" of the game's structure in the country.

While Dravid has reportedly told the board that he is not interested in a third stint, former Australian players like Ricky Ponting and Justin Langer have claimed that they have turned down approaches for the high-profile position.

"Neither I nor the BCCI have approached any former Australian cricketer with a coaching offer. The reports circulating in certain media sections are completely incorrect," Shah said in a statement.

Both Ponting and Langer are involved in the Indian Premier League as the head coaches of Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants respectively. World Cup-winning former batting star Gautam Gambhir, who is currently mentoring Kolkata Knight Riders, is speculated to be among the top contenders for the post right now.

"Finding the right coach for our national team is a meticulous and thorough process. We are focused on identifying individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Indian cricket structure and have risen through the ranks," Shah said.

The BCCI secretary also said that having in-depth knowledge of Indian domestic cricket will be one of the important criteria

for appointing the next coach. He said the understanding would be crucial to "truly elevate Team India to the next level." The BCCI has set May 27 as the last date for filing applications for the job.

Ponting had claimed on Thursday that he was approached to take over the role but said that he declined as it did not fit with his "lifestyle" right now.

Ponting told ICC review, "I've seen a lot of reports about it. Normally these things pop up on social media before you even know about them, but there were a few little one-on-one conversations during the IPL, just to get a level of interest from me as to whether I would do it."

"I'd love to be a senior coach of a national team, but with the other things that I have in my life and wanting to have a bit of time at home...everyone knows if you take a job working with the Indian team you can't be involved in an IPL team, so it would take that out of it as well," he said.

"Taking up the job of coaching India also implies spending 10-11 months away from home but Ponting said his family seemed ready for it.

"...I had a whisper to my son about it, and I said, 'Dad's been offered the Indian coaching job' and he said, 'Just take it, dad, we would love to move over there for the next couple of years'" he said.

"That's how much they love being over there and the culture of cricket in India, but right now it probably doesn't exactly fit into my lifestyle," Ponting said.



Meanwhile, Langer, who had remained noncommittal about applying for India coaching role after IPL clash between LSG and Mumbai Indians, said he would "never say never" but at the same time revealed receiving crucial advice from Lucknow skipper KL Rahul.

Langer told BBC Stumped Podcast, "It would be an amazing job. I also know that it's an all-encompassing role, and having done it for four years with the Australian team, honestly, it's exhausting. And that's the Australian job."

"You never say never. And the pressure of doing it in India...I was talking to KL Rahul and he said, 'You know, if you think there's pressure and politics in an IPL team, multiply that by a thousand, (that is) coaching

India. That was a good bit of advice, I guess," Langer said.

"It would be an awesome job, but not for me at the moment," he added.

Former England and current Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower had also ruled himself out of the race saying he is happy being involved in franchise cricket for now.

Chennai Super Kings chief executive Kasi Viswanathan has done the same for Stephen Fleming claiming the former New Zealand captain won't be keen on taking a job which requires him to work 'nine-ten months a year'.

Shah described the position of India's head coach as the most prestigious job in international cricket, saying it demands high level of professionalism given the kind of support the national side enjoys.

"When we talk about international cricket, no role is more prestigious than that of the Head Coach of the Indian Cricket Team. Team India commands the largest fan base globally, enjoying support that is truly unrivalled," he said.

"Our rich history, passion for the game make this one of the most lucrative jobs in the world. The role demands a high level of professionalism as one gets to nurture some of the best cricketers in the world and an assembly line of talented cricketers to follow.

"Catering to the aspirations of a billion fans is a huge honour and the BCCI will pick the right candidate, capable of propelling Indian cricket forward," Shah added. (PTT)

No reason for Dhoni to stop playing: Kaif

MUMBAI, May 24: Former India batter Mohammad Kaif feels there is no reason why Mahendra Singh Dhoni should not play the next season of the IPL, given his form, fitness and ability to play big shots with ease.

Speculation has been rife that Dhoni, who has led CSK to five IPL titles, could have played his last IPL season.

The former CSK skipper, who had undergone surgery to treat a knee injury issue last year, scored 161 runs in 73 balls at a strike rate of 220.55 this season. He was also good behind the stumps.

Kaif thinks Dhoni has enough left in the tank to keep playing.

"Personally, I don't think he's done, he could not win the game (last league match against RCB). In the last over after hitting a six, he got out. You could make out seeing his body language that he seemed very disappointed not winning the game for CSK," Kaif, a cricket expert and commentator with the official TV broadcaster of IPL 2024, Star Sports, told PTI Videos.

"Why he should not come back? He is fit, he is scoring runs and hitting sixes, and there's no reason to stop playing... it's up to him, we can't say with Dhoni what's his plan," added Kaif, regarded as one of India's greatest fielders.

The 43-year-old also said that Kolkata Knight Riders skipper Shreyas Iyer had been a revelation with his calm demeanour, and attributed the team's success this year to his leadership qualities.

Two-time IPL champions KKR entered their fourth final with a thumping eight-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in Qualifier 1. They had also topped the league stage with 20 points.

"He (Iyer) missed the whole IPL last year and KKR probably missed his captaincy in 2023. The way he is changing the bowlers, and picking his playing XI, he looks very calm under pressure.

"In a tournament like the IPL, you have to be very composed, you have to know what's happening in the game and Iyer has come a long way. He has become a much better captain now," opined Kaif. (PTT)

Ritu Moni took a blinder off her bowling to dismiss Shafali India beat Bangladesh by 7 wickets, take 3-0 unassailable lead



SYLHET (BANGLADESH), May 24: A dominant India grabbed an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match women's T20I series as they pummeled Bangladesh by seven wickets in the third match here on Thursday. After their skipper Harmanpreet Kaur opted to field first looking at the cloud cover and a mild breeze, India's bowlers dished out another disciplined performance to restrict Bangladesh to 117/8, which the visitors overhauled with nine balls to spare.

When they came to bat, openers Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma put on 91 runs in just 12.1 overs to take India closer to a series win. Shafali got out after a 38-ball 51, hitting eight fours, while Mandhana found form as she struck 47 off 42 balls with the help of five boundaries and a six. Ritu Moni took a blinder off her bowling to dismiss Shafali while Nahida Akter accounted for Mandhana. But the damage was done.

Earlier, the decision to bowl first did not yield the desired result immediately, as Bangladesh raced to 44 for no loss in the six power-play overs. However, the Indian bowlers tightened the screws on the home team batters after the dismissal of Dilara Akter, who blazed away to 39 off 25 balls. The hosts' brisk start was largely due to the batting of Dilara Akter who struck a few boundaries and negotiated the Indian bowlers without much difficulty early on at Sylhet International

Cricket Stadium. Trailing 0-2 in the five-match series, Bangladesh looked determined to give a better account of themselves and keep the rubber alive, two days after being shot out for 119 at the same venue. With the T20 World Cup around the corner, the objective is to finalise their middle-order, which has been having some difficulty. Even as Dilara kept the scoreboard moving at a fair clip, Bangladesh lost their first wicket when Murshida Khatun (9) was run out by the Deepti Sharma-Richa Ghosh combo. The star performer of the series opener, medium pacer Renuka Singh dealt a big blow on Bangladesh when her slower delivery on the leg side made contact with Dilara's gloves on its way to Ghosh, even as the batter looked to hit it hard over the square leg region. The soft dismissal hurt the home team as the India bowlers looked to settle into a nice rhythm. At the end of the 10th over, Bangladesh were 66 for two, with their captain Nigar Sultana and Sobhana Mostary in the middle. A poor example of running between the wickets led to the dismissal of Sobhana (15 off 20 balls), the diving batter failing to beat Renuka's throw at the striker's end. Fahima Khatun was out the first ball, given lbw off Shreyanka Patil after the new batter shuffled across to sweep the ball but missed the line completely. (PTI)

Barcelona seeks its first win against Lyon Women's Champions League final

BILBAO, May 24: Barcelona will need to find a way to get past the most successful club in women's soccer if it wants to build on its recent dominance in the sport. The Catalan club will be playing in its fourth straight Women's Champions League final on Saturday in Bilbao against record eight-time champion Lyon, the nemesis it has never been able to beat. The titleholders from Spain have a shot at a statement victory by finally overcoming the storied French club and winning its third European title — all within a four-season span. Lyon, meanwhile, will be hoping to reclaim the trophy after not getting past the quarterfinals last season and seeing the hype grow about Barcelona and its star players Alexia Putellas and Aitana Bonmatí, who have won back-to-back player of the year awards. "We're coming up against a Barcelona team that is a really tidy European side, and they are the holders, so we know, above all, to respect all of our opponents," said Lyon coach Sonia Bompastor, the first woman to win the title both as a player and coach. "We know that all our rivals want to bring Olympique Lyonnais down a peg or two, so they're always very motivated," said Bompastor, who also can become the first woman to win two titles as a coach. "Now, we are very focused on ourselves. I've said since the start of the season that we have a lot of quality in the group, and a squad that is very talented and very strong." Lyon will be playing in its 11th European final in 15 seasons. It won five titles in a row from 2016-20, and holds nearly every Women's Champions League club record. The French side won all four matches it has played against Barcelona, including 4-1 in the 2019 final in Hungary and 3-1 in the 2022 final in Italy. Barcelona, in its fourth final in six seasons, beat Chelsea for its



first European title in 2021 in Sweden and Wolfsburg for its second in 2023 in the Netherlands. "We have the confidence of being a more experienced team," said Barcelona coach Jonatan Giráldez, who will leave at the end of the season to join U.S. club Washington Spirit. "We're a team that has been growing a lot, not only in domestic competitions, international competitions, but also with the national team, of course." The club had nine players in the Spain squad that broke through with the nation's first Women's World Cup title last year, a feat eventually marred by the unwanted kiss by former soccer federation president Luis Rubiales on player Jenni Hermoso during the awards ceremony. Barcelona also sent eight players to the Final Four of the inaugural Women's Nations League, which Spain won in February.

Barcelona is trying to become the third team to win three European titles, after the eight by Lyon and four by Eintracht Frankfurt. It made it to the final by overcoming a 1-0 first-leg loss to Chelsea at home in the semifinals. Lyon eliminated French rival Paris Saint-Germain in the last four. Lyon has lost two of its goal scorers from the 2022 final in Turin — Amandine Henry and Catarina Macario. The other, Ada Hegerberg, is doubtful to play on Saturday because of an injury. It will be the third time the Women's Champions League final will take place in Spain after it was held in Getafe in 2010 — the first one-game decider for the re-branded Women's Champions League — and San Sebastian in 2020 in an empty stadium because of the coronavirus pandemic. Saturday's match will take place at Athletic Bilbao's 53,000-capacity San Mames Stadium, which is expected to be filled with a majority of pro-Barcelona supporters. It was the third straight season in which there was a 16-team home-and-away group stage in the Women's Champions League. In all, 70 clubs from 49 nations participated, with more than 500,000 people attending the games throughout the season. In the final on Saturday, it will be either Barcelona adding to its dominance or Lyon showing it's still the club to beat in Europe. "Barça and Lyon are the two best teams in Europe, without any doubt," Giráldez said. "It will be a fun final." (AP)

Indian junior men's hockey team loses 4-5 against Dutch local club

BREDA (THE NETHERLANDS), May 24: The Indian junior men's hockey team fought hard after a sluggish start but could not prevent a 4-5 loss to local Dutch side Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push in its third match of the ongoing tour of Europe here. After a narrow 2-2 (4-2) penalty shootout victory, India had slumped to a 2-3 loss to the Belgium junior side in their previous match. Captain Rohit (18th minute), Sourabh Anand Khushwaha (24th), Ankit Pal (32nd), and Arshdeep Singh (58th) sounded the board for India, but the side was unable to overturn the five-goal deficit on Thursday. Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push began the game aggressively, earning a penalty corner and scoring from it in just over a minute. In the very next minute, the local side overpowered the Indian defence to score another penalty corner goal. The Indian colts resisted the initial pressure and attempted to score but fell short as Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push held firm and finished the first quarter with a 2-0 lead. Determined to gain a foothold in the game, India earned a penalty stroke as the second quarter began and captain Rohit stepped up to score from the spot. (PTI)

Lose 0-2 against Belgium Indian women suffer second straight loss in European leg of Pro League



ANTWERP (BELGIUM), May 24: The Indian women's hockey team lost its second game on the trot in the European leg of the FIH Pro League as Belgium handed the visitors a 0-2 defeat here. The Indian women, under new coach and captain in Harendra Singh and Salima Tete, were earlier thrashed 0-5 by Argentina in their opening match on Wednesday. Both Belgium goals came from field efforts through Alexia 'T Ser-

stevens in the 34th minute and Dewaet Louise two minutes later on Thursday night. Contrary to the result, the Indians started the match on an aggressive note and won an early penalty corner, but couldn't capitalise on it. However, the visitors continued to press Belgium, which initially struggled to keep possession and relied on counter-attacks. India's defence stood tall in the first two quarters, denying the hosts any scoring opportunities.

Belgium won a penalty corner towards the end of the first quarter, but the effort was saved by veteran India goalkeeper Savita without much difficulty. In the second quarter, Belgium increased pressure with brisk passes and constant attacks. But the Indians absorbed the pressure well, shifting the tempo in their favour by maintaining possession and making quick passes, which allowed them to test Belgium's defence a couple of times but in vain as the deadlock remained at half-time. Belgium came out all guns blazing after the change of ends and as took the lead through Alexia four minutes into the third quarter. Two minutes later, Dewaet struck again to double Belgium's lead. Down 0-2, India upped their ante and even won a penalty corner towards the end of the penultimate quarter, but failed to make the most of it. In the fourth quarter, India made early advances and tested Belgium's defense rigorously, but the hosts successfully defended their lead. Despite maintaining possession and making regular circle entries, India couldn't find the back of the net. India will play Belgium again in their next match on Saturday. (PTI)

India lose 1-4 to Belgium in FIH Pro League



ANTWERP (BELGIUM), May 24: Defensive lapses cost the Indian men's hockey team as it went down 1-4 to hosts and world no.3 Belgium in the European leg of the FIH Pro League here. The Harmanpreet Singh-led side had defeated Argentina 5-4 in shootout after both the teams were locked at 2-2 at the end of regulation time in the opening match here on Wednesday. After a barren first quarter, Belgium took the lead in the 22nd minute through a field goal by skipper Felix Denayer. Four minutes after half-time, the home side doubled its lead through a penalty corner conversion by Alexander Hendrickx. The Indian defence was relentlessly caught off guard by the brisk passing and skillful play of the Belgians as they extended their lead in the 49th minute through another fine field goal by Cedric Charlier. Young striker Abhishek pulled one back for India from a field effort but Belgium looked too strong as they sealed the affair in the final minute of the game when Hendrickx sounded the board on a penalty stroke. The Indian defence looked in disarray from the word go as they failed to counter Belgium's relentless attacks with veteran custodian PR Sreejesh cutting a

lonely figure at the back. India too had their chances and secured their first penalty corner in the 18th minute but skipper Harmanpreet's flick was saved by Belgium goalkeeper Loick van Doren. Two minutes later, India secured back-to-back penalty corners but an off-colour Harmanpreet failed to utilise the chances. Belgium eventually took the lead in the 22nd minute when captain Denayer guided the ball into the goal after Sreejesh blocked the first shot from Florent van Aubel. Belgium doubled their lead four minutes into the third quarter from a blistering counter-attack from Tanguy Cosyns, Denayer and Nicolas de Kerpel to eventually win a penalty corner, which was converted by Hendrickx through Sreejesh's feet. Charlier made it 3-0 in favour of Belgium in the 49th minute after receiving a long cross-field pass from Denayer, finding the bottom-right corner of Sreejesh's goal. India drew one back five minutes from the final hooter with a superb reverse hit strike from Abhishek to beat Van Doren. It was not to be India's day as they conceded a penalty stroke just before the hooter for not being 5m away when a Belgian player was receiving the ball inside the circle, and Hendrickx stepped up to seal the deal. India skipper Harmanpreet was understandably disappointed with the performance. "We did some good things, but the finishing wasn't there. Defensively we need to improve, man-to-man marking needs to get better. Excited to play them again on Saturday, looking forward to improve game-by-game," he said after the match on Thursday night. India will again play Belgium on Saturday. (PTI)

Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams' playing their last? Difficult lately for Nadal because of hip and abdominal muscle injuries

PARIS, May 24: If this is, as expected, Rafael Nadal's final French Open, it will be one that everyone — the 37-year-old Spaniard included — surely will remember vividly. No matter how healthy the guy everyone calls "Rafa" might be. No matter how long his stay in Paris lasts. No matter whether he somehow adds another championship at Roland Garros to the record 14 he owns. Narrator: Not even Nadal truly believes that is possible. Indeed, it wasn't even certain that he would be in the field until his name was placed in the bracket on Thursday — and he was drawn to face No. 4 seed Alexander Zverev — although Nadal has been practicing all week on site. "I am not negative," he explained. "I am just realistic." Think back just a couple of years ago to Serena Williams' farewell at the U.S. Open. That's the sort of atmosphere and adoration likely to be on display whenever Nadal swings a racket or simply strolls around the compact-for-a-Grand-Slam-grounds in the southwest section of the French capital where the clay-court

tournament begins Sunday. "I cannot predict what kind of emotions I am going to have there," said Nadal, who has been saying for a while that he thinks 2024 will be his final season before retirement. "I just want to enjoy every day." That's been difficult lately because of hip and abdominal muscle injuries that limited him to 20 matches, and a 9-11 record, over the past 20 months. Nadal missed nearly all of 2023 after hurting his hip during a loss at the Australian Open that January. He had surgery almost exactly a year ago and sat out the French Open for the first time since making his debut there in 2005, when, naturally, he claimed the trophy at age 19. A torn hip muscle this January forced Nadal to miss the Australian Open; an ab problem sidelined him later. He returned in April, but in three places he's won a total of 27 titles — Barcelona, Madrid, Rome — Nadal made it no further than the fourth round anywhere and called himself "unpredictable." That stretch was capped by a 6-1, 6-3 loss to Hubert Hurkacz at the Italian Open, a result so dispiriting that Nadal



wondered aloud whether he should bother showing up at Roland Garros, although did say he was reluctant to skip "the most important event of my tennis career." The 22-time major champion is not able to run at full speed or compete with full force. He does not have the match-readiness required to succeed. "For him to feel like he's going in with

his C' game — not B' game; C' game — and maybe fearing almost that he could lose first or second round?" said Chris Evert, who won seven of her 18 Grand Slam titles in Paris. "He's been such a perfectionist on that surface, why would he want to expose himself at that level?" No man has won even half as many French Opens as Nadal. His winning percentage there is .974. He had streaks of

five championships in a row, four in a row and three in a row. This says it all: There's already a statue of him near the main stadium. "It's really a paramount challenge to play him in Roland Garros," said Novak Djokovic, whose 24 major trophies make him the only man with more than Nadal. "He's an incredible athlete. The tenacity and intensity he brings on the court, particularly there, is something that was very rarely seen, I think, in the history of this sport." Djokovic — who formed, with Nadal and the now-retired Roger Federer, the so-called Big Three — and Iga Swiatek are the defending champions in France and both are ranked No. 1. Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner are the emerging stars of men's tennis; Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff have that status in the women's game. But all eyes — of spectators and of other athletes — will be on Nadal for however long he stays in the field. "He's probably the only player that when I practice on the court next to him, I would literally zone out of my practice to watch him," said Gauff, the 20-year-

old American who won last year's U.S. Open. "The way he carries himself is just great. His legacy is going to be something that is almost unmatched when it comes to just the intensity in which he approaches everything. That's something that the players will miss and the fans will miss." So this represents a chance to say "Merci" and "Au revoir." No one — maybe not even Nadal himself — knows how many more times he will play, whether at Roland Garros, which also is set to host tennis at the Summer Olympics (the already owns singles and doubles golds), or anywhere else. So plenty of standing ovations await. Likely a post-match ceremony, too. Might even be the sort of requests seen at a recent tournament: One opponent asked for the shirt off Nadal's back after facing him; another asked if they could snap a photo together. Swiatek, an unabashed Nadal supporter, was asked whether she ever did that sort of thing after a match. "Not really," she replied, "but if I would play against Rafa, for sure, I would ask for a T-shirt." (AP)